

Studies in Critical Social Sciences

Horst J. Helle

China: Promise or Threat?

A Comparison of Cultures



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China: Promise or Threat?

Studies in Critical Social Sciences

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By

Horst J. Helle



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Helle, Horst Jürgen, author.

Title: China : promise or threat? : a comparison of cultures / by Horst J. Helle.

Description: Brill : Boston, [2016] | Series: Studies in critical social sciences ; VOLUME 96 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016034846 (print) | LCCN 2016047881 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004298200 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9789004330603 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: China--Social conditions. | China--Cultural policy--History. | China--Social life and customs. | China--Religion. | China--Foreign relations.

Classification: LCC HN733.5 .H534 2016 (print) | LCC HN733.5 (ebook) | DDC 306.0951--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016034846>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1573-4234

ISBN 978-90-04-29820-0 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-33060-3 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

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Foreword

A Fascination with China

The name Marco Polo evokes images of exotic adventure and Europe travels east to explore the riches of the Orient. Everyone knows the story of how his travels brought to Europe new spices, gun powder and noodles. Just as the horticulture of the New World introduced tomatoes to Italian cooking, East and West collided to create the quintessential Italian meal of pasta and tomato sauce. China represents mystery, the unknown and unknowable, certainly with the isolation during the great dynasties of central China, and perhaps even more so today, China is a country both seemingly impenetrable yet everywhere in the world. China is ever present in the Western press, is a topic of intellectual inquiry, and for many a symbol of the unknown that should be feared. What can't be denied is that we have misconceptions borne of misunderstanding, and anything that offers us a better understanding of the country and its people can only aid in fostering a safer world for all.

Most of us think of historical China as a vast inland empire, in the North China Plain with its capital Beijing protected by a Great Wall that extended from the North China Sea across the northern border west to the mountains. It was a wall designed to protect the empire from the Mongols coming from the North. But China's history included extensive navel adventures. During the end of the 10th Century to the end of the 13th Century (during the Tang [618-907] and Song [960-1279] Dynasties) Chinese merchants sailed throughout South East Asia, into the Persian Gulf, along the Arabian Peninsula, the Red Sea and there is evidence of trading with cities of Egypt and Ethiopia (Bowman 2000). Chinese ships traveled along the east coast of Africa and appeared in the chronicles of North African merchants (Sun 1989: 310-314). The ongoing invasions by the Mongols meant that China's rulers pulled back its naval forces for the defense of the Empire. But this fascination with China's maritime exploits have led to some wilder (and generally disputed) claims about how far its fleets traveled (Menziés 2002, 2008). One can speculate; had the Mongol invasion not focused Imperial resources inland, continued merchant explorations down the coast of Africa might have resulted in a 13th Century voyage up Africa's Western coast, perhaps leading to a very different dynamic of Chinese-European interactions.

European misconceptions about China are long standing, and Max Weber's essays under the title *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion) that appeared first from 1920 to 1921, included a section on China, later published as *The Religion of China* (1951), is but

one example. In it he tried to understand China's failure to develop the kind of bourgeois capitalism in place in Europe by the turn of the 20th Century. Building on his general argument that there is both capitalist practices (instances of activities we might call production and manufacturing) and a capitalist spirit, a nation has to have the latter before the former can become the dominant system of production. So-called "modern" socio-economic development cannot occur unless there are proper (and religious) influences. Some of these themes resonate with this book's content – that is, what are the essential characteristics of Chinese and Western cultures that can explain both the similarities and differences in the two societies.

The desire to make sense of this uneven development led to explorations into China's past for indications of how the economies of the West and China diverged. In his analysis, Elvin (1974) recounts China's Imperial history, concluding that between the 8th and 12th Centuries China's agriculture was transformed, unleashing productive forces that became "the dynamic driving force behind an era of economic revolution (113)." In essence, agriculture in China exceeded the practices and productivity of agriculture in Europe during this same period. Elvin goes on to document this economic revolution fuelled by significant advances in farming, water transport, money and credit, markets and urbanization, and finally a revolution in science and technology. Why, then, doesn't China's economic prowess and technology result in the kind of industrial transformation that can bring on an Industrial Revolution as had advances in the West? European productivity gains in agriculture starting in the turn of the 19th Century generated the surpluses needed to feed an every growing industrial and urban population, as well as provided the wool (though at the cost of enclosures and displacement of communities) that fuelled early manufacturing. Elvin concludes, perhaps in contradiction to Weber's arguments, that China's extensive bureaucracy and the domination of Imperial rule during this period created what Elvin called a "high-level equilibrium trap (298)" that froze the economy into a state of quantitative growth but a qualitative standstill.

The 19th and early 20th Centuries brought a period of turmoil, of colonial and imperial struggles, and followed by a long period dominated by warlords, the Japanese occupation and the Second World War. China was both romanticized by their exploits during wartime, and the locale for popular fiction and films depicting the heroic struggles of Westerners in a strange land. As World War II came to a close, China was embroiled in a civil war that resulted in the victory in 1949 of the Chinese Communist Party led by Mao. The first decade or so was one in which massive changes, with the goals of national unity, socio-economic change and "freedom from foreign influence" were introduced in the countryside to transform production and social relationships. Urban areas

with their industrial base were slowly transformed to work for the benefit of China's citizens. By 1953 China introduced the first five-year plan with its focus on giving priority to heavy industry, nationalizing and collectivizing the firms and farms, and launching China's economy. During this period China became increasingly isolated, became involved in the Korea War that severely curtailed relationships with Europe and the US, and by the end of that decade its relations with the Soviet Union reached a low point.

After a brief period of openness in 1957, under the banner of "Let 100 Flowers Bloom" that encouraged open criticism, Mao launched "The Great Leap Forward" in 1958. Creating large communes, encouraging "backyard" furnaces to craft the tools needed for agricultural production, and introduced a series of inconsistent policies that ended in chaos and huge output shortfalls all compounded by bad weather that severely damaged China's agricultural output. The Great Leap Forward ended up a great failure and, in some ways, a step back. This, in turn, led to an effort to shake up both the Party and China in what was generally known as the Great Cultural Revolution lasting more or less from 1966 to 1976. The results of this period was chaos, a shake-up of the party, and a country unsure of its path forward (much has been written and it does not need to be revisited here).

The 1970s brought about significant changes. With the death of Zhou En'lai early in 1976, followed by the death of Mao 9 months later, there was a passing away from the leaders of the Chinese revolution, and the beginning of a new era in China. New relations with the West and especially the United States marked a period of greater access to Chinese society, but the country remained obscure to most Westerners. A year after Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping became the country's leader and embarked on a program of "Four Modernizations" looking to reform China's economy and society in order to bring China into the modern era in agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology. The reforms put in place in agriculture resulted in support for privatization in order to increase production. This opened the way for farmers to begin to sell surpluses above their production quotas in local markets. By 1987 new economic reforms continued the transition, opening up the way for entrepreneurs building the foundation of economic activities that characterize China's economy today. The 20th Century came to a close with China relatively more open, but still a mystery to outsiders.

Now, well into the second decade of the 21st Century, China is both ever present in global affairs, central to the global economy, and yet not well understood by most people. Routinely, political rhetoric in the United States rails against China as that great enemy waiting to dominate this society, and at the same time when China's economy slows down or there is a fear China is falling

into a recession, the response in the economies of Europe and the US is to create great uncertainty and anxiety. Does China pose a threat to all, or is there a promise of great mutual benefit as we strive to recognize our common interests and or better understand our fundamental differences? This volume is an attempt at such a resolution.

David Fasenfest

Detroit, US, April 2016

Preface

Not far from Taiwan, just across the straight on the mainland, there are two important cities: Quanzhou and Xiamen, both located in the province of Fujian. The Chinese university that was founded to serve students whose families had left the country, has a campus in each of those two towns. The Chinese name of that school is *Huaqiao University*, in English, the *University for Overseas Chinese*. The idea of the founders was to give a home of higher education to young academics with various passports, whose parents and maybe grandparents had become residents of other nations, but who hoped to never lose contact with China, the country of their ancestors. But when I was invited to teach there, that description fit only a small minority of the students who were enrolled at the time. Most of them were sons and daughters from Chinese families living anywhere in the mainland.

The old campus on which the university was originally founded is located in Quanzhou. That city has a long history of openness and of trade relations with many countries and religions. Today it stands for a combination of economic progress and traditional culture. An amazing variety of temples and other places of religious worship mark the center of Quanzhou. At the outskirts there is a huge statue of Lao-tze which now has become the destination of pilgrimages. During the Cultural Revolution a team of young men was set to blow it up as a symbol of backwardness, but one of the more senior party leaders succeeded in persuading the red guards not to ignite their explosives. Today worshippers have the choice between two altars near the statue, one for depositing fruit and vegetable as sacred gifts to deified Lao-tze, the other for burning incense the Buddhist way.

Many years have passed since my former student, who received her degree in Munich, Germany, persuaded her Chinese teachers to invite me to lecture at *Huaqiao University's* old campus. During the most recent visit I met her husband and son. She took me to her husband's village outside Quanzhou. We arrive there on a religious holiday, and I expect every family to worship their deceased ancestors in the respective shrine. But upon our visit in the village we observe such activities in one small temple only.

Trying to understand what is going on, I ask if other families in the village do not follow the old custom. I get the reply that the entire village worships the same ancestors. They all have the same family name; they are not allowed to marry anyone with that name: The men find girls from outside the village as brides, and the young women leave the village when they get married.

The more I hear about the situation the more I realize that all the people living in this village are in fact one kinship group, one very large family.

My former student's husband had left there to go to college and technical school. But his brother stayed in their parents' house. To that he added a simple three story building which looks out of place in the village. He rents it to migrant workers who cannot afford to pay for living space in Quanzhou, but want to work there. That gives him the opportunity to add to the money he and his father make as peasants. His brother, my former student's husband, works for a local newspaper, but as mechanical engineer he is responsible for the technical side of printing it, so he is not concerned with what gets included in its pages and what does not.

Years ago, after a fairly successful short stay on the old campus I got later invited to the new one in Xiamen for a whole semester. It is normal to live on campus, the accommodation is quite uniform, a simple one-room-apartment. Students, in all of China separated carefully by gender of course, live together, depending on the college, with five or three room-mates. Some time ago there were eight undergraduate students in one dormitory room, but the trend now goes to four. Graduate students and teaching personnel without a Ph.D. have one room-mate, teachers with a Ph.D. live alone or with their family.

In my campus room I see three rows of words printed on the wall, and I am told it means "No smoking." But since there are so many characters, I insist on a more detailed translation of the inscription.

吸烟有害健康
吸烟有害他人
吸烟易引发火灾

The sheer number of words makes it hard to believe that this is the linguistic equivalent of the blunt interdiction: *Do not smoke!* After all, there are two lines with six characters each and the third line even consists of seven. In all three rows the first two words are the same, they mean: *to smoke*. In rows one and two, signs three and four are also identical, they mean: *has bad effects*. The last two words in row one mean: *health*, the last two in row two mean: *fellow humans*. The third row translates as: *Smoking can start fires*. But I ask even further about the characters used and learn that the first one by itself means *to suck* and the second means *smoke*: It is in fact a small picture of a person in a room with a fire outside!

To finish this analysis of the no smoking sign quickly, we look at row three only: We already know that it starts with: *to smoke has bad effects*. Then follow character three and four meaning: *it is possible easily*. Finally there are

three signs left. They mean: *something happens, fire, a building on fire*. The last line can therefore be translated to mean: if sucking smoke occurs it can easily happen that something burns and even that a whole building is on fire. So in all three lines there is reference first to one's own health, then to the health of one's neighbour, and finally to causing a fire, and while all that can surely be summarized into "do not smoke" the Chinese version is clearly more expressive.

Written Western language appeals to the ear, seeing it in print evokes the impression of the sound of spoken words. But Chinese writing does not do that: It consists of pictograms and conjures up images rather than sounds. At the end of the third line of the *no smoking sign* with a little imagination one can actually see the blaze. This has the amazing consequence that in Asia people who do not speak the same language and can therefore not communicate orally, can nevertheless exchange written messages successfully.

For instance, the official Chinese spoken in Peking cannot be understood in Hongkong because the oral language there is Cantonese rather than Mandarin. But written Chinese can be read across the divide of separate spoken languages. For instance 大学 (Great Knowledge) can be understood to mean *university* in China and in Japan, even though the spoken words are different. Since *Bei* means North, and *Nan* means South, it is plausible that Beijing (or Peking) is the imperial palace in the North, while Nanjing is the imperial palace in the South. In addition, if one looks at the characters for the Japanese capital, one will realize that Tokyo means imperial palace in the East, in Chinese Dongjing.

In oral communication the expectation of what purposes speaking ought to serve are different in China from the West. Empirical research on language use has shown that culture specific ways of speaking can be noticed in the usage of oral language: Western business persons who are on an occupational assignment in China complain that: "In Chinese you sometimes you have to... guess the meaning..." (Schreiter 2015: 107). If a Chinese person says "yes" it does not mean "yes, I understand" or "yes, I agree," but it merely means "yes, I am listening."

Problems of language use turn up also in connection with oral translations. A Chinese interpreter will not concentrate on the exact reproduction of meaning but instead conform to norms of politeness and even to aesthetic beauty of what is spoken. The Western observer will likely resent deviations from the translated originals that are based on such considerations. But the Chinese translator feels under obligation to include creative alterations assuming those to be in the interest of the parties (ibid. 114). A Western businessman who was himself proficient in Chinese described the performance of his lady translator as follows: "She never translated what the other person actually said, but rather what she believes he or she was thinking" (ibid. 115). In the culture context of

China the primary task of an interpreter may not be to transfer precise replicas of meaning but rather to enable a harmonious conversation (*ibid.* 116).

Back on the campus, my interest in inscriptions on the wall of my room and in the differences in written and oral communication between the cultures was disturbed by loud commands given and the sounds of military exercises outside the building: The freshman class was being drilled on the campus as if they had just been drafted into the army. This was already the fourth day of such drills, and in the South of China in late August and early September, when the school year starts, the temperatures can be very hot in uncomfortably humidity. Under such stressful conditions the young Chinese, all of them about 19 years old, have to report to duty at 8:00 in the morning, and with only a short lunch break, continue being subjected to hard physical training until 6:00 p.m.

They all wear uniforms. Sometimes they sit in groups in the shade, but most of the time they stand to attention or march. They are strictly separated by gender, and if a troop of 40 young women march in step with their ponytails whipping from side to side it is reminiscent of a ballet, even more so if they practice the goose step. Elder Chinese welcome this spectre, giving the reason that these youngsters have been spoiled by their families, and now it seems about time to subject them to some hardening training. To the Western visitor of course, even if he or she is familiar with ROTC¹ on an American college campus, enforced military training for all beginning students, and be it – as is the case in China – only for one week, is a strange phenomenon.

The explanation “hard training” – to balance having been spoiled at home – is obviously not the only justification for these exercises. There is a reason why we included the alternative “Promise or Threat” in the title of this book. We will come to that later. But if for now we dwell on the question of whether these freshmen have been spoiled when they were little, we must surely limit that reproach to their pre-school age. Whether or not the extremely caring environment of the small child in China ought to be associated with being spoiled, is a matter of perspective. Possibly in the West it takes the *Protestant Ethic* as a point of departure to arrive at the verdict: They are being spoiled.

The predominant style of socialization from birth to being sent to school, to which the Chinese child is typically exposed, may seem promising and threatening at the same time if judged by someone in the West. In China the child normally stays at home, there is a team of four adults available, the parents and the grandparents from the father’s side. All four follow the rules that the child must never be let cry, i.e. suffer, and should never be left alone. The child is always – the younger the more – in bodily contact with one of the four

1 Reserve Officers Training Camp.

care-takers, and – most surprising maybe to the Western observer – inside the family residence the small child has no room to him- or herself. A *child's room* or separate *nursery* never existed in a Chinese home (Weggel 1994: 214).

After the years in the emotional paradise at home, school must be experienced as a shock. The numbers of hours in class, and the quantities of home work to attend simply do not compare to anything a Western child experiences in the first four years of school. Being in elementary school in China is – by comparison – a very tough task. Before the critic from outside China arrives at a judgement about that, he or she ought to consider the following: In Western countries learning the ABCs involve familiarity with what is on the keyboard of the computer. Mastering a few dozen letters is sufficient to qualify as someone who can read and write. In China, by contrast, it takes a secure familiarity with at least 2000 characters before a person can read the newspaper, and as is true everywhere, the more educated someone aspires to be, the larger his or her vocabulary. It appears then, that the educational agendas for beginners of school are markedly different, and it likely follows that as a consequence the methods of teaching cannot be identical.

I have frequently wondered if not the familiarity with hard work in school is carried over in China from elementary school to college and beyond. Years ago, as guest of a university in the U.S.A., I entered the computer room on a weekend, because I had forgotten to take care of something urgent. I found only Asian looking persons in the room, because it was a weekend. Besides, the student who majors in philosophy in the West learns of course about philosophy, meaning philosophy of the Occident. The Chinese philosophy major knows both, Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy! An encounter between the two young academics has the potential of causing embarrassment to the Westerner. The same applies to other academic disciplines: The Chinese sociology student knows Western sociology, but the Western sociologist has no idea of Chinese sociology, and – what is worse – he or she likely finds that quite in order.

Over the years since 1996, when I first visited mainland China, I have repeatedly been confronted with the fact that the Chinese know so much more about us Westerners than we know about them. In my opinion there is no excuse for that. Writing this book was a reaction to that sentiment, knowing full well, that the pages that follow here cannot possibly change that. But if the chapters below find readers and thereby can contribute even a little toward reducing the asymmetry of information, then writing them has not been in vain.

Munich, Germany, March 2016

Introduction: The Goal of This Book

For millennia many Chinese and their leaders have seen their country as special in its culture and history, as called by fate to a particular mission, and as geographically located to be the *Zhong Guo* (中国), the *Center Country*. For millennia the Chinese – as other, comparatively short-lived peoples in this world – have seen themselves located in the middle of the universe. In the past such ethnocentric perception often served as a justification for threatening collective behaviour toward other nations. But in the present, after extended painful wars and cultural struggles, educated contemporaries both in China and in the West find it desirable to overcome ethnocentrism. This shift signals an interest not only in what has been threatening in confronting China, but also in developments appearing as potentially promising results of an exchange: What increasingly captures our attention now is the *relation* between China and the rest of the world, particularly the West.

The central point of departure for the reflections in the following pages is the assumption that both segments of humanity, the Orient and the Occident, can, and need to, learn from each other. That promising vision can only become a reality if actors from both sides are aware of how their cultures compare, how they have evolved over time, what they have in common, and in what they differ. The better known a foreign culture, the less threatening it appears. The reverse is also true: What is unfamiliar harbours the potential of creating fear.

But apart from that, a foreign population may be perceived as threatening for good reasons. There may be a history of aggressive collective behaviour, or there may even be more recent bellicose developments. In any case there is a strong link between the level of perceived threat and the thoroughness and reliability of information available. While supplying such information, this book asks the question if the Western observer should consider China in the present and in the foreseeable future to be a threat or rather a promise to the West and to the rest of the world.

It would be far from realistic, if we look into a Western mirror, then not to admit that there are threatening developments evolving in the Occident. The West has recently become a threat more to itself than to any geographical region outside its own territory. Feeling threatened has become somewhat of a cultured mode of being. To give only one well known example, Michael Crichton's novel *Dino Park* (1990), and the film Steven Spielberg made out it, first entitled *Jurassic Park* (1993) as well as later remakes and additions under similar titles (1997, 2001, 2015) show that large numbers of Westerners enjoy being threatened as a past time. If Ulrich Beck (1944–2015) were to rewrite and

publish his widely read book *Risk Society* (Beck 1992) today, he would likely name it *Threat Society*.

With these problems in mind the following pages present a comparison between the cultures of China and the West in order to better understand what threats or promises may be implied in their relationship. Such a project must establish a basis for claiming the existence of a unified culture on each side of the divide. That will be possible only by sketching some aspects of the history of evolution during which China on the one hand, and Europe and America on the other arrived each at their specific collective identity.

On the side of the Orient there were more than two millennia with an emperor, believed to be the Son of Heaven, ruling his subjects who worshiped their ancestors as immortals and who in addition were attached to Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, or to a combination of those. On the side of the Occident there was Ancient Greece with its epics and philosophy, there was the Roman Empire with its organizational and legal system, and there were the Judeo-Christian religious and ethical traditions of two camps of Western rulers raining each other in, at least to some extent, with religious power holders like the pope or archbishop of Canterbury on one side and emperors and kings on the other. Out of this grew the one-party-rule of the national Chinese version of socialism in the East, versus various types of democracies in the West.

This comparison, presented in detail in the following chapters, will lead the reader to get a better view of the differences and of what they mean for the present and the foreseeable future. To that end we will have to look far into the past, but in addition we must find in the present those types of behaviour that go unnoticed because they seem normal in one culture, but not in the other: We must try to *say* something about actions that, in their proper contexts, *go without saying*. We will also arrive at characteristics to be found on both sides of the divide which are shared because they are fundamentally human and cannot reasonably be claimed as achievements by any one of the two cultures being compared here.

This project will imply a critique of visions of history, in which China found reasons for seeing itself as superior to the West; but a critical view of the reverse is required as well: Max Weber (1864–1920) wrote¹ about the superiority of the Occident, that only *there* we find “scholarship” in the sense of data collection, systematic reflection on fundamental problems of life and the world, philosophical and theological knowledge, based not simply on unquestioned acceptance but on sceptical questioning. Weber continues that there

¹ Weber, Max (1978a): *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. Vol. 1, 7th printing. Tübingen: Mohr. pp. 1–2.

was astronomy in China, India, Babylonia, Egypt, and other places, but only in the West was astronomy based on a mathematical foundation created by the Greeks. There was geometry in India, but it lacked the method of rational proof, also originating from the Greeks. The fields of mechanics and physics too started there. There were well developed sciences in India but without the rational and controlled experiment. There were alchemists in China, but scientific chemistry came about only in the West. There was teaching about government and law in many cultures, but only in the West was it based on a rational construction of concepts and on the systematic coherence of Aristotle's teaching. The legal system of Ancient Rome determines the continental European law in France, Germany and other countries till this day. The uniqueness of Europe also applies to the arts: China and other cultures have highly developed music, but only in the West was there a theory of harmony based on mathematics. – That was Max Weber's view more than a century ago.

Admittedly, his way of characterizing the West as quoted above leans in the direction of enumerating promises rather than threats. But it was on the basis of the Western achievements listed by Weber that capitalism, colonialism, militaristic nationalism, and other evils evolved. It was also consistent with those developments when toward the end of Weber's days Oswald Spengler convincingly predicted *The Decline of the West*² (originally published in 1918).

Reflections about the tendency for each side of the East–west-Divide to consider itself superior to the other, plus a critical approach to recent world history, lead to the question how the two cultures compare from the perspective of ethics? Bertholt Brecht (1898–1956) was conscious of the work of the Chinese philosopher Mozi (also spelled Mo-tsu or Mo-tse 墨子 ca. 490–ca. 381 BCE) and his ethical principles of universal brotherly love.³ Brecht read those as a pre-Christian version of *universalism*.⁴

But many devoted followers of Confucius (551–479),⁵ particularly Mencius, also spelled Meng Zi or Meng Tzu (孟子 ca. 372 or 379–ca. 289) who was aware of Mozi's teaching, reacted by claiming that it would be wrong to approach all

2 Spengler, Oswald (1991), *The Decline of the West*. Ed. Arthur Helps, and Helmut Werner. Translation: Charles F. Atkinson. Preface Hughes, H. Stuart. New York: Oxford University Press. (Earlier editions: New York: Alfred A. Knopf, MCLXXX [1980], 1928, German original 1918).

3 Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer: Mo Ti und Bertolt Brechts "Buch der Wendungen," pp. 154–178 in: *Mo Ti : Gegen den Krieg*. Diederichs, Düsseldorf/Köln 1975. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (Hrsg.): *Mo Ti : Gegen den Krieg*. Diederichs, Düsseldorf/Köln 1975, pp. 70, 78, 79.

4 Technical terms will be defined and explained in the following chapters in their proper contexts.

5 All years from here on are to be read as BCE.

human beings with equal love and respect. Mencius and his followers rejected Mozi's *universalism* because, as they saw it, it could only be achieved at the expense of special care and closeness within the family. Universal brotherly love, as taught by Jesus, and centuries before him by Mozi, the most impressive alternative to Confucius, would therefore result in the loss of a special emphasis on kinship ties.

The description given above of Mozi's belief in brotherly love among all humans matches the concept of a *universalistic ethic*. However, such a position was not allowed to take root in China: Instead, Mencius, the Confucian, gave detailed reasons for his attack on Mozi's point of view: Animals too do not distinguish between family members and other individuals belonging to their own species. To the extent to which humans were to follow the notion of universal brotherly love, they would behave like animals. Accordingly, in the ethical debate that evolved, the Confucians rejected Mozi's teaching of brotherly love as animal-like.

As a result of this attack, the teachings of Mozi disappeared from the agenda of Chinese philosophy and were not rediscovered until the middle of the 19th century (Bauer 2006: 64). Instead, the rule of placing the highest importance on the ties between relatives, developed into the dominant ethical position in China: An ethic of *exclusivity* based on kinship was to be acknowledged by the majority of the Chinese as fundamentally human to this day. Some of the practical consequences of that attitude will be described here below in Chapter 1.⁶

6 For summaries of the following chapters see the last chapter.

Familism: A Threat to the Environment

The “Public Sphere:” Rights without Obligations

The most influential Chinese sociologist of the 20th century, Fei Xiaotong (1910–2005), started his book *Earthbound China* (Fei 1992) with a complaint about selfishness among the Chinese as the inclination of every one of them, to “sweep the snow from his own doorsteps” only (Fei 1992: 60). At first sight there is nothing surprising about this statement, and European rural traditions contain very similar admonitions. Fei, however, pointed out that in China this folk rule reveals an egocentric ethical defect that is not typical merely of peasant life but can be encountered among city dwellers just the same as in the countryside as a common Chinese selfishness.

Fei argued his point most strikingly with the example of the canals in the beautiful town of *Suzhou* near Shanghai, familiar to many tourists, and sometimes referred to as the *Venice of China*. There he deplored the custom of throwing garbage and what else a family may want to get rid of into the water next to their dwelling place thereby recklessly contributing to creating a health hazard, not to mention the damage done to the environment and the sad loss of beauty (Fei 1992: 60).

Fei did not publish his critical remarks for people outside China, who may be reading it in translation decades later. He wrote it as a sociologist for his fellow Chinese, inviting them in 1948, when the Chinese original of his text first became available, to reflect about structural and cultural foundations of their behavioural preferences. He wanted them to look at their own traditions from a new perspective before Communism took over the country, and long before those ethical defects were discussed as a threat to the environment.

Sixty-six years later, in 2014, a colleague in the United States contributed the following from his own experience: “I remember visiting someone in Guiyang. He and his family lived on the top floor of a nondescript building. As I climbed the concrete, rough stairs that were totally dusty and dirty, I was struck by the fact that no one seemed to take care of this public sphere. Then I entered the spacious apartment of my friend and was suddenly in a private realm of luxury and refinement, clearly indicative of someone who is very wealthy. Exquisite carpets, fine paintings and antiques, a good library and great furniture were an overwhelming contrast to what I had just seen in climbing the stairs. That and the unkempt exterior of the building, again the public sphere, drove home

the point that the Chinese don't give a damn about that realm. What counts is the immediate personal area. I am sure you had similar experiences. Incidentally, I think the Chinese mania of surrounding everything by walls and fences deserves sociological attention as well."¹ These remarks suggest that what Fei observed decades ago is still current as an *ethic of exclusivity* and does not appear to have undergone much change under the impact of the policies of "The New China" since 1949.

In comparing the two cultures, China and the West, the question arises, if and how the alternative *ethic of universality* comes about as a result of socialization in Europe and America. In the past there was a tradition of responsibility toward a public realm instilled into most Westerners in early childhood education: A mother in the Occident may try to better her pre-schooler during his or her unruly age by repeating two admonitions: If you were to behave like this outside our home, what would people think of you? And: Just imagine what the result would be if everybody were to do that? Admittedly, today Western countries are home to a variety of diverse styles of family education and the simplification implied in our illustration applies even less to the present than it did to past conditions.

But still the comparison confirms the differences: To the Chinese family unknown persons outside the home – the Western mother's public "everybody" – do not matter much. The people beyond the confinements of our residence are "none of our business" as long as they are neither relatives nor friends. If we are Chinese, we feel the duty to help our kin and close contemporaries and try hard to please our ancestors. Otherwise we politely ignore strangers and stay out of trouble, and that is it. This is, admittedly, a simplification. Yet, unless we simplify things here temporarily, we cannot arrive at a comparison. Later in this book, more nuances will be introduced.

The ancient and virtually unchanged worship in China of the ancestors of one's own family as gods or saints raises the question of how religious ideas impact social conditions. We will come back to that in the chapters on religion. With regard to the clan of origin, strong expectation in the direction of conformity and solidarity were – and are – expected. At the same time, being a member of this or that particular kinship group, also causes a sense of calling, and potentially creates the courage to be different from members of other families.

In terms of Simmel's thinking (Helle 2013: 100f.) China is ambivalent as having powerful forces toward conformity at work, but at the same time making creative modern developments possible. The latter may occur against the background of placing the belief in having something unique to contribute to the

1 Personal communication by e-mail.

family context. The conviction of the uniqueness of one's own kinship group serves as a justification for an exclusive ethic as the position of the majority of the Chinese. But there are minorities of representatives of a universalistic ethic in China as well, referring back all the way to Mozi, to a particular version of Christianity, to the global proletarian movement, or to other sources.

Fei points out that the apparent selfishness of the majority in dealing with the *public sphere* seems hard to understand on the surface, since Chinese people are usually responsible husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, devoted caretakers of their adult and often aging parents, not to mention their closeness to their siblings and good friends. Chinese are, generally speaking, far from being *ethically inferior* to members of other cultural traditions, and far from being selfish on the level of individual conduct. The selfishness Fei complains about is thus not that of the person but rather it is the selfishness of the kinship unit. It is the familistic selfishness that today becomes a threat to the environment.

According to Fei, one reason for this is the absence of moral obligations toward anything like the *public sphere*. Whatever does not belong to a specific *person or family*, what is therefore not acknowledged as clearly being part of *their* respective sphere of interest, control and influence is public in the sense "that everyone can take advantage of it," or, in other words, "one can have rights without obligations" (ibid: 60). This then would explain the behaviour toward the snow as well as the attitude toward the garbage and the environment. It would, if Fei's observations are valid, have the potential of explaining numerous differences in comparing China to the West.

Having been a student in London, and having had the experience of being treated as a foreigner outside his home country, Fei reacts angrily to prejudices against Chinese who visit other cultures. He knows better than most of his compatriots what he is writing about in this respect. In Fei's experience, Chinese have been tied to the stereotype of "corruption and incompetence" (ibid: 61) in the West. He explains those labels not with individual shortcomings of this or that Chinese person, but instead with the relative insignificance attributed in China to "each person's service to, and responsibility for, the public welfare" (ibid: 61). What is being labelled negatively by Westerners therefore should – according to Fei – not be the person but the culture he or she comes from as it is reflected in that person's conduct.

Of course there is loyalty in China, but it is not devoted to an abstract collective, for instance to the contemporaries sharing a common environment; rather it is tied to a person or a group of persons to whom one feels close because they are well known as relatives or friends. Fei points out that "a great many Westerners are impressed by the business achievements of the overseas

Chinese in Southeast Asia... When it comes to managing their family's business, they show greater aptitude than people from any other country" (ibid.). But again, we are dealing with a "family business."

In the West there is a tradition of loyalty not only to family owned companies but also to large corporations. At the end of March 2014 German media criticized the chief executive of the electronic company named after the *Siemens* family, which obviously has outgrown the dimensions of a family business a long time ago. The Siemens manager was verbally attacked for having travelled to Moscow to negotiate a large business deal with president Putin of Russia while most Western countries were shunning away from any contacts with Putin, because he provoked the crisis in Ukraine.

In an interview the businessman referred to 160 years of Siemens history. He defended his sense of loyalty toward that corporation. In his view it followed from that to be his duty to help it flourish and to enable it to give jobs to its employees by selling railway cars to Russia. Such a notion of loyalty to an organization is precisely what Fei finds missing in China. There, he writes, loyalty can only be based on close personal ties.

The consequences of this traditional ethical position in China not only impact the environment and the relationships between an employee and the organization he or she works for, but in addition they have far reaching effects that Western observers tend to simplify as *corruption*. In the absence of a majority culture of a *universalistic ethic* severe problems arise in China in everyday interaction in the "public sphere," as the following examples illustrate.

Case 1: A first year student in an M.A. program is left by her boyfriend. In her despair she takes an overdose of sleeping pills in an attempt to commit suicide. Another girl, her room-mate, notices that and quickly two female class mates rush their suicidal friend to the emergency room off campus in a taxi. There nothing is being done until money is paid! The young ladies cannot bring up the required amount, so one of them must ask her boyfriend for financial help to finally initiate emergency treatment.

Case 2: A young man is injured in a traffic accident, the driver disappears. Classmates take the man in severe pain to a hospital. It is the evening of the moon festival, so hospital staff is reduced. No treatment can be started until a "present" in cash to the physician in charge can be made by the father of one of the helping class-mates.

When I asked my students in alarm, if these were exceptional cases, I was assured, they were quite normal in China. It seems that running a hospital, short of implying ethical obligations comparable to public service, is primarily becoming a business. As the culture of a *universalistic ethic* appears to be on the retreat worldwide, this trend may increasingly become global.

Looking back at these examples of what from a Western perspective appears to be individual selfishness in the “public sphere” illustrates the fact that the absence of a *universalistic ethic* is not a personal or individual problem but a lingering threat that is imbedded in one culture and may be in the process of quietly entering the other. Accordingly, Fei draws the conclusion that the implicit defect is not political or ethical but instead sociological: Fei writes “if we want to discuss the problem of selfishness, we have to take into consideration the pattern of the entire social structure” (ibid.). The task at hand, i.e. explaining selfishness as a threat, can thus be seen as a challenge directed specifically at sociology, not merely at philosophy, religion, or ethics.

Two Types of Personal Association

In order to further help the Western observer understand Chinese society, Fei distinguishes between (a) the *family sphere* where people acquire by marriage – or have by birth – membership in only *one* social group, versus (b) the *organizational context* where they tend to have *multiple* memberships. What comes as a surprise to the Westerner is the fact, that in China distant relatives and the group of close-knit college friends are both counted as belonging to the “*organizational*” context. This is so because in both *modes of association* the persons involved are dealing with *close personal relationships* as foundations for mutually recognized membership. This applies to what Fei calls (in Chinese) the family mode, where a unique membership is required (jiatinggeju 家庭格局) as it does to the organizational mode, where multiple memberships are normal (tuantigeju 团体格局), (ibid: 62).

In addition, in his comparison of cultures Fei points out that the boundaries of families are *distinct* in the West whereas in China they are *blurred*. He remarks jokingly that in China, if you invite a friend and add the words “bring the whole family” you will not know how many people may come (ibid.). It would be similar to extending an invitation in the West with the words “bring all your relatives.” In the West, when the host invites his guest to bring his family, it is simple: He means that person’s spouse and children, because they are the new family which the couple founded when they got married.

In China by contrast the family is “eternal,” like in the West a nation, a church, or a corporation: It loses old members due to death (or desertion) and acquires new ones when a son finds a wife and as a result, new members are added by marriage and by birth (or adoption). The Chinese family visibly (not only in theory) consists of three or more generations in day to day interaction, not to speak of the ancestors in the beyond.

Fei compares the, as it were, one-dimensional structure of the familistic social ties, to throwing a stone into a lake and watching the many concentric circles it creates, moving further and further away from the point where the stone hit the water (ibid: 62f.). The individual is in the *center*; some of his or her relatives are closer, some are more remote, but they all somehow belong to that person's unique circle of relatives and friends. He or she is not, as in Simmel's writings, positioned at the *intersection* of several social circles. Rather each individual determines the character of the specific circle existing around him or her.

Indeed, in China people have close relationships with friends outside their families and they of course feel loyalty to them, but not – as in the case of the chief executive of the German Siemens Company – as loyalty via an organization, but rather on a non-public person-to-person basis. In the Chinese cultural tradition such extra-familial loyalties are typically *fashioned after* a family relationship: A close friend from college may be considered an *adoptive brother*, a group of girls who are classmates from high school may define each other as *sisters*, closely watching their ages as basis for hierarchical difference, and addressing each other as *older sister* (姐姐) or *little sister* (妹妹).

As a consequence – and this comes as a surprise to many Westerners – the Chinese government's *one-child-policy* from 1980 to 2015 (which at the beginning of 2016 changed to a “two-children-policy”) had little or no effect on the Chinese proneness to apply family models to patterns of non-family behaviour. If any change has occurred, that policy may even have increased the inclination to call someone “my brother” in the absence of any family connection.

The Chinese social reality is thus fundamentally *person oriented*. That means in this case that someone is emotionally close and feels and practices loyalty on the basis of *real or “defined”* kinship ties as well as on the basis of very personal friendships. In contrast to the West, a Chinese normally would not feel *loyalty toward an organization* or to an unfamiliar person, merely on the basis of sharing with him or her the membership in the same “organization” as an abstract idea of solidarity. Why is that so?

In the evolution of Western civilization, it took a number of steps from ancient Greek philosophy via religious developments to the imperatives of rationality. Simmel describes the process thus: “When the stoics later demanded, as an ethical goal, to be in harmony with the general supreme reason of the world [Weltvernunft], when the Christian ethic depicted the same as a realization of God's Kingdom on Earth, then we have to search for the founder of these objective moral principles in Plato, who for the first time cut loose the absolute good from the entanglement with human subjectivity, be it egotistical or altruistic, and who placed that highest objective idea into the center of the world

orbit" (Simmel 1983: 154). It is one of the striking theses of Fei Xiaotong that this turn toward objective moral principles, which Simmel attributes to Plato, *never happened in China* (Fei 1953: 26).

The consequences of potential allegiance to rational ethical imperatives transcending immediate kinship interests are these: In the Oriental cultural tradition Fei introduces *two types of personal association* for what in the West appears rather as subtypes of primary group relationships. Loyalty is legitimized in China as personal closeness. By contrast, relationships in the West with the emotional distance normally required in organizations need a rational objective basis for justifying their existence and continuation in loyalty.

But since according to Fei what Simmel described as placing the "highest objective idea into the center of the world orbit" never happened in China, there is no cultural foundation for rationally based reliable relationships in the contexts of what Western sociology calls secondary groups. The absence of those foundations tends to create situations inside large scale organizations which to the Western observer – for lack of any better way of understanding them – smell of corruption.

Personalization of Law

Since spectacular advancements usually come at a price, we can conclude that the West suffered the loss of some valuable components of its cultural tradition in exchange for its turn toward objective moral principles. In the East on the other hand it seems that the *absence* of "that highest objective idea" helped China maintain value positions – for better or for worse – that have been lost in occidental quarters. We can observe in this context that in the Chinese tradition, loyalty toward a person is regarded as being more important than obedience to an abstract rule. We will come back to that later in the context of obligations a son has toward his father even if faced with illegal paternal behaviour. The priority of loyalty to a person rather than to a principle obviously has private as well as political implications.

In the Western "private" sphere, if a father is tired of arguing with his smart offspring about the appropriateness of a given rule he wants the youngster to obey, he may personalize the rule in question by saying: "I want you not to do this, because if you did, it would make your mother sad." In the realm of politics in China – normally considered to be "public" in the West – the personalization of a law works in a similar way even outside the family, because you certainly do not want to make your emperor (or party chief) sad, let alone angry! Looking at it this way, it may be regarded as almost legitimate if in past

centuries the oriental monarch had someone executed for causing him to be in a bad mood. The threat, “you had better not make me angry at you!” even rings in the background of the 1793 letter of Emperor Qianlong to King George III of England, which we will encounter here in the chapter on the Opium Wars.

An event that occurred in the 18th century may serve us as additional illustration of the personalistic approach to public rule. It preceded the Macartney Mission (1793–1794) and is referred to in British colonial history as the Flint Affair, because it was related to the supercargo and leading manager James Flint of the British East India Company who was fluent in Chinese. His frustration with the corruption and unreliability of Chinese commercial partners in the city of Guangzhou (Canton) prompted him in 1750 to write a petition directly to the emperor. The severe accusations against Chinese business men shocked Emperor Qianlong and he promised, if those allegations turned out to be true, to severely punish the Chinese merchant suspects.

An investigation found the accusations correct. The ensuing punishment of the Chinese merchants appeared cruel but seemed justified in the Chinese culture context. However, after that had taken place, the Chinese translators, whom the British East India Company had trained to know some English, and who assisted Flint in producing a written version of his complaints in Chinese, were executed for being instrumental in making the Emperor angry and embarrassed. For the same reason Flint was imprisoned in Macao from 1759 to 1762.

All this is difficult or impossible to understand from a Western legal perspective. It can only be made vaguely plausible against the background of the absence, as we saw above, of the rational abstract concept of the objective good, to which Simmel and Fei refer in their analysis. In our introduction above we have seen Max Weber describe these Western achievements: There was teaching about government and law in many cultures, but only in the West was it based on a rational construction of concepts and on the systematic coherence of Aristotle's teaching. The legal system of Ancient Rome determines the continental European law in France, Germany and other countries till this day. But Ancient Rome had no impact on China, and there the legal system is based on different evolutionary steps.

Back to the problem of familistic behaviour that must be seen as threatening to the environment! Beginning with the widespread feeling among Chinese persons that in the public sphere there are rights available without any obligations, we have identified two different “problems” in China: The absence of the tradition of a universalistic ethic and the absence of an objective legal system that is perceived as valid independent of any person.

Quite obviously there are other countries in which there are problems with observing rules to protect the environment. This is far from being a typical Chinese difficulty. However, the fact that in China there is a special type of threat to the environment can in part be explained by referring to the familistic tradition of the “selfish” kinship system. The prevalence of an exclusive kinship-based ethic and the absence of a turn toward objective moral principles represent an important theoretical background for explaining that threat.

Cultural evolution has taken different paths in the two regions of the world. In the continuity of this observation, and fortified by observing the development of Chinese culture, it will be shown in the following chapters that China is superior to the West in the way its culture of the *intimate sphere*² has been handed down through the generations, whereas the West has become superior to the Orient with regard to rationalizing and organizing what it calls the public sphere.

² I avoid here the term “private” because it is meaningful only in confrontation with the term “public.”

Exchanges of Threats: The Opium Wars

International Relations: Britain

During China's long history confrontations with neighbouring countries had led the emperors and their advisors to consider other peoples as "barbarian," meaning culturally less developed than the Chinese nation. A lower stage in evolution did not preclude the possibility that China suffered an occasional military defeat at the hands of the less civilized strangers. Military strength, however, was not generally interpreted as cultural superiority. This attitude was also kept alive for some time in the face of the two-fold defeat against Great Britain as the result of the two Opium Wars (1839–42 and 1856–60).

But it became more and more difficult to believe in China's cultural superiority while confronted with military and political humiliation. As a result, many Chinese intellectuals became increasingly impatient with their country's failure to defend itself militarily and doubted the validity of the *Zhong Guo's* cultural tradition because of that frustration. They started looking to Europe as a source of innovative ideas, including those by Marx and Engels.

The Opium Wars which had a critical effect in that direction were fought upon the request of British merchants to support their economic activities in mainland China. Those included (but were of course not limited to) the sale of the life-threatening opium to wealthy Chinese, more and more of whom became addicted to it and were eventually incapacitated by its use. When the Chinese government acted to restrict the import of the dangerous drug, British tradesmen asked their king in London to intervene militarily on the side of Western business interests. Reflecting upon this phase in history tends to place the modern Western observer on the side of China's leadership in its early struggle against drug addiction.

Britain and the Western powers won both wars. Having defeated China militarily, mainly on account of their more advanced level of industrialization and its resulting military technology, they imposed humiliating conditions in their peace negotiations. Apart from that, British and French soldiers marched into Peking. There they looted and destroyed the emperor's Summer Palace. In the present, a European visitor to Peking may be confronted with those acts of barbarism. Typically, he or she is then asked the question of what they think of such behaviour; the implication being, that how Western foreigners conducted

themselves on Chinese soil was clearly barbarian in light of what happened during and after the Opium Wars.

As a consequence of its defeat China was forced to allow foreign powers to install independent enclaves, primarily in important trade regions like Shanghai and Hong Kong. In addition, Christian missionaries were given the right to settle in China anywhere they wanted (Poerner 2011: 169). To be allowed to pursue their religious goals under such political conditions obviously backfired. It was to burden Christian missions with an atmosphere of foreign military intervention that may take centuries to overcome.

In summary then, between 1840 and 1860 the ethical balance of foreign politics seemed to have clearly tipped in the direction of China as the innocent victim of rampant European colonialism and imperialism. But this is merely the thesis provoking the antithesis as we go back further in history and ask what had happened earlier.

Moral judgment shifts if one turns back in time by half a century and looks at Occident-Orient relations from a British perspective. Merchants from the United Kingdom had traded with China during the 18th century, but the official policy imposed by the emperor there limited import as well as export activities to the port of Guangzhou, then – and frequently to this day – referred to by Westerners as Canton or Kanton.¹

In 1793 a large British vessel carried an official royal delegation to China in the hope to establish diplomatic relationships between King George III (lived 1738–1820, ruled 1760–1811) in England and Emperor Qianlong in Peking (Beijing) (lived 1711–1799, ruled 1735–1796). The journey is known as the *Macartney Embassy*, also called the *Macartney Mission*, after the name of the person in charge, George Macartney. He was instructed in London to present to the emperor the wish of Great Britain to increase trade with China and accordingly

- (a) to have some of the restrictions lifted which had been imposed on foreign trade,
- (b) to allow Great Britain to maintain a permanent embassy in the Emperor's capital Peking (Beijing),
- (c) to permit Great Britain “to use a small unfortified island near Chusan (Zhoushan) for the residence of British traders, storage of goods, and outfitting of ships,”² and finally
- (d) to reduce tariffs on merchandise traded in Canton (Guangzhou).

1 That name was derived from the pronunciation of the name of the province Guangdong surrounding the city of Guangzhou.

2 Wikipedia, entry: Macartney Mission.

The journey undertaken with these goals in mind lasted from 1792 to 1794 and must be judged as morally of the highest standards and diplomatically fair and open-minded on the part of King George III and of Great Britain as a nation. The mission pretended to come for the purpose of congratulating the emperor on his 80th birthday. However, this minor lack of sincerity – if that is indeed what it was – cannot be regarded as serious.

The whole undertaking failed, however, due to the conviction on the Chinese side, that China was superior in every respect to foreigners in general and to Great Britain and its King George III in particular. The attitude of the emperor and his advisors cannot be documented in any better way than by quoting the letter which Emperor Qianlong wrote to King George III. In spite of the considerable length of the letter it is included here in full because of its importance.

You, O King, from afar have yearned after the blessings of our civilization and in your eagerness to come into touch with our converting influence have sent an Embassy across the sea bearing a memorial [memorandum]. I have already taken note of your respectful spirit of submission, have treated your mission with extreme favor and loaded it with gifts, besides issuing a mandate to you, O King, and honoring you at the bestowal of valuable presents. Thus has my indulgence been manifested!

Yesterday your Ambassador petitioned my Ministers to memorialize me regarding your trade with China, but his proposal is not consistent with our dynastic usage and cannot be entertained. Hitherto, all European nations, including your own country's barbarian merchants, have carried on their trade with our Celestial Empire at Canton. Such has been the procedure for many years, although our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its own borders. There was therefore no need to import the manufactures of outside barbarians in exchange for our own produce. But as the tea, silk and porcelain which the Celestial Empire produces, are absolute necessities to European nations and to yourselves, we have permitted, as a signal mark of favor, that foreign hong[s] [groups of merchants] should be established at Canton, so that your wants might be supplied and your country thus participate in our beneficence. But your Ambassador has now put forward new requests which completely fail to recognize the Throne's principle to "treat strangers from afar with indulgence," and to exercise a pacifying control over barbarian tribes, the world over. Moreover, our dynasty, swaying the myriad races of the globe, extends the same benevolence towards all. Your England is not the only nation trading at Canton. If other nations, following your bad example, wrongfully importune my ear with further impossible requests, how will it be possible for me to treat them with easy indulgence? Nevertheless,

I do not forget the lonely remoteness of your island, cut off from the world by intervening wastes of sea, nor do I overlook your excusable ignorance of the usages of our Celestial Empire. I have consequently commanded my Ministers to enlighten your Ambassador on the subject, and have ordered the departure of the mission. But I have doubts that, after your Envoy's return he may fail to acquaint you with my view in detail or that he may be lacking in lucidity, so that I shall now proceed ... to issue my mandate on each question separately. In this way you will, I trust, comprehend my meaning....

Your request for a small island near Chusan [a group of islands in the East China Sea at the entrance to Hangchow Bay], where your merchants may reside and goods be warehoused, arises from your desire to develop trade. As there are neither foreign hongts nor interpreters in or near Chusan, where none of your ships have ever called, such an island would be utterly useless for your purposes. Every inch of the territory of our Empire is marked on the map and the strictest vigilance is exercised over it all: even tiny islets and far-lying sandbanks are clearly defined as part of the provinces to which they belong. Consider, moreover, that England is not the only barbarian land which wishes to establish ... trade with our Empire: supposing that other nations were all to imitate your evil example and beseech me to present them each and all with a site for trading purposes, how could I possibly comply? This also is a flagrant infringement of the usage of my Empire and cannot possibly be entertained.

The next request, for a small site in the vicinity of Canton city, where your barbarian merchants may lodge or, alternatively, that there be no longer any restrictions over their movements at Aomen [a city some 45 miles to the south of Canton, at the lower end of the Pearl (Zhu) River delta] has arisen from the following causes. Hitherto, the barbarian merchants of Europe have had a definite locality assigned to them at Aomen for residence and trade, and have been forbidden to encroach an inch beyond the limits assigned to that locality. ...If these restrictions were withdrawn, friction would inevitably occur between the Chinese and your barbarian subjects, and the results would militate against the benevolent regard that I feel towards you. From every point of view, therefore, it is best that the regulations now in force should continue unchanged....

Regarding your nation's worship of the Lord of Heaven, it is the same religion as that of other European nations. Ever since the beginning of history, sage Emperors and wise rulers have bestowed on China a moral system and inculcated a code, which from time immemorial has been religiously observed by the myriads of my subjects. There has been no hankering after heterodox doctrines. Even the European (Christian) officials in my capital are forbidden to hold intercourse with Chinese subjects; they are restricted within the limits

of their appointed residences, and may not go about propagating their religion. The distinction between Chinese and barbarian is most strict, and your Ambassador's request that barbarians shall be given full liberty to disseminate their religion is utterly unreasonable.

It may be, O King that the above proposals have been wantonly made by your Ambassador on his own responsibility, or peradventure you yourself are ignorant of our dynastic regulations and had no intention of transgressing them when you expressed these wild ideas and hopes.... If, after the receipt of this explicit decree, you lightly give ear to the representations of your subordinates and allow your barbarian merchants to proceed to Chekiang and Tientsin [two Chinese port cities], with the object of landing and trading there, the ordinances of my Celestial Empire are strict in the extreme, and the local officials, both civil and military, are bound reverently to obey the law of the land. Should your vessels touch the shore, your merchants will assuredly never be permitted to land or to reside there, but will be subject to instant expulsion. In that event your barbarian merchants will have had a long journey for nothing. Do not say that you were not warned in due time! Tremblingly obey and show no negligence! A special mandate!³

Obviously and consistently the text of the emperor's letter treats the king of Great Britain as his subject, demanding full and unlimited obedience to the emperor of China, who considered himself the ruler of the world.⁴ His letter contained open threats and used the command "tremblingly obey" at the end. In London, clearly the text of the document and the implied attitude could only be judged as humiliating and provocative.

Thus the stage was set for European diplomats to be replaced, in England as elsewhere, by military strategists. The two Opium Wars seemed implicitly justified by the condescending tone of Emperor Qianlong's letter of 1793 to George III. In 1840 the British took Chusan (Zhoushan) by force, having asked for it in a diplomatic but futile way as item no. 3 (see above!) on the agenda of the Macartney Mission in Beijing in 1793. In 1841 Zhoushan was returned in exchange for Hong Kong which at that time was merely a fisher village.

Did Emperor Qianlong's condescending letter addressed to the King of Great Britain give rise to the Opium Wars and their long term consequences? It may have led up to those, which does not mean that it literally caused or

3 "Qianlong Letter to George III (1792)" University of California, Santa Barbara. Retrieved January 30, 2014. <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/2c/texts/1792QianlongLetterGeorgeIII.htm>.

4 In 1874, Queen Victoria took the title "Empress of India." The British monarchs kept the title until 1947.

justified them. But how could the emperor consider the European nations barbarian and even call them by that name? Apart from the fact that this attitude of superiority was applied to all non-Chinese nations, not just the Europeans, a search for “objective facts” in support of the Chinese view of a savage Europe at the time leads to disturbing results:

England, September 1st: George Macartney, 1st Earl Macartney sails from Portsmouth in HMS *Lion* as the first official envoy from the Kingdom of Great Britain to China.

France, September 2nd: During what becomes known as the September Massacres of the French Revolution, rampaging mobs slaughter three Roman Catholic bishops and more than 200 priests.⁵

In view of such occurrences Emperor Qianlong may not have found much reason to ask himself or his advisors, how appropriate it still was to consider the people of Europe barbarian.

Be that as it may, the international relations between China and the West during the 18th and 19th century led Chinese intellectuals to an utterly ambivalent attitude toward Europe, and at the same time to an increasingly critical evaluation of their own Chinese traditional culture. Why did the European communist movement gain so much support from Chinese intellectuals that it eventually led to the rule of Mao Zedong (lived 1893–1976) in China? How can we explain that during the past century the West could not influence mainland China with other ideas as decisively as with the teachings derived from the Germans Marx and Engels? Their *Marxism* was transported east to China directly as well as via China’s “European” neighbour Russia after having been *enhanced* there with Lenin’s and Stalin’s influence. But what is it that made these revolutionary ideas from the 19th and 20th century more attractive to Chinese intellectuals than older Western achievements like ancient Roman rationalism, Judeo-Christian thinking, and humanism? Threat and disappointment from the West caused them to give preference to that type of European thought that was itself critical of European conditions. That applies to texts from the 18th century by authors as Montesquieu (1689–1755), Voltaire (1694–1778), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) preceding and leading up to the French Revolution, as well as later to the writings by Marx and Engels published during the 19th century.

5 Wikipedia, Entry “1792”.

Russia, Japan, and Germany

Apart from the Chinese view on Europe as a threatening continent in general, there developed a special relationship between China and Russia, the only European power with territory bordering on the “*Center Country*.” After Japan had defeated China in the war of 1894–95 and thereby dealt an additional severe blow to the centrist self-perception (Schmidt-Glintzer 2014: 28), Li Hongzhang, then one of the most important political advisor to the emperor, was invited to St. Petersburg for the coronation of Tsar Nikolas II in 1896. The diplomatic outcome of that visit was the signing of a secret treaty between Russia and China, in which the two nations promised to come to each other’s military aid in case Japan attacks Russia, China, or Korea (Kindermann 1970:78).

The treaty also specified that the Chinese ports should be open and available to Russian military operations in such a case. In addition, China agreed to permit Russia the construction of a railway through parts of Manchuria with the explicit permission to transport Russian military personnel and equipment through Chinese territory (ibid: 79). The only part of the treaty that became known to the public was the plan to build the railway.

The implied hope that Russia, the European ally, would help protect China from the increasing military strength of Japan, turned out to be an illusion: Instead Japan even defeated Russia at the end of the war of 1905! This victory of an Asian nation over what was considered a first rate European power had lasting symbolic and ideological consequences in China. In Europe it helped level the field for the Russian Revolution.

At the occasion of China being defeated by Japan in 1895 the ambitious German emperor William II had written in a letter to the Russian Tsar that Germany too was interested in establishing a colony in China. No negative reaction came from the Russian side, so the Kaiser felt emboldened to go ahead with that plan (ibid: 80). When in November of 1897 two German missionaries were murdered in the province of Shandong, the German emperor used that sad event as a pretext for taking military action. The city and port of Qingdao (known also as Tsingtau) was taken by German troops after they overpowered the Chinese garrison there.

The imperial government of China was hoping for support from Russia against the German intervention. Finding itself, however, defeated militarily and diplomatically isolated on the issue, China had no choice but in March 1898 to sign an “agreement” leasing Qingdao to Germany for 99 years, similar to Britain’s lease on Hong Kong. In addition, China was forced to give to Germany the rights to build railways and to exploit mines throughout the province of Shandong (ibid.).

The Chinese Experience: Threat and Disappointment

About two decades later the outcome of the negotiations that were intended to conclude World War I with the *Versailles Treaty of Peace* of June 28, 1919, aggravated even more China's view of The West of the early 20th century, which now more visibly included America. China had perceived itself as ally of the anti-Germany coalition. It sent an envoy to Versailles hoping to negotiate at least to the effect that the former German colonial holdings in Shandong province, including the city of Qingdao would be taken away from defeated Germany and returned to China. That, however, did not happen.

Instead China's assumed allies, the "Big Three" nations represented by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and American President Woodrow Wilson, decided in Versailles to ignore China and to pass control of the formerly German colony in Shangdong to Japan. The Europeans and the United States thereby severely humiliated China and disappointed the educated class in their expectations of finding justice and fairness in the way their presumed allies would treat them. The effects of this disappointment about Western equity – or rather the lack thereof – can still be found in the attitudes of elderly intellectuals in China today.

Looking back at the small selection from the history of Chinese-European relations that we considered in this chapter, it seems plausible why from a Chinese perspective the *inferior and barbarian* nations of the West including the United States mutated to members of a *threatening industrial* culture, later of course to be identified with "capitalism."

In addition to the West having proven dangerous militarily and unreliable politically, it was also experienced as threatening from the perspective of the economy. Throughout China's history its economic balance in rural areas had depended upon combining the production of agricultural goods with the manufacture of handicraft. "As far back as the time of Mencius the peasants were being urged to plant mulberry bushes at their homesteads for the production of silk" (Fei 1953: 114).

Silk, tea, and porcelain, commonly referred to as *china*, were the standard handicrafts made in the countryside of China. Cotton spinning was also widespread. During the busy times of the year every farm hand was needed in the field, however, "rural activities are quite seasonal" (*ibid*: 115). That gave the population in the countryside the opportunity to add to what they grew as peasants the goods they manufactured as handicrafts.

The wealthy gentry, who frequently extracted painfully high payments from the tenants of the land, circulated some of that money back to them as buyers of their products and thereby helped assure that the peasants secured the

needed additional income. But when European companies of mass production started selling their goods in Shanghai, Hong Kong and other trading points in China, the members of the gentry increasingly purchased the more prestigious products that had been imported from Paris or London. As a consequence, the local goods no longer found buyers. "If a countrywoman who has spun some cloth cannot find anyone to buy from her, whom can she blame? She will simply sigh and cease to spin" (ibid: 117).

The rise of Chinese business in the big cities as the result of imports from the West thus contributed to the decline of the countryside. There the poor peasants could then justifiably see themselves as victims of Western capitalism. Fei observes that during the Japanese occupation, which sadly blocked traffic between countryside and big cities, the countryside recovered, because their handicrafts were again in demand (ibid: 109).

The Chinese peasants of course realized the causal relationship between blockage of traffic and their improved condition and were aware of the paradox that they experienced something beneficial on the basis on a terrible war. In general, then, as a result of threatening Western business activities they experienced the added hardship of poverty, which was imposed on them before and after the last war with Japan. As a result, the notion became wide spread in China that Western nations were dangerous militarily, unreliable politically, and threatening from the perspective of the economy.

Why Did China Not Defend Herself?

Looking back at the many military provocations facing China from European countries and from Japan the question must be raised, why the huge country did not display more military power to defend herself. A prominent Chinese view on the reluctance to fight reads quite sober as follows: A simple young Chinese may feel inspired by a great man, wanting to follow him. That leader may then put such individuals in the military and send them "to fight. They will be killed whether they go forward or turn back. That is dangerous to them" (Lin 1936: 200). They may have been inspired to "forsake their own private pursuits and join the military service, and when they are poor, those above do not pay them any attention. Of course they remain poor. Now who likes to be in danger and poverty? Therefore, they will mind their own business and will be interested in building their own houses and will try to avoid war" (ibid.). This statement must be read in the context of the prevalence of private interests over public service.

But indeed there have been wars throughout Chinese history. In a striking piece of research, published in 1931, J.S. Lee (Lee 1931) presented empirical

support for a cyclical philosophy of history. He pointed to the periodic recurrence of disastrous civil wars in China. He presented with considerable plausibility the scheme of three cycles of about 800 years duration each with a sequence of political hubris and actual greatness, followed by catastrophic decline. These cycles cover roughly the intervals between 200 BCE and 600 CE, next between 600 and 1400 CE and finally between 1400 CE and our approaching future of the year 2200. Each cycle starts with a maximum of centralized power and the striking employment of technical and human resources, then ends with the collapse of one or several dynasties.

In *cycle one* monarchic power and cultural greatness enabled China in the years 220–206 BCE to build the Great Wall in its earliest version. The construction was ordered by Qin Shihuang, the first emperor of a unified China who died in 210 BCE after having had thousands of terracotta soldiers⁶ modeled for his mausoleum. In addition, the same tyrannical ruler commanded the construction of a colossal imperial palace, the Epangong (阿房宫) which after his death was set on fire by rebellious crowds and burnt for three months.

Cycle two started around 600 CE with “the building of the Grand Canal under the Sui Emperor, who had also magnificent palaces” built, “noted for their grandeur and luxury” (Lin 1936: 27). The cycle ended in the rule of foreigners over China, the Mongol emperors, referred to as the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 CE).

Cycle three started at about 1400 with the renewal of the Great Wall and its extension to its present form. In addition, new canals and dams were constructed and, most importantly perhaps, the city of Peking was built under Emperor Yongle of the Ming Dynasty.

After between 200 and 300 years of their respective existence and increasingly during the second half and toward the end of each cycle, brutal *internecine* wars occurred in which Chinese killed each other in large numbers. It is disquieting, that the publication by Lee and the comments about it by Lin occurred decades prior to the most recent Chinese civil war and the Cultural Revolution (compare: Leese 2013), events which Lee might have predicted in the continuity of his comparative research about the three cycles of history.

These speculations about the real or imagined repetitions in Chinese history lead up to the following question: How can it be explained that this people, identified by a continuous culture, survived the repeated political disasters it suffered? Maybe this happens because the strength of China comes out of its families rather than its government and its military. Can public weakness and even vices be compensated in a society by private virtues?

6 The Terracotta Army was discovered outside Xi'an in 1974 by coincidence when workmen were digging a well.

China and the US: A Balance of Power?

Why Follow Thucydides?

In the United States at least since 2011 there has been a debate, conducted in public addresses, internet blogs, and best-selling novels¹ that the relationship between China and America may have an historical parallel in antiquity in the conflict between Athens and Sparta. According to some of these exchanges America's dealings with China ought to be looked at with the ancient warning in mind, which the Greek historian Thucydides (about 545–about 396 BCE) presented to the people of Athens. He is said to have urged the Athenians to prepare for war against the Lacedaemonians led by Sparta, because over time, Sparta was getting more and more powerful und thus growing into a threat. The recent Thucydides-debate in the U.S.A., *horribile dictu*, tacitly implies the option of a pre-emptive war.

What is the background for this somewhat surprising reference to ancient Greek historiography? Since a familiarity with the details of the text by Thucydides cannot reasonably be taken for granted even among Americans with considerable erudition, it is even harder to explain why reference to the ancient Greek is made in the U.S.A. in the context of topical military debate. We start our search for answers by adding here some more information about the notion of “Thucydides’ Trap.”

According to Thucydides, Pericles (495² or 490 – 429), the elected strategist of the Athenian people, tried to persuade the assembly of the polis to enter into the Peloponnesian War (431–404) against the Lacedaemonians led by Sparta. He gave his audience a list of reasons for making such a decision: Peaceful negotiations are fruitless since their opponents “wish complaints to be settled by war.” In addition, the tone in which the Lacedaemonians deal with the Athenians is described by Pericles (in the words of Thucydides) as shifting from persuasion to giving orders, a remark clearly appealing to the emotions, not the reason of the Athenians.

1 Tom Clancy (with Marc Greaney): *Threat Vector*, Penguin Books, London (England) and New York. 2012.

2 Again, all years are to be read as BCE.

The list of orders Sparta tries to impose on Athens includes: Raise the siege of Potidaea, let Aegina be independent, revoke the Megara decree! In addition, Sparta has, as Pericles also mentions according to Thucydides, stated in an ultimatum to Athens the serious warning “to leave the Hellenes independent.” Pericles then comments on this list by admitting that each item by itself may seem a trifle demand, but then adds: “Why, this trifle contains the whole seal and trial of your resolution.” Urging a speedy decision, he spells out clear alternatives: Either “submit before you are harmed” or “if we are to go to war, as I (Pericles) for one think we ought, to do so without caring whether the ostensible cause be great or small, resolved against making concessions.”

In the West, the primarily American concern about China connected to the writings of Thucydides, can be looked at as the creation of an atmosphere of suspicion. In the United States Thucydides’ rendering of the history of the Peloponnesian War has recently been treated as an important resource.³ Some theorists have referred to it by describing what they call “Thucydides’ Trap” as a warning: Conflict and even war seem to be on the horizon unless China and the United States find ways to avoid confrontation.

This apparent danger follows from what those theorists believe to be the lesson from Thucydides report about the Peloponnesian War (431–404). That military confrontation in antiquity led up to a prolonged siege of Athens and to its surrender to Sparta in the year 404. Given the widely professed indebtedness of Western culture to Ancient Greek intellectual foundations it is hard to simply discard the Thucydides debate as far-fetched, even though it is more a specifically American than a wide-spread Western phenomenon. We shall therefore look at some of the ancient Greek writings that preceded Thucydides in order to better understand the influences of demagoguery to be found in the historiography written by him.

3 According to Ben Schott (“The Thucydides Trap” in *The New York Times* of January 31, 2011) it was Graham Allison “who coined the phrase Thucydides Trap, where a rising power causes fear in an established power which escalates toward war. Thucydides wrote: ‘What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta.’” In 2012 in the online journal *Opinion* of August 21, Allison published the article “Thucydides’ trap has been sprung in the Pacific” in which he refers to China’s aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea. Also in 2012, but prior to Allison, Gen. Martin Dempsey, then chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, mentioned Thucydides in a speech, in which he is optimistic about avoiding the “trap.” See: EIR (Executive Intelligence Review); May 3, 2012. The South China Sea controversy is recurrent: See the article in the government controlled Chinese press: Missile hype to fuel tensions – US have ulterior motives in reporting S. China Sea defense. In: *Global Times*, Feb. 18, 2016, pp. 1–2.

Homer

China as well as “the West” look back at millennia of literary culture; China’s oracle bones of the Shang Dynasty date back to the 16th–11th century BCE. The inscriptions from those times on bones and turtle shells primarily represent results of *exchanges with the beyond*. There is good reason therefore to count them among religious texts. Homer, the first poet of the occident, however, primarily referred to warfare with only occasional remarks about religious phenomena.

Homer must have lived, if he ever really existed, in the second half of the 8th or during the first half of the 7th century. He of course described the Trojan War which is dated at about 1200. In the scenes leading up to the battle of Troy we find the oldest descriptions of fighting speeches recorded in Western literary tradition long before Thucydides described the rhetoric of Pericles. They are the rallying addresses delivered to the soldiers waiting to attack Troy, according to Homer, by two prominent orators: King Agamemnon and the hero Odysseus.

During Greek and Roman antiquity, it was frequently hard to distinguish between an orator and a demagogue. The original Greek meaning of the word demagogue must not have been as negative as most of us see it today: A *pedagogue* instructs children, and a *demagogue* instructs the people; from the perspective of the original meaning of those words, in both cases *instruction* was needed. There is no question that Perikles acted as a demagogue in Athens as did Cato in Rome two centuries later. They both stood in the venerable tradition of strategic communicators as handed down in the Homeric epic of the Iliad about the Trojan war.

The first scroll of Homer’s Iliad leads up to a striking example of demagoguery.⁴ As was the custom of the time, the Greek military had captured a girl who, however, happened to be the daughter of a priest dedicated to the god Apollo. The girl was taken to the tent of the king Agamemnon who refused to give her back even though the desperate father pleaded with him and offered a generous ransom for the return of his daughter. The king’s stubbornness enraged the god Apollo who in his anger sent disease to the Greek armies as a punishment. To end such calamity, the priest’s daughter, was finally returned, whereupon the king demanded another girl as replacement. He chose the one who had

4 Homer, Iliad <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0133> German translation: Homer, *Ilias und Odyssee*. In der Übertragung von Johann Heinrich Voss, herausgegeben von Peter von der Müll. Wiesbaden: R. Löwit, no year, (nach der ersten Ausgabe von 1793).

been given to the hero Achilles (not taking into consideration, how the girl or Achilles may feel about that).

This resulted in a serious confrontation between the two men at the height of which Achilles nearly raised his sword against his own king. Since even the hero was not allowed to refuse the king's demand, the girl eventually changed hands, but as a reaction the furious Achilles refused to fight for the Greeks henceforth. Having been involved in a futile siege of the walled city of Troy for nine years, having barely recovered from being smitten with a (god given) epidemic and in addition realizing that their best fighter, Achilles, was no longer available in the field, the Greek soldiers must have been far from ready to fight. In this situation king Agamemnon crafts a demagogical plan to prepare them for an attack all the same.

The king – in an aside to his entourage – makes the remark: Let us see if we can get them ready to fight. Therefore, I the king, will test them in my speech, and ask if they would not prefer to board their ships and flee the battlefield of Troy. – Agamemnon's most senior advisor, Nestor, encourages the king to use trickery in order to make the soldiers willing to fight. The plan is, to have the king's speech followed by somebody else's with the intention to hold the armies back from boarding their ships to leave the battlefield.

According to the tricky plan, king Agamemnon ends his address with these words: Since we left our homes, nine years have already gone by. Our ships' timber is beginning to rot and their tackling no longer functions properly. Our wives and children sit at home waiting for us, but nothing of what we have come here for has been accomplished. Therefore, let us all board our ships and flee home to our own land, since there is no hope that we can take Troy after having tried in vain for nine years. – Homer reports in his verses that the king's words, though not sincere, had a significant emotional effect, as can easily be imagined. The insincere speech could have given the impression of being very concerned and compassionate.

Strangely, Odysseus then takes the sceptre from the king and uses it to beat into silence the ugly and apparently somehow crazy Thersites. This scene of violence serves as the transition between king Agamemnon's speech and the address which is jointly attributed by Homer to the hero Odysseus and to Athena, the Greek virgin goddess of reason: "But up rose Odysseus, sacker of cities, the sceptre in his hand, and by his side flashing-eyed Athena, in the likeness of a herald, bade the host keep silence, that the sons of the Achaeans, both the nearest and the farthest, might hear his words, and lay to heart his counsel. He with good intent addressed their gathering."

After the mockery that characterized the king's speech, the sincerity of the second piece of strategic communication is made credible by pointing out that

Odysseus had the goddess Athena standing by his side and that he speaks to the assembled soldiers “with good intent.” He too, as the king in the preceding speech, refers to the pain of being separated from wife and children thus showing compassion with the fighters. But then Odysseus turns to a prophecy connected to the apparition of “a serpent, blood-red on the back,” which is interpreted as predicting that after nine years of frustration victory over Troy will come in the tenth year of the campaign.

Thus the soldiers are inspired by Odysseus, to be brave a little longer in order to finish their mission successfully, rather than fleeing home to arrive there without any achievement to justify their absence of nine years. The reaction is as it was intended: The assembled host shouts with consent and excitement praising “the words of godlike Odysseus.” Next Nestor, the senior councillor, speaks again, adding to what had just been said, the remarkable advice that the Greek soldiers after victory, shall not leave for their home before “each have lain with the wife of some Trojan,” a custom, which parts to the Russian military still followed when they defeated Germany in 1945. After these speeches as illustrations of strategic communication and because of their effects on the military as the result of demagoguery, a new phase in the war on Troy could begin, culminating of course in Odysseus’ cunning, involving the *Trojan Horse*, memorialized to our days in the “Trojan” as malicious software on today’s computers (confusing the horse with a citizen of Troy).

Homer’s Influence

We can safely assume that Perikles (495 or 490–429) as well as Thucydides (460–395) were familiar with Homer’s *Iliad*. From this we may derive the hypothesis that the principle of strategic communication designed to persuade large assemblies of persons was present in Perikles’ speech in the continuity of the achievements as orators attributed in the *Iliad* to Agamemnon and Odysseus. It appears from the literary evidence that the art of the orators was not perceived as telling the truth, be it convenient or inconvenient, but rather as knowing how to manipulate the vote in the assembly and how to get the people to conform to this or that powerful person’s interests.

The results this tradition produced during the fifth and fourth century BCE deserve an evaluation from the perspective of political ethics of the present. Consider the following examples for decisions arrived at by the “democratic” political system of ancient Athens: In 424 Thucydides was sent as military commander to Thasos. During the winter of 424–423 the Spartan general Brasidas attacked Amphipolis, a city in the same region. Thucydides was accused of not having helped the city quickly enough, which may have been unjustified. In any event, Amphipolis fell into the hands of the Spartans. In an angry reaction

the Athenians punished Thucydides by exiling him *for 20 years* even though he never felt there had been any misconduct on his part.

Socrates (470–399) was ordered to self-execution by drinking poison because he was perceived as misguiding the youth of Athens. Plato (428/427–348/347) witnessed the trial of Socrates, but was too ill to be present at the death of his beloved teacher. Being known as a follower of Socrates, Plato felt threatened in Athens. Disillusioned with corruption and petty politics in Athens, Plato immigrated to Southern Italy. There Plato served a tyrant as court philosopher until the ruler came to dislike the sage's ideas. Accordingly, the tyrant sold Plato into slavery. Had not a good friend purchased him and set him free, he would have remained a slave for the rest of his life.

Back in Athens, Aristotle (384–322) started an academy only to find himself subject to similar accusations that had led to the death of Socrates. As a result, Aristotle had to flee his native Athens to save his life. This is a sobering review of some of the effects of strategic communication practiced there by orators, and of the measures following those speeches by majority decision. This happened during, or close to the era of the Peloponnesian War (431–404). Fortunately, the people of Athens today tend to identify with the victims, not the perpetrators of what happened in antiquity.

In light of this, it is not clear why any political system of the present should ponder about possible contemporary applications of the so-called “Trap of Thucydides.” What has been going on in Greece during the fifth century may have been advanced by the standards of the time. By the standards of the present, however, decisions such as exiling Thucydides and condemning Socrates to death cannot serve as examples of wise democratic process in ancient Athens. Admittedly, the word “democracy” is a Greek word, meaning in literary translation “rule of the people.” But, as is well known, in ancient Athens that rule involved the established elite only, not the people as a whole with no right to vote for the rank-and-file let alone for women.

Nevertheless, the debate about the “Thucydides Trap” has been going on in the United States for several years. It is based on the assumption that below the surface of several concrete issues of contention there are two crucial factors: The growing power of Athens and the increasing fear of Sparta to lose its independence. Both factors, striving for power as well as experiencing fear, are attributed to *basic drives* in human nature and are therefore seen as inevitable. They are indeed properties that may or may not exist in *individuals*. It has long been recognized as a fallacy to transfer individual traits to *collectivities* assuming that large groups follow the same pattern of behaviour as individuals. This disqualifies “Thucydides’ Trap” for immanent methodological reasons in addition to the problems with ethical content that have been detailed above.

We now turn to the comparable ancient literature on the Chinese side of the comparison.

Chinese Classics on Warfare

At about the time of Pericles the strategist, in China the classical text *The Art of War*, attributed to Sun Tzu or: Sūnzǐ (孫子), was given its final version. It is widely read in China even to this day. A French translation appeared in 1772 and an English one in 1910. It is reported⁵ that Chairman Mao Zedong and General Douglas MacArthur consulted it during the last century. Sun Tzu, the ancient author, was a general and strategist and was born about 544 BCE. His text's significance surpasses giving technical advice in warfare: It has become an inspiration in peaceful endeavours as well, such as competing in business or "conquering" a woman. While the dramatic changes in military technology have rendered some of the more technical sections obsolete, the overall cultural value of *The Art of War* has remained intact. It presents military know-how in war as an *art*, as the title indicates, not, as we find in the text by Thucydides, as a duel between good and evil.

Another famous general in the tradition of Chinese culture was Guān Yǔ (關羽), who was born about the year 160 CE. His fame started with his killing a tyrant and included the command over an army of 100,000 soldiers. He is still famous for freeing the two wives of his adoptive brother from the enemy and for then personally protecting their honour as women.

As we shall see below in the chapter on Confucius, the sage taught about *bravery* during his lifetime that it was the lowest ranking virtue out of five in number. During the evolution of Confucianism, being courageous moved further and further into the background. Wisdom and cleverness, like, as is explained below, the wisdom of Zhuge, rank higher than being daring.

There are four classical novels in Chinese literary tradition which virtually everyone familiar with that culture knows: *Journey to the West*, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Water Margin*, and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. In the latter it happens that a band of soldiers approaches the large mansion of the nobleman Zhuge to capture him, and he knows about this. Unable to defend himself or to flee he takes two young boys to stand at his side while he plays a *guzhen*, a musical instrument similar to a zither.

The hostile group arrives and hears the music. Confronted with this peaceful scene their leader concludes that there must be a large contingent of fighters hiding in the building, and that the musician's composure can only

⁵ Wikipedia, entry "The Art of War."

be explained as the total absence of fear on his part combined with trickery due to the knowledge that nothing can happen to him because he feels well protected. Being afraid of the suspected defenders of the mansion, the band retreats and no violence occurs. – In China today, if a person is admired for his or her good judgment, that person may be called “as wise as Zhuge.”

The low priority attributed to bravery by Confucius and the significance of fear and intelligence in story about Zhuge Liang represent an interesting contrast to how in Homer’s poetry or in other Western epics, like the Song of the Nibelungs (which originated shortly after 1200 CE) bravery and *fighting to the death* are presented as heroic.

An Alternative to Thucydides: E.R. Service

Fortunately, as theoretical guidance in debating the evolving relationship between China and the West, and for establishing patterns of political and social evolution, sociological theory has better tools to offer than what has been available since two and a half millennia. As one example there is the discovery by Elman Rogers Service⁶ (1915–1996) of the fading evolutionary potential of established cultures. Service was an American neo-evolutionary cultural anthropologist. He participated in the Spanish civil war where he was severely wounded. Service ended his teaching career in Goleta, California, at the University of California Santa Barbara. He contributed significantly to the development of a modern theory of social evolution.

Service is well known for his “*law of evolutionary potential*” describing the fading ability of cultures to adapt to new challenges. To avoid the misunderstanding of wanting to present a universal philosophy of history claiming that all cultures will by necessity go through the same stages of evolution – or have already done so – Service emphasizes that he merely wants to explain discontinuities or apparent “jumps” which seem to contradict evolutionary theory. To that end he combines the principle of adaptation (Darwin) with the theory of cultural diffusion as follows:

Cultures tend to become stable, establish themselves firmly and resist any type of change. This trend toward rigidity contradicts development; as a consequence, the evolution of culture repeatedly requires destabilization in order to counteract resistance to change. The impulse to destabilize may be generated by the environment or may come as a reaction to

⁶ Elman R. Service, The law of evolutionary potential, in: Elman R. Service, Marshal D. Sahlins (eds.) *Evolution and Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968, pp. 93–122, 102.

contact with a different culture via cultural diffusion. This can of course also happen as the result of war or of a Cultural Revolution as in China.

In order to research the seemingly accidental decisions in favour of either stability or of change, Service looks for the origins of territorial discontinuities in the history of the West. During the 20th century the United States was for Western Europe what Rome had been for Greece in antiquity: Faced with the rigidity of an established culture certain aspects of the older culture were raised up to a new level of rationality and specialization by a more powerful newcomer.⁷

The sequence of evolutionary levels of development in culture and government normally follows the steps of continuous progress. Spectacular innovations, however, typically arise in populations, which have previously not been in a leadership position. Between the 4th and the 3rd millennium BCE Sumer breaks through to a city culture and invents writing. The Sumerians cultivate the fertile but dry South of Mesopotamia. Then around the year 2500 they are subdued by Akkad, a people of Semitic pastoralists who were less cultured but more bellicose than the Sumerians. The Akkadians had the upper hand in fighting also because they were used to migrating through several diverse environments needing energy to adapt to those from comparatively low levels of specialization, whereas the Sumerian had become city dwellers and thus highly rigidified to fit only one stable urban living condition.

Following the pattern of Mesopotamia, the *religions of a divine king* spread to the empires of Babylonia and Egypt where the pharaoh ruled as a god, like later the emperor in China. Significant gradual quantitative progress was achieved in these regions, but the decisive qualitative jump up to a higher level of culture coincided with the take-over by the Greeks, an outside power. However, what before the age of the Greeks, Akkad had been to the Sumerians, later – as has been mentioned above – the Romans became for Greece: In each case the political system with the more mobile military and the more efficient government subdued the population with the higher and more differentiated level of culture.

E.R. Service attributes territorial discontinuity to the fading evolutionary potential of the rigidified cultural and political system that used to be the dominant power.⁸ It is precisely the exhaustion of the adaptive potential in the history of Athens, which has implicitly been documented by Thucydides when he has Perikles advise the Athenians to stay “resolved against making

7 Elman R. Service, *Origins of the state and civilization*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975, 217f.

8 Elman R. Service (1968), 97ff.

concessions.” It is not convincing to reduce the outcome of a multi-faceted cultural evolution to the notion of a “trap.”

Service hits upon a paradox that contains considerable political relevance: In the short run the most effective system is the one which concentrates all available energies on mastering the given reality confronting everyone at a particular time. However, in doing so, it by implication also consumes those energies which would be needed in the long run to adapt to changing conditions. This results in the failure of the more highly specialized political system when it comes to successfully facing new challenges for which past experiences provide no blue-print. A lower level of specialization by contrast entails more potential for adaptation and thus permits the less evolved society to outperform the population which was formerly the leader. It is certainly possible to look at The United States and China from this perspective without following the demagoguery of the Perikles of Thucydides and the other Greek strategists preceding them.

Once the levels of hunting-gathering and horticulture have been surpassed, on the evolutionary level of agriculture the law of evolutionary potential by E.R. Service can be applied as follows: In order to stay connected to the soil the populations need to become sedentary as has been the case of early Sumer. In addition, they then start founding cities, which means that compared to nomadic cultures they neglect the military or, more precisely, do not develop it further as happened in China. Conflicts between nomads and sedentary people forced the population of Sumer to polarize and form alliances with either the city people or the pastoralists. Such conflicts caused China to build the Great Wall.

The result was, as has been indicated above, at first the exhaustion of the evolutionary potential in Sumer, and then its military inferiority in the confrontation with Akkad. The permanent conflicts between a sedentary agrarian culture on the one hand and nomadic pastoralists on the other forced China – as we mentioned – to start building precursors of the Great Wall as early as the 7th century in the days of Homer, and later to build the Great Wall itself in the years 220–206 BCE as ordered by Qin Shihuang, the first emperor of a unified China, whose tyrannical rule will be dealt with in detail here later. He succeeded largely in shutting out the bellicose nomads by means of the Great Wall and in uniting China for the first time, but only temporarily.

To summarize: Comparative research based on archaeological and historical data makes it possible for E.R. Service to link discontinuities in regional evolution to the fading and exhaustion of energies required for making changes. One of the insights to be gained from Service’s law is this: The better adapted system has less energy available for adaptation: “More adaptation equals

less adaptability.”⁹ Or in the more concise version of this insight, as Robert N. Bellah worded it: “The more complex, the more fragile.”¹⁰ If this is applied to questions about the chances for survival of a culture and of a political entity, it follows that the future does not belong to those populations which have maximized adaptation but to those with a maximum ability to adapt to formerly unfamiliar living conditions.

This insight may lead back to the message implicit in “Thucydides’ Trap:” A nation which realizes that due to its inability to adapt to novel conditions for survival and success, may start a war out of fear to lose its leadership position. In much of human history developed societies were destabilized due to wars. Following E.R. Service, destabilization is needed to regain the potential of development. Massive enforced destabilization had occurred in Germany during World War II and in China, as I just mentioned above, during the Cultural Revolution 1966–1976. Surprising periods of recovery followed in both cases. It is one of the tasks of modern social scientists to describe paths toward peaceful destabilization as alternatives to the “necessities” that appear to be implicit in “Thucydides’ Trap.”

Promises and Threats Based on Economic Interests

In her book “China: the Fragile Superpower” Susan L. Shirk (Shirk 2009: 9) explains, in the continuity of the Thucydides thesis, that history has produced evidence in support of the tendency for rising powers to cause war. But she also points to “the most notable exception” which “occurred when the United States surpassed Britain in the late nineteenth century” (ibid.) without provoking an attack by Britain at the time. Shirk believes those nations managed to avoid war “because they shared the same values and culture.”

Shirk does not think that this applies to a confrontation between China and the United States, assuming of course that Americans share values with Britain that the population of mainland China does not share with Western nations. Are *shared values* a condition for avoiding “Thucydides’ Trap,” as Shirk implies, or can *shared interests* be sufficient? Were there in fact such *interest* shared by Britain and the United States that kept them from fighting each other, regardless of their values?

9 Elman R Service (1975), 320.

10 Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, xxiii.

It appears that in current international politics the potential of peaceful cooperation hinges on fairly distinct *interests*, which cause parties to accommodate each other in the absence of shared *values*. This is true even in domestic politics. Increasingly it becomes unclear to the outside observer how strong the ties are within Western countries that unify their citizens on the basis of shared *values*. In the absence of that conventional basis for peaceful cooperation it is to be hoped that shared interest can successfully take over from shared values to secure continued inner peace.

Derived from issues of immigration we witness at the present time severe disagreements on value issues among the political parties of Western democracies and even within the parties. Populations confronted with the necessity to adjust to changing conditions, like waves of refugees, tend to become polarized. Such polarization will erode any common *value* base, even if such shared foundation had existed for a long time. Having concrete *interests* in common may help bridge the widening gap between polarized value-camps.

Bellicose behaviour by Russian President Putin related to the Ukraine and to the annexation of Crimea has been interpreted by some analysts as being driven by the need for increasing solidarity within the polarized population of Russia. Supposedly, Putin achieves that by constructing the scenario of being threatened from the outside. Beyond the assumptions implicit in the notion of Thucydides' Trap there is the danger that a nation goes to war in order to restore national identity and emotionally based feeling of national unity. That was one of the motivations for the German Kaiser to start World War I in 1914.

Accordingly, war is not merely likely to start as a reaction to competition between a new rising power and an established leading nation, as contemporary followers of Thucydides believe; war can also get started to avoid internal confrontation among factions of one's own domestic population. This is true because in the past in comparison to a civil war an international war sometimes appeared preferable to a monarch, to a government or to party leaders. Possibly at present at least as much danger may result to world peace from the loss of value consensus inside a nation as from competition between nations. This concept of a threat can of course be applied to China as well as to the United States and to the West in general.

Be that as it may, on the level of value orientation, with regard to *shared interests* Susan L. Shirk presents to her readers a number of examples that have the potential of bringing the United States and China closer together peacefully even in the absence of *shared values* and emotional closeness.¹¹ At the

11 Members of the older generation of Chinese have seen the United States as the power which freed China from the horrors of Japanese occupation.

same time Shirk criticizes and deplors that as a result of shared interests the two nations have become interdependent or even co-dependent (ibid: 27).

Obviously foreign trade hinges on stable and peaceful international relations. Therefore, these considerations not only apply to China's relationship with the United States but also with Japan and Taiwan (ibis: 24). On the one hand there is the rational side of interests in trade relations and economic exchange, on the other hand there exists an emotional undercurrent in China against Japan (because of atrocities during World War II), against Taiwan (because of its insistence on autonomy from mainland China) and against the United States (due to its military presence in the Pacific beyond Hawaii). These illustrations suggest that peaceful exchanges between nations in which China participates, cannot rely on shared values and emotions, but instead must be based on the rationality of shared interests, independent of value discrepancies and emotional discord.

Shirk's observations raise the question if China and the United States share a rational capitalist orientation? Money making in the tradition of Max Weber's interpretation appears to be rational on the surface. But when Weber looks into the cultural foundations of rational capitalism in his text on the *Protestant Ethic* (see here the Max-Weber-chapter!), business activities turn out in Weber's view to be a type of behaviour which has irrational, religious foundations, at least at its outset. Thus "...the supposed conflict between other-worldliness, asceticism, and ecclesiastical piety on the one side, and participation in capitalistic acquisition on the other, might actually turn out to be an intimate relationship." (Weber 1950: 42).

Therefore, to confront rational interest in money making and the value position of religious conviction as opposed to each other is according to Weber not a historically correct view of what he calls modern rational capitalism: "The earning of more and more money... is thought of so purely as an end in itself, that from the point of view of the happiness of, or utility to, the single individual, it appears entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational" (ibid: 53).

This Weberian thesis that earning money is widely thought of "as an end in itself" opens up the economy for a variety of value motivations, be those religious, patriotic, familistic, or others. All of these can be used to justify participation in capitalistic acquisition. The distinction between getting rational capitalism started and keeping it going, shows that optimising the rational results in money making activities can be combined with and justified by a variety of value orientations that do not need to clash, if a *rational interest* as it were overarches them. Accordingly, economic cooperation can be carried on across deep divides of political ideology. This applies to the exchanges between China and the United States.

The above insight applies to potential conflicts in economic exchange *within* nations as it does *between* nations. It has obvious implications for the interactions between China and the West in business matters. Having thus detached money making on two levels from possible value positions, because – (a) it could have been initiated on the basis of disparate value orientations, (b) it is being continued through history regardless of the motivations behind it – the theoretical problem no longer centers on *value* content but instead shifts to matters of *shared interests*. That opens up a new scenario for conflict with the question: In *whose interest* are business activities carried on? There are no concrete business interests except to the benefit of certain types of subjects. Those can be humankind, a nation, a clan or family, an individual, or a combination of those.

Whereas the interpretation of capitalism by Karl Marx leads to viewing the maximization of profit as entirely selfish and ethically totally negative, Max Weber's take on a free and profit oriented economy includes emotional foundations, possibly, but not necessarily sanctioned by their religious nature. The Calvinist Protestant capitalist's view of having become wealthy is potentially this: God counts me among the Chosen Few, and thus He made me rich. The oriental business person can base a similar attitude toward his or her own wealth on Chinese tradition: My ancestors are supporting me, so I became wealthy with their support from the beyond.

In China, Deng Xiao Ping, confronted of course with Marxist orthodoxy, has introduced a long term thinking in consecutive stages of political change in which raising the wealth of the Chinese nation is one important step of transition. On the ideological level, according to Deng, more wealth is necessary in order to enable the evolution of history to finally progress to the stage of communism, now a remote goal. Obviously, more wealth is also compatible, as we saw, with Chinese traditional family ethic.

In a speech delivered at the occasion of a seminar for newly elected candidates and members of the central committee of the Communist Party, Xi Jinping told his listeners: "All party members must stay focussed on the Deng-Xiao-Ping theory..." (Xi 2014: 25). Vowing that Marxism will not become dated but keep up with progress that is achieved in action and science, Xi continues: "To uphold Chinese Socialism is a magnificent task. Deng Xiaoping has laid down the fundamental ideals and principles for that, and the central leadership team of the third generation in the company of Jiang Zemin as well as the Central Committee with Hu Jintao as secretary general have also written excellent chapters for this great work." (ibid: 27).

Publicly the current Chinese leadership motivates national economic success as improving the living conditions of the farmers and workers. Privately

Chinese individuals see working hard as a way to bring happiness and wealth to themselves and to their relatives. Against this background it is erroneous to consider China a capitalist country in the Western sense of that word. What the China of Deng Xiao Ping shares with the United States or parts of Europe is not capitalism as discussed by Karl Marx and by Max Weber. What they share is merely the interest in raising the standard of living and of consumption.

Accordingly, regardless of their respective value preferences, maintaining a so-called free market economy in the West versus an offshoot of Marxism called Chinese Socialism in China, both China and the West share the rational interest in the accumulation of wealth. Yet they motivate those gainful activities by associating them with different values. The emotional base for money-making is clearly different. But in spite of that motivational discrepancy, in a comparison of China and the U.S.A., their shared economic ambitions can be registered as a common goal and a shared interest which according to Susan L. Shirk can and should become a point of departure for peaceful cooperation.

Real and Imagined Military Threats

Trying to move the encouraging discovery of the peaceful effects of shared interests from the economy to the military, we find that the voices on the issue of “Threat Assessment” that reach Europe from America are mixed: There is the comforting statement that “the United States military is reported to greatly exaggerate the threat posed by China’s and Russia’s navies, according to a prize-winning column in *The Washington Post* by Walter Pincus.”¹² Alarmed nevertheless about the fear of a military conflict as expressed in the Thucydides-Trap-debate, I contacted a colleague in the United States in 2014 about it and received this reply:

“A war with China is not a realistic probability, at least there is no such discussion here in the United States. Of course, a *cyber war* has been ongoing between the two countries for years, but only recently has it really intensified. The Chinese have caused a lot of damage to the U.S. economy by hacking various financial institutions and corporations. Yesterday (February 4th, 2014), the health insurance company Anthem was hacked and the evidence points again to China. Indeed, even in my own emails there is not a day that goes by that I don’t have several messages asking me to download something. Often these messages are written in Chinese but sometimes in very bad English, so they

12 Amitai Etzioni, *Assessing Threat Assessments*. The Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies. The George Washington University, Internet, Posted: 01/21/2015.

are easy to spot as scams.”¹³ Computer hacking cannot be perceived as a model for peaceful behavior, but still, it is a form of confrontation that stops short of intentional killing.

Looking back at this chapter, it is not clear why inspiration should be gained from Thucydides who described the Peloponnesian war, a bloody fight of Greeks against Greeks, rather than from Herodotus (484–425) who wrote about the Persian wars in which Greeks combined forces to turn back the aggression from Persia? It is further not clear; why American theorists follow the hypothesis that a rising new power typically endangers peace (using as illustration Germany in 1914 over against Britain) rather than a declining power plagued by internal controversies. In addition, in connection with Thucydides, it is not clear, if the United States ought to be identified with Athens or with Sparta, particularly since it was the latter power that won that war.

When the hostile band of soldiers approaches the mansion of the nobleman Zhuge to capture him, he knows about this but is unable to defend himself or to flee. He takes two young boys to stand at his side while he plays a *guzhen*.¹⁴ The hostile group arrives and hears the music. They do not see what the two boys at Zhuge's side see: Pearls of sweat run down his face, because he is very much afraid. Yet his control of emotions, his discipline, his ability to hide his fear from his enemies is what saves him. The growing power of Athens and the increasing fear of the Spartans to lose their independence are supposed to be inevitable reasons for going to war. Both factors, hubris on one side and fear on the other, may indeed be basic drives in human nature. But to consider them unavoidable is below the level of Zhuge's wisdom.

13 Personal e-mail communication.

14 A musical instrument similar to a zither.

Religions: Core Components of Cultures

The Task at Hand: What is a Religion?

Religions have been in the background of many of the topics that we touched upon in the previous pages of this book: In the Introduction we saw that Brecht discovered the teachings of Mozi about brotherly love among all humans, and how Confucians rejected that as animal-like. In Chapter 1 it appeared – and be it by implication – that a religious foundation for acting in the interest of the entire human race was a convincing point of departure for saving the environment, but that Confucius-based Chinese Familism as described by Fei Xiaotong kept that from happening. In Chapter 2 about the Opium Wars, the rights of missionaries to spread Christianity in China, was described as a highly controversial issue. In Chapter 3, starting with the debate about Thucydides, Max Weber's discussion of the Protestant Ethic was included in the part about economic interests. The implicit or explicit reference to religion in those preceding segments makes it necessary for clarification to devote this chapter entirely to the topic of religion.

In China, religious behaviour is typically imbedded in other activities in a way that makes it hard for the Western observer to even identify it as religious. For a discussion of how to define religion in a convincing way, see below, but as an illustration of implicit religiosity consider the following story:

A peasant lost his horse. It disappeared and nobody knows what happened to it. The village neighbors express their sympathy, but the peasant says: Who knows, something good may come of it. A few days later the lost horse is back in the company of another horse that none of the villagers has ever seen before. Everyone congratulates the peasant for having two horses now, but he warns: Who knows, something bad may come of it.

After a while the peasant's oldest son decides to ride the new horse. Rider and horse are not familiar with each other; the young man falls down and breaks a leg. The neighbors again show their compassion, but the peasant tells them: Who knows, something good may come of it. This remark leaves most of them puzzled. Soon after the son's equestrian accident, the emperor's draft commission arrives in the village and summons all young men to serve in the military. Being a patient with a broken leg, the peasant's son must stay behind. During the war it turns out that sadly all the other young men from

that village get killed in action, with the peasant's son as the sole survivor in his age group.¹

Obviously, off hand this story cannot be called *religious*. Nevertheless, it represents an attitude toward fate with a certain affinity toward a religious orientation. In addition, it contains an openness toward developments in the person's life even if those were not intended and could not have been foreseen. It also widens the person's mind and raises his or her sensitivity for alternative realities. Finally, the story shows a deep trust in fate, a trust that can look for and find religious confirmation and thus generate resilience in daily life.

Religions everywhere can only exist to the extent to which they are given credit for telling the truth, or at least *a truth*. Truth is not only *what works* but more importantly, the basis on which the believer is *prepared to work* or *to act*. Moreover, what all religions have in common is the conviction that death does not end the existence of the person and that the living may experience getting some personal attention from the beyond. How this is written into concrete articles of faith varies greatly from religion to religion.

No religion will teach that there is no life after death. In addition, all religions expect the living to get into contact with a person in the beyond by prayer, sacrifice, meditation or other ritual. The respective "person" is always immortal and may be a god, a saint, a deceased ancestor, or a benign or even an evil spirit. Thus, the religious person can be identified as being in a relationship with an immortal and feeling guided, assisted or threatened by him or her.

No religious person will believe in anything of which he or she is not convinced that it really exists: Humans of all ages seem to have given their religious ideas the status of reality. Once that ability is lost on a massive scale, the respective religion will disappear. Religions must be able to establish a living relationship between the believer and an immortal. Unless a personal relationship with some well-known counterpart in the beyond can be established, be it a god, a saint, an ancestor, or a spirit of some kind, religion has no chance of acceptance and survival (Helle 2001: 146).

If all religions share the property of establishing personal contact to one or more immortals in the beyond, then systems of faith can be distinguished according to a typology of those transcendental contacts. Some immortals are – at least for some mortals – well known because they lived on this earth at one time. That applies to Christian saints (to some extent, provided their story is still told) and to Chinese ancestors (to a more likely extend, since their descendants will remember them).

1 Adapted from: <http://www.bigear.cn/news-59-39662.html>.

Recent empirical observations in Western societies with saints and their religious history show, that the familiarity with those immortals fades and consequently emotional attachment to them disappears. Because in the Chinese tradition by contrast the “saints” are the deceased family members the likelihood that they are well known to their descendants is significantly higher.

In addition, there is another distinction between China and the West that relates to the very foundations of religious convictions: In China the immortals tend to lead family lives as the ancient Greek gods did on Olympus, but the god of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims exists by himself and is not surrounded by any relatives. This difference opens up a potential for Western culture to create a sacred realm that does not depend on family conditions and is not subject to rules of kinship life.

Whereas in many regions of the world there has been a sad history of intolerance, hatred and even persecution of one religion by another, one of the remarkable facts about the long religious history of China is the comparatively peaceful and open relationship during most of that time between the religions practiced there. Admittedly there have been confrontations in Chinese history between Daoists, Buddhists, and Confucians. But none of them compare to the inter-Christian cruelty of the Thirty-Years-War in Central Europe (1618–1648) or to how Shiite and Sunnite Muslims kill each other at the present time.

Still, the problem of intolerance is consistently present in China, but typically not in the way one religion is treated by another, but rather in the way this or that particular religion or religions in general are dealt with by the various levels of government and since 1949 by the Communist Party. One of the key questions of this chapter is therefore: What are the primary reasons

- (a) for antagonisms among religions, a topic comparatively irrelevant in China, or
- (b) for antagonisms between party and governments on the one hand and one or several religions on the other? The second question is of obvious importance for the situation in contemporary China.

We try to explain first why in China controversies between religions are absent or at least infrequent in history by comparison to other regions of the world. In addition, one dimension to which we pay attention is the degree of liberty granted to religious behavior in the “public sphere.” The latter, as we have seen above, has characteristics in China that are different from those in the West. While theory construction and concept formation in the sociology of religion have been geared to Western religions with monopolistic tendencies, “in China, multiple religions have coexisted for thousands of years” (Yang 2012: 33).

Shared Origins of Contemporary Religions

To account for the comparatively peaceful coexistence of distinct religions in China, numerous reasons can be cited, however, we explain the relative tolerance as due to a common origin shared by all types of faiths: Religions typically receive recognition by believers for establishing contact with the beyond. For millennia worldwide this task has been assigned to the shaman, a male or female medium who could and can to this day play a credible role in communicating with spiritual or immortal beings. In the case of the Confucian regions, i.e. China, Japan, and Korea, the immortals are particularly, but not exclusively, the ancestors of one's own family.

A wealth of archeological finds has documented the origins of shamanism primarily in Asia. The Chinese graph for the family name Wu 巫 (Shaman) depicts the practice of "dancing down the spirits." This priestly task can be performed all the way up to the highest hierarchical level of society: "It can be proven that rulers in China, Japan, and middle Asia were endowed with shamanistic powers..." (Findeisen and Gehrts 1983: 17). The kings of Korea during the Yi-dynasty (1392–1910) were held responsible until as late as 1910 for using their shamanistic powers to promote good weather. Accordingly, providing the country's peasants with sufficient rainfall was the king's solemn duty.

The Chinese character for king 王 (Wang) which has become a frequent family name, depicts the ruler as mediator between the three levels of human existence: The "inner" world in the middle is surrounded by the underworld of the dead below and the heavens of the immortals above. Relating these three realms to each other required shamanistic abilities which the Asian king needed to have in order to fulfill his "priestly" duties in the service of his people.

While Shamanism can still be observed and studied in Siberia and South-Korea today, it has been persecuted and as a consequence almost disappeared in mainland China since 1949. We shall look into the reasons for this intolerance in our next section on the relationship between religions and government. Due in part to the absence of Christianity in Asia, ancient China has taken an approach to shamanism that was different from Europe and North America.

This oldest preserved *form of relating to the beyond* dates back as far as the religion of the Stone Age *hunters*. They depended on being able in their hunt to reach the flesh of caribou or of swimming animals as food. Much later the members of the *agrarian* culture were and are reminded of this dependency by the Chinese *dragon*, often visible as sculptured divine animal. It is both caribou and fish: The dragon typically has antlers on its head like a mammal, but

it is – most certainly as *qilin*² – also equipped with fish skin, and in addition the fantastic animal is depicted with the hoofs of cattle. Thus different kinds of sources of food and therefore of life are integrated into what appears to be the synthesis of several primordial deities derived from edible animals.

Ever since the most basic levels of culture in the days of the Stone Age, life depended on the availability of an animal that would, according to primordial religious imagination, bless the starving human being by giving him or her its body to eat. Thus came about the animal deity in the form of the mammoth, the caribou, the bear, or some type of fish which the ancient shaman visibly represented in this world by wearing for instance antlers on his head or a bear hide as his coat, similar to dragon and *qilin* in China.

The divine person in the beyond, whichever shape or imagery human imagination attributed to him or her, was worshipped as the giver of life. Religious evolution promoted this immortal being from a sacred animal to a powerful spirit. In many regions of the world it became a totem, and – in China – possibly a remote “ancestor” of one’s own clan. In many contexts the Chinese emperor was referred to as the *son of the dragon*. What the various levels of religious development have in common is this: The shaman is the mediator for the mortal human to stay in touch with the beyond as the source of life everlasting.³ If seen in this evolutionary continuity, the shaman is the precursor of the priests and ministers of later religions, the more subdued builders of bridges to other realities.

The shaman as religious leader in different Asian regions thus represented the continuity between lower and higher levels of cultural evolution. This has been true to some extent also in countries that became part of the Muslim world. According to Islam the beyond can be visited only by Mohammed and by a few selected prophets. Since shamans traditionally claimed to also have this ability, they were rejected by the spiritual leaders of Islam as unacceptable competitors with Mohammed.

However, according to the religious ideas prevalent in inner Asia during the 19th and 20th century, the shaman was still the mediator between mortal humans and immortal spiritual beings, but only in this world. In the context of Muslim culture, shamans were perceived as being able to do that without leaving this world, since, as we mentioned, they were believed to be barred from visiting the beyond (ibid: 215f).

2 Wikipedia: “The qilin (Chinese: 麒麟; pinyin: *qílín*) is a mythical hooved chimerical creature known in Chinese and other East Asian cultures...”

3 About shamanism in ancient China see: Arthur Waley (1973), *The Nine Songs*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

The lasting significance of shamanism in China can be inferred from the following story: In Jiangsu Province, not far from its capital Nanjing in a town of about one million inhabitants, a woman served quietly as a priestess of folk Daoism. She performed family rituals for her neighbors, the happy ones at the occasion of a birth or marriage, and the sad ones if somebody died.

Soon after the New China was founded in 1949 she was condemned to 15 years in prison for seducing the people to accept superstition. When she was released after those long years, she was without any income, but relatives took care of her. After some time, she again performed rituals in the context of her clan. Young relatives criticized her for reverting to her ritual behaviour in spite of such severe punishment and in spite of the fact that a New China had been founded. She replied: "Yes, but the souls are still here, and we must take care of them."

About her field work in a small village in Hebei province Fan Lizhu writes in 2003: "We think that local religious practices and beliefs carried out by ordinary people in their daily life have long been the quantitative mainstream of the history of Chinese religions, and a fundamental support for traditional society, culture and moral values. Unfortunately, this significant part of Chinese culture has been ignored for a long time by academic studies. In the 20th century Chinese popular religious practices and beliefs were criticized by scholars and destroyed by wars and political movement. Despite the best efforts of half a century of Communist propaganda against religion and the violent destruction of temples and statues during the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), devotion to local deities continues to thrive in China. Temples are being rebuilt; the sale of incense sticks and paper money is once again big business; mediums who represent these gods are to be found everywhere" (Fan 2003).

Religion today including shamanism as it impacts everyday life, can also be seen in an extended conversation I had with a member of an ethnic minority, married to a so-called "adoptive sister" of a graduate student who was then my Chinese translator and informant.⁴ The "sister" had become a police officer entrusted with the task of supervising the tearing down of houses that had been built illegally without a construction permit. The police woman was an attractive lady from Northern China with very light skin. Her husband's skin was much darker as is typical of the so-called "local people," the Li (黎族 = Lizu) on Hainan Island.

The husband is a strong and visibly healthy man in the prime of life. He first modestly tells me about some of his healing successes as practitioner of Chinese Medicine. From there our conversation moves on to Daoism. In his

4 Adapted from my diary entry of Wednesday, January 26, 2011.

youth he was taught by Daoist sages, or masters, until he got married. His then new closeness to the policewomen as wife seemed to fit living in the capital Beijing. There he received formal training in criminal law followed by a short period of employment at a court of law. However, these activities in the capital did not make him happy.

So he took his wife and son back to his home on the island of Hainan where he can also make money as a business man, breeding and selling fish. He devotes much of his time to Daoism and Buddhism, and it appears that he has no difficulty combining those two religious orientations. The business activity with fish is needed, because – as he mentioned proudly – he never took any money for healing people.

While he and I dwell more on the subject of healing, it turns out, that secretly *he is a shaman*. He reports that he has successfully performed exorcisms. This of course implies dealing with persons from the beyond. I ask his police wife if she does not feel strange about being married to a spooky person who can be in contact with ghosts. She replies that the couple shares their Buddhist faith which creates a bond between them. The shaman confirms that, but adds that in the context of Chinese Buddhism he is regarded as the reincarnation of an ancient saint. He is also a member of the Communist Party. A truly remarkable man (and shaman)!

Daoism particularly, can be studied as an example for religious evolution based on shamanistic foundations. Anna Seidel in her chapter in an edited volume (first published in 1987) on the Daoist resurrection of the body considers the Daoist approach to death an “innovation over the traditional Chinese attitude” (Miller 2003; 30). While it had long been assumed that the souls of the departed reside in the underworld but can be comforted there by their relatives in this world, according to Daoism not only that is possible and advisable, but in addition they can even be freed from confinement to the underworld altogether (*ibid.*).

The power to deliver ancestors from the underworld (which only later due to Buddhist influence became hell) rests primarily with the Daoist priest who, as successor of the shaman, is – as it were – the guarantor of religious advancement. In addition, this implies that a devoted follower of Daoism can practice techniques for becoming an immortal even without having to die first. Daoist immortals are “an entirely different class of spiritual beings than the ordinary ancestor...” They traditionally included “emperors, ancestors, and worthies” (*ibid.*: 29). A more detailed discussion of Daoism can be found here in the next chapter.

The many millennia of religious history of China include this shamanistic tradition in combination with the firm belief in an *Imperial Mandate of Heaven*

with the emperor as the supreme shaman. Survival under rural conditions obviously depends on many factors, among them the quality of political leadership resulting in protection from foreign invaders as well as in the maintenance of domestic peace. Accordingly, the religions of the agricultural humans included faith in a wise, benign and immortal king or emperor. He, like all the other deceased ancestors in the beyond, was originally – like Abraham – the head of a clan, and it was hoped that he not only *perpetuated the rule* of his family, but also *convey his wisdom* and experience to his son, grandson, and great-grandson.

The duration of the rule of one dynasty was admirably long in the history of China. But sometimes the ruling king turned out to be positively incompetent. This was interpreted by the people as having lost the *mandate of heaven*. It frequently resulted in rebellion and military confrontations until finally the old ruling dynasty was replaced with a new one. The role religions usually played in such dramatic events was consistently taken into consideration by emperors and parties who feared religious influences, because they perceived them as a threat to their intention to stay in power.

Governmental Interference with Religious Affairs

Since during the millennia of imperial rule the monarch was seen as a quasi-sacred figure, the respective ruler felt empowered also to make decisions and interfere in matters of faith. Here is one example from the early history of the empire. During the time between the 3rd and the early 5th century after Christ China entered a state of severe crisis. Centuries prior to that in the year 221 BCE it had been united for the first time under its first emperor. His tyrannical rule over a large region resulted in significant economic, military and cultural advantages in comparison with not so well organized neighboring countries.

But his son's rule meant the end of that Qin dynasty. Succeeding the Qin, the Han emperors stayed in power for more than four centuries. Then the empire broke up into three separate parts. A brutal civil war started resulting in massive movements of refugees. Pressured by aggressors from outside China, the regions on the North and the North-West were lost.

During such difficult times, when it would have seemed normal for the ruler to concentrate on something more mundane, the emperor of the Eastern realm, Sima Rui, in the year 318 CE condemned a religious ritual as heretical because it seemed aimed to putting not the body but the soul to rest in a grave. The emperor's edict contains the statement: "The grave is for the

purpose of storing away the body; the ancestral temple for settling the spirits. The *hun*-summoning burials of the present age aim to bury the spirits. They are hereby banned.” (Bokenkamp 2007:81). This ban, as we will see, can be interpreted as an early persecution of shamanism by the government. What causes this governmental interference with religious affairs?

The catastrophic conditions at the time and the brutality with which fighting and mass killing was carried out, resulted in the loss of bodies of persons, whom their families wanted to bury but could not find. A traditional funeral was not possible in the absence of a body. Thus the only solution seemed to be to resort to a “soul-summoning burial” (Bokenkamp 2007: 61). In a truly shamanistic manner the soul of the deceased person had to be summoned from wherever it may have been hiding.

At that time people in their religious belief followed a complicated concept of multiple “souls” as different kinds of spiritual components of the living person. Of those components the one which comes closest to the Western idea of a soul was referred to as “hun.” Accordingly, the experts on this period of Chinese religion call the ritual the “hun-summoning burial” (ibid: 70). But why was it condemned by the emperor Sima Rui? What exactly was it that he condemned?

The task of finding and calling back the soul of the dead person was assigned to a “summoner.” He climbed onto the roof of the house with a piece of clothing in his hands the deceased used to wear. He there performed a ritual which included exclaiming the name of that person three times. It was then expected, that the *hun*-soul would come and enter into the piece of textile that had been part of its former attire and that it reside in it as in a substitute body.

Next the piece of clothing, now supposedly containing the soul that had been summoned into it, would carefully be handed down from the roof of the building (ibid: 69). If the corpse of the deceased was present, it would be deposited on it for a while. But the great significance of this burial rite must be seen in the fact that it could be performed even in the absence of the corpse.

Stephen R. Bokenkamp, on whose research our remarks are based, sees in the *hun*-summoning ritual “an archaic, shamanic survival in the ritual canons of sober Confucians” (ibid: 62). We have here an example for government interference on the side of progress: In comparison to relicts of shamanism the Confucian burial rite was seen as the more advanced and generally accepted religious orthodoxy. According to Confucian teaching the *hun*-soul was expected to ascent to heaven at death and could not be summoned back by a shaman (Miller 2003: 29).

However, the Confucian burial required the presence of the corpse. The reason why parts of the population reverted back to the less highly developed level of religious culture was the military and political crisis in the country

which resulted in loss of life in combination with loss of access to the corpse. The tendency to revert back to older and less complex levels of culture in times of social chaos and disorganization as *collective regression* can probably be generalized across cultures and throughout history. It can also be seen as a type of destabilization of the kind E.R. Service writes about (Service 1968).

As was mentioned above after the founding of the New China in 1949 the persecution of religion in general and shamanism in particular started with a new and unprecedented determination. Astounding in comparison with other regions is how late this happened there. The Christian tradition with its witch-hunts in Europe and North America and the almost complete rejection of any shamanistic elements in the context of Islam resulted in a much earlier demise of this wide-spread precursor of later religions.

The reason why political representatives of Christianity, Islam, and Communism felt shamanism to be intolerable was apparently this: We, the persecutors of shamans, must impress upon their potential followers that our orientation as Christian faith, Muslim faith, or Marxism-Leninism is far more progressive. As spokespersons for a new alternative we cannot tolerate any comparison or even competition with the ancient ideas and practices of shamanism. Therefore, that form of spirituality must be forcibly suppressed as outmoded and as a harmful hindrance on the way toward a new stage of cultural evolution. The condemnation of the *hun*-summoning burial by emperor Sima Rui in the year 318 A.D. was a precursor of later persecutions. The most radical and violent attitude toward relics from shamanism has not appeared in China till after 1949; centuries later than in other parts of the world.

What potentially makes the Chinese case of governmental interference with religious affairs an interesting topic for historical and sociological research is its multi-dimensionality. On the surface the controversy rests on the assumption of being a sincere defense of the belief in progress as expressed by party members and other followers of the atheist European ideas of the 19th century that were developed by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and Karl Marx (1818–1883) in Germany. But in the background of contemporary progressivism there was the traditional concern, which the Communist Party of today shares with the emperors in Chinese history: Will a particular religious conviction challenge and question the mandate to power given to the mighty by heaven or, in the case of Communism, by history?

But the relationship between Western religious influences and the Chinese leadership has not always been tense. The Jesuit mission was possible only with the consent and support of the emperor. Missionary activities propagating Christianity started in China early in the 17th century (Neuner 2015).⁵

5 Neuner, Peter (2015):. See also: Kaltenbrunner, Gerd-Klaus, (1992): 190f.

The beginnings are today associated with the Catholic Jesuit Fathers and their leader Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). The 500th return of his death was observed in 2010 by the Chinese government. The cemetery with the graves of the first Jesuit Fathers to arrive in China are now part of the compound of the Central Party College (中央党校) in Beijing and it is kept up in a highly dignified manner.

Father Ricci and his brethren, learned monks from Europe, lived in China like Confucian scholars wearing the appropriate attire and hats and conducting themselves in polite Confucian ways. They did not consider Confucianism a religion and as a consequence treated its teachings as compatible with Christianity. “Matteo Ricci, an Italian missionary, translated the *Four Books* into Latin in 1594 (Wanli 22,⁶ Ming Dynasty). It was the first foreign language version of the Confucian works” to be published (Yang and Yu 1995: 3).

Among them was Father Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666), a nobleman from Cologne, Germany, who was an expert in astronomy and in contact with Johannes Kepler. Schall was highly regarded by the emperor because in 1629 he successfully predicted a solstice. In 1632 Kepler sent part of his research results to Schall in Beijing to help him revise the Chinese calendar, a task that the emperor had ordered the priest from Cologne to devote himself to.

In the course of the 17th century the missionaries in Confucian disguise increased their influence even at court, and in 1692 Christianity was given the same rights as Daoism and Buddhism. Christian church buildings were placed under the protection of the emperor. Upon the monarch’s orders additional churches were built. There was then a sound foundation for the hope to open China for Christianity from the top down.

That did not happen, however, largely due to severe set-backs the Catholic Church inflicted upon itself. Initiators of the conflict were two other groups of Catholic monks, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, who took a negative view of the Jesuits’ success in China. They resented the adoption of Confucian outer appearance by Father Ricci and his associates, and they denounced their using the Chinese word Shang Di (上帝) for the Christian god. Whereas the Jesuits translated those two sungs as “the highest power in heaven,” the two other organizations of Catholics monks claimed it to mean “highest emperor.” The Catholic church embarked upon one of its more embarrassing episodes in church history by forcing its missionaries to only use the Latin word *deus* as name for god.

In addition, the Franciscans and the Dominicans took the case of the China mission of the Jesuits to the Catholic Divinity Faculty of the Sorbonne

6 Wanli 22 identifies a particular year within the Ming Dynasty according to ancient Chinese time.

University in Paris, a group of scholars of theology with considerable power in matters of the faith at the time. The Sorbonne Faculty condemned the Jesuits' *method of accommodation* – as it was called. That tragic decision defined as against the Catholic Church the Jesuits' adaptation to the culture to be won over for Christianity, an approach, which they preferred to imposing the European culture on everybody worldwide. As a follow-up of the verdict from Paris the Chinese rites which the Jesuits used in their religious services were forbidden by Pope Benedict XIV in 1742.

That papal decision became known to the Chinese emperor who thereupon asked the Jesuits to either ignore the pope or else get out of China. They obeyed Rome, their mission collapsed, and henceforth Christian missionaries were seen as representing a foreign culture or even a repressive European colonial nation, as we have seen in the context of the Opium Wars. The resulting evaluation in China was captured in the saying: One Christian more means one Chinese less.

Still to this day, modern holders of power in China see the church as a political entity worldwide. The contribution of the Catholic Church toward ending Communism in Poland led some party leaders in China to perceive that church as a serious threat to their rule. This appears absurd in light of the fact that the Catholic population of China is lower than one percent of the total number of inhabitants. Yet a conspiracy theory was created within the party, claiming that the Vatican in Rome and the United States conspired to bring a native Pole to power as Pope with the goal to end Communism in Poland.

A comparison between Poland on the one hand, and Italy or Spain on the other may be meaningful in light of the fact that they share a long history of Catholic Christianity as a characteristic trait of the large majority of the respective population. However, to expect what happened in Poland to repeat itself in China is utterly unrealistic. The unfounded fears within the party shed a light on how far the orientation on religious affairs there has strayed from historical and empirical reality (Yang 2012: 22).

There are ups and downs in the way party and government in China have dealt with religion, but a general tendency or trend can also be discerned. Fenggang Yang distinguished between three forms of atheism in China since 1949: He called them militant atheism, enlightened atheism and mild atheism (ibid:46). Obviously the orientation of the CCP (Communist Party of China) by itself cannot be called religious, regardless of what definition of religion one prefers.

However, from a purely formalistic perspective some rigid behavior that party members display in public can be compared to the fear members of religious bodies sometimes have, to be identified as straying from the orthodox

teachings of their group. And it appears that the criterion of orthodoxy in the context of the CCP hinges on a few words quoted from Marx: *Religion is the opium of the people*. This quotation comparing religion to opium, assuming that an addiction to religion is similar to dependency upon a hallucinatory drug, is important enough to warrant looking at the context from which it has been taken, particularly since the words by Marx are usually quoted out of context.

Marx wrote: “It (religion) is the *fantastic realization* of the human essence, because the *human essence* does not have any true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the struggle against *that world*, the spiritual *smell (aroma)* of which is religion. The religious misery is at the same time the *expression* of the real misery, and also the *protest* against the real misery. Religion is the moan of the oppressed creature, it is the mental disposition of a heartless world, it is the mind of a mindless condition. It is the *Opium of the People*” (Marx 1964: 208). The last few words of this quotation are famous, but few people know the context, in which they appear: “Toward a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law, Introduction” which Marx published in the German-French Yearbooks in 1843/1844 (Marx 1964).

If Communist orthodoxy wants to follow Marx in this early text it must first consider the struggle for a *true reality* as essential. One of the claims voiced frequently by spokespersons of the party against religion is the demand, not to get orientation out of dogmas and dreams but instead “to seek the truth in facts” (Yang 2012: 4). The instruction to *look into the nature of things* is part of ancient Chinese wisdom. Now Yang turns this demand against those, who launched it with respect to pious behavior, in light of “the obvious fact of religious change in China is not decline but resilience” (ibid: 4). In his attempt to explain religious vitality in contemporary China, Yang Fenggang points out that we must try to “understand the resilience of religion in a society with one-fifth of the world’s population” (ibid: 3).

Religious Vitality in Contemporary China

Types of Atheism in Party Politics

In this chapter we start by discussing the various ways of interpreting Marx' statement about the *opium of the people* in order to show how they relate to certain theoretical positions voiced in the context of official PPC documents. Moving from theoretical reflection to empirical observations Yang presents "a definition of religion with classification" dividing the phenomena under study between *Full religion*, *Semi-religion*, *Quasi-religion* and *Pseudo-religion* (Yang 2012: 37). Cults worshipping political leaders like Mao as if they were deities are *pseudo-religions* to Yang. His typology of four forms of religious devotion is confronted by him with three types of anti-religious attitudes in the theoretical argumentation of the Communist Party of China: *Militant atheism*, *enlightened atheism*, and *mild atheism*.

The party discussions frequently rely on alternative interpretations of Marx's dictum that *religion is the opium of the people*, and some argue that opium was used for benign purposes as a pain killer. Of the three atheisms, mild atheism is the most recent development (ibid: 45). Mild atheism finds its foundation in the Marxian view that religion is a symptom of the sickness of capitalist society, and once its defects will have been corrected by socialism the people's desire for religious orientation will disappear by itself. Accordingly, there is no historical need for the persecution of religions.

Mou Zhongjian is a representative of such mild atheism. According to him "theists and atheists... should respect each other" (ibid: 62). Mou opposes the scientific atheism that is propagated in China today because he considers it "destructive to social development" (Yang 2012: 63). While these ideas voiced by Mou may be the source of a hopeful view toward the future, it would be unrealistic to ignore the fact that at least until 2010 they were "peripheral in the official discourse of the Chinese authorities" (ibid: 63).

What makes Chinese party ideology difficult to reconstruct for Western students of Marxism is – as was mentioned here before – its indebtedness not merely to Marx and Engels, but in addition to the Russians Lenin and Stalin, to Mao of China (ibid: 47) and to Mao's successors as party leaders. The three atheisms Yang distinguishes agree of course that religion must and will disappear; they differ, however, in the measures to be taken and in the patience they display in achieving their unquestioned goal. The policies toward that goal can be compared with reference to four periods in recent history:

Period 1: 1949–1957: The five officially recognized religions were forced to become “patriotic” in exchange for not being annihilated like other religions. Those five are Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and, strangely as two separate religions Old Christianity (Catholic and Orthodox) and New Christianity (Protestant). The separation of Christianity into two distinct religions is the result of the erroneous notion that they worship different deities: Catholics (and Orthodox Christians) the God of Heaven, Shang Di (上帝), while Protestants are perceived as worshipping Jesus. The unifying idea of the Trinity cannot be entered into the political debate about religions.

Period 2: 1957–1966: Forceful reduction of the number of temples and churches of the five “patriotic” religions.

Period 3: 1966–1979: Cultural Revolution and follow-up period: Ban of all religious activities and destruction of countless religious sites and irreplaceable monuments of historical significance.

Period 4: 1979–2009: Limited tolerance, economic development (tourism, foreign investment) as motivation for the construction of temples and churches, reversal of these political decisions due to disagreements within the party, and crackdown on certain sectarian groups (Qigong, Falun Gong).

At the beginning of period 4 it gradually became possible again, to select religious studies as a major at Chinese universities, although in some schools only at the graduate level. The example of the university study of Daoism may serve as an illustration of the changes. Daoism started as an academic field in Mainland China in the 30ies and 40ies of the last century. Scholars like Meng Wentong, Wang Ming, Chen Guofu and others wrote articles and books on Daoism, which are still important for scholars of religion today. But compared to research in other areas such as philosophy, history, Buddhism and Christianity, the achievements on Daoism were limited. That also applied to the number of scholars who studied Daoism at that time.

Between 1949 and 1979, during what Yang called phases 1, 2, and 3, the study on Daoism was forbidden. As a result, there were almost no contributions on Daoism except the studies on *Tai pingjing* and *Bao puzi* by Wang Ming. Since December of 1978, the Chinese government began to support research on Daoism which made it enter a new era in its history: Special institutions for Daoism were established.

With the permission of the Chinese government in 1979 the first Research Institute on Daoism was founded in the context of the Institute of Religious Studies in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. In 1980 an

Institute of Religious Studies focusing on Daoism was established in Sichuang University. At the end of the 1980s, the Research Institute on Daoist Culture was founded in Huadong Normal University. The establishment of these institutes has since provided some new opportunities for the developments of Daoism.

In addition, the research subjects relating to Daoism were listed among the humanities as subjects of Philosophy and Social Sciences. The government supported the development of Daoism in an unprecedented way. Some institutions of higher learning, like Sichuang University, started to recruit graduates who specialize in Daoism. As a consequence, some young scholars interested in Daoism increasingly play a significant role in studying that religion. In some other Universities and Institutes, more and more scholars are engaged in studying Daoism from various perspectives. In addition to government initiatives, organizations on Daoism were founded by private supporters in Hubei province, Shanxi province, in Shanghai and elsewhere.

Vocational conferences about Daoism were held in China, providing scholars opportunities to learn from each other, which means, as was mentioned above, that the study of Daoism has entered a new phase. Also some journals about Daoism were established and papers on Daoism are getting published more and more. Increasingly, academic and popular books on Daoism are distributed. All of this is a development which evolved in only a little more than three decades.

Since the beginning of what Yang Fenggang called period 4 the opening or re-opening of sites for religious services has led to a striking shortage of temples and churches as well as of personnel who were willing and qualified to serve congregations (ibid: 149). Yang mentions that in 1997 the number of religious sites per every 100,000 Chinese averaged 6.5. The equivalent number for the U.S.A. at that time was about 117 (ibid: 150f.). In Taiwan there is one church or temple for every 1,350 persons; in mainland China the equivalent number was one for about 10,000 persons in 2009 (ibid: 151).

All statements referring here to data depend on the statistics released by the Chinese government itself. According to that source, in the period between 1982 and 2009 the number of Catholic priests and nuns increased from 3,400 to 5,260 and the number Protestant ministers from 5,900 to 37,000 (ibid: 152). There has been an increase during that period also among the Muslim imams from about 20,000 to about 40,000, among the Buddhist monks and nuns from 27,000 to 200,000 and among the Daoist monks and nuns from 2,600 to 50,000 (ibid: 153). These figures point toward religious resilience; they must however be seen in the context "that the numbers of lay believers have increased even faster" (ibid.). However, no matter how reliable these statistics are in

detail, they document an impressive trend toward more religious activities in contemporary China.

Yang explains that “the outdated religious policy has rendered itself ineffective in controlling religions, all the while antagonizing the Chinese populace and the world community. The religious policy has become one of the liabilities in China’s stride for modernization and for entering the global stage” (ibid: 84). This is so because “the heavy regulation of religion will lead not to religious demise” (ibid: 85) but to a dynamic interplay between the four types of religion described before (*Full religion, Semi-religion, Quasi-religion* and *Pseudo-religion*) and the following three types of religious “markets.”

Those “markets” are defined by Yang as (1) *red*: Religions are made “patriotic” and thereby placed under constant party supervision. (2) *Black*: Religions are made illegal and worshippers are forced to meet secretly and under threat of severe punishment. (3) *Gray*: The black market is dangerous, the red market is unattractive, so a gray market will thrive in which assemble “all religious and spiritual organizations, practitioners, and activities with ambiguous legal status” (ibid: 87).

Comparing the situation of supply and demand for religions with a commodity market, Yang describes what he calls a *Shortage Economy of Religion* under Communism. The ideological orthodoxy of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (ibid: 126) failed in predicting and explaining the continued “demand” for religion (as it also failed to predict the amount of food needed, see: Yang Mosher, Guo 2012), partly because of the willingness of some pious persons to prefer martyrdom to giving in to atheist imprisonment and torture (Yang 2012: 127). This observation, also in light of the history of persecution of Christians at other times and in other parts of the world, gives rise rather to the hypothesis, that in the long run, the religious policies of the Communist regime have not weakened, but in fact strengthened religions.

Ancestor Worship: The Religion of China

The tendency in the history of China for their religions to confront each other temporarily but eventually to return to peaceful coexistence may still be valid in contemporary China. Every member of the Communist Party will of course visit the graves of their ancestors on Qingming day (清明) to pay respects to them. In an interview a local party leader was asked by a Western visitor who had witnessed the Qingming graveside ritual: Mr. Secretary, as we both know, Karl Marx has described religion as the opium of the people. Now I have observed the moving rituals at grave sites here on Qingming day which struck me

as a very religious type of behaviour. The reply was: "What you saw there was not religion, it was Chinese tradition!" The members of the party are not allowed to practice what is defined in Western languages as a religion. However, as Chinese daughters and sons they cannot but follow in the age-old sacred tradition of worshipping each the particular ancestors of their own clan.

If worshipping the deceased members of one's own family is in fact the *religion of China*, then the notion is absurd that a person must have the right to freely choose his or her religious affiliation. As a Chinese person you have *faith in your family* and you perform or participate in the rites of your clan. That is the center of your orientation, although you do not perceive it as specifically "religious" but simply as Chinese. This view is, or was, the traditional and conservative Chinese position. However, young and modern Chinese increasingly see the option of combining loyalty to their relatives, dead as well as alive, with overarching religious belief systems as they are known and taken for granted worldwide.

But according to Yutang Lin, unquestioned loyalty to one's relatives is the case "first of all" because of "the Chinese family system, which was so well-defined and organized as to make it impossible for a man to forget where his lineage belonged" (Lin 1936: 32). The orientation toward ancestors as members of the preceding generations is mediated via parents and grand-parents. It combines the principle of immortality with the requirement of reality and thus results in a religion that is not weakened by fundamental doubts.

In the established World Religions¹ by contrast, believers are urged to accept divine and saintly personages as real, even though the faithful have merely anecdotal knowledge of them. By comparison the Chinese person has potentially a very intimate knowledge about his or her forebears. This foundation of Chinese culture "is enhanced by the ritual of ancestor worship, and the consciousness of it had penetrated deep into the Chinese soul" (Lin 1936, *ibid.*). Nevertheless, as I indicated before, from the perspective of the members of this culture, it is not counted among the "religions."

It is the result of an extended process of cultural evolution how, what we describe here as the *not acknowledged religion of China*, has entered into a mainly peaceful combination with Confucianism and Buddhism. Daoism deserves special attention because it can be looked at as the evolutionary point of departure for later religious orientations in the *Zhong Guo* (中国), the *Center*

1 Max Weber lists as World Religions: Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. See the opening sentences of *The social psychology of the World Religions*, Part III in: H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.

Country. Daoism grew out of Chinese cultural history itself rather than being imported from outside, as has been the case with Buddhism and, with lesser quantitative result, with Christianity and Islam. But neither Confucianism, nor Buddhism, and certainly not Daoism are perceived as weakening or ever questioning the family-oriented *religion of China*.

Aggravated by its own Western tradition of religious intolerance, the lack of their willingness to *acknowledge the religions of China as religions*, was one of the problems the Christian missions encountered there. As long as Christianity approached China with the uncompromising attitude that was normal in Europe since the days of Saint Boniface (born 673² or not later than 675, died 754 or 755) and Charlemagne (747 or 748–814), that deistic religion will correctly be perceived as potentially wiping out the foundations for ancestor worship. It was and will be deeply resented in China, Japan, and Korea. If, on the other hand, as Catholic missionaries of Korean descent have been able to do in South Korea since the end of World War II, Christianity can be presented as compatible with venerating one's own deceased relatives, then it has the potential of becoming part of the Asian cultures.

2 These and the following figures obviously refer to years in the Common Era. Historians do not agree on an exact year.

Max Weber's View of Religion in China

Max Weber is known for his studies on Daoism and Confucianism. But his famous journal article on the Protestant Ethic (Weber 1950), originally published in 1904, has had more impact on the development of the sociology of religion. It served as the point of departure and the background for his later research on the religions of Asia.

As Weber clarifies in comments he wrote on his own work, his ideal-typical construction of the *Protestant Ethic* is designed to explain how a specific type of rational modern capitalism *came about* as a novel type of economic activity. Once rational capitalism exists as a way of doing business and of making money, it can be carried on rationally through history without remaining attached to its religious origins, or – for that matter – to any religion or other specific value orientation. In other words, the *Protestant Ethic* was *needed* – according to Weber – to *start* a particular type of capitalism, not to *continue* its existence. In addition, it was needed to replace *universalism* and instead establish ethical *exclusivity* on a religious basis.

When we followed Fei Xiaotong in his interpretation of the reckless behaviour of throwing garbage into the canals of Suzhou, the quick disposal happened in the – presumed – interest of the family and against the general public. Such behaviour needed the ethical principle of *exclusivity* as justification.

Pre-reformation Christian churches in the West as well as Mozi in ancient China (see here the Introduction!), emphasized the brotherhood of humankind (*universalism*). Looking at what happened in the history of international as well as inter-ethnic relations it is not clear if this ethical position has ever been anything more than a vague hope. Confucianism in China as well as various ideas of elitism, nationalism and religious particularism in the West contradicted the notion of global brotherhood successfully and sometimes vehemently.

In the West particularly Calvinist Protestantism spread the notion among the baptized of being members of the Chosen Few, similar to the self-confidence of selection of the Jewish people (*exclusivity*). Max Weber points out that the Calvinist reversal of Christianity from universalism to exclusivity was crucial

1 The construction of “ideal types” is a non-normative, methodological tool used by Max Weber in his work.

for developing that utterly successful business ethic oriented toward gainful investment as follows: The former rewarded merely conformity, the latter encouraged being different and having the courage of becoming an innovator and a stranger (Helle 2013: 36).

Societies that were consistently universalist had no ethical foundation for making any difference between persons: They all were children of God, regardless whether they acknowledged that or not (compare: Simmel on Christianity, Simmel 1997: 203). If one of them turned out to be poor or in distress it was the brotherly duty of his fellow Christian to come to his or her aid. Granted that this did not always happen in real life, it was nevertheless a referent to ethics with powerful implications: Do unto thy neighbours as you would have them do unto you, but who is that neighbour of mine? It is not the member of my own ethnic group or clan; it is the stranger from a looked down upon population nearby, like the inhabitants of Samaria who produce the proverbial Good Samaritan.

In the traditional universalistic cultures of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, in Italy, Spain, Russia, and Greece the specific rational type of capitalism did not originate, because everybody was everybody else's brother in Christ, and had no right to witness his or her poverty unmoved. What was needed to justify the extraordinary wealth of some as compared to the poverty of others, was an exclusive ethic, following the example of Judaism: "You are not allowed to take interest from your brother. From the stranger you may take interest" (Deuteronomy 23:20). In this biblical text the *stranger* is not the fellow Jew, who is referred to as *brother*, but the *stranger* is potentially his partner in a business transaction. (Nelson 1969).²

So much for the religious foundations of the *exclusive* ethic. On the other side, in the tradition of *ethical universalism* there is this document from Roman Catholic teaching: In a letter of solemn teaching to the bishops of Italy, entitled: *Vix Pervenit: On Usury and Other Dishonest Profit* the then ruling Pope Benedict XIV decreed on November 1, 1745 the practice of charging interest on loans as usury. This was, however, simply a reminder of what had been the ancient ethical rule in the Catholic Church anyway.

2 On the book by Benjamin Nelson John F. Hickey wrote the following brief book review for Amazon.com on August 5, 2015: "This book conveys critically important information about the intertwined history of Jewish-Christian (and, implicitly, Muslim) relations, the history of lending as an essential part of world capitalism, the biblical roots of these intertwined histories of conflict, and the psychology of modern man as shaped by the way Christianity has wrenched us from tribal brotherhoods to universal otherhood. I learned more from this book than maybe any other book I have ever read".

Clearly there is the divide between universalism and exclusivity. In addition, on the side of exclusivity, there are two distinct sets of values which appear to be functional in overcoming sentimental feelings of compassion with a stranger, so inappropriate in commercial dealings. Those two are the Protestant Ethic and “tribalism” as follows:

Calvinist predestination made the Protestant Ethic possible according to which God in his unfathomable grace had chosen a few to be his children, to be saved, and to become successful and wealthy, and those poor “devils” (sic!) who remained poor, were simply not chosen by God. Who am I to worry about them, if even the Almighty has decided against them? So I am allowed to deal with them as strangers. This would be – in simplified words – the ethical consequences of high relevance for commercial dealings to be drawn from the belief in Calvinist predestination.

If this type of exclusive ethic makes it possible for some to feel righteous about their economic success and feel justified in their wealth even where faced with the poverty of others, then we can assume a similar effect to be tied to the Chinese family ethic. In China it is everybody's duty to contribute to the wealth of one's own kinship group. Thus, contrary to the ancient universalistic version of Christianity, the Chinese tradition is not universalistic, it is – to refer to the title of Benjamin Nelson's book of 1969 – “tribal.”

In the context of religious universalism, it is striking how in recent years the monetary problems of Europe haunted mainly countries with a universalist ethical tradition: First Ireland (catholic), then Portugal (catholic), next Spain (catholic) and even Italy (catholic), but most seriously of course Greece (orthodox). No comparable difficulties were encountered in the primarily Protestant North of Europe with a tradition of ethical exclusivity: Britain, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries. Germany is the case of a compromise since its population was for centuries roughly half catholic, half protestant. Living as a Catholic among Protestants may have modified the conventional conditions and required courage to be different rather than universalistic even then.

During Chinese history Daoism and Confucianism are the two religions which have influenced the development of economy and society, according to Max Weber's publications. But the tourist traveling China today may get the impression of being in a Buddhist country. Very few authors – Georg Simmel is one of them³ – question the religious quality of *original* Buddhism. A religion

3 “Nun aber ist der Buddhismus auch keine Religion.” Georg Simmel, *Die Religion*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften zur Religionssoziologie*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989, S. 127.

or not, its origin is of course India (or more precisely, Nepal⁴). Starting during the third century BCE⁵ it was imported into China by Buddhist missionaries. Once it took root in its new cultural environment it changed significantly to become a distinctly *Chinese version* of Buddhism. As a result of those changes it clearly qualified as a religion even by Simmel's criteria (Helle 2015: 48f.).

Apart from Buddhism, let us take a look at what Max Weber found significant about religions in China in general (Weber 1978a). As he did with his other studies of the economic ethics of world religions, he looked at the "practical motivations toward action" (ibid: 238). He assumed that in addition to other influences "the religious determination of leading one's life" and particularly the "attitude of the person toward the world" (ibid.) decide what action will be taken.

In this context Weber was interested in the dogmatic contents of what in a given religion is recognized as true and as real. In addition, he concentrated on the educated and cultured classes who as the *literati* gave direction and served as examples for the other segments of society. They developed and required of their membership adherence to a specific ethic which identified them as members of their class (Standesethik, ibid: 239).

In comparing cultures, Weber saw the West as special because of its high level of rationalization of everyday life. But in China as in other countries of Northeast Asia, life in this world was imbued with the presence of immortals. If those were to be experienced as irrational, as liable to react with furor and violence, they might become negative examples for monarchs and other mortals in power. In order to avoid that moody and unsettled deities bring chaos to the public sphere in this world, Max Weber claimed that the East depended on gods who were aloof and contemplative. We shall come back to this East–West comparison below.

In China, Heaven, the son of which the emperor was supposed to be, had become a more and more abstract concept, similar perhaps as with the American referring to "the government" instead of to specific persons. It was impersonal Heaven who *awarded* a dynasty or *withdrew* from it the mandate to rule. In the West emotional immortals could be tolerated to a higher degree because they were defined away from the world of everyday experience and confined to a beyond to which only priests and shamans had access.

But further Western steps along the path of continued rationalization tended to make immortals generally inaccessible and therefore irrelevant as models

4 Siddharta Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, (according to dates that are contested) was born 563 BCE in Nepal and died 482 in India.

5 Extending Chinese influence to central Asia under Emperor Wu of Han (156–87 BCE) enabled more contacts with India.

for emotional conduct. But in Northeast Asia deities and ancestors are here in this very world among us. Accordingly, they must behave as model people and display an attitude of contemplation rather than one of fear or anger lest they introduce chaos into this world.

It is in this context that Max Weber explained the sacrifice celebrated by the emperor of China as dedicated not to a deity driven by emotions, but rather to the principle of order and harmony. This principle was not embodied in beloved or feared immortal persons but instead in living conditions into which this world, nature as well as government and society, were to be placed and maintained. The quality of sacredness was then inherent in those *conditions* rather than in certain *people*.

In the West Weber saw groups of persons as bearers of holiness, as the Chosen People according to Jewish faith or the Chosen Few following Calvin, regardless of how unholy they may conduct themselves here on earth. In China, by contrast, Weber identified the sacred as a way of life, not as following from membership in a certain group of people. Because of that, the divide between this world and the beyond looks quite different: In the West, only the “good people” make it to Heaven, in China there are good and bad persons everywhere, and there is order and disorder everywhere. What identifies *the holy* are not persons but conditions, or ways of life. On the other hand, where the unholy or evil prevails, it results from wrong behavior and from ritual mistakes that are made in government and nature.

Daoism handed down the belief in a harmonious nature. Nature is sacred precisely because of its presumed harmony. Weber reads the result of sinological research available in his days as explaining the power of the Chinese emperor not with reference to his military power – as was typically the case in the West – but instead he was powerful as the representative of a condition of peace, harmony and order. This the emperor manifested in his priestly activities. In performing those he created *holy conditions*.

There have been different opinions about Confucianism as to the question whether it is a religion or not. As we saw above, the Jesuit missionaries had good reason to portray Confucianism as a philosophy rather than as a religion. While Weber admits that there are areas of overlap between religions and other systems of orientation, he writes: “There is no other distinction between ‘religious’ and ‘profane’ conditions, other than the fact that religious conditions are exceptional (*das Ausseralltägliche*) and do not happen in everyday life.”⁶ (*ibid*: 250). Looking at it this way, Confucianism is clearly a religion to Weber.

6 German original: “Es gibt keinerlei Scheidung von ‘religiösen’ und ‘profanen’ Zuständlichkeiten anders als durch die *Ausseralltäglichkeit* der ersteren.”

Therefore, in combination with the tradition of ancestor worship, so characteristic for China, and building onto that shared ancient foundation, there co-exist three *religions* (宗教= *zongjiao*, *zong* means related to the temple in honor of the ancestors, *jiao* means teaching or knowledge): Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. If one considers the meaning associated with the two pictograms representing the Chinese word for religion, they represent three different ways of worshipping the ancestors.

As we saw, Weber asks if these three “teachings” have an influence on how the believers will act. With regard to concrete content of religious faith, Weber does not try to discuss if these dogmas are true or not, but asks instead what their impact is on how people behave economically.

Weber distinguishes between types of Gods as alternative ideas of the divine. How a population imagines its deity or deities is decisive for the kind of culture that develops there. On the one hand Weber writes about an emotional God who is “angry, forgiving, loving, and demanding” (ibid: 258), but on the other hand, one who is present only in contemplation and meditation (ibid.). Against this typology of images of the deity Weber then compares the West, which in his view is unique, with China, and more widely, including Korea and Japan, with North-eastern Asia. His results of the comparison can be summarized as follows:

In China and other parts of Asia, it was in the interest of the leading personages of the culture, to reduce the irrational components of the idea of God, such as anger, love, and other unreliable emotions. These non-rational qualities, if attributed to a deity, could otherwise be experienced as justified by a human, who, when acting in that way, could claim to merely imitate the God. This largely unwelcome variant of *imitatio dei* (imitating God) was potentially a threat to the stability of the state. A moody despot could rule, claiming to follow an equally moody deity. Jewish religion masters this problem by defining its God as a partner in contractual agreements. Like business people, God and the Israelites as it were sign an agreement which from thereon is binding even to God!

When the Israelites made for themselves the Golden Calve and pray to it as their new god, the Bible reports that their real God became so furious that, in a rage, he announced to Moses his intention to destroy the people as a whole (Bible, Exodus, Chapter 32, verse 10). Interestingly, God promises in the same context to make Moses the leader of a different, more worthy people (ibid.). Moses, however, reasons with God, explaining to him first that he would lose face with the Egyptians if he first rescues his people, then destroys them (ibid. verse 12). But maybe more importantly, Moses reminds God that he took an oath to lead his people to the Promised Land (ibid. verse 13). These

argumentations have the result that God quiets down and abandons the idea to destroy the Israelites.

God flies into a rage high up on a mountain. Had this happened in the valley among the people, the intervention of Moses may have come too late. In accordance with these deliberations Max Weber sees the achievement of the West in rationalizing and disenchanting this world, defining all the unpredictable and highly emotional deities and spirits into the beyond, which is securely and clearly separated from everyday experience.

That procedure makes the secularized world of the West rational, predictable and therefore accessible to the natural sciences. It makes the discovery of reliable natural laws possible to scholars from Newton to Einstein. But while the West throws all irrational divine and spiritual powers out of this world, thereby preparing everyday life for the work of engineers and bureaucrats, North-eastern Asia, and certainly China keep the gods, ancestors, and spirits right here as part of the life we all lead.

Yet, China too finds a way that leads toward coping with irrationality. The emperor represents the divine in this world; he is believed to be the Son of Heaven. He offers the supreme sacrifice to Heaven and is himself the *pontifex* (*bridge maker*) as the pope is in the West. But in the history of Chinese culture Max Weber sees heaven not as driven by unpredictable emotions. The emperor directs his sacrifice and religious ritual not to a heaven, that is a *beyond* in the sense of being separated from inner worldly reality as in the West, instead the emperor addresses heaven as the principle of order and harmony. What Weber points out, and what is hard for a Westerner to understand: Order and Harmony are not represented by certain good personages who guarantee those principles, rather order and harmony are conditions which mortal as well as immortal persons can enter into, or which they can fail to adopt and drop out of.

If Max Weber is right in observing that the dichotomy of sacred versus secular in China is not a distinction between things and persons who can both be one or the other, but instead between conditions which things and persons have the potential of entering into, then this has fundamental consequences. It means for instance that the dividing line between the realm of inner worldly experience and the beyond looks quite different in the Orient from what it looks like in the Occident. The Jewish faith as well as the Calvinist variant of Protestant Christianity promise that the world of everyday experience becomes more and more reliable and predictable, not only for projects of science and technology, but also for ethics. In China there is no such promise.

In the West, the bearers of economic progressivism perceive themselves as holy, not on the basis of the conditions they enter into during their lives, but on the basis of their being members of the Chosen People or of the Chosen Few as

Calvinist sect. Being holy to them is something they – as it were – inherited like the color of their hair or the size of their nose. As pioneers of a new economy they can powerfully promote business activities without risking their status of salvation, or to put it more psychologically, they are equipped with a healthy quantity of religious self-confidence.

According to Weber, in the world view of North-east Asia too there is the distinction between this world and the beyond. This world is what we experience every day, the beyond is the extraordinary that we can experience only in rare and special situations. But in China here in this world as well as in the beyond, there can prevail a state either of harmony or one of disorder. The so-called evil cannot easily be identified as the quality of this person or of that thing, it is a state of being one can enter into and one can hopefully leave again. Government as well as nature can be in order or in disorder. It depends in part on whether or not mistakes were made when performing religious ritual.

But these fundamentals of cultural evolution far surpass the scope of economic ethic. On the basis of the research results of sinology available to him at the time, Weber sketched a social history of China. The imperial power which pacified the regional princes against their tendencies to quarrel with each other became a principle of order and harmony. The emperor was not primarily the ruler who forced the smaller monarchs to surrender to his overwhelming military power; instead he was experienced as representing the principle of peace and harmony in the vast country. This he guaranteed not merely by secular, military activities but primarily by religious ritual.

Weber sees a division of labor between the different levels of government: “The sacrifice to heaven whose ‘son’ the emperor was supposed to be, was the prerogative of the emperor, the local princes performed the sacrifice to the spirits of the region and to the noble ancestors, and the heads of families sacrificed to the ancestors of their clan.” (ibid: 300). The heaven is the address to which the emperor’s sacrifice is directed, and he alone worships the heaven ritually.

Weber believes that in the course of time the concept of heaven became more and more impersonal, while parallel to this change the emperor became more and more divine. As heaven loses the quality of a personal god, which Weber believes it had in the distant past; the emperor himself is increasingly seen as the incarnation of the sacred. As we have seen before, the concept of the sacred refers to a state of being which a person can enter or leave. A human can thus enter the state of the divine without ceasing to be fully human.

Since, in the context of his duties a professor, Weber teaches students of economics, his research is in part also geared to conditions of achievement or performance. In traditional societies abilities to perform among males is frequently measured as military prowess and fighting ability. Max Weber,

however, concludes from his insights into the culture of China that early in the history of that people military fighting ability was replaced by other, more peaceful activities.

Of course China is famous for Gong Fu, and the English language version of Wikipedia describes it as a “Chinese term referring to any study, learning, or practice that requires patience, energy, and time to complete, often used in the West to refer to Chinese martial arts.” But even further removed from physical fighting is the emphasis on the study of literature, particularly the texts of the classics, which, in combination with ritualized skills at arms, like archery, constituted membership in the ranks of cultured and respected Chinese gentlemen (*ibid*: 302).

In the West, to this day, leading members of the recognized nobility and certainly ruling monarchs tend to appear in public wearing military uniforms with the insignia of generals or admirals. The emperor of China, however, became the highest and even transcendental representative, not of the military, but of the peasant culture, performing the ritual of plowing the fertile ground. As a result of that, by performing “the ritual of plowing, he had become the patron (saint?) of agriculture and for quite some time had no longer been a ruling knight” (*ibid*: 303). Weber believes that defining agricultural activities as sacred, creates a cultural similarity of China with the ancient cultures of Egypt and of Mesopotamia. At the same time, it creates a contrast to the Jewish religion and to the Protestant version of Christianity.

Weber asks the question, if not the social distance between the emperor and the common peasant in China has been so enormous, that ritual plowing by the monarch could not have had much meaning to the commoner. But then Weber explains why he believes that this was not the case. The image according to which the distance between emperor and peasant resulted in utter powerlessness for the latter is false for this reason: Weber claims that the highest and the lowest member of the Chinese culture share the religious cosmos composed of heaven and earth. In this all-encompassing transcendental reality any simple common peasant could complain about the emperor and his officials, and he or she was believed to have the ability to direct such a complaint to heaven directly.

Max Weber writes that because of this, in imperial China among all ranks of the ruling persons, “the curse of the commoner suffering oppression and poverty was greatly feared” (*ibid*: 303). Such fear was grounded in the conviction that a curse by the lowly constituted a fundamental loss of harmony. Accordingly, the actual event of such a curse, and even the fear and resulting behavior anticipating and possibly avoiding being cursed, have likely reduced the number of uprisings and civil wars in China (*ibid*: 304).

Weber then generalizes this insight and concludes that according to these religious ideas of peace and harmony in imperial China civil wars are not possible there (*ibid.*). In relation to the size of the total population, the military has been small in numbers. The traditional belief in the harmony granted from heaven and in the emperor ruling as the son of heaven meant to Weber, that the military could only be used to battle exterior enemies who were not Chinese.

To disturb the condition of peaceful and quiet harmony inside the people was an act against heaven.⁷ Therefore, Weber concludes, that the absence of such disturbances was not the result of a peace loving population typified by persons who liked to be left alone in their private enterprises, but rather it was the result of a sacred condition, of the peace that heaven preformed and prescribed: “The guarantee of quiet conditions and inner order can best be given by a power who precisely by being impersonal and thus aloof with regard to any specific worldly power, is free of passion and particularly free of anger, one of the attributes so characteristic of the God of the Jews” (*ibid.*: 305).

The sacred power of heaven manifests itself to the simple people in China by what they experience in their lives every day. The sometimes dreadful separation in the West between the secular world and the holy beyond does not exist in traditional China. The sacred manifests itself also in how the simple people experience their government. If their lives are happy and peaceful it proves that they are ruled according to the order of heaven. If, on the other hand, fighting, disharmony, and even chaos prevail in everyday life, then that proves to the simple people that “the rulers lack charisma, that they have turned away from heaven and that therefore they must be called to order or be replaced” (*ibid.*: 307).

But provided the emperor is endowed with the religious charisma he is expected to have at his disposal, then he is not a ruler *under god*, or *under heaven*, instead then *he is himself* in charge of the affairs of heaven and earth. There are many powerful gods and spirits making their will felt, and the emperor is one of them, competing with them for influence and even commanding or if necessary, criticizing them. Weber found that “in the year 1455 the emperor delivered a punishing address to the god of the Tsai mountain” (*ibid.*: 309). The emperor could also order rituals and sacrifices to be ended if the spirit, to whom they had been directed, had proven unreliable. On the other hand the monarch could also praise and promote (give a more advanced positions to) gods and spirits if they had performed well to the benefit of the humans who worshipped them.

7 Reference to “heaven” is also not unusual in the Bible, as in the parable of the Lost Son who confesses to his father: “I have sinned against Heaven and before you” (Luke 15, 18 and 15, 21).

All this describes the enormous power of the emperor of China, because from a Western perspective he was a religious, a military, and a political leader combined in one individual. Yet, as we saw before, his sacredness was not seen as a quality of his person, but of a condition he could enter into or drop out of. He was expected to bring about peace and harmonious living conditions for the common man, to provide enough rain and a generous harvest. In order to ensure that, the emperor had to fulfill the “ritual and ethical prescriptions and live according to the rules of the old classical texts” (ibid: 311). In case he failed in bringing his empire into a state of affairs that meant comfortable and happy lives to his people, then he was required to publicly confess his sins (ibid: 312).

If even that did not help, he needed to be deposed and replaced by a successor who could convincingly display through his performance as ruler, that he had the Mandate of Heaven. Max Weber concludes his reflections on China with the remark that the sacred duty not to disturb the harmony of nature was an impediment to the development of modern rational capitalism.

Maybe the sudden return to the question, which economic ethic promotes capitalism and which one hinders it, characterizes Max Weber's sociology of religion. As a teacher of economics he has an interest and feels responsible to find answers to that question. However, as a theorist of cultural and social change in this world, he finds answers that go much deeper into the essence of culture. Of course religion is to him the foundation of culture. He has also done research on Islam, but never published a coherent text devoted particularly to that faith.⁸

Max Weber's younger brother Alfred Weber has also done research and published on China. However, he was not very interested in religion. Accordingly,

8 The Max-Weber-expert Karl-Ludwig Ay writes (in a personal communication): “If I remember correctly from reading Weber's letters (in the meantime his correspondence 1898 to 1920 has been edited completely) I did not notice any significant reference to Islam or to related intentions pointing to research or publications. However, in his letters Weber hardly ever wrote about his own research or the progress he made with it anyway. Also, I do not remember any text by Weber which explicitly deals with Islam. But: “Economy and Society” is full of very learned references to Islam, references which would be unthinkable without a thorough study of that religion. In addition, the title of the sequence of articles “Economic Ethic of the World Religions” as well as the first paragraph of the introduction to that, mention Christian and “Islamic religious ethic” as fundamental parts of that project. Those remarks make sense only if in Weber's head – or even in his desk – half finished or completed texts existed on the subject. Treatment of Christian ethic may have been omitted because Weber's neighbour and friend Ernst Troeltsch published a related work in 1912 (*The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches and Groups*). But with regard to the Islam-Project we are faced with a strange empty place” (translation mine).

Alfred's approach leans in a different direction: It is more geared toward explaining how culture evolves over time. In two of his books the passages on China are highly relevant: First in Alfred Weber's book *The History of Culture as Sociology of Culture* of 1935 that was reprinted in 1950 (A. Weber 1963), and secondly in the book *The Tragic and History*, published in 1943 (A. Weber 1943).

In the revised edition of his first book of 1935 Alfred Weber adds the footnote: "For a more detailed analysis with regard to China and India compare *The Tragic and History*" (A. Weber 1963: 69, footnote). Already in the 1935 publication Alfred referred to the French Sinologist Marcel Granet and his book *La civilisation chinoise*, Paris 1929 (ibid: 72 footnote). In the later work of 1943 Max Weber's younger brother again uses research insights from Granet and quotes Granet's Book *Danses et legends de la Chine ancienne*, Paris 1926 (A. Weber 1943:101). For reasons that are not professional but political, German sociology has largely ignored the work of Alfred Weber since the 1970ies.

Daoism: China's Native Religion

The Fundamentals of Daoism

China, the giant country, consists of numerous cultural subgroups and ethnic minorities, many of whom carry on traditions of various religions of primarily local significance. Among those are the folk religions of many of the country people, observing a local ritual of ancestor worship without following intellectualized religious teachings. There are, in addition, millions of followers of world religions, also Christians and Muslims who, as we have seen above, are counted among the members of the Chinese people as well. But what is so special about Daoism?

In this section I will disregard the diversity of religious orientations and instead concentrate on the oldest religious phenomena and on the origins of the indigenous – or home-made – religion that was not imported by missionaries from other countries: The native religion of China is Daoism.¹ For more than two thousand years the philosophical tradition of Daoism, its visions of the beyond, its cosmology and its principles of ethic have contributed to the evolution of Chinese culture. Daoism is discussed here from the perspective of comparative cultures without explicitly pointing to parallel concepts familiar to the Western reader from the bible such as *ascension*, *creation*, and the *deluge*.

The fundamentals of Daoism following Lagerwey, are these (Lagerwey 1987: Introduction):

- (1) *Classical texts of Daoism* (in comparative analogy to the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Greek poetry of Homer). Those are the Lao-tze (or Laozi, which can mean the book as well as its author). That book is also referred to as the Tao-Te Ching or the “Classic of the Way of Power.” Other texts of fundamental significance are the Chuang-Tze, the Lim-Tze, the Huai-nan Tze, and additional text which are related to these.
- (2) *Daoist religion in a narrower sense*, including the vast collection of texts called the Tao Tsang. The primary subject matter here is the performance of the ritual and of meditation.

1 Taoism, in: Marriam Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions, Wendy Doninger, consulting editor, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1999. pp. 1061–1075.

- (3) *The persons who live the lives of Daoists* as members of a monastic community, as priests in the service of that religion, or simply as followers of Daoism.

Up until the present the entire culture of China was permeated by Daoism. Therefore, without at least some familiarity with that religion it is not possible to understand China. One might want to look at Daoism as the bridge between the learned Confucianism of the intellectuals on the one hand, and the folk religion of simple people on the other: Daoism is more attractive to the latter group because of its more spontaneous emotionality in comparison to the official Confucian rituals of the past imperial culture. Daoism may also be attractive to some people because it is not as vague and diffuse as traditional folk religion.

The philosophical and religious concepts of Daoism have spread far beyond the borders of China, where they originated: They have thus become influential as well in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. In recent decades, variants of Daoism have also been adapted to the life style of Western people resulting in the formation of small groups of Daoists in Europe and North America.

Lagerwey points out that in the context of the academic field of sinology in China as well as in the West the distinction between Daoism as a *philosophy* and Daoism as a *religion* has been widely spread, however this approach belongs to the scholarly past. According to that dated point of view the early texts, supposedly written by the great sages, particularly by Lao-tze (who lived during the sixth century BCE and was elevated by his admirers to being a deity) as well as texts by the great mystics and commentators following him were considered as *philosophical* Daoism. This scholarly approach may be seen in analogy to the study of the Hebrew Bible, and of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and other founders of early Western philosophy.

Religious Daoism on the other hand, was erroneously considered to be a later development in the form of a neo-Daoist superstition. The research of recent decades, however, has been able to show convincingly that the ancient Daoist texts can only be understood against the background of religious practices that were current during the life time of Lao-tze and the other authors of the classical texts of Daoism. The ancient scriptures contain reports of ecstatic states of sages, of travels into the beyond similar to that of Elija,² and of experiences that came to the respective author while under conditions of trance.

These reports place the earliest Daoist experience on the same level of religious revelation as those in the context of shamanism that have been reported

2 Bible, 2nd Book of Kings, 2nd chapter, verse 11.

from various cultures in different parts of the world. It is therefore erroneous to present Daoism as if its founders had been sober philosophers, and as if their doctrines have later been used, or abused, for superstitious religious purposes. Since that has become understood to be unacceptable it would instead seem appropriate to link Daoism to very ancient sources of revelation, and to credit Lao-tze and his followers with having been the first ones to convert their mystical experiences into lasting texts.

In addition, recent research by sinologists has suggested that there is not even a sharp line separating Daoism from Confucianism. Both teachings agree in many details, as on the image of humans, on society, on the ruler, on heaven as the beyond, and with regard to their cosmology. These ideas have developed as it were in dialogue between *Daoism and Confucianism*. The thesis of a similarly creative exchange between *Daoism and Buddhism*, however, could not be sustained, because both teachings competed with each other for gaining influence on the ordinary people practicing a folk religion.

Such competition of course also resulted in copying certain traits from the other side with the effect that Chinese Buddhism, as I mentioned above, adopted characteristics which cannot be found in the Buddhism of other countries in Asia. This resulted for instance in the formation of Ch'an Buddhism, better known in Western countries as the Japanese variant, called Zen-Buddhism.

In China, competition resulted in a form of coexistence and since the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) Daoists and Buddhist components of folk religion have become so closely aligned that it is hardly possible to identify their origins and separate them from each other. In general Buddhism tended to be wide open to whoever showed an interest, whereas Daoists were more demanding upon their members' intelligence and level of education, particularly their knowledge of ancient texts.

Among the famous founders of Daoism it is primarily Lao-tze (or Laozi) who is known worldwide. His family name was Li (李). The book *Tao-te ching*, attributed to him, is – from today's research perspective – a collection of texts authored by various persons. It developed over time until during the third century BCE the final version evolved. The book had an effect on the evolution of government and law in China because it is designed to guide the behavior of a ruler. The king or emperor is advised in the text to govern in a way that makes his rule as unnoticeable as possible.

That ruler was encompassed with an aura that imposed upon the king or emperor abstinence from action. At the same time, it nourished the expectation that the man in charge of the country, by mastering the correct cosmology, could act as a high priest, guaranteeing harmony in nature and society. This emphasized the religious overtones of government: The ruler's adherence to

the instructions and admonitions of the *Tao-te ching* had the potential of making him the guardian of the equilibrium of the universe which was to subject itself in obedience to his priestly person.

There are countless translations of the *Tao-te ching*. They differ in many details because the ancient Chinese original text is often dark in its meaning and shares its ambiguity with most ancient texts of other cultures. As a sample for the reader who is unfamiliar with it I insert here Section 32 in a translation that tries to combine the various versions available in English and in German:

The Dao is eternal and without a name.
 It is original state it is inconspicuous,
 Still the world cannot subdue it.
 If princes and kings could keep up with it,
 All things would come on their own to obey them.
 Heaven and earth together would donate sweet dew,
 And peoples would agree to live together in peace.-
 At the beginning of creation names were assigned,
 Once those exist one should acknowledge their limits
 He who sees those limits is without danger.
 The being of the Dao in the world is like rivers and creeks flowing into
 larger rivers and into the ocean.

True to the Daoist idea of the ruler, as I mentioned before, until almost a century ago the king of Korea was expected to provide his people with favorable weather conditions. He was expected to avoid a draught and guarantee a generous harvest. Should nature not produce those effects, it was obvious to the king's subjects that he lacked the mandate of heaven. This of course made his status as ruler highly questionable: It rested on a religious position vaguely described as that of a high-priest and more adequately comparable to the highest ranking shaman in a society, often with the aspiration to monopolize shamanistic activities.

The high-priest or supreme shaman was, as it were, the Daoist aspect of the ruler. Over time, an additional component was added: The principle of a *blessing passivity*. It implied powerful inaction or *wu-wei* (无为 = no action). This notion can hardly be adequately described with the word *do-nothing-ness*. It rested (and rests till today) on a deep trust in nature's intrinsic qualities of harmony and development (similar to the belief in a presumed self-correcting tendencies in the markets, on which liberal economists used to build their trust). The Confucian partners of the Daoists who together with the latter were trying to improve the ruler's conduct, introduced the ritual worship of the cosmos by

the king or emperor as celebrating priest: The eternal order of the universe was to be recognized by ritual subjection of the ruler's cosmological liturgy.

Nature and Life Everlasting in Daoism

Daoism had the effect of modifying the belief of the common people: It contained the faith that selected persons would not necessarily have to subject themselves to normal death. Instead it appeared possible to follow a path which would inhibit the separation of body and soul, and eventually result in the promise that life everlasting could be attained without having to die first (Miller 2008: 29). In the sacred texts of the Western religious tradition too there are reports suggesting that access to the beyond could be attained without leaving a body behind: Nobody knows about a grave of Moses³ and Elija went up to heaven in a miraculous way.⁴

In China belief in life everlasting evolved in the following stages. It had been established faith according to Chinese concepts of the beyond to consider one's deceased ancestors as immortals who lived on eternally. Ancient folk religion had reserved heaven above for deceased dignitaries, including "emperors, noble ancestors, and worthies" (ibid: 29). The dead loved ones of the common people, on the other hand, were believed to rest peacefully in the underworld. As I mentioned above, the three levels of reality, heaven, this world, and the underworld, are represented in the Chinese word for king (王 = wang). The king was seen as the sacred person who had the priestly power to connect the three levels with each other. The horrible concept of a hell did not arrive in China until Buddhism was preached by missionaries from India.

Compared to this traditional faith of the three levels, in Daoism *heaven above* was awarded some innovative aspects. This was the case because intensive religious activities toward the beyond were initiated and motivated. Accordingly, Daoist immortals who arrived in the beyond having circumvented death were believed to be a spiritual being of a different and very special kind. Thus, the Daoist effect on ancient faith encouraged a revision of the images of the beyond.

There was no longer the same living and dying for everybody, but rather by following certain ritual and dietary rules, the Daoist could make himself or herself qualified to bypass physical death and ascend to heaven like Elija. In addition, certain religious activities of a devoted Daoist could even deliver the

3 Bible, Deuteronomy, 34th chapter, verse 6.

4 Bible, 2nd Book of Kings, 2nd chapter, verse 11.

dead members of his or her own clan from the realm of shadows in the underworld and enable them to ascend to heaven as well, even after having resided below for some considerable time,

As a result, heaven ceased to be strictly a location for the mighty ones who during their lifetime had excelled in political and military power. Instead heaven increasingly became a gathering place for *religious virtuosos* of Daoist persuasion. But Chinese heaven, no matter which version we consider, is quite different from the heaven of Western religions. Neither vision of Chinese heaven was to be understood as founded on the dualism of good and evil. There were clearly “bad people” in heaven as there were on earth. Thus inhabitants there did not share any particular level of goodness, rather what they shared was merely immortality, for better or for worse. Something similar must have been the case in the Western heaven prior to the eviction of the devil.

In order to live long and to possibly avoid physical death entirely, the followers of Daoism needed to be as healthy as possible. Health is not seen simply as part of individual experience and fate. Instead the personal body is considered to be integrated into the “body” of the cosmos and designed to participate in the life of the universe. Accordingly, the actions performed in the service of health and longevity are embodied in the interactions between the individual and nature. The person’s body is alive and engaged in interaction with the cosmos: “Where there is solicitation (kan), there is response (ying)” (Lagerwey 1987: 6).

That principle is at the basis of texts explaining the genesis of holy personages: A woman is overshadowed by a cloud of red color, or she swallows a rice corn, and in both cases the outer solicitation causes an inner response: She will be pregnant and upon additional praying she will later give birth to a hero who enters this world to create a new order. Her getting pregnant is not something that happens to her individual body alone, the entire cosmos proceeds in perfect solidarity with her; the Daoist cosmos is compared to a gigantic uterus (ibid: 6).

Inside the “uterus of nature” too, manifestations of good and of evil grow side by side. It is up to the human being to provoke, to solicitate, to induce those developments which he or she hopes will occur. This is typically achieved by means of the ritual with the help of the Daoist priest. The ritual is designed to assure the maintenance of the proper order of things. The cosmos resembles human beings in that it cannot avoid responding. Because among all the beings populating the earth, humans are endowed with the most powerful potency, they are also the bearers of enormous responsibility.

This is a force they received from the beyond. Because of this power that was laid into their hands, the human beings are themselves masters of their fate. According to Daoist belief the individual does not depend on personages

in heaven, not on gods, saints, or even ancestors, but rather his fate is in his or her own hands, because the powers in the beyond gave him the might to solicitate the proper responses himself. He must thus learn how to make good use of the potential awarded him. In the case of failure, he or she has nobody to blame but themselves.

Thus, the human being is seen as empowered, and Daoism is the religion teaching him or her to strengthen his potency and to lead it to perfection. The truly complete and rounded person embodies potency that solicitates responses by merely being there. The classical text describes it thus: He “accomplishes without having to act” (Lao-tze 47, quoted in: Lagerwey, 1987: 6). The fact alone that such a person is present in a given location is sufficient to result in benign weather conditions and in a good harvest. That person's mere presence increases the fertility of the soil and causes the fields to respond to him by producing generously. As a consequence there is something sacred about that individual.

Such a person has ordered the energies of his or her body, and the harmony which is thus arrived at, will then cause the energies of nature to be balanced in efficiency and harmony also. According to Lao-tze the maximum of potency can be found in a newborn male baby (Lao-tze 45). The ancient sage sees proof of that in the fact that the infant's penis can become erect without provocation. It would be erroneous to conclude from this illustration of the Daoist notion of potency that it only concerns human sexuality. A newly born is of course not cable of engaging in any sexual act. Just as obvious is the Daoist insight, that potency is not a power limited to *male* humans, nor, as we have seen, is it limited to sexual activity.

Potency is of course correctly associated with fertility. According to Daoist teaching the person is confronted with the alternative of either converting the nature-given energies to a large number of offspring or – and this is strictly the male perspective – to “return the semen to repair the brain” (Lagerwey 1987: 7). This means that retaining male sexual fluids inside the body rather than letting them escape during orgasm, contributes toward improving the respective man's mental potentials as well as toward extending the duration of his life here on earth.

Although of course modern science has shown that to be groundless, the belief in this causal connection persists in Daoist circles. It was sometimes quoted as an explanation for the often short lives of Chinese emperors who were privileged to have numerous concubines and who were assumed as a consequence to ejaculate excessive quantities of semen during their adult lives.

On the other hand, it is assumed that a man who consistently has followed the practice of “return(ing) the semen to repair the brain” (ibid: 7) can be

recognized by the outer form of his head: His forehead will be round, thereby leaving more space for the brain inside. This shape of the forehead indicates that the bearer of such a head can direct his mental energies anywhere he wants to. It further indicates that he has the ability to extend his consciousness to include heavenly spheres. There he has the shamanistic power to summon spirits into his presence above the clouds in order to present his wishes before them.

Thus, keeping the semen inside the male body and as it were channeling those fluids to bodily areas where they serve other purposes results in pontifical powers. The potential of sexual behavior resulting in becoming a biological father has then been converted to the empowerment needed for shamanistic interaction with the beyond.

The result is the notion of a Daoist priest who due to his controlled behavior has become the most powerful being in the universe by realizing the potential given to him by nature. As a result, the winds in the sky and the waves of the oceans obey his will. His solicitation causes the response of nature, because he has transformed his bodily potency into mental powers.

It is because of this that the empowered priest of Daoism is of immeasurable worth for the region in which he appears. He has the might to withhold rain like Elija,⁵ to let it rain, or to order the sun to shine. He demonstrates the human potential to be the mightiest of all beings on earth, because the less powerful ones, the lord of rain or the ruler of the winds must give in to the wishes of the empowered human person. Whenever he solicitates nature will respond to him. As early as the 3rd century BCE this type of person is described in the classical text *Chuang-tzu*. He, the Daoist priest, is also the link in the evolution of religion connecting shamanism to Daoism.

In order to better understand the significance of this pontifical position it is important to consider the cosmology of ancient China. Daoism did perhaps not create, but certainly accepted as given the view according to which the universe is a giant uterus within a larger body to which that uterus belongs. It is pregnant with living beings as well as with events. Its content can be compared to the Tohuwabohu of the Hebrew Bible, describing the chaos that prevailed prior to creation.

Just as the empowered human can take the initiative to make the sun shine or to start and stop the rain, a comparable, but even more powerful energy at the beginning of time resulted in shining a spark of light into the darkness of the chaos. That solicitation made it possible to enter into an incessant dialogue between light and darkness rather than merely initiating a spark that

5 Bible, 1. Judges, 17:1.

would soon disappear in darkness again without leaving a trace of its short-lived existence.

As a result of such a dialogue, cosmic energies could be channeled into a circular motion of light and darkness, into an equilibrium in which energies could be sustained and harmonized rather than lost in unchecked confrontation: A useless explosion causing excessive brightness of light and then collapsing into darkness could be replaced by the harmonious exchange of day and night. These Daoist notions are more complicated, but also more descriptive than the simple divine command "Let there be light!"

The darkness, prior to being hit by the first spark of light, is chaos, is negative, and is *female*. Daoism identifies what is meant here by the word *yin*. Only after light appears can there even be the knowledge that darkness existed. The spark of light that sets everything in motion is the *male* principle, called *yang*. It is quite obvious in Daoist contexts that *yang* cannot exist without *yin*, just as *yin* cannot exist without *yang*.

Once the first spark of light has initiated the process of creation, it continues according to its own inner necessities like a pregnancy: Light rises up into the sky, darkness settles down below the earth "Henceforth, the universe has become *di-verse* (sic!): a composite of heaven (*t'ien*) and earth (*ti*) – giving *tien-ti*, the Chinese word for *universe* – of good and bad" (ibid: 9).

The *di-verse* universe is from then on the cosmos placed into human hands. Given the potency which humans are endowed with they bear the responsibility to maintain equilibrium and harmony and to restore those if needed. If they fail to live up to this sacred task, but follow their base inclinations like power and lust instead, the waters of chaos become the deluge: It will swallow up the earth. Thus, infractions against the order of nature will be punished, not by an angry god via nature, but by nature itself directly. These are Daoist teachings that could deeply impact the contemporary concern about the environment.

Daoism as Seen by Confucians and Buddhists

How did Confucians look at Daoism in general, apart from the fact that frequently both, Confucians and Daoists, were co-creators of religious ritual? The followers of Confucius were the scribes, or in Max Weber's terminology, the *Literati*. As such they respected the classical texts of the Daoists and shared the veneration of their presumed authors: Lao-tze und Chuang-tze. Those texts revealed what, in the context of Daoism, could be counted as philosophy. They also contained a cosmology that was not controversial in Daoist dialogues with Confucians.

Accordingly, this aspect of Daoism, i.e. the messages contained in its classical texts, was recognized by the Confucians as part of a learned tradition. But folk Daoism as it was practiced in the small temples of the villages and carried on inside peoples' homes by a Daoism priest as a ritual at the bed-side of a terminally ill person, was rejected by the Confucians. Many of them considered that the superstitious result of a process of degeneration during which Daoist philosophy had been leveled down to primitive folk religion (*ibid*: ix). To the extent to which this had happened the Confucians held that the *Tao-Te Ching*, also referred to as the "Classic of the Way of Power," could no longer be considered a guide for the behavior of a ruler.

The rejection of Daoism by the Buddhist camp turned out to be even more severe than the Confucian critique. As we have seen, both Daoism and Buddhist teachings competed for the attention and adherence of the illiterate majority of the people. Daoism had been the traditional form of religious observance among those, until during the 8th century CE a new wave of missionaries from India spread Buddhism in China as a religious alternative. Buddhism presented itself as more enlightened, more rational. Its advocates tended to cast Daoist priests in the light of evil magicians using their powers to spread threat and fear. Daoists rituals and knowledge of plants and minerals was cited as source of potential dangers if provided by malicious priests.

Under such attack, Daoists learned much from the Buddhists. The former incorporated into their own Daoist tradition much of the Buddhist ritual as well as the Buddhist notion of salvation that went with it. As a result, Buddhism could not replace Daoism. But Buddhism introduced into Chinese culture a concept not familiar to it in the past: It succeeded in importing into China the belief in reincarnation, totally alien to the shamanistic tradition. Bokenkamp has shown in detail the process by which that occurred (Bokenkamp 2007).

In contrast to the idea of reincarnation Daoism teaches that immortality can be attained via a long life in this world and thus, as I explained above, by eventually avoiding physical death entirely. The various means to be applied toward that goal include ritualized sexual intercourse. This aspect of Daoism invigorated the critique from the Confucian camp, culminating in the attack that Daoism is a mixture of irrational magic practices and superstition capable of seducing the people and even the emperor himself (*ibid*: ix).

Missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church in China as well as many sinologists following their lead took over this Confucian view of Daoism. It was used for the purpose of debunking Daoism as superstitious and for constructing a contrast between it and Confucianism. The latter was presented as sober philosophy with no religious components. The missionaries did that hoping to convince their superiors in Rome, that by adapting to Confucianism they simply became experts in Chinese philosophy rather than forming an alliance

with a pagan religious orientation. As we have seen above, the Jesuit Christian mission failed due to problems within the Catholic Church.

Lagerwey explains the long lasting silence on Daoism in Western sinological research with this misrepresentation as superstition. It was virtually forgotten and has not been rediscovered as a topic of interest until the sixties of the 20th century. He cites the *First International Conference on Taoism* of 1968 as turning point. During those meetings Kristofer Schipper presented his paper on "*Taoism: the Liturgical Tradition*" which helped initiate a new movement of empirical research. Data collection on Daoist ritual in the context of folk religion was started with video cameras and other techniques of photography. At the same time research on the classical texts was resumed to find out more about the relationships between ancient texts and contemporary ritual.

Lagerwey quotes Joseph Needham and Kristofer Schipper (ibid: xii) who have shown that the various scientific achievements of early China have been due not to Confucian but instead to Daoist influences. Experimenting with various minerals and other substances in order to invent new "medicines" hopefully leading toward immortality was a characteristically Daoist activity.

One of the early experimenters accidentally created gunpowder: He was surprised and frightened to find his small laboratory suddenly explode on him. Alarmed by what happened he made a detailed description of the event in order to warn other adapts and to keep them from being exposed to the same danger. But alas, his warning words become the blue print for the production of gunpowder. It was of course used for making the famous Chinese firecrackers, but also to facilitate more effective killing in warfare. It has long been academic consensus that gunpowder was invented in the 9th century CE in China.

Today an uninterrupted tradition of Daoist religious practices exists only in Taiwan because the island was saved from the anti-religious excesses of the Cultural Revolution 1966–1976. It is difficult to judge if what we can observe in Taiwan can be assumed to be characteristic for China as a whole. During the thousands of years of religious evolution in China obviously the forms of Daoist activities have also changed and have likely been different from region to region.

In the long history of this Chinese religion there has been the monk who shares his journeying as well as his secluded life in the monastery with other Daoist priests. Next to him there has been the married village pastor who trained his son to become a Daoist priest as well. In all these varieties of Daoist life there seems to have been the goal to contact persons in the beyond in the shamanistic tradition via a combination of meditation and ritual. However, the most immediate purpose of employing the services of a priest have been and still are to achieve tangible effects in this world: "...the goal of Taoist ritual is health, wealth, and longevity" (ibid: xiii).

Oracle-Bones: The Mandate of Heaven

How to Change – Forward or Backward?

The vision of ideal political, cultural, and social conditions which served Confucius as ethical orientation was perceived by him as a concrete historical past of his own country. In continuing our comparison of cultures we note the difference between his vision of a splendid past on the one hand, and the utopias of Western thinkers on the other: As everyone knew since it was published, Thomas Morus' *Utopia* (1516) was to be found on an island that did not exist. Similarly, when Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu published his *Lettre Persanes* in 1721, it was clear that the correspondence between two Persian nobleman visiting Europe, and their loved ones at home in Persia was fiction. Nevertheless, for Thomas Morus as for Montesquieu the literary products of their artful imagination were tools to criticize the conditions in their countries by confronting them with a fictitious alternative.

But in contrast to European fictitious descriptions of an ideal condition of the public sphere, Confucius' critique of the deplorable *status quo* engulfing him during his lifetime was based on the conviction that the splendid alternatives he saw in front of his mental eye had actually existed in the not-too-distance past. This vision was kept alive as a view of a peaceful, prosperous, and happy age in the collective memory of his people that existed not on some remote, imagined island, but on this very earth and in their own country.

His point of departure made Confucius and his non-utopian teaching uniquely different from Western social philosophies. It also gave him considerable more authority in demanding *change as a return* to what had proven to work well in the past. It is maybe a matter of linguistic or political taste whether one wants to call such an approach conservative or even reactionary. It was, nevertheless, by implication as well as in some texts explicitly, a *powerful critique* of the *status quo* and a consistent demand on people to change their ways by looking back at how their immortal ancestors had behaved.

The Confucian view of history entailed weaknesses as well: It prevented China from establishing a firm and lasting legal system based on past experiences with human failure. Such a code of rules would by implication cement certain aspects of a *status quo*, but such an affirmation of present conditions was utterly undesirable from the perspective of the great sage harking back

to a splendid past. Then, what was the future state of affairs going to be? Is it possible to simply demand that a people, a society, a culture step back into its own past? Are there Western authors who in a similar way suggest reviving an admirable age that has gone bye?

In his *Decline of the West* Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) succeeded in persuading almost an entire generation of Western intellectuals to abandon their trust in incessant progress. That optimistic belief had dominated previous centuries in Europe and America; it persists in many circles in the assumption that there must be unending growth in the economy. But the Agadir Crisis of 1911 was seen by Spengler as a preview of World War I, as a watershed in the development of the West that fit his cyclical philosophy of history.

In consecutive cycles, as Spengler saw them, the fate of a population is doomed to go from bad to worse because it starts with a *culture* as a source of life and creativity, but then gradually mutates into what he gives a negative tone when calling it a *civilization*. “The Civilization is the inevitable *destiny* of the culture... Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion...” (Spengler 1980: 31)¹

As early as 1918 Spengler found the then current form of *civilization* in the West increasingly to be that of bureaucratic rule: Bureaucracies replace flexible interactions among potentially creative individuals with an impersonal abstract order, and shift what used to be responsibilities of competent decision makers to an anonymous *system*. On this Max Weber agreed with Spengler. The problem of bureaucratization is even more pressing today than it was a century ago: Bureaucracies stifle contemporary social reality from San Francisco to Berlin and beyond.

These systems of public administration usually start out in history as *means* to an end in the service of individuals and of public order, often legitimated by high flung long-term cultural goals. But in the course of time, disillusioned bureaucrats will let them degenerate to become *ends* in themselves. Simmel described this tragic tendency convincingly even before Spengler did (Helle, 2013: 62f.). Spengler argued in the continuity of Simmel’s dichotomy of *content and form*, but changed the terminology from *content* to *life* and from *form* to *Gestalt*. There are numerous references to Chinese culture throughout Spengler’s book.

1 In German terminology “Kultur” is associated with poetry and classical music, “Zivilisation” by contrast with technology and bureaucracy.

As a reaction to his critical view of a *linear evolution* of a history characterized by eternal progress, there is continuity in ensuing publications on the *cyclical philosophy of history* on which Spengler based his book; a continuity that includes the names of Nietzsche (2001), Dilthey (Rickman 1979), Scheler, Heidegger, and Jaspers (1974). Spengler was, however, convinced that the philosophers of his time were weak thinkers and did not have the ability to produce anything relevant. Inspired by Spengler and others at the end of World War I, descriptions of “decay” captured the widespread mood of the era.

These speculations however, did not prompt many people in the West to *return* to a real or imagined splendid ancient order and to arrive at a view comparable to the Confucian *Fugu* (复古 go back to the ancients).² But Confucius, by teaching his disciples, spread the firm belief in a historical reality that was worth being brought back from the past. He inspired generations of Chinese with that dream. To him it is quite clear that the concepts and ethical rules for a peaceful and cultured society have already been implemented in his own country. They were tragically lost due to human wickedness. According to Confucius it is the task of *normative knowledge*, for learned Chinese to describe the corpus of wise insights and bring it back to become real again in the ways in which the people in this world conduct themselves.

Looking at the conceptual tools available to Simmel, Spengler, and others, it appears that – in Spengler’s terminology – China maintains a stable *culture* through the ages and combines it with various stages and types of *civilization*.³ The West, by contrast spent at least the last three centuries in refining a specific *civilization*, based largely on progress in the natural sciences plus technology, combining that with various types of *cultures*. Thus, perhaps in China there is *one lasting culture* producing various civilizations, whereas in the West there is *one civilization* depending on support from different, often competing and transient cultures.

If a comparison between China and The West has any merits, it must start by considering the Shang period with its bone inscriptions as that era during which the fundamentals of the uniquely Chinese *continuity of culture* came about. Following the assumption just outlined, those foundations would stay intact during the evolution of China throughout the following millennia. In the coming chapters we will test the usefulness of this approach in applying it to various areas of social reality. We start with Schwartz’s report on the *oracle bone inscriptions*.

2 An appeal to return to a splendid ancient order.

3 See footnote 1 above.

The Splendid Age of the Oracle Bones

Compared to the reflections about changing cultures that we mentioned above, the insights Benjamin I. Schwartz (1916–1999) presented in his book *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Schwartz 1985) are different and likely unique. Typically, historical research is tied to written sources. Accordingly, if directed to the distant past it necessarily reaches only as far as the time when writing was invented. What we know, for instance, about the Pre-Socratics was passed on because Aristotle wrote about it, and only few and fragmentary texts were found later to make his reports more rounded. But the research results published by Schwartz transcend the barrier of written sources and refer to conditions that prevailed even prior to the creation of texts as historical records.

Schwartz's interpretation of *oracle bone inscriptions* is based on archeological finds of parts of animal skeletons and turtle shells. We are dealing here with a uniquely Chinese phenomenon that enables research into early communications with the beyond. In the Shang period animal bones and turtle shells were exposed to extreme heat in a fire until the material cracked. A religious specialist, a shaman or diviner, would then read a specific meaning into those cracks. What had been revealed to him from the beyond was then written on the bone or shell, in which the crack occurred. Research into such procedure would normally qualify as archeology. Schwartz, however, used *oracle bone inscriptions* as ancient texts of a special type.

His approach made it possible for Schwartz to construct a picture of the Chinese Shang period that can be dated to start at approximately the time of 1766⁴ followed by the Zhou (Schwartz prefers the spelling Chou) since 1122. During his lifetime Confucius (551–479) witnessed nothing but phases of decay, because the splendor of the Zhou era which he admired so much ended before he was born. In his teaching he later referred also to a Xia dynasty which even preceded the Shang, however at that point mythology and history merge. To Confucius the eras of the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou follow each other and each contributed to an age of splendor. After that was lost prior to the days of Confucius, Chinese history drifted into what is referred to as the *Spring and Autumn Period* (since 722) and finally into the centuries of the Warring States (481–221) at the end of an era of disarray (Kohn 2012: p. 211).

The religion of the Shang period as it becomes accessible in the inscriptions on the *oracle bones* appears to be based on divining, as is familiar from studies on shamanism. Many cultures develop a liturgical procedure for finding out from the beyond what the divine spirits, including in the case of China the

4 This, as the following dates, refer again to the time before the common era = BCE.

ancestors, expect their mortal followers or relatives to do. To this end they feel the need to know something about their future, or even about the meaning of their respective present. All this is perceived as results of what immortals decide. Illustrations for similar behavior with the same intentions in other parts of the world are, for instance, inspecting the intestines of a slaughtered animal, laying out *Tarot Cards*, or simply throwing dice.

Schwartz reports about the Shang period – as I mentioned above – that certain bones, typically the shoulder blade, or the shell of a turtle were heated in fire until they cracked. The shape and quality of the resulting rupture was then interpreted by the diviner as the answer from the beyond to what the respective faithful precursor of the dice-thrower of today wanted to know. Early forms of Chinese scripture were inscribed into the heated bone or shell material, similar to taking notes, in order to clarify and memorize the results of the divining procedure.

Based on this type of information Schwartz succeeded in reconstructing a whole age. His results include explaining the process of centralizing religious power in the course of which “the king becomes the main diviner” (Schwartz 1985: 37). The task of divining is originally one of the responsibilities of numerous shamans all over the country. But then the development described by Schwartz leads to a process in the course of which religious power is centralized in the person of the king who becomes the supreme shaman, in tandem with having the highest political, military, and legal authority (to the extent to which these terms can be applied to the Shang period).

When interpreting the words that can be found on the ancient bones and turtle shells, one cannot but acknowledge the prevailing significance of ancestor worship (ibid: 38). Admittedly, there is reference to spirits of rivers, mountains, and to spirits of weather phenomena like wind and rain. There are also inscriptions on bones and turtle shells about the sun, the moon, about specific stars as well as the high god of heaven Shang-Di (上帝)⁵ or in a later phase of cultural evolution, when the deity was removed and in a way emancipated from the Shang kinship system, simply about Di (帝) as the highest deity. But all these heavenly powers, including the spirits of mountains and stars, appear secondary to the ancestors who are better known and of course closer to home for everyone.

The latter are the group from which Shang-Di eventually emerged as the god of heaven, having as it were started his career as deity also merely as an ancestor of the leading clan. In the early days before Shang-Di evolved into Di, it was

5 As we have seen above, this word was used by the Jesuit missionaries for the “Heavenly Father” of Christians.

not clear – or not meaningful to try to distinguish – if Di imparted the *Mandate of Heaven* on the respective king in his capacity of member of that king's clan or in that of the high god in heaven, because that god *then was* a family member and therefore an ancestor himself. In the course of the evolution of culture, Di was gradually seen as standing above families.

According to the inscriptions on the *oracle bones and turtle shells* the entire ritual that led to those inscriptions was performed to address deceased members of the *royal family*. This can be concluded from the purpose of the sacrifice, the quality and meaning of the cups and other containers used, and particularly from the burial site of the departed. The elevated quality of those is reminiscent of excavations in the pyramids in Egypt and in Southern Mexico.

Schwartz presents the hypothesis that the strong orientation toward ancestors in China may have its roots as far back in history as the Neolithic age (ibid: 21). This raises the question if *kinship* was the basis for *kingship*, or if this relationship could also be seen in reverse: If the leader of a Neolithic group (king) could have become the precursor of a powerful ancestor to protect and care for his dependents. In any case, it seems that the evolution of kinship forms and that of types of political organization ought to be seen in close relationship as Marcel Granet has done in his research.⁶ Moreover, at an early stage of evolution, human culture did not even provide the conditions necessary for clearly distinguishing between family and polity.

Schwartz quotes Kwang-Chih Chang (Chang 1982) as having pointed out that the graph *tsu* for the patrilineal family is an arrow beneath a flag. (ibid: 26). This observation encourages the hypothesis that an association of male fighters gave protection to each other as well as to their women and children, and that the patrilineal family evolved out of that association. It could even be extended further into the more distant past when the males were primarily hunters rather than fighters. In the course of cultural evolution, the chief of the band (Service 1975) becomes the king and his comrades become his *brothers*. From this view the political system of kingship and the family organization as kinship evolve alongside each other.⁷ As we shall see below, the insights of Marcel Granet are in agreement with these assumptions.

The explanation of family and polity as originating *pari passu* from the same ancient social organization may be useful in examining the history of the relationship between (or the absence of a clear separation of) the private

6 Granet 2013. Also see here the end of Chapter 6.

7 On the topic of interchanges between the evolution of kinship and of political organization see also Marcel Granet, *op. cit.*, p. 310ff.

and the public in China and in explaining, why the two areas of social behavior have not become as clearly distinct from each other as in the West. The ease with which Chinese *even today* define people to whom they feel close as their *adoptive kin* or quasi brothers and sisters is striking to a Western observer.

In China since at least 1200 BCE the power of the deceased ancestor is based on a concept comparable to what in Western religious terminology is called *Realpräsenz* (*being really present*). For the faithful Catholic, Orthodox, and (since 1577) Lutheran Christian during consecration as the climax of the liturgy, God is in fact present in the consecrated bread and wine and thus constitutes a *Realpräsenz* in the midst of the congregation. In the Orthodox Christian tradition, the same is true for the respective saint who is believed to be present in his or her icon, provided that icon was created by the artist according to fixed rules for painting icons. Like the Christian God during the liturgy, or the Saint seen in his or her icon, *one's own* ancestor in China is *really present* in the family ritual.

Schwartz clarifies that by quoting from the book of Mozi (also spelled Mo-tsu or Mo-tse): “The spirit of the man is not the man, yet the spirit of your elder brother is your elder brother. Sacrificing to a man’s spirit is not sacrificing to a man; sacrificing to your elder brother’s spirit is sacrificing to your elder brother.” (Schwartz 1985: 21). Just as – from the perspective of “we” versus “they” – in The West the concept of *Realpräsenz* can only apply to “us” as members of our own religious *community*, in China what was quoted here from the book Mozi, can only apply to members of “our own” *family*. This creates a highly significant boundary between kinship groups: *My* ancestors are *really present* in this world, *yours* are not, at least they are not in *my* presence. In spite of – or in addition to – this strict ritual distinction, Mozi is that ancient Chinese thinker who – as I have explained here in the introduction – tried in vain to enter into Chinese ethical tradition the principles of universal brotherly love.

Schwartz attributes the flexibility of the social system of kinship to the life cycle of individuals: Over time sons become fathers, daughters become mothers and – more significantly under the patrilocal family tradition – daughters become mothers-in-law, and eventually, of course, they all become immortal ancestors. In addition, some of the power a parent has over his infant child, is retained, checked and mitigated by love, if such love prevails. This means that the departed as well as the living need to primarily fulfill their duties according to what they owe the members of their clan. And attending to those duties is largely ritualized.

While according to the Hebrew Bible Yahweh entered into a contract specifying the mutual obligations God and his people had toward each other, the ancestors of China need no such abstract list of rules spelled out in detail as

in the Book of Deuteronomy.⁸ They all, the living and the dead Chinese family members simply need to play their respective roles in the family drama as on the stage of a theater. Life is a ritual; ethics are the duty to perform that ritual with as much perfection as possible. Neglect of the ritual obligations towards living family member as well as toward the departed is sinning against one's ancestors.

The metaphor of the theater is helpful here in comparing cultures. Modern Western individualization tended to debunk the idea of role playing as forcing the person into a predetermined mold leaving no room or opportunity for individual spontaneity and development. This more recent attitude can obviously not describe Western culture of the past, since there have been eras when it was considered a pious decision for the individual to *remain in his estate* (Martin Luther: *Jeder bleibe in seinem Stand*) and play one's God-given live-long role religiously.

Even as late as the early twentieth century it was normal in many parts of Europe for the son to continue in the occupation of his father. If during the nineteenth century the sons did not follow that rule they often compensated their deviation by aspiring to greatness outside their clan: Marx did not become a lawyer like his father, Dilthey did not become a protestant preacher like his father, and Simmel and Adorno did not become businessmen like their fathers.

But in the contemporary West at the start of the third millennium CE, on which we embarked more than a decade ago, role playing has become an activity people want to limit to between 40 and 50 hours per week. After they get off work, they just want to *be themselves* rather than play a role. In China the status of role playing follows a significantly different path in cultural history. Suffice it for now to say in somewhat provocative brevity: If a Chinese person does not play his or her role well on the stage of the kinship theater at home, then that person is nothing more than a poor actor. Why is that so?

The ritual that can be reconstructed from the inscriptions on the oracle bones summons the ancestor as follows: The well-known immortal family member is asked to be present. This will remind him or her of their duties toward their own clan. In return the assembled faithful promise to perform their ritual obligations directed toward him or her. How can the living perform the ceremony of divination and expect the dead to be addressed by it, to abide by their respective role, if they themselves are not willing to do that? How can an

8 Also called "Devarim," (spoken words) is the fifth book of the Hebrew Bible and of the Jewish Torah.

actor on stage level critique against a co-player if he himself does a poor job during his performance?

Every role-play of course depends on how the correlate roles are performed, unless on stage in an exceptional situation an actor performs a soliloquy like Hamlet. But the question “to be or not to be” can be raised only by an individual, not by a clan: The clan is eternal; the option “not to be” does not exist. An individual can apologize for a deviant act; a clan cannot, because it includes immortals endowed with a certain degree of infallibility. That makes it more difficult for Confucian Japan to apologize for atrocities committed during World War II than for Christian Germany.

It is clear from these deliberations that the Chinese family as well as the ritualized interaction (li = 礼) in its context have a religious base of its own. Whereas in *Christian* cultures marriage and childbirth are attributed religious meaning from a religion located primarily *outside* the kinship system, i.e. in congregation and church, the *Chinese* tradition provides the source of religion from *within the clan*. This means of course that the Western family can more easily lose its religious dimension than the Chinese family can. In the West, Catholic and Orthodox traditions are closely connected with the worship of saints, a practice which – as was mentioned above – clearly depends on the extent to which the respective saints *are known and appear familiar* to the worshippers.

In the absence of a dualistic world view in the China of the Shang period, *the beyond* is more or less a continuation of *this world* with the same type of personnel living as members of large kinship systems and performing their well-known family roles here as they do there. It is therefore plausible that the social structure of the beyond is a *replica* of the society of mortals, or *vice versa*, both including good as well as evil characters.

As I indicated here before, the patrilineal family seems to have evolved out of the band needed for hunting as well as for military defense. In reverse, it may be possible for the polity for its part to have evolved as an extension of the kinship system of early Chinese society. That important development can be assumed to have occurred in this way: The royal family-head searches out the high God as his personal ancestor with the aid of diviners, and being closer to him than any other living creature, eventually demands the monopoly of access to him. This centralized religious authority in turn enforces his power as secular ruler; and thus the king⁹ becomes the high priest and patriarch of his people telling them what to do in his capacity as the supreme diviner. Then they all are defined as members of his patrilineal and patrilocal family.

9 This refers to ancient times before China was ruled by emperors.

The bone inscriptions show that according to the religious ideas of the Shang era the living and the dead are members of one overarching society encompassing them all. The dead ancestors participate in the family affairs with the living, and the correct way to behave is solidified in ritualized family conduct. Thus doing the right thing is guided by ritual. And as a living person can be offended by infringements on his or her kinship role, such offence can also be given to an ancestor. In both cases it is necessary for the individual to apologize and make special efforts to restore a peaceful and loving relationship, be it within the boundaries of this world, or be it crossing over into the beyond.

Out of this general social order of relatives evolves as central high god the person of Di (帝) whom I mentioned here before, and who is experienced as almighty, just like a father is seen by a small child. Schwartz quotes Keightley (*ibid*: 30, foot note 37) about the power and characteristics of Di (spelt Ti): He had “dominion over rain, wind, and other atmospheric phenomena, harvests, the fate of urban settlements, warfare, sickness, and the king’s person. He may share some of his functions with other spirits, but his ultimate sovereignty is undisputable.” (*ibid*: 30). The high god was thus the transcendental counterpart of the earthly king.

From a religious perspective that king (王 = Wang), guided by Di from above, appeared to be in a similar position as a medieval “pope.” But, in contrast to “the West,” a division between religious and secular leadership did not evolve in the days of the kings and emperors in China. The division between the two realms is symbolized in the West by the emperor’s penitential encounter with the pope as “vicar of Christ” in Canossa, Italy (1076–1077) following the dramatic and for the emperor and his entourage nearly fatal crossing of the Alps. In the ritual encounter between pope and emperor that followed, the pope represents the *sacred*, the emperor the *secular* power.

In China the emperor was a *secular as well as a sacred* person until the revolution of 1911. Schwartz refers to thousands of years of cultural continuity. (*ibid*: 31). After numerous generations of uninhibited rule, one dynasty exhausted its kinship resources and was replaced by another in a more or less violent takeover, but the earthly political order as a replica of the cosmic order was (until 1911) never questioned. Some recent analysts of the Chinese condition are inclined to extend this observation even beyond 1911 to the role Mao Zedong played since 1949. Seeing his portrait looming large from above the entrance to the *Forbidden City* in Peking seems to support such a hypothesis (not to speak of Mao’s picture on every Chinese money bill to this day).

Be that as it may, the political and social order of at least pre-1911-China was defined by the ritual behavior inside the families, i.e. by the quasi-liturgical inner-familial interaction, so powerfully reinforced by Confucius who for

instance paralleled the relationship between father and son with that between emperor and subject. This ritual behavior applied to Chinese kinship reality from the imperial family all the way down to the simplest peasant household. Its unifying effect counteracted the development of a class society: The primary source of inequality was the position in a kinship group, not in a class of society!

It is a narrow, specifically Western view of a power relationship, to see as the problem of inequality merely the duty of the underling to obey. In the Chinese tradition the relationship obviously also entailed the solemn duty of the person in power to care for, protect, and preferably love his son, younger brother in the family, or lower ranking member of the political order respectively. Isolating the aspect of obedience from seeing the power-holder as responsible caretaker, would most likely have prevented Confucianism from surviving through the millennia: Its historical vitality is based on the combination of submission to him who provides protection.

The *family as a metaphor* for religion and politics is of course not peculiar to the cultural history of China. The God portrayed by Christianity for centuries was seen and addressed as a *father in heaven* for centuries. Political leaders as late as the 1950ies in Germany were referred to as *Landesvater* (the country's father). But in the West, family relations never acquired the degree of centrality in life, which they apparently had (and have) in China. For centuries the French, German, or Italian son or daughter who was disillusioned (or rejected) by his kin, could find a new social home in a monastic organization of the church, or the sons – provided wars lasted long enough – in the military.

In China too, wars as well as monasteries were and are available. A Daoist or Buddhist woman or man could likely find acceptance in one of the numerous monasteries. However, the social status awarded them there was of a different nature and also not necessarily – as typically in the West till recently – remained mandatory for the remainder of the person's life. In the West adults could, and – due to severe restrictions on the right to get married – were forced to make a choice between living *within* or *outside* families.

The Chinese were typically not confronted with such an alternative: In China the ritualized life inside the clan was (and is) the sanctioned way of life for everybody. It has served for millennia as the model for a human existence in peace and harmony both in family and state. Traditionally, families would permit a son to become a monk *only after* he had (at least begotten) himself a son to carry on the patrilineal family into the future.¹⁰

10 Compare the end of the novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*. See here Chapter 10.

And yet, in spite of the prevalence of kinship ties, the foundations of Chinese early culture were twofold: On the one hand the emperor could trace his power to his ancestors in the beyond who had helped him seize the supreme leadership position and were visibly supporting his worldly might. In addition, as the Shang rule was replaced by the Zhou and the high god was no longer *Shang Di* but more generally *Di*, the highest person in the beyond became somehow situated above the level of kinship and became a meta-family god who decided which family was to be entrusted with ruling the nation. Thus *Di* stood, as it were, in the background behind and above the chiefs of the clans. In a similar way even the ancient Greek high god, Zeus, in spite of all his divine powers was still subject to predetermined rules of fate that he did not have the might to alter. *Di* became the representative of a personalized Chinese version of fate.

Rather than directly spelling out that it was *Di* who entrusted this or that clan with imperial powers, it became more common to speak about the *Mandate of Heaven*. It was *Di*, and possibly an entourage of ancestors and cosmic spirits around him, who awarded or withdrew that mandate. But since there was no earthly organization devoted to controlling the emperor's performance, the heavenly trustees of the mandate to rule the earth had no concomitant equivalent in this world. This, in part, explains the extraordinary and absolute power of the Chinese emperor in comparison to the medieval rulers in Europe. The latter usually needed to reckon with the pope, even though in rare cases they solved the conflict between church and state without him, as Henry VIII of England did.

It is true that the Creator God of Jews and Christians was referred to as being in command of the *heavenly host*, whatever the faithful may have associated with those multitudes. This most likely was a military metaphor dating back to the Jewish Holy Scriptures where Yahweh was in charge also of granting military victory. But it can be hypothesized that at least the trend in the evolving imagery of the Western god was more oriented toward a father-metaphor which influenced *family life* in the West. There a family image based in the beyond and on faith in a *Father in Heaven* with his son close to him have influenced the earthly family (and thus reinforced the position of the father there), while in China the earthly organization of the imperial government became the model for the court held by *Di* above the clouds.

The Chinese god *Di* was perceived as an *emperor in heaven*: The inscriptions on the oracle bones mention how *Di* rules the universe with the help of his *transcendental bureaucracy*, and how he sends out messengers to this world who bear the titles well known to the people from the administration of the political sphere. The heavenly mail carriers were thus not called "angel"

but something like “heavenly ambassador” or “divine secretary of state.” This Chinese parallel between politics and heaven is of striking significance in the *Great Petitions for Sepulchral Complaints* which Nickerson describes for the Celestial Master tradition of early Daoism (Bokenkamp 1999: 230ff.) Even the application forms used to send petitions to heaven were adapted from what was then current stationary in dealing with the local government.

The unity of heavenly and earthly domination unfortunately awarded the Chinese emperor sacred infallibility. Fei Xiaotong writes: “When the emperor orders your death, you must die... the emperor can do no wrong” (Fei 1953: 27). The ratification of earthly power from the beyond applied not only to the relationship between the ruler and his subjects, but could claim the same validity within each individual family in the kingdom.

The royal clan was not merely a model to emulate as far as possible, but it was a kinship unit governed strictly by rules identical to those of every other family! “The king is the ‘high priest’ of his lineage’s ancestor cult.” (Schwartz 1985: 35). And the oldest healthy male has *that same function and duty* in every family. That is the *religious reason* for the need of at least one son, a need which makes it necessary to adopt a son (or install a son-in-law as “son”) if there is no natural male offspring.

In addition, since in the era of the oracle bones the king tries to enforce his monopoly as diviner and as having direct access to Di, this explains early punitive actions against shamans and other diviners as unwelcome competitors (long before Communism). The king also becomes the “high priest” in paying respect to Di, the high god in heaven, whom he will also beseech to allow him to stay in power.

When contrary to the king’s monopoly as supreme shaman a multitude of shamans remained active throughout the history of China, then this can be explained with the huge difference between the official political order valid for the cultured and ruling class versus the informal ways of “folk religion” practiced to this day by the common people in the villages far from the ruler’s residence and influence (ibid: 36).

The ultimate source of authority for the king during the era about which the oracle bones give us clues, was not his clan, which could undergo worldly forms of change, but rather the *Mandate of Heaven* as it was awarded to him and indeed to his family by the high god Di. The sacred power was later referred to more distantly no longer as Di, but as *Heaven*. This sacred power was the highest authority that awarded or revoked the *Mandate*, while considering continually how deserving a noble family had been.

An occasion in history at which the Mandate had been transferred from one monarch to another was the content of the following dialogue between

Mencius and his disciple Wan Zhang. This quotation from the *Analects*¹¹ shows that a transfer of the Mandate cannot be made effective by handing over a position from one monarch to the next simply on the basis of worldly power

Wan Zhang said, 'Was it the case that Yao gave the throne to Shun?'

Mencius said, 'No. The sovereign cannot give the throne to another.'

'Yes – but Shun had the throne. Who gave it to him?'

'Heaven gave it to him,' was the answer.

"'Heaven gave it to him:' – did Heaven confer its appointment on him with specific injunctions?"¹²

Mencius replied, 'No. Heaven does not speak. It simply showed its will by his personal conduct and his conduct of affairs.'

"It showed its will by his personal conduct and his conduct of affairs' – how was this?"

Mencius's answer was, "The sovereign can present a man to Heaven, but he cannot make Heaven give that man the throne. A prince can present a man to the sovereign, but he cannot cause the sovereign to make that man a prince. A great officer can present a man to his prince, but he cannot cause the prince to make that man a great officer. Yao presented Shun to Heaven, and Heaven accepted him. He presented him to the people, and the people accepted him. Therefore, I said, 'Heaven does not speak. It simply indicated its will by his personal conduct and his conduct of affairs.'"

Zhang said, 'I presume to ask how it was that Yao presented Shun to Heaven, and Heaven accepted him; and that he exhibited him to the people, and the people accepted him.'

Mencius replied, "He caused him to preside over the sacrifices, and all the spirits were well pleased with them; thus Heaven accepted him. He caused him to preside over the conduct of affairs, and affairs were well administered, so that the people reposed under him; thus the people accepted him. Heaven gave the throne to him. The people gave it to him. Therefore, I said, 'The sovereign cannot give the throne to another'. Shun assisted Yao in the government

11 Website of Study.com: *Analects of Confucius*: "The '*Analects of Confucius*' are somewhat analogous to the gospels of the Bible because they were written by disciples of a moral teacher after his death, to carry on his teachings."

12 This translation is superficial; the meaning is more accurately: Did Heaven confer the appointment by impressing a detailed government program on the future monarch with great urgency and – as it were – making him memorize it in some kind of a teacher-student dialogue?

for twenty and eight years – this was more than man could have done, and was from Heaven. After the death of Yao, when the three years' mourning was completed, Shun withdrew from the son of Yao to the south of South river. The princes of the kingdom, however, returning to court, went not to the son of Yao, but they went to Shun. Litigants went not to the son of Yao, but they went to Shun. Singers sang not the son of Yao, but they sang Shun. Therefore, I said, 'Heaven gave him the throne.' It was after these things that he went to the Middle Kingdom, and occupied the seat of the Son of Heaven. If he had, before these things, taken up his residence in the palace of Yao, and had applied pressure to the son of Yao, it would have been an act of usurpation, and not the gift of Heaven. This sentiment is expressed in the words of The Great Declaration: 'Heaven sees according as my people see; Heaven hears according as my people hear.'"

Here ends the dialogue between Mencius and his student. This quotation raises the question, if there is a "democratic" tradition in ancient China because of the closing words from "The Great Declaration"? In any case, to Confucius and his disciples, the rule of the king was not absolute but tied to ethical knowledge and subject to judgment by a higher authority in the beyond. These are the conditions which Confucius saw as his vision of an admirable past and which he hoped to revive to social and political reality. Through his teaching he hoped to contribute toward bringing back the lost splendor. From a historical perspective of comparative religions this phase to which the great sage is harking back can perhaps be considered a revelation without lasting acceptance as one of humankind's missed opportunities.

Confucius: Recapture the Lost Splendor

Heavenly Mandate and Objective Order

The question of how the rule of one dynasty over a large territory was organized during the oldest period accessible in Chinese history, takes us back to the duality of family and polity. The early Chinese feudal system, however, was not really based on that duality, but on the principle of *entrusting family members*, who would be bound to their monarch by the sanctity of kinship ties, with the duty of acting as deputies of the king in remote areas (Gassmann 2006). Also, as extension of this system, trustworthy vassals *from outside* the ruling dynasty could be *adopted* and given the status of family members, including all the rights and duties involved.

The teaching of Confucius emphasizes that the conditions inside the family have direct impact on stability or fragility in how the country is governed: “For someone to be respectful to his parents and affectionate to his brothers, yet to be inclined to give offence against the ruler, that hardly ever happens. For someone without any inclination to give offence against the ruler to stir up a rebellion, that never happens” (From: The Analects 1, 2). All this illustrates how closely family and polity were intertwined – or rather, that such distinction did not exist – in the days of the Shang and the Zhou. In addition, they leave room for speculations that such feudal loyalty could be created on the basis of matrilineal family conditions as well as on the basis of a father-son-succession.

Given the closeness not only between family and polity (in the sense of organizing power over a large territory), but at the same time between family and the military, a country-wide military hierarchy was likely based on the same procedures. In addition, identical structures in family, polity, and the military were sanctioned by religion: Above in Heaven, Di had shifted his Mandate from the Shang to the Zhou. This showed that “*The Mandate of Heaven* is not forever” (Schwartz 1985: 46, footnote 13), but awarded to the most deserving clan, the Zhou, who during their tenure as kings established the long lasting order of peace and happiness which Confucius admired and was harking back to.

The sources of research supplying the data for this chapter on Confucius are not the *oracle bones* but the *oldest texts* available. One of those is the *Book of Poetry* which alludes to conditions in the early Zhou (or as Schwartz (1985)

writes: Chou) period (1046–771 BCE).¹ Confucius of course knew the ancient poems and concluded from their content what the conditions had been like in the days of the Zhou and how they had succeeded in following the Shang dynasty.

According to what is reported in the *Book of Poetry* about the Western Zhou, the notion that an unsophisticated clan by the name of Zhou could suddenly take over by force the rule in a large territory from the Shang is erroneous. The poetic sources indicate by contrast that the Zhou were not simply wild and more violent than the Shang, but instead had been their cultured neighbors and profited from their development long before taking over the kingship from them. “Archeological finds indicate that the Zhou people had internalized many aspects of the Shang achievements or participated in what might already have been a shared Chinese culture.” (Schwartz 1985: 42).

One of the reasons for the success of the Zhou rule may have been their definition of *Di* as their distinctly *personal* high god, not as aloof and remote as *Heaven* appeared to be seen in later periods. *Di* gave the Mandate to the Zhou king, thereby making him – in Western terms – a divine right sovereign. But from their take-over experience the ruling Zhou concluded that *Di* might just as well take the Mandate away from them again, should they no longer prove worthy of it. Schwartz quotes Zhou Kung, the Duke of Shao, who was an uncle of the heir to the throne and who ruled peacefully as regent alongside his infant relative, the future king.

The Duke of Shao is famous for his benevolent stance towards the people in the South of China whom he was entrusted to govern. The Duke used the word *Heaven* instead of *Di* when he explained the change of the dynasties from Shang (or Yin) to Zhou: “Implacable Heaven sent down ruin on Yin. Yin had lost the Mandate and Zhou has received it. Yet I do not dare to say whether it will end in misfortune... Heaven’s Mandate is not easily preserved. Heaven is hard to rely upon.” (ibid: 47).

This awareness that the kingship was awarded by *Di*, so to speak, *on probation*, must have been a strong motivation for self-criticism and for the willingness to reevaluate and improve over time the ways in which the rule over the country was implemented. Such self-critical attitude of the royal family toward its own performance as rulers was precisely what Confucius considered necessary, but found missing during his life.

1 The entire Zhou dynasty lasted for a very long time (1046–256 BCE), but is divided into the Western Zhou (1046–771) and the Eastern Zhou (771–256). Livia Kohn (2001) in her study of Daoism reports the year 1122 BCE (not 1046) as beginning of the rule of the Zhou.

Heaven, accordingly, was not – or no longer, as *Shang Di* appeared to be – the god of a clan, but had become the god of history. This made the high god of early China a personal deity who, although evolving out of the shared background of family relationships, had become independent of ancestors during the Zhou rule, independent even of the ancestors of the royal family. This clearly reduced the power of the Zhou ancestors as deceased family members over their offspring and establishes a mighty non-family god next to them as their judge and sacred god-king in the beyond. (ibid: 49).

It remains speculation if that implicit divine independence from dynastic interests was preserved in the continuity of Chinese culture, or rather lost in later eras: The concept that a divine judge above the clouds decided, which kinship group deserved to rule and which did not, may have become increasingly unwelcome to later dynasties. The warnings quoted above from the Duke of Shao “Heaven is hard to rely upon” may have given rise to a tendency for later rulers – particularly during the era that immediately followed the Western Zhou – to make themselves independent from any judge above them. When in later periods of the empire a particular dynasty got close to being deposed, the emperor and his relatives had probably already rejected the notion that a transcendental power was evaluating their performance. If this is indeed what happened, then that too could have been a reason for Confucius to consider the early Zhou worth going back to.

On the issue of whether or not in China absolute rulers were subjected to and judged by an *objective order* guaranteed by fate, Joseph Needham (Needham 1982) distinguished two opposite types of orders: He confronted the legislation by Yahweh as the source of Jewish and Christian religious orientation with what Needham calls the “organismic” order of the Chinese. By that he means a set of rules, which were, so to speak, already in existence on their own without a specific legislative act of a god.

As we mention here in a different context, in the Western tradition the Jews see their god as entering into a contract with his people and then abiding by it (even as the people breaks the agreement). In the warning statement given by the Duke of Shao “Heaven is hard to rely upon” it appears that there too are objective criteria by which the performance of a ruler is judged and possibly, if that appears necessary, the *mandate of heaven* is withdrawn.

Schwartz, in contrast to Needham, does not see any merit in making the distinction between the order resulting from a divine decree on the one hand, and a set of rules inherent in an inner-worldly system on the other. The decisive point to Schwartz is the fact that, regardless of the origin of the rules, the humans subjected to it *can obey it or not*, and a powerful person in the beyond can then hold them responsible for their actions. Accordingly, *Di* can award

or withdraw the *mandate to rule* and thereby make sure that power will be in the hands of good men rather than in the hands of their ruthless counterparts. This, according to Schwartz, is what counts, and the distinction between types of orders introduced by Needham seems irrelevant to Schwarz for drawing that conclusion.

The question of an *objectification of order* and of subjecting ruling individuals to sets of rules they cannot change or ignore is part of the observations relating to the *axial age*. At that threshold in cultural history Karl Jaspers (Jaspers and Arendt 1985) saw a developmental divide in the era of Confucius and Socrates. According to Jaspers it occurred in various regions, in ancient Greece, in India, in China at about the same time. One of the common achievements seems to have been the awareness that even the most powerful ruler was to be judged by comparing the political order he established and maintained, with the *notion of an ideal order* that could be used as a measuring stick for critique.

The changeover to a higher level of culture was thus made possible by the development of *abstraction and objectification*. Some ideas that transcended the physical existence of the individual became current, and some contents of human imagination were attributed the status of reality. In the West this applied to Plato's eternal ideas as explanations for what Socrates teaching was really about, and as sources for more and more ambitious ethical orientations. As an application of Plato's dualism there started to establish itself an alternative second reality in the beyond.

In China, however, what developed as contribution to *abstraction and objectification* – among other innovations of course – was the objective value attributed to *ritual*. The deceased ancestors are *really* present if they are worshiped in obedience to the proper *ritual prescriptions* just as in the Catholic and Orthodox Christian tradition the worship service's success is guaranteed *ex opere operato* (by the work itself that was performed) if the priest follows the rules of the ritual. Accordingly, as an alternative to the external objective reality of Plato's dualism ritual resulted here in a firm reality that could no longer be subjected to individual whims.

Thus, in the era of the Duke of Shao at the latest, a monarchical rule that had the moral ability to reflect its own quality came into being to replace an archaic absolute sovereignty during which the exercise of power had been self-explanatory and in no need of any justification. Confucius was an untiring advocate of subjecting monarchical reign to such ethical standards. He saw those standards largely disregarded by the power holders who were his contemporaries and none of whom was willing to use his services as advisor.

What the period of the early Zhou kings meant for Confucius is this: The achievements of the axial age must be preserved, and a long era of peace and

welfare can be established, proving thereby that an ethical foundation for a political and kinship order was possible, not merely imaginable. What the great sage Confucius, whom Marcel Granet (1884–1940) refers to as “this saint” (Granet 2013: 29). is faced with, is the painful question: Why and how did it get lost? And since in the days of Confucius the loss of that admirable condition was at hand with all its sadness and horrors, what could be done to restore it in the future? What were its characteristics that posterity should strive to restore?

In search for answers, Schwartz quotes again from ancient poetry, this time depicting the solemn ritual order at gatherings of cultured members of the ruling class. The verses of the poet describe how that gentlemen class flourished as long as each participant in ritual celebrations behaved in a sober and ritualistic way observing the *quasi liturgical* prescriptions for correct social conduct. But then the poem depicts how the use of more and more alcohol sets in with its ugly consequences, and as a result, the ritual gatherings tend to break up more and more frequently in the complete chaos of drunkenness. (ibid: 55).

Schwartz explains how such reckless behavior was performed by those, who ought to represent the culture of their time. They as the elite were then the social group who as a body stood for the normative knowledge available in that society. Their ethical failure led to the loss of the *tao* as the *normative order*. The familiar word, traditionally also referred to as *Dao* to which Daoism is dedicated, has several meanings. One of those is intended by Confucius when he refers to the *tao* (ibid: 64–67) as the order that was lost and that was therefore missing in his time.² But it was missing not only in the days of Confucius. He sadly experienced the absence of order as a task, and he devoted his teaching and his entire life to finding ways of restoring what had been lost.

Finding Options for the Future

According to Confucius, the familiarity of human beings with what is expected of them, their *normative knowledge* of the order they are designed by fate to realize in their lives, goes back much further than the early Zhou period. The deified sage sees sources of that normative knowledge present in some aspects of the Shang and even further back as far as the Xia kings who preceded the

² Schwartz finds indications to this use of the word in the *Book of Documents*, in the *Book of Poetry* and in the *Analects*. Reference is made in all these texts to the *tao* as the *normative order* that embraces all activities humans undertake as the notion of how things ought to be. That may well be the Confucian use of the word. In Daoism itself, its meaning spectrum is more complex.

Shang. The specific orientation toward a splendid past, so typical of Confucianism, results in the principle of keeping the foundations intact even if a new house needs to be built to replace an old one.

Confucius insisted accordingly that he was not creating any new knowledge himself but merely related to his disciples the wisdom of the ancients. He confessed: "I trust the ancient past and I love it." (van Ess 2009: 21). Confucius concluded "that the highest possibility of human experience had already been achieved within the known human past and that the hope of the future was to recapture this lost splendor" (Schwartz 1985: 63). This *backward looking hope for the future* is a decisive trait of Confucianism and of Chinese philosophy in general. It may be at the same time a crucial distinction between Chinese thought and the wide spread progressivism dominating Western thought in spite of the influences of Oswald Spengler and others like him.

Thus, the hope to recapture the lost splendor was the theme that connected the various topics of the great sage's teaching. What today we know as the words of Confucius are obviously not *his very words*, any more than the words Socrates supposedly used in his dialogues. Their teaching was written down by their students. As a result it is nearly impossible to determine what has been the teacher's original intent and what has been added to, or interpreted into it later (van Ess 2009: 19).

While this applies to Chinese as it does to Western ancient philosophy, there are some distinctions to be made. As was mentioned above, Confucius is quoted as saying that he only wants to hand down to his disciples what has come to him, and that he does not claim to create any new ideas of his own. (ibid: 21). This statement may have been motivated by modesty. Referring to ancient authors is also a universal *topos* to legitimize a particular thesis by attributing it to *the ancients*. By contrast, many Western authors such as Plato and Aristotle have presented their own innovative insights with self-confidence.

The conviction of finding options for the future in connection with the lost splendour of the past also influenced the educational program: Learning and studying classical texts was and is to this day more central in the Chinese tradition than in the West. It is compatible with looking for *wisdom in the past*. In the West the student's own thinking, reflecting, and speculating was consistently encouraged. That is a method which more likely helps finding *new solutions in the future* rather than wanting to reproduce a splendid past (ibid: 19–20).

The students of Confucius were taught to improve their morals and behavior. Looking into the past in the hope that it will lead to a good future was part of learning how to be a gentleman. A central concept in making the vision of a cultured person become a reality is the virtue of being human, referred to by the word *jen* (仁 in pin yin: ren). *Jen* includes the Western ideas of *love*,

humanity, benevolence, and kind-heartedness. According to *van Ess* it is often confused with *chih* (知), the knowledge of how to care for the needs of the people. Having *chih* means to *know how humans are*, acting with *jen* can be translated as to *deal with humans* in a considerate way (ibid: 21).

These ethical virtues become uniquely Chinese by culminating in the kinship context: The special love for one's own parents is called *xiao* (孝) with an emphasis on behaviour rather than attitude. Because the living and healthy body is regarded as a gift from the parents, loving one's parents implies taking good care of one's body. A tattoo is interpreted as a severe infringement against that rule and in the past could be inflicted on a person as a punishment. Originally the *act of xiao* was the performance of the sacrificial rite which the son as "family priest" offered for his deceased father (and his other ancestors) in the beyond (ibid: 22f.). The original form of *xiao* has thus been distinctly religious, performed out of dedication to the father in the beyond.

From the beginning of the first millennium (1000–900 BCE), long before the sage's own days, the eldest son as the family priest was required to perform the ritual for the deceased ancestors. *Van Ess* quotes an ancient text according to which in antiquity the Son of Heaven (the emperor) worshipped seven ancestors, a feudal lord in the emperor's service worshipped five, a high ranking official three, and a simple official merely his own father (originally after the father's death!) Later Confucian teachers came up with a more egalitarian system allowing even a simple man to sacrifice for up to four ancestors (ibid.). These numbers must also have reflected the amount of support the respective person could expect from the beyond related to the number of immortals with whom he was in regular contact.

We find the meaning of *xiao* (孝) change during about the first half of the Han period, i.e. one or two centuries before Christ: From performing the sacrifice for the beloved *dead relatives* in the beyond it is gradually transformed to describing submission to and reverence for one's *living parents*. This social evolution helps understand the transcendental roots of *xiao* that exist in Confucian cultures to this day. It includes the conviction shared by the vast majority of all Chinese persons that they owe it to their parents to have offspring. To die *childless on purpose* constitutes for them a serious breach of the *xiao*.

In the tradition of Chinese culture the more general command: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you* is valid as one of the Confucian rules; but in addition – in comparison to the West – in China it is radicalised and concentrated on dealing with each other inside the kinship context. This is true in spite of the historical fact that Confucius was hoping not only to influence family life, but to gain political impact by his teaching. His motivation to teach, came out of the misfortune that beset him: Confucius had not been able to

find a monarch who would hire him and rule according to his teachings, so he taught his students in the hope that they would find such a ruler in the future, even after the master's death.

To make that more likely, they needed to qualify as gentlemen in a more formal sense of the word. In about the year 500 BCE in the days of Confucius (551–479), in the advanced parts of China there existed a gentlemen culture of the nobility. It required of its male members six areas of competence: 1. rules of etiquette as cultured behaviour, 2. music, 3. archery, 4. being a charioteer in military confrontations, 5. reading and writing, and 6. calculating. To master these six skills constituted membership in the group of not only the Confucians but of the educated Chinese gentlemen in general. (ibid: 25).

The impact of this gentlemen class in the history of Chinese culture was (until 1949) highly significant, because for centuries they were the ones who taught the right ways in thought and deed and practiced the arts in the villages of the vast nation. As village teachers they kept the continuity of Chinese culture to the days described by Fei Xiaotong (Fei 1953), until communism forced many of their successors into martyrdom if they had been on the side of Chiang Kaishek (1887–1975 also known as: 蔣中正, Jiang Zhongzheng). As a group they had been for centuries the carriers of the normative knowledge on which the culture of China rested.

Such groups as preserver of the Chinese culture were of course particularly important in times of crisis. During the Mongol occupation that led to the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 CE) the ruling Mongols “dispossessed the Song³ imperial and aristocratic families. Those anxious about preserving the heritage of the past – which the Mongol occupation threatened to annihilate – turned to the social practice of connoisseurship to remember the Song” (Brook 2010: 193). Familiarity with the literature and art of the past was a badge of membership in the group of cultured Chinese families. It served as an invisible bulwark against unwelcome innovators as it does to this day.

At the beginning of this book when we looked at Bert Brecht's admiration for the universalistic teaching of Mozi and at the rejection of Mozi's opinion by Mencius, the Confucian, we encountered a fundamental distinction between Chinese and Western views: Universalism as at least an option in the West versus its rejection as animal-like on account of neglecting relatives. Mozi's implicit anticipation to early Christian as well as utopian socialist ideals did not find acceptance into Confucian thinking.

3 The Chinese dynasty that preceded the foreign rule of the non-Chinese Yuan from Mongolia. The Yuan clan included Genghis Khan (1162 or 1155–1227).

Even the basic views in philosophical anthropology on what supposedly constitutes the essence of the human condition are largely incompatible: Mencius teaches that humans are good-natured by birth. He often mentions the great sages of antiquity, mythical emperors and founders of dynasties, who are represented as embodying all imaginable human virtues in an ideal way. But they are to him and his disciples not merely the greats over there, in the beyond and out of reach. They are instead to be experienced as present in this world like you and me, and we must work hard to become like them. This is so, because every human person is endowed with the potentials we admire in the great sages, and thus it is the duty of each of us to realize those potentials.

Neither in the philosophical anthropology of Mencius in China nor in that of J.J. Rousseau in the West is there anything like *original sin*. Instead, following Mencius, there are four innate qualities in everybody's heart aiding his or her goodness: 1. compassion, 2. shame and disgust, 3. modesty and being reserved, and 4. knowledge of right and wrong.

Those four abilities flowing directly from the heart, enable humans to realize in their conduct four cardinal virtues: 1. The kind-heartedness mentioned here before as *jen* (or *ren*) is based on compassion. 2. The inclination to be just and to let justice be the principle of treating others, is not so much linked to obeying laws (as it is in the West), as it is to following one's inner feeling of shame and of disgust when confronting evil deeds or conditions. 3. Morality grows out of modesty and out of conducting oneself in a reserved way. 4. Finally, it is knowledge or wisdom that is obviously linked to being able to tell right from wrong (van Ess 2009: 32).

Strangely, in order to explain this concept of Confucian ethic, Mencius refers to something like an opposite to original sin: An original compassion. If a child should fall into a well, everyone will react with concern and compassion, independent of whether the child is a relative or not. This may in part contradict Mencius' rejection of the universalism of Mozi.

Van Ess mentioned that in addition to the four cardinal virtues *kindness, justice, morality, and wisdom*, Confucius taught about *bravery* during his lifetime as virtue number five. However, during the evolution of Confucianism, being courageous moved further and further into the background. Wisdom and cleverness (like the wisdom of Zhuge) rank higher than being daring. In the Occident, on the other hand, the evolving concept of masculine honour implied the necessity for any male to prove the complete absence of fear, if that seemed the requirement at hand. Being called a coward had become the worst imaginable offence to a male. Van Ess suggests that this may be "one of the most remarkable differences... between the entire Chinese tradition and European thinking" (ibid: 33).

Accordingly, in the Chinese tradition it is more desirable to be “as wise as Zhuge” than to be a daredevil. Downgrading bravery and admiring such wisdom entails a preference for non-violent behaviour. Even the good ruler does not govern by force and by threatening his subject with punishment. In addition, he does not impose large numbers of inflexible laws on them. Instead he leads by his own virtue and charisma. (ibid: 35).

Apart from political power, following the history of ethics, it was hardly possible to link Confucianism to capitalism for this reason: The disciples of Confucius were taught to put their own private interests behind. (ibid: 27). The master’s advice was: “Do not worry about not finding employment but be concerned about the means by which you try to find it. Do not worry about nobody knowing about you; instead be concerned that there should be no reason why anyone should know you” (ibid: 28).

Advancement in society as climbing to a higher level of social status was, according to the teaching of Confucius, to be achieved by learning hard and by raising the level of morals as a gentleman, not by making money! Accordingly, merchants ranked low in prestige. In the Han period (200 BCE–200 CE), a period during which Confucian doctrine was dominant, businessmen were counted among the class lowest in recognition and prestige regardless of their wealth (ibid.).

The Party or the Family as “Church” in China?

In the West, the “sinfulness” of everyone, including the rulers from Charlemagne to Henry VIII, was part of Christian teaching and found its painful confirmation in history. This experience constantly reinforced the need for institutionalized ethical knowledge in the church as well as – since ancient Greece – in the academy. In China there were intermittently truly admired monarchs whose presence in history could be interpreted as supporting the claim, that the ruling family was able to find within its ranks the one son who after his father’s death had the ability to realize in his reign the combination of “the highest possibility of human experience” in ethics, with the concentration of absolute power in one person (Schwartz 1985: 63). Looking at it this way, China may have had so many admired emperors since the beginning of the Common Era that the hope to subject the individual sovereign’s power to any law above him did not develop into a lasting institutionalized order because there seemed to be no need for that.

As a consequence, and in the absence of any structural option like a *church*, which in China could become the guarantor of ethical behavior – or at least of

ethical knowledge outside the family –, the *scholar and intellectual* as expert in normative knowledge was the only source of critical influence upon the unchecked authority of the emperor. China has been and is to this day ruled by *persons*, not by *principles*: The notion that everybody including the holder of the highest position in government is subject to a law binding to all, is absent. Even today in contemporary China any verdict handed down by a court of law can be annulled by the Communist Party.⁴

This indeed raises the question if the party will gradually become the functional equivalent of a *church* as structural home of abstract rules that apply to everyone, or whether the party is merely the heir of the absolute power of the emperors of the past and will continue personalizing it in the person of the party chief. Referring to the situation prior to Communism, Fei Xiaotong (Fei 1953) described the risky status of the intellectual under imperial rule, who may be accepted as advisor to the monarch, but gets himself into life-threatening situations if he dares to criticize the supreme power.

If the Communist Party has indeed arrogated to itself the traditional powers of the absolute ruler, appearing – at least occasionally – as standing above the law (or a law?), then the consequences may well be that the situation of the intellectual has not changed: He (or increasingly also, she) oscillates between taking high level risks on one side and yielding to opportunism on the other, as intellectuals in China were obliged to do for centuries or even millennia.

Fei reports that in the Chinese tradition the emperor has been compared to a tiger who unexpectedly may take a person's life: "If the highest authority were bound by law, then administrative authority would be able to cage the tiger. But in Chinese history this has never happened. As a result, the ruled, including the officials themselves, have never sought for efficiency in administration. Rather the opposite has been true. Inefficiency and parasitism, on the one hand, remoteness of imperial control and a do-nothing policy by the emperor, on the other – this has always been the ideal" (Fei 1953: 26). These remarks, published in English translation as long ago as 1953, ring frighteningly up to date.

The image of a perfect state, or of ideal political conditions, included the expectation, that a "good emperor" was one "who presided but did not rule" (*ibid.*). This Daoist ideal, however, was not something an intellectual serving as official could rely on. They went to serve the emperor in spite of the danger

4 Questioned about this practice, a Chinese professor and party spokesperson compared it to the power of the jury in court proceeding in the U.S.A., which he saw as limiting the powers of the judiciary as well.

of being attacked by the tiger, in the hope that their service there would result in an informal type of immunity, that would, hopefully, grant them and their families protection by using “their position as a shield against the emperor’s whims” (ibid: 27.).

As a result “groups of officials with their relatives, formed” in Chinese society “a special class not affected by the laws, exempt from taxation and conscription. Nevertheless, they had no real political power” (ibid.). It appears then that the tradition of being above the law applied not merely to the emperor himself but also to his courtiers and their relatives! It is reminiscent of the condescending Western saying: *quot licet Jovi non licet bovi*. (What is allowed to Jupiter is not allowed to cattle), as an odd argument against legal equality.

The absence of the general Western notion of equality from China is related to the central position of family values there. The inner order of family life everywhere is not egalitarian; it is instead hierarchical. In the context of family interaction, a parent surely claims rights from which smaller children are barred. Western demands for equality find their origin in sources other than the kinship system, or, if one wants to insist on the family context, in the idea of a universal brotherhood of all humans as siblings rather than the image of a three-generation kinship group in which social status is attributed according to age.

The Western norm of *equality* before the law is based on *equal rights* awarded (by God?) to individual citizens over against their government. The Chinese tradition of *inequality* by contrast emphasizes the *different duties* individuals as family members have in protecting and caring for weaker ones under their domination.

The centrality of kinship relationships in China makes the individuals less dependent there upon government action. It is true, that compared to the West, a Chinese person must acknowledge more duties toward family members, must provide financial support, and must take care of ailing and aging kin. But as a consequence Chinese relatives depend on each other rather than on the government. In Western nations by contrast, as the cohesion within family contexts gets weaker, people become increasingly dependent upon government support.

The wealth of ethical provisions, which developed in the course of the cultural history of China was identified, collected, and interpreted by a highly educated stratum in that society, i.e. by scholars to whom Max Weber in his text on China refers as the *literati*. They not merely represent the small section of the population who in the old days could read and write, and where thus *literate*, they are in addition, the intellectuals, the bearers of Chinese cultural

tradition, with high levels of erudition, but with very low levels of political power.⁵

Fei describes the service provided to Chinese society by the *literati* thus: “The function of the scholar was to formulate, to clarify, and to crystallize this point of view” that society accepted, “into a doctrine. In the period of transition between feudalism and imperialism the school of thought which reflected the philosophic trend of the times best was that of Confucius and his followers. But the Confucian school was only one of many in this period of the ‘hundred schools.’” (ibid: 35). The reason why Confucianism became the dominant system of ethical teaching is attributed by Fei to the fact that its popularity in kinship contexts coincided with its adaptability to “the Chinese imperial system” (ibid.).

But there is another distinction between China and the West to be taken into consideration. In the teaching of Jesus there is the obvious demand and expectation that action will follow the knowledge about what God expects. Fei points out, however, that “the Confucian *tao-t'ang* stands not for action but for upholding a standard or norm which defines the Way of a good emperor (and a good citizen). It is one thing whether the monarch acts according to the Way or not. It is another whether we” (ibid. 41) as scholars have clearly worked out what it takes to be a good ruler (and a good family person in general).

The sad fact that order had completely broken down in the days of Confucius – poetic language describes tigers roaming the streets – became the topic of a dialogue between him and one of his students. Looking for an explanation for the disastrous condition of public order, the master asked his disciple, if his teaching may be wrong and may be to blame for the disaster. But his student Yen Hui answered: “The Way of my master is very great – the world cannot accept it. But, my master, try to carry out your Way. If others don't accept you, it shows that you are a gentleman. If we don't work out the Way for doing things, that is our shame. If those who have the power don't follow the right Way, that is their shame” (ibid: 41).

Fei compares Christianity with Confucianism and emphasizes that Christ did not accept the division between knowing and action. By contrast, “Confucianism is divided into two parts: (1) the knowing what is good and (2) the doing what is good. Thus the man who knows what is good does not necessarily have an obligation to carry it out. In fact, he may not be able to do so, since

5 Compare the popular Chinese novel: *The Scholars* (Chinese: 儒林外史: “The Unofficial History of the Forest (ie. World) of the Literati”) is a Chinese novel authored by Wu Jingzi (吳敬梓) and completed in 1750 during the Qing Dynasty. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Scholars_\(novel\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Scholars_(novel)).

what he is able to do depends upon his social position. As a result, we have the differentiation into separate categories of (a) the scholar who knows and (b) the monarch who does" (ibid.). Thus there is a scholarly task at hand, to construct – or rather re-construct out of familiarity with cultural history – the normative knowledge that is needed to lead a cultured and ethically spotless life.

But the scholar who knows is merely a member of a loosely knit group of intellectuals who can be dispersed easily. They can be caused to retire to their respective families if as a group they become undesirable to those in power. The university has occasionally shown signs of political strength, but then again has proven to be utterly vulnerable. In summary then in China – in the absence of the equivalent of a "church" – there appears to be no structural basis for objectified normative knowledge outside the family.

Since the kinship system is the central social structure of Chinese society, *the family* has become the primary field of application of that normative knowledge. Whereas in the Western tradition a person wanting to lead an exemplary life had the choice of making the family his arena of excellence or devoting his or her life to public service, such an alternative never existed in China. Why that is so becomes clear from the following quotation. Confucius' student Zengzi, is believed to have written the ancient text *Da Xue*.⁶ The name means "Great Knowledge" and is also the Chinese word for university (大学). Zengzi's text explains what knowledge of "the ancients" we should look for, and why.

Da Xue 2: "The ancients, who wished to illustrate enlightened virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete.

Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified; their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated; their states were rightly

6 Da Xue, this text, which, along with the Doctrine of the Mean, is traditionally dated to the fifth century, soon after the death of Confucius, was most likely composed late during the third century BCE, shortly after Xunzi's heyday and, perhaps, during the brief Qin Dynasty (221–208 BCE). <http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Daxue.pdf>.

governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.”

It is remarkable how in the above text the various areas of human existence, person, family, and state, appear as one integrated whole. Zengzi’s text *Da Xue* has led to numerous commentaries. Here follows one example to illustrate how family life and the public sphere are interconnected.⁷

7 *Commentary on “Ordering one’s state and setting the world at peace”*: Concerning the phrase, “Getting the world at peace lies in ordering the state.” When the ruler treats the elderly as the elderly should be treated, the people rise up with filiality. When the ruler treats his elders as elders should be treated the people rise up with behavior fitting the younger. When the ruler treats the orphaned with compassion the people do not turn their backs. Hence the ruler fulfills the *dao* of the carpenter’s square. What you detest in your subordinates do not employ to serve your superior. What you detest in those who are before you do not employ to lead those behind you. What you detest in those who are behind you do not employ to follow those before you.

The West: Individualism at Its Limits

The Western Family as Fate and Tragedy

Types and qualities of family relationships have long been imposed upon individuals by the respective dominant cultures. The inclination for persons sharing a common terrain of social existence, to be tolerant of each other with respect to the patterns of the private lives they follow, is a modern phenomenon in the West and may be fragile even today. In the past, from Oedipus and Electra via Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet¹ and Gretchen in Goethe's Faust to Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, the Occident produced a chain of accounts of the sometimes brutal force which representatives of the dominant family culture exercised over the "deviant" individual. The rationale behind such suppression has been the expectation that the production of good personalities was required, but was possible only in the context of the particular kinship system that enjoyed public recognition.

In the West the implied conflict caused by the clash between a normative family order and an individual's wishes, traditionally resulted in tragedy with no happy ending: This applies throughout the centuries to Oedipus, Electra, Romeo, Juliet, to Gretchen in Goethe's Faust and to Thomas Mann's *Sesame* who all end their lives in worlds of despair. Their apparent failure qualifies as *tragic* because they are not simply guilty, undisciplined or ethically inferior people but rather potential innovators and precursors of an alternative family culture.

Thomas Mann's (1875–1955) book *Buddenbrooks* (1901) has the subtitle: *The Decline of a Family*. The story begins with a German business man and his French wife laying the foundations for a successful merchant clan. But then Thomas Mann depicts the demise of the family, leaving no hope in this world and ending with the desperate woman *Sesame* rejecting all skepticism about Christian beliefs and insisting she will see the person she misses most, in heaven. This is a marked difference in comparison to the way a masterpiece of Chinese literature ends, as we shall see.

The *Dream of Red Mansions* originated from the latter half of 18th century China. It is referred to as the pinnacle of the Chinese classical novel. The text is critical of certain aspects of feudal society, perhaps even predicting its end.

1 Shakespeare actually describes two clans fighting at the expense of two individuals.

It was temporarily forbidden by the imperial government under Emperor Qianlong, whom we encountered here before in the context of the Opium Wars.

The novel has two authors, because the initial artist died prior to finishing his masterpiece. It is praised for its language, often poetic, for its sensitivity to emotional subtleties, and it is marveled also for its length: 120 chapters, of which the first author, Cao Xueqin (Tsao Hsueh-chin 1715–1763) wrote the first 80, and Gao E (Kao Hgo 1738–1815) the remaining 40 chapters. There is some discussion on whether or not the second writer fully understood the intentions of the first one, however, the question whether the two parts of the book are fully compatible, does not need to concern us here.

Important for our line of reasoning is the way this story about the declining fortunes of a large cultured family ends: The tragic hero who would have been the coming head of the clan and instead sees it collapse around him during his teenage and young adult years, gets married in spite of all disaster. Then – only after having begotten a son(!) – he becomes a monk and, in order to join a monastery, leaves his family.

However, the novel leads its readers to believe that the monk's son will grow up to guide his clan upward again to new happiness and success in the future, not in heaven, but in this very world: Chinese clans will go through phases of flourishing and declining, but they will not die! That is the dominant expectation, and that is what distinguishes them from Western clans: The Chinese kinship group, backed up by immortality, wields a level of authority, which – for better or for worse – a Western family will hardly ever attain.

Given the extraordinary popularity of the novel *The Dream of Red Mansions* and given the fact that since the end of the Mao period Chinese television has seen two versions of it brought into millions of living rooms (the latest version in 2010), the influence and continuing significance of this work of literary art is beyond question. It is filled with normative knowledge, and knowing what happened in the *Dream of Red Mansions* tells millions of Chinese today, what decisions they ought to make and what they should do or avoid in their daily intimate lives.

Could it be then, that given the cultural conditions of the West at present, where each young couple *starts a new family* when they get married and where they then may or may not produce a child, the family is as finite as the life of the individual, imbued with the potential of failing, disintegrating and ending in divorce or otherwise, whereas in China the family is immortal, with individual persons serving as agents to carry it through the ages and if need be, to lead it out of tragedy and return it to a splendid come-back?

In the Orient the newlyweds owe it to their parents and their ancestors to pass on life via their children, or by having at least the one child that was

permitted in China according to the “one child policy” that lasted from 1980 to 2015. It has since been replaced by a “two children policy.” From this perspective the function of the government and the economy is primarily enabling and supporting *kinship*, not improving the lives of isolated *individuals*. It seems therefore that in the Occident individualism leads to *various forms* of family life, whereas in the Orient society is based on *a firm and unified kinship tradition* to be served by all individuals, though in various ways.

In a recent book on *The Modern Soul of China* the psychoanalyst Antje Haag explained how in her opinion “in Chinese thought the rights of the individual have played a secondary role because a type of socialization that lasted for millennia has been focused merely on the well-being of the collective” (Haag 2011, 31). Looking at it this way, what happens to the person is not as important as what happens to the clan. In addition, Haag points to “...the soft Chinese self that was constituted on the basis of the Confucian and the Daoist heritage” (ibid: 39).

The dominant orientation toward the clan plus the “softness” of the self, result in an underdeveloped ability to split the self into two separate sub-selves with the opportunity to enter into an inner dialogue with each other. Thus (and as always, generalizations as the following must come with a *caveat*), while the Western individual often works hard to avoid strict questioning by the own inner conscience or second self, the unified Chinese self is primarily afraid of outside punishment and of his or her family losing face. These may be very long-term consequences of disparate ethical and religious orientations, which during centuries left their influence on personal development.

If such a difference between China and the West does indeed exist as a general tendency, to which extent can it be attributed to the two cultures finding themselves in different stages of evolution? Or, alternatively, to which extent is that difference due to lasting characteristics that will not go away, but preserve their effect on individual lives throughout the existence of the culture of which they are constitutive components? The answer to these questions will likely have to be in response to both alternatives, since on the one hand the cultures both do indeed change and at the same time they retain their respective identity by not losing certain fundamental characteristics, which at least for the immediate present can be generalized as individualism here, kinship there.

Western sociologists of modernization and of urbanization widely accept the thesis that the degree of maturity of a culture, in terms of having developed as it should by the threshold of the third millennium, can be measured by the degree of differentiation between the public and the private. This idea also presupposes, inspired by Herbert Spencer and his early functionalist evolutionary theory that the segments of Western society we tend to look at as

kinship, government, commerce, and religion, become more and more differentiated and as it were become identified by increasingly separate styles and locales of social behavior. But in China there may be a fundamentally different approach toward interpreting the segments of social behavior we just mentioned as kinship, government, commerce, and religion.

Merely attempting to concentrate on fundamentals while ignoring for the time being the obvious fact that Western as well as Chinese society undergo change, we see in the West as goal of education the ability of the person to adjust his or her behavior to the demands of the respective segment in the context of which they want to be able to interact successfully. The Westerners must thus learn to behave in a loving, lawful, businesslike or possibly a pious fashion, depending on where and with whom they are in contact.

The Chinese by contrast may expect to be able to conduct themselves in the segments of government, business, and of course religion in a way that is compatible with and subservient to fulfilling their ritualized family duties. Rather than following the Western way of adjusting the behavior style of the person to the requirements of each segment, in China the requirement of the segment is adjusted to the needs of families (and Westerners tend to see "corruption" in much of this). This means for instance, as will be explained below in a famous Chinese story: If the father steals a sheep, his son will not tell on him.

In China the family is the fate of the individual, in the West more and more often the individual becomes the fate of the family. Where the Chinese person must sacrifice his or her hopes and ambitions for the sake of the clan, tragedy may result in that individual's life taking a turn to sadness. When in the West a family collapses because one of its members cannot but continue pursuing his or her personal goals, tragedy may be on the side of the relatives left behind.

Evolution of Kinship in the West

In early 1895 Simmel published an article on the evolution of family and kinship in the West. In many highly developed agrarian cultures he identifies a type of kinship organization which he calls patriarchal. (Simmel 1895). He mentions that such a traditional family household "always numbers twenty to thirty people" (Simmel 2009: 75). As a consequence, since modern conditions enforce a reduction of the number of people living together as one family, the result is by necessity that a type of household depending on such a large number of members cannot continue to exist.

However, the individualization of a modern, more differentiated person can happen only in wider company. Wilfried Dreyer (Dreyer 1995: 84) has pointed

out how in Simmel's work participation in culture is central for the development of the individual. Retiring from the public and left to one's own intellectual resources would render the isolated human an ἴδιος (*idios*) in ancient Greek. Thus on the threshold of modernity too, it would be *idiotic* to fence the person into the patriarchal family household. As an effect the social group of orientation both exploded and imploded at the same time so to speak.

The "wider company" required by modernity for individualization could not be provided in a small rural household; so some of its members started to leave it. This coincided with leaving the countryside and converting the family culture to city life, a process that occurred in Germany on a massive scale at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. A comparable massive migration occurred in China in recent decades. The Chinese sociologist and anthropologist Guanbao Shen (1949–2016) (Shen 2001) devoted much of his research in recent decades in China to that dramatic process.

Simmel does not have China or any other specific regional culture in mind when he concludes, that in general at the time when individualization gains momentum, the longing for intimacy gradually increases. That new need for very personal closeness, however, requires a small family of below ten members. As the *family is torn apart* into a *wider* and a *narrower* circle, we have seen *societies torn apart* in the West into a private world and a public world.

A comparative view of China and the West must not only take into consideration the relative importance attributed to kinship on the one hand and to government and the economy on the other, but it behooves us in addition to raise the question: Who are the primary actors involved? As a result of individualization in the West, it is clear and hardly ever even discussed that there *individual persons* interact, whereas in the Chinese tradition we are dealing more explicitly with *primary groups* as dynasties, clans, and families as the agents of history.

What this means becomes visible when a young couple falls in love and decides to get married. In the West they plan their future, if possible with the consent and help of their parents. But if the parents do not agree with the choice of a partner, the couple will most likely stay together anyway. In China this is much more difficult. The consent of the two families from which the young lovers originate is almost indispensable. In most cases the newlyweds will live under one roof with the young husband's parents. It is therefore meaningful also for that reason that there is mutual acceptance prior to the wedding, because the bride and her in-laws need to get along afterwards in day to day interaction.

In the West the young couple and particularly the young wife will be left to their own resources when a baby arrives. This is definitely not so in China.

The mother-in-law and possibly the mother of the young woman too, will be available to assist with advice and active intervention, sometimes more than the young couple would like to receive. Pregnancy, childbirth, and care-taking during the first phase in the new infant's life are an intergenerational project involving grand-parents as additional care-takers.

That has a number of consequences. It reduces the fear of the inexperienced young mother to make mistakes with the new born child. It gives her more opportunity to recover from the stress of giving birth. It gives the mother-in-law a chance to prove herself as an experienced care-taker of infants, and it has the potential of bringing the two women of two different generations and from two different families very close together as a result of their cooperation in early child-care.

This is only one example of service production within the kinship context. The widespread involvement in China of grand-parents in taking care of their own grandchild reduces the need for extra-familial childcare as is provided in Western countries in day-care institutions, nursery schools and similar providers. At the same time, it gives members of the older generation a meaningful task, a fact that most likely has positive psychological effects. In addition, the younger generation of adults is under the frequently very demanding obligation of taking care of their aging parents in the family context. If this were not the case, the problem of providing homes and care for the ailing elderly would be nearly impossible for the government of China to solve.

The family of the past, existing under pre-industrial conditions prior to modernization and individualization, was not yet specialized with regard to types of interaction among its membership: The family was a place where sex, pregnancy, and childbirth occurred, where education with praise and punishment happened, where food and clothing was produced, where business activities were planned and carried out, and where religious rituals were performed. As a consequence, a mix of loving tones and harsh tones, business-like language and caring language, all had its legitimate place inside the traditional family. In the course of modernization, however, gradually responsibilities that used to be placed in the kinship system migrated away from it. Western Family sociology of the fifties called that process *loss of functions*.

In the Occident, the resulting changes opened up a dramatic combination of chance and risk. *The chance* was that the interaction inside the family could become gentler, more personal, and more peaceful, because many functions which required harsh decision making were delegated out of the family into the schools, the occupational world and into other areas of public interaction.

The risk that went along with that chance was this: If the persons living together as a family did not love each other – or found to their surprise that they

did not love each other anymore – they had nothing else that could help them stay together and work together as in a business. The business-like component had left the family, and what stayed behind was either gentle, tender, loving and erotic, or it was harsh, even violent and terrible or impossible to bear.

This trend is driven by the tendency toward further and further individualization: The modern Western person is increasingly required to develop the potential, which they believe they carry inside themselves, rather than they are to serve and help other people, even their own close relatives. As a consequence, kinship ties no longer function in emergencies and the respective government has to come to the aid of weak or failed individuals who have no relatives to assist them.

This leads to the need for payments from the public sector, which in traditional societies were – and in China today are – not necessary, because the kinship system provides the services in question. As the government tries to replace the large family, it will have to extract the money as taxes and then redistribute the funds as social support, but in that process the emotional involvement is lost and can of course not be replaced by any government program nor by any monetary measure.

Personal emotionally based care by family members cannot be provided on the basis of money paid. This is where the spheres of the economy and the family are irreconcilable. The services to be provided professionally become much more expensive, but even if more money is made available, the quality of care in interaction between individual and minders outside the kinship group will be different in quality. In the family there is the presence of the *total person*, in a government-sponsored or privately organized scheme, people will be working in their *occupational role* for a certain number of hours per day and per week, and beyond that they will want to go on vacation, they will prefer not to work during weekends or during important holidays like the lunar New Year in China or Christmas in the West, even though the person who requires care, likely would then need them most.

A small child could spend much time in the *gentle sphere*, be caressed and hugged and dealt with on a very long term basis, as typically still happens in China.² But increasingly in the West the child will be in a day-care facility emphasizing of course cleanliness and respectful and peaceful interaction, but causing exposure to a *more rational* sphere to possibly last for too many hours per day and for too many years out of the child's life.

2 Oskar Weggel reported that about three fourth of all children in China did not have access to day-care or kindergarten (Weggel 1994: 213).

The traditional Western families of the past were characterized not only by tenderness as a typical quality of interactions, but rather by the limitless duration of the relationships. They typically could not be dissolved, marriages did not end in divorce, parents could not be abandoned by their children, and children could not be disowned by their parents. The relationships were for life; they were – in fact, if we include the religious dimension – for eternity. Whereas this has changed dramatically in the West, it is still largely true in China, because there, due to the prevalence of ancestor worship, the transgenerational relationships are eternal for religious reasons: It was and is the duty of the descendants to worship deceased family members and burn incense or candles for them as the immortal forebears.

Some of the characteristics of family life can also be found inside other primary groups, like among good friends who met in school or college. They too are expected to stay close to each other during their entire lives. The crucial difference between families and primary groups of friends of the same age is of course, that families consist of at least two generations and have offspring. Primary groups of peers by contrast typically recruit members who belong to the same generation.

But in spite of this significant difference, groups of close friends too expect the relationships to be very long term, usually for life. They expect a high degree of interest in each other's well-being and of readiness to help each other in an unselfish way. In China this includes borrowing money. Individualization, while it helps the person better to develop his or her unique potential, tends to dissolve families as well as other primary groups, because those are correctly perceived as reducing individual freedom, in part because of their implicit expectation of altruistic behaviour on a long term basis.

Modernization resulted in a significant change of the social structure of society. Processes of decision making were institutionalised under the name of democratisation to replace the responsibility and power of individual leaders. *In the West* this caused the idea that also the family should be restructured and democratised in order to make it suitable and well-adjusted to modern society. This demand for adaptation of the family can be discussed from a social science perspective as follows:

Either the family is indeed in need of modernization, like the rest of society. Then of course it must adjust to the changes that happen there. Or, and this is *the Chinese perspective*, the family is the organization of human needs that never change, like having an emotional satisfying and stable sexual relationship, and taking care of an infant. These are very basic human demands on life that do not change and have been much the same today as they were several

thousand years ago. Accordingly, looking at it that way, there is no justification for modernizing family life.

If that is so, then one could also argue even in the West that the family ought not to adjust to modern society, but rather try to defend very sensitive areas of emotional needs against the industrial age. The effect on the individual is either, that he or she feels happy only, if family environment and contacts outside the family, in school, university and occupational life, are equally modernized, or, precisely the opposite: a person in our day and age can function best and be happy only, if he or she can be *modern at work* and *archaic at home* in his or her private life. According to this reasoning modernization ought to be welcomed in the public sphere, but resisted to a degree in family life.

Among the generation of Westerners, who are young parents now, many tend to look at any kind of ideological approach to family matters with disdain. To more and more young adults in the West, it is up to the individual couple to decide how they want to live their private lives. Politics is reduced to providing money. From the perspective of socialization those conditions entail little or no resources for generating altruism. Many Western young adults do not have anybody to take care of but themselves because their elders are placed in the care of institutionalized retirement housing. Parenting of course, has the potential of changing that by creating new responsibilities for the young adults.

Max Weber as well as other students of Western civilization and its development have emphasized the importance of *asceticism* as the ability to maintain independent from economic conditions. The contrasting emphasis on consumption, frequently conspicuous, is driven by economic interests. Combining such deliberations with the life cycle, in the West the necessity to make sacrifices is pushed further and further toward younger and younger people, and is now even pushed all the way to the infant, who already as a baby must sacrifice the joys of being in the presence of his or her own mother, because she must go out to work.

One remarkable effect of freeing the adult woman from the restraints of managing a home is the gradual dismantling of motherhood as an institution. In Germany in 2016 young mothers have made public statements in the media declaring their regret of having produced a child because it limits their abilities to advance in their occupation. There are differences among Western countries, but apart from certain time lags that cause changes to happen at different times in different regions, the general trend is uniform.

The trend can be linked to the developments in America, where the generation of US-citizens born in the fifties as the so-called “boomer babies” (Cherlin 2010: 6) refused to follow the pattern of private life their parents had observed in the 1970s: “Sex, living together, and marriage, which had been a package deal

in the 1950s, were no longer linked. Young adults no longer needed to get married in order to live together with a sexual partner" (ibid.). That is decidedly different in China today.

In Western countries with high levels of development like those in Central Europe and America, the increasing life expectancy due in part to advancements in medicine has had a number of other remarkable consequences. One of them is related to the contradictory observation that on the one hand people become older than their forebears, but on the other hand the time horizon in which they find their orientation for hoping and planning gets shorter and shorter. I could follow this trend in my consulting activities with my own German students (Helle 2010).

At the beginning of my teaching career I asked students what they wanted to have achieved in ten or twenty years, and once they told me, I would then try to advise them on how they might arrive at their goals. Over the years, I had to reduce the time span further and further, and by the turn of the millennium, if I asked for two or three years, I would likely get the answer: Teacher, I would be happy if I had an idea what will have happened by the end of this semester. – As early as the eighties empirical research with German youth produced the results that with about one third of them the plans and expectations of the average young person did not exceed even one year (Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell 1981, vol. 1: 677f.). It appears to be an intrinsic quality of the contemporary *Zeitgeist* in the West to promote the trend toward individualization by reducing the notion of being responsible for, or in control of, a middle term, let alone a long term future.

Two types of processes seem to energize this tendency: One is the inclination of young adults to move out of firm and lasting relationships, because those are increasingly experienced as confining; the second is the frequent dissolution of the kinship context due to divorce and desertion. The latter development has the effect that the family is frequently falling apart before the young person can fully develop inside that intimate social environment. The biblical story of the Lost Son (Bible, Luke 15, 11–32) who after years of aberrations regretfully returns to the father-house, is thus losing its plausibility in the West, because for many young adults there is no longer a paternal home to which they could possibly return.

The difference between Occident and Orient on these issues is very great: On a Chinese college campus there are no married undergraduates and certainly not unmarried mothers or fathers. That members of the young generation get married before they have a child is the overwhelming expectation, which is widely observed in China in general. In addition, it is the rule, supported by close-knit groups of girls as well as by future grooms, that – at least

the woman – has not had another partner prior to the one who becomes her husband. The implied restrictions of course limit the opportunities for the young generation to follow personal spontaneity and to develop special traits of the individual. It is hardly possible in these pages to weigh advantages and disadvantages against each other.

Yet it seems safe to state, that individualization can be carried further only, and a sound and stable family structure can be successful only, provided it enables individuals to become bearers of the identifying core of their *traditional culture* on the basis of which they will then master *modern challenges*. Individualization against and without that foundation has the potential of producing problematic persons if *traditional culture* and *modern challenges* are played against each other for ideological reasons. This, at least in part, explains the rapidly expanding market for psychotherapeutic services in many Western countries.

The continued encouragement of further individualization, prevalent in the West can only be continued in tandem with rising divorce rates and low birth rates. It appears therefore that individualization has reached a critical limit there. In China, however, individualization appears to have much unused potential, based also on very intense child care in the pre-school phase and on the resulting psychological soundness³ of young individuals.

3 The widespread damage done to Chinese persons psychologically during the Cultural Revolution is discussed in detail in the study by Antje Haag (Haag 2011).

China: The Kinship Society

Granet and the Analects: Cultural Evolution of Kinship in China

Granet¹ uses texts of ancient songs, poems and anecdotes as sources of information, similar to how Schwartz worked with the oracle bones. Granet thus succeeded in sketching a vivid picture of life in ancient China as it was lived in the distant past among members of the nobility and among the people in the countryside.

As an illustration I quote from a marriage song of the peasants which Granet interpreted. In it the texts go back and forth between questions and answers: “How is hemp cultivated? – The furrows must be crossed! – How does one take a wife? – The parents must be notified! – How does one cut branches? – It can’t be done without a hatchet! – How does one take a wife? – it can’t be done without a match-maker” (Granet 2013: 153). The lyrics of songs like these hardly need any interpretation. Provided the translation is reliable, they speak for themselves: “The rainbow is in the East! – No one dare point to it... The maid when she will marry – leaves brothers and parents a long way off... When she will marry, the maid – leaves far away brothers and parents” (ibid: 154). The sad complaints of young brides about being suddenly separated from the loved ones in whose presence they grew up, point to the patrilineal character of the family system which has hardly undergone any change even to the present.

When a young Chinese woman gets married, she (even today, in the overwhelming majority of cases) leaves her parents and joins her husband’s family. The same is true in the Confucian traditions of Japan (Reinhold 1981) and

1 In his introduction to a German edition of *La civilisation chinoise* by Marcel Granet, the German sinologist Wolfgang Bauer pointed out that C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) has been familiar with the work of Granet (Bauer 1988). Bauer referred to the article by Mills and Meyer Fortes (Fortes 1906–1983 was a cultural anthropologist) on Ancestor Worship (Mills, Fortes 1961). In addition, we have access to an early manuscript by Mills, published as one of his *Collected Essays* with an introduction by Irving Louis Horowitz. That introduction is dated June 1962. The title of the chapter by Mills is *The Language and Ideas of Ancient China* (Mills 1962). The piece was actually written by Mills in 1940 when he was a student at the University of Wisconsin. (Personal communication from Javier A. Trevino). In addition, Mills also worked with Granet’s companion volume *La civilisation chinoise*, in which Mills observed Granet delineate “the distinctive features of the societal and political system of the ancient Chinese” (ibid: 473).

in Korea. Different from “the West” which introduced the bilateral kinship system under the influence of Christianity, these societies have consistently followed the patrilineal (and patrilocal) family system. Accordingly, the bride needs to get to know and love not merely her husband, his parents, siblings, and grandparents, but also his ancestors as equivalents of the clan’s specific *saints*. Those are her husband’s personal protectors in the beyond who perform as the guardians of his kinship group! Perhaps ancestors and saints are hard to compare; maybe ancestors help families, while saints help individuals. In the background of these distinctions are millennia of history of culture difference that we need to learn to understand.

The young person who is expected to make the ancestors happy under these traditional conditions is typically not the daughter but the son: The daughter must say farewell to her father’s ancestors when she gets married, but the son is never required to change ancestors throughout his whole life. Advice to the son is summarized as follows: In book I of the Analects of Confucius the entry no. 13 ends with the lines addressed to any future husband: “Marry one who has not betrayed her own kin and you may safely present her to your ancestors” (Waley 1989: 87).

Understanding family relations in China is difficult for a Western person, as long as the observer looks at Chinese facts from a Western perspective. Here is a recent dialogue as illustration: The young woman returns to her home village in Southern China. She proudly presents her college degree to her relatives. Her father’s oldest brother, the family head, is delighted to see the diploma. He tells the young graduate: “You make the ancestors of our family very happy, even though you are a girl!” The uncle’s praise should be read like this: Even though soon, when you get married, you will have to leave our family and our ancestors, we are happy that now, while you are still single, you make the ancestors of your father’s clan very proud of you by your academic achievements.

Granet reminds us that in China the central concept of family life is – and has been for millennia – *filial piety* (孝). We are familiar with this concept from the chapter on Confucianism. It is the foundation “of domestic and even of civic morality” (Granet 2013: 310). An ethical rule with firm foundations in the kinship system applies, however, to other areas of society as well: People respect their monarch because they experience in him a father-figure. The latter of course occurred in Western history as well.

On the subjects of the origins of loyalty and obedience of the oldest son to his father, called, as we have seen, filial piety, Granet refers to Confucian texts which seem almost casual but are attributed sacred qualities nevertheless. They make use of anecdotes which have the purpose of teaching listeners the correct way to behave. The listeners interpret what they hear as a description of

the rules that have been observed by the immortal ancestors themselves while they lived on earth. This meaning gives those texts the quality of Holy Scripture in spite of their casual and anecdotal style. The reference to the beyond also makes it appear plausible, that the teachings implicit in the anecdotes were first implemented in the ritualized conduct of early Chinese nobility.

Granet confronted those tales with historical events and other indications of cultural evolution. He made the striking discovery that filial piety as it has been handed on from generation to generation did not grow out of sentiments of emotional closeness between father and son. Instead he found the ritualized respect of the son for his father to have evolved out of ancient rites which had no family background but originally controlled and secured agnatic (from Latin *agnatio*) succession in civic leadership.

According to Granet it must have taken a long time before father and son even acknowledged each other as relatives. Before that happened, they were related as superior and underling in a relationship of public service, and – as Alfred Weber (A. Weber 1943: 99f.) has pointed out – this they could conveniently have done under matrilineal kinship conditions. The hypothesis that in ancient China a matrilineal family system preceded the patrilineal one is plausible also in light of the findings of Fei Xiaotong according to which there are pockets of ancient local ethnic minorities in China who live according to a matrilineal family order to this day (see the next segment of this chapter!). In this context it is noteworthy that the Chinese character for *family name* or *last name* is *xing* (姓). It consists of two parts which mean woman (女) and born (生). Accordingly, if a Chinese is asked for his or her family name, the question in fact aimed originally at the woman of whom they were born.²

The Latin legal terms from the ancient Roman Empire *agnatio* and *cognatio* play an important part in Granet's analysis. *Cognatio* means to be related by blood, based merely on who the mother and the begetter has been. In modern terms it would come close to the idea of sharing similar genetic information. *Agnatio* by contrast refers exclusively to kinship relationships *among men* and is limited to male offspring who was born into a legitimate marriage relationship. Different rules and regulations for behaviour in kinship contexts can be distinguished with the use of these two terms by asking, if cognation or agnation were the intended effect of the respective rule. It is clear that starting in an early stage of its evolution the Chinese kinship culture, as Granet has shown, developed in the direction of an agnatic family system.

2 In modern Chinese asking for the last name has a similar ring in China as the question "where are you from?" It is reminiscent of asking "in which village did you grow up?" (See here the reference to the visit to a village reported in the author's preface!).

Father and son were related as superior and underling, because – as we have seen above – what initially created a lasting relationship between them, was “a bond of infeudation, a juridical and not a natural bond, and moreover, a bond of extra-familial nature” (ibid: 311) without requiring any biological basis. In the beginning the son respected in the father his feudal lord, and only in a later stage of evolution did father and son acknowledge each other as relatives. Granet concluded from this insight that the conventional wisdom explaining political ethic, like obedience to the leader as a projection of domestic moral, must be abandoned.

Rather the opposite is true: The ritualized feudal order came first; it later permeated (in Granet’s words it “impregnated”) kinship relationships. Granet summarized his findings about the origins of the Chinese kinship system as follows: “While the domestic order seems to rest entirely upon paternal authority, the idea of respect takes absolute precedence of the idea of affection in family relationships. Regulated on the model of court assemblies, domestic life forbids all familiarity. Etiquette rules there, not intimacy.”³

Clearly, in the days of Confucius the special type of loyalty between father and son was not the same all over the country and certainly not the same in the different social strata of society. That is spelled out explicitly in the Analects of Confucius in the chapter that is named after his student Zi Lu. In a conversation that took place in 489 BCE the Duke of She (沈諸梁) informed Confucius, saying, “Among us here there are those who may be styled upright in their conduct. If their fathers have stolen a sheep, they will bear witness to the fact.” Confucius said, “Among us, in our part of the country, those who are upright are different from this. The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this.” No matter how that may appear to a Western observer of Chinese culture, the great sage himself here defines law abiding conduct in the “public sphere” to be of lesser dignity than the family duty of *filial piety toward a father*.

3 Ibid. – Here follows the French original of this crucial passage: «On les lit pour trouver en eux le code des bonnes mœurs; nul n’oserait imaginer que ces mœurs n’ont pas été celles des anciens. En revanche, dès que l’on tient compte des données historiques, on aperçoit que, loin de sortir d’une simple codification de sentiments naturels, les règles de la piété filiale dérivent d’antiques rites par lesquelles s’obtenait primitivement l’affiliation agnatique. C’est au terme seulement d’une longue évolution que le fils et le père se sont considérés comme des parents. Le premier lien qui les a unis est un lien d’infeudation, lien juridique et non pas naturel, et, de plus, lien de nature extra-familiale. Le fils n’a vu un parent dans le père qu’après l’avoir reconnu pour son seigneur. Il convient donc d’inverser le postulat historique qui est à la base des théories chinoises. La morale civique n’est point une projection de la morale domestique ; c’est tout au contraire, le droit de la cité féodale qui imprègne la vie domestique.»

In the book *Mengzi*, (or Mencius) chapter Jin Xin, Section 1, we find an even more striking dialogue about a father-son-relationship, this time involving a ruling monarch who finds himself confronted with a father accused of a murder. The answers are given by Mengzi, one of Confucius' most important disciples after whom the book is named, and who, as we saw above, is also known as Mencius (372–289):⁴

“Tao Ying asked Mengzi, ‘Shun being sovereign, and Gao Yao chief minister of justice, if Gu Sou (the father of king Shun) had murdered a man, what would have been done in the case?’ Mengzi said, ‘Gao Yao would simply have apprehended him.’ Question: ‘But would not Shun have forbidden such a thing?’ Mengzi: ‘Indeed, how could Shun have forbidden it? Gao Yao had received the law from a proper source.’ Question: ‘In that case what would Shun have done?’ Mengzi: ‘Shun would have regarded abandoning the kingdom as throwing away a worn-out sandal. He would privately have taken his father on his back and retired into concealment, living somewhere along the sea-coast. There he would have been all his life, cheerful and happy, forgetting the kingdom.’”

The latter story suggests unconditional loyalty between father and son. But it must also be seen through the eyes of Mengzi who is credited with the saying: *The benevolent man extends his way of treating a person he loves also to someone he does not love*. In light of this we must leave it open, how Mengzi looked at the relationship between father Gu Sou and his son king Shun. The son concealing a crime his father committed be it stealing a sheep or killing a man, may be motivated by intimate closeness or by obedience to the rule of etiquette. In either case, the result is a victory of filial piety over all possible conflicting considerations arising from the realm of government and law, or from any other segment of society outside the kinship system.

The relationship between brothers is also the topic of a famous dialog in the *Analects*. The brothers are Xiang and Shun, and the latter becomes king. As was well known at the time, Xiang had made nearly every attempt imaginable to kill his brother in order to keep him from becoming the ruler. After taking office, Shun establishes a record of punishing evildoers, but he spares his brother and even gives him the title of *Prince of You Bei*. Against this background Wen Zhang asked Mengzi why Shun uses clemency and even kindness toward Xiang in spite of that brother's evil intentions in the past. Mengzi replied:

“A benevolent man does not lay-up anger, nor cherish resentment against his brother, but only regards him with affection and love. Regarding him with affection, he wishes him to be honourable: regarding him with love, he wishes him to be rich. The appointment of Xiang to be the *Prince of You Bei* was to

4 All years are to be read as BCE.

enrich and ennoble him. If, while Shun himself was sovereign, his brother had been a common man, could he have been said to regard him with affection and love?"

Mengzi's reply teaches that to love someone includes wanting to make him or her wealthy. The concluding sentence of the text suggests a strong emphasis on public recognition. The imperative to treat his brother not according to an abstract law but rather to "regard him with affection" is motivated largely by taking into consideration, what impression it would have made on others if Shun had been ruler while "his brother had been a common man." The way a ruler treated his closest relatives was relevant for his recognition among his subjects. It is noteworthy how closely conduct in a family context and behaviour in public are interconnected. These dialogues from the Analects had, and have to this day, a profound impact on the notion of normative knowledge about family life in China.

Fei Xiaotong: Field Work on Contemporary Family Life in China

Fei Xiaotong conducted field research among villagers in Guangxi province belonging to the *Hualan Yao* minority. In the context of the family culture which Fei and his students studied the "biological father" and "social father" are not necessarily the same. All the "sons" born by a man's wife are to be accepted by him as his own. This does not mean that the village locals from the *Hualan Yao* do not understand the relationship between sex and reproductive physiology. They explained when interviewed, "The child may not necessarily be the child by a husband." But the fact that this infant is "not necessarily his own" is not sufficient reason to allow him to disclaim his responsibilities as the "social father" of the child.⁵

Fei reports these observations in his book *The Social Structure of Hualan Yao*. There he gives a detailed description of the Yao ethnic minority. These people live in the subtropical area of Guangxi, where the climate is warm and humid. Fei is interested in the coexistence of the monogamous marriage system with a semi-open lover system of the local people. He states that, in view of the sex life of the locals, marriage is just a "legal" union, and the "extralegal" relations are socially accepted by default. As long as they are not made open to all, other people do not care and let the relationship go as if unnoticed.

5 Collected Works of Fei Xiaotong in Chinese, 同6, 费孝通文集第一卷, 429页. – I owe this information to research collaboration with Li Li, Shen Guanbao and Tang Weiming.

It is consistent with these field observations on the topic of the evolving concept of fatherhood when Simmel points out that in less developed cultures men are eager to bring their women, who in some cases are their sisters, into contact with the chief, the priest, or other prominent man (Helle, 2015: 60). This is reminiscent of the biblical report of Abraham and Sarah visiting king Abimelech or of the couple spending time in Egypt at the court of the Pharaoh.⁶ According to Simmel, men who encouraged such contacts for their women and sisters believed that any child born out of the encounter – which then would nevertheless be taken care of by the respective “father” – would inherit the admired qualities of their noble begetter. This would later benefit the whole family including the stepfather who arranged for the contact with the famous male (Simmel 1895: 10).

As the illustrations show, both Simmel as well as Fei take from very different contexts the insight that the notion of “father” must have undergone a long and complicated process of development. In the course of that it changed from (a) relating to the child merely via its mother who was close to the man helping to take care of the infant, to (b) a “direct and individual relationship between the begetter and the child” (ibid.) based on obedience and loyalty.

Simmel introduces a distinction between two ways of relating to the next generation; this can occur via handing on upon death material goods as valued inherited possessions, or via passing on genetic information via blood relations, and at the same time using that biological fact as point of departure for cultural consequences. Of course the two – inheriting material goods on the one hand, and feeling close on the basis of blood relations – can be combined, as typically happens in China. Simmel assumes, however, that in the distant past, the former (inheriting wealth) may have been a powerful motif standing on its own.

Knowing who the begetter of a son was, did not have much relevance under matrilineal cultural conditions when – as Bronislaw Kaspar Malinowski (1884–1942) reported about the Trobriand Islanders (Malinowski 1929) – the dying tribal chief hands on his power, wealth, and office to his sister’s oldest son: Blood relations between the adult male and the male child who later succeeded him as chief was defined the matrilineal way: The chief and his successor’s mother descended from the same woman. Earlier in this chapter we saw that the Chinese character for family name is xing (姓) and that it consists of two parts which mean woman (女) and born (生).

Fei, who was Malinowski’s student at the *London School of Economics and Political Science*, believes that on the evolutionary path toward patrilineality,

6 Bible, Genesis, Chapter 20, verses 1–11, and Chapter 12, verses 11–15.

the lover system he observed in his field work among the *Yao* minority culture is of great significance and influence. It creates *conditions for selection* in the sense of “survival of the fittest.” Fei uses reasoning which reads as anticipation of social biology: The effects of “sexual choice” are more significant under the lover system than under the system of monogamous marriage.

The *patrilineal* kinship system that has clearly dominated China for millennia is also characterized as *patrilocal*, meaning that the family is where the father resides. In case of a divorce, the children typically stay with the father. As has been mentioned above, the bride leaves her family of origin when she gets married, and moves to her husband’s home to become a member of his clan. As a consequence, one may surmise that she is a “member” of two families, but even though one may get that impression on the basis of a superficial observation of people’s behaviour: Her primary allegiance is to her husband’s family, and that is ritually confirmed on festive occasions.

Local people whom Fei interviewed during his field work use the expression “incense” to describe the continuation of worshipping relatives after they die, which carries a very strong sense of religious ethics. The reason lies in their conviction, as Fei’s research documented, that dead family members do not leave the family, but while staying close, live in another world an intangible life similar to the tangible one. That is why the ancestors’ invisible life is ritually worshiped by their living offspring. Apart from this consideration – which may explain the special social position of *women* who change family membership, in comparison to *males* in China who do not – as a result of the patrilineal kinship system, everyone (including married women) belongs to *one family* only and not to two or more.

When Fei completed his doctoral thesis at the *London School of Economics and Political Science* in 1938 entitled “Peasant Life in China” based on the materials collected from a village in Jiangsu, he compared the matrilineal roots still visible among the *Yao* with the more typical Chinese patrilineal families of the *Han*. He clearly described the remarkable difference between the *Han* residents of the village in Jiangsu and the *Yao* people in terms of their concept of family and marriage.

For example, the village in Jiangsu is a typical patrilineal unit: There is special emphasis on parent–son relationship and intergenerational inheritance of property, based entirely on blood relation in the male line of descent. The cultural differences between the matrilineal *Yao* and the patrilineal *Jiangsu Han*, results in their completely different view of female chastity. This could be documented when in the 1980s Fei guided his students to the village of Jiangsu for a revisit. He discovered a special living arrangement in the village: When the girl reaches puberty, her parents must provide in their own bedroom a small

bed for the daughter to sleep in, until she gets married. Although the locals did not give any explanation for this spatial arrangement, it is done undoubtedly in the interest of keeping the girl in chastity before marriage (Shen 2007).

A functional explanation for the significance of chastity would point to the difficulty to determine physical fatherhood in the absence of genetic testing. It was therefore important to limit a young woman's sexual activities to have contact with one man only in order to make sure who the father of a possible child is. In order to know without doubt, who the *father as begetter* was, the respective clans needed to insist on the truthfulness of the wives during marriage and on their virginity prior to it (Simmel 1895: 10).

The unconditional limitation to having sexual relations only with the spouse thus developed earlier on the side of the women, and only there Simmel sees it founded in the principle of inheriting wealth according to blood bonds. The demand for the husband to be truthful as well, was a later and much slower development which, according to Simmel, rests on different foundations (Helle 2015: 61). But marital truthfulness became necessary in principle to establish monogamy in traditional societies.

Simmel, similar to Fei after him, stays with an evolutionary mode of arguing, applying Darwin's biological insights to culture change: *The more effective cultural form* survives in the course of competition and selection. As a result, the monogamous marriage eventually supersedes other forms, because it enables a type of socialization in the family which Simmel assumes – for the development of the children and thus for producing personalities – to be superior to any other. If the next generation grows up in a kinship group in which both parents cannot unite their efforts in bringing up their common offspring, then – according to this point of view – those children will have less favorable chances for developing.

Monogamous marriage thus entails an evolutionary advantage, comparable to more fertile soil or more advanced agricultural technology. Consequently, the struggle for survival will make it more likely that the monogamous two-parents-group will outlast other family cultures in which the mother is more or less left alone in taking care of her offspring (Simmel 1895: 13). If this is true, then it will matter in the context of this comparison of cultures: It will make the present Chinese patrilineal three-generation-family successful for some time to come, because on a global scale it will likely produce more competitive offspring than the kinship systems of other regions.

Just as it is one-sided to try to explain everything from the perspective of the economy as if money was the only thing that counts it is also one-sided to pretend that money does not matter in the life of a family. Indeed, often marriages are contracted expressly on economic conditions, and in many native cultures,

money must be paid in the event of marriage. On a low level of subsistence every adult member of a family is crucial as a farm hand who contributes to gaining the food needed.

If in such context, a young woman gets married and as we explained above, as a consequence shifts membership from her family of origin to the family of her future husband, then in economic terms, it means hiring away a crucial part of the work force. It makes sense if that loss is compensated by paying a certain amount of money to the family of the bride (Helle 2015: 62f.). It may seem like purchasing her, but that is too narrow a view of what goes on economically.

According to Simmel's line of reasoning, the money paid for the bride, requires considerable sacrifice on the part of the groom and his family, because it is difficult for them to come up with the required amount. Later it is likely that as a consequence what has been acquired as the result of making a sacrifice will be kept in high esteem; the groom who had to toil and save for years to finally be able to "afford" that bride will be determined to consider her "valuable," at least for that reason. Speaking of the "value of a bride" in money terms seems unethical in many Western contexts. In China, however, the two areas of commerce and kinship are not separated in the same way, as the following case description shows.

A Chinese student of medicine has successfully completed her work in medical and hospital training in Germany. Her widowed mother lives in China and is quite well-off financially. Nevertheless, the young M.D. takes a considerable amount of money back to visit her mother, simply because it is the common way to follow the Chinese rule of etiquette. – A former graduate student in China has completed her M.A. degree and looks for a job. Her aging father needs to be hospitalized. As is normal in mainland China, the hospital requires a family member to take care of the patient around the clock. The young woman takes turns with her mother to live in the hospital at the side of the sick father, having to share the bed with him during the night, because the hospital does not provide any other sleeping arrangement.

What do these illustrations show? The kinship relationship has priority over commercial independence of an adult child, as it does over behavior in the public sphere in general, like in the hospital. The physicians there are dealing with families, not merely with isolated patients. And, for better or for worse, the government too is dealing with families, not individuals, e.g. when fugitive Chinese citizens are retrieved by Chinese special agents in Australia or the United States. According to *The New York Times*, Li Gongjing, a captain in the economic crime division of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau, explained the agents' approach in an interview with *Xinmin Weekly* magazine in

November of 2014. “A fugitive is like a flying kite. Even though he is abroad, the string is held in China. He can always be found through his family.”⁷

In the context of hunting down tax evaders, this statement may be reassuring, however, if a fugitive is under surveillance for other reasons, Li Gongjin’s statement is frightening, as it may well be intended to be. It demonstrates one of the consequences of living in a kinship society; it can be promising and threatening at the same time.

Altruism and Selfishness: A Precarious Balance

As was reported here in an earlier chapter, Fei Xiaotong deplored the lack of responsibility of people throwing garbage into the water near their dwelling place. Fei wrote: “If we want to discuss the problem of selfishness, we have to take into consideration the pattern of the entire social structure” (Fei, 1992: 61). This confronts us again with these questions: What is peculiar about Chinese society? What must we take into consideration in comparing selfishness there with selfishness in the West? How do the two cultures generate altruism and how do they channel it into certain social contexts?

In order to establish the centrality of kinship in the Chinese culture, we start with something appearing superficial at first sight: Every Chinese name *starts* with the family name. It is not a person’s *last name*, as in the West, in China it comes *first*. Fei Xiaotong is a descendent of the Fei family, as Deng Xiaoping had a father, grandfather, and great grandfather whose family name was also Deng.

In addition, the Chinese language is rich in words designating types of status in the kinship system. Western persons talking about their grandmother may need to explain if they mean the one from their mother’s side or the one from their father’s side. The person having command of the Chinese language uses distinct words for each of his four grandparents. Thus the question never arises: Do you mean the one from your father’s or from your mother’s side?

Similarly, if we know that a person is another person’s cousin, we may have to ask to find out about the gender, but then we still have no idea if we are dealing with a child of a father’s brother, of a father’s sister, of a mother’s brother, or a child of a mother’s sister. The Chinese language provides separate words for each of those kinship relationships. Also, Western descriptions like *older brother* or *younger sister* are distinct words in Chinese. The comparative wealth

⁷ The New York Times, Obama Administration Warns Beijing About Covert Agents Operating in U.S. By Mark Mattezzi and Dan Levin, Aug. 16, 2015.

of vocabulary available to describe types of family realities suggests that the field of kinship relationships was more significant in the Chinese cultural tradition than has been the case in any of the European languages. Terminology used to identify participants in family life today in China and in the West, points in the direction of an important distinction between Orient and Occident.

The roots of this centrality of kinship in history can be found precisely in the period which Confucius admired so much: "...the Western Zhou represented a particular mode of ruling a vast area when the productive forces were at a relatively low level. The essence of such a system was to govern the country through kinship. Consequently, the political and economic organizations were wholly assimilated to that of blood relationship" (Li Jun, quoted by Gassmann 2006: 14).

Consider against this background the following case from contemporary China: The young woman has successfully completed her Master degree at the university. Having returned to her home after many years of absence on a college campus she re-joins the three generation family of her parents, her father's aging parents, and herself. She intends to work hard to prepare for the entrance examination in order to be accepted into the Ph.D.-program of a different university in China. Then her father and her father's parents fall ill at the same time.

Her mother takes care of her sick in-laws in the family home, but her father must be hospitalised, and she must join him as care-taker in the clinic. She must go back and forth between the hospital and the home to bring food to her father which her mother cooks. Even during the night, she must be with her father in the hospital. Nobody asks, if she would like to do all that or not: It is simply normal behaviour in a Chinese family context, it means following the rule of etiquette. If her father's parents were well, she and her mother would take turns in the hospital, but in the given case, that is not possible. As a result, of course she cancels her application for admission to the Ph.D.-program.

Fei Xiaotong writes that it is necessary to look into "the pattern of the entire social structure" (Fei, 1992: 61) in order to understand selfishness and altruism in a society. The behavior of disposing of garbage in – what in Western contexts would be called – the public sphere appears selfish, the service provided for an ailing family member in the hospital appears altruistic, but do these Western terms really fit the respective Chinese situations?

What we are faced with in the tension between individual and society are either balances, or problems resulting from imbalanced conditions. The agonizing demands in China on the individual in the context of his or her kinship unit would be unbearable unless they are balanced by freeing the person from too many additional duties outside the home. This theoretical approach

perhaps does not excuse, but it helps explain, Fei's complaint about throwing garbage where it does not belong.

In the West the demands on the person resulting from kinship obligations are limited by comparison. There is the day-care center, the nursery school, the hospital staff, and the retirement home to relieve the individual from sacrificing too much time, energy, money, and personal freedom for of his or her relatives. To still arrive at a balance that would preclude rampant selfishness in the West, one would expect various kinds of public services to be performed by individuals outside their kinship context, as in religious, government, or non-government organizations by which the volunteers would compensate for the freedom awarded them by their families. Nothing of that kind of voluntary work can reasonably be expected of the average Chinese, given the enormous involvement required inside his or her kinship group.

Possibly this observation can contribute toward understanding massive discord in Europe in 2015 and 2016 about unpaid spontaneous involvement in helping arriving refugees. The rejection of a generous refugee policy is most pronounced in less developed countries, in which the family is more demanding on its members. The acceptance of large numbers of refugees may correlate with high degrees of individualization and of low social coherence of families, as is typical in large German cities.

I explained to a Chinese friend how I concluded in this book that the selfishness Fei Xiaotong described as throwing garbage into the canals in the beautiful town of *Suzhou* near Shanghai was to be seen in connection with the altruism people display in kinship contexts. I suggested that selfishness in one situation and altruism in the other ought to be balanced against each other. My friend replied that it was an interesting idea, but one that did not really reflect the realities of Oriental culture. This is so, because what I called "altruism" was basically not an ethical preference of an individual but compliance with ancient custom by following the rule of kinship etiquette.

Accordingly, the "performer" deserving recognition and possible admiration, was primarily not the *individual* but instead the *social unit*⁸ representing the tradition, in the case under discussion the Chinese family. Just as in the hospital case we ought to admire (or consider with abhorrence) the system rather than the individual, in the garbage context we might also want to blame the system for not having been able to produce a generally accepted rule of behaviour toward the environment, at least not for the time being. Yet, as it turned out in my conversation with my Chinese friend, *selfishness* as observed

8 On the Chinese concept of "danwei" as unit and kinship group under socialism see Oskar Weggel (1994: 58f.).

by Fei and *compliance* with kinship etiquette by the young woman at her father's bedside in the hospital are incommensurable, they are not theoretically located on the same ethical level.

The garbage thrower is exposed to conditions of modernity. He or she is thus confronted with a largely uncharted territory of ethics in which there is room for spontaneous selfishness and also for deliberate altruism. That is totally different, however, in the kinship context. I asked, if what I at first perceived as "altruism" could be compared to flying into London, and after having recovered from the shock of left-hand-traffic, to then admire the Britons for being so considerate and altruistic as to drive on the side of the street that is prescribed by their traffic rules. Not a good comparison, was the reply. Apart from the fact that in London you will surely get killed in the street if you try to insist on right-hand-traffic, obedience to what the traffic system requires cannot be compared to the Chinese kinship system.

There, as we mentioned repeatedly, it is a matter of following the traditional rule of etiquette. In addition, it is the law to take care of one's parents, and – maybe most powerful of all – it is the ancient conviction that the individual's life is a gift from his or her parents. In addition, bringing up the child through the stages of infant, toddler, pre-schooler, and student is acknowledged as an admirable performance into which the parents and frequently grand-parents invested unquantifiable measures of love, time and money. If a young and healthy Chinese declares: I cannot take care of my ailing father, then he has the ancestors, the tradition of his or her culture, and even the law against him!

Does that mean, if a Chinese person neglects his or her parents, the police will be on the doorstep? That is the least interesting consideration. It will most likely never happen for that reason. The police will show up in China if you propose to overthrow the government, not if you beat up your neighbour. According to Chinese tradition even the most capable official cannot repair any damages members of a kinship group do to each other inside their family. So what chances does the reluctant care-taker of parents have to refuse? Maybe there is no realistic chance to do that. He or she may claim: I do not have the money to do anything, or, I must take care of my children and therefore have no time and energy left to take care of my parent.

These two would be the only excuses remotely possible in China's kinship society. However, such conduct would create the prediction that such a person's offspring will do unto them what they did unto their own parent. Also it will destroy much of their reputation and social prestige. As I quoted here above from Granet's research, in China the central concept of family life is – and has been for millennia – *filial piety* (孝). It is the foundation "of domestic and even of civic morality" (Granet 2013: 310). Even though my Chinese friend

rejects this comparison, I tend to believe that in China refusing to move into the clinic with your sick father to take care of him while he is hospitalized is like trying to drive on the wrong side of the road in London.

The Chinese kinship system surprises the Western observer by the absence of diversity. Compared to the wide variety of family types in the West, families in China prescribe and allow largely the same pattern of behaviour. This must be taken into consideration as a source of solidarity and mutual understanding to counteract the absence of a tradition of ethical universalism: While each person is expected to plan and toil in order to advance the wealth, health, and happiness of their relatives, all Chinese also recognize the fact that they share the same family duties as a unifying fate.

China: A Threatening Promise to the West

Summaries of the Chapters

In the introduction at the beginning of this book I mentioned the possibility, which likely is a necessity, for the Orient and the Occident to learn from each other. But what could be a motivation for either side wanting to do that? Could it be done out of admiration of one side for the other, because there are promising developments in the making across the divide, or could it be out of fear of becoming the inferior opponent who has reason to feel threatened by the perceived strength of the other side? We will review the chapters above with these questions in mind. To make it more likely that what follows will remind the reader of what he has already read here, we will occasionally repeat verbatim significant portions from the preceding chapters.

Chapter 1 describes China as a disappointment. It has the title: *Familism: A Threat to the Environment*. It introduces the reader to what sociologist Fei Xiaotong described as the Chinese absence of responsibility toward the “public sphere:” Whatever does not belong to a specific *person or family*, what is therefore not acknowledged as clearly being part of *their* respective sphere of interest, control, and influence, is public in the sense “that everyone can take advantage of it,” or, in other words, “one can have rights without obligations” (Fei, 1992: 60).

The people beyond the confinements of our residence are “none of our business” as long as they are neither relatives nor friends. In the Chinese cultural tradition extra-familial loyalties too are typically *fashioned after* a family relationship. If we are Chinese, we help our kin and close contemporaries and try hard to please our ancestors in the beyond, and otherwise we politely ignore strangers and stay out of trouble.

Against this background the West seems superior to China in the way it maintains creativity and order in the realm of government and law. There have traditionally been defects in the Chinese organization of the state, as there are visible shortcomings in the development of Western institutions of private life (Cherlin 2010). These weaknesses, provided they are perceived as such, may motivate both cultures to learn from each other.

In the countries of the occident the typical television show people view in their free time is a criminal story centering around a murder, and featuring men and women of the security forces catching the culprit, whereas in China

much free time is spent at the television set viewing family drama: Misunderstandings between in-laws, tension among members of different generations, that is what interests the Chinese consumer of mass media entertainment. Is the latter implicitly concerned about a possible collapse of family life, while the Westerner is primarily worried about public order being overcome with crime and violence? Do such fears reflect value preferences handed down in the tradition of the respective culture, or do they simply express the dominant problem of the societies people live in at the present time? Or could those concerns be a combination of both?

Trying to correct a deviant person by asking them – what, if everybody were to act like that? – does not have the intended effect in China, because there “the public sphere” is not endowed with the necessary moral authority. As a result, that sphere cannot exercise any social control. The controlling spheres are the family and the wider circle of relatives and friends. There the company in those two contexts creates the consciousness of duties, of having to obey certain rules and in general of meeting the expectations of the other members. This causes people in China in general to be good husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, daughters and sons, but they will not cause them to form an orderly line at a bus station.

It does not give them any reason to be active defenders of the environment either, because each family feels as if it had its own environment. It is to be hoped that the responsibility for saving the environment can become a motivation among Chinese to learn from the West in this respect,¹ because the cultural points of departure for the family-centered attitude toward it must otherwise be perceived as a threat of increasing magnitude. The West in turn must learn from China how the family sphere can be maintained and kept from falling apart even when facing the pressure of modernization and individualization.

Chapter 2 is entitled: *Exchange of Threats: The Opium Wars*. It takes us back to the end of the 18th century and to the two wars in China of 1839–42 and 1856–60. It explains how partly as a result of rampant nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism practiced by European nations, partly by condescending and ethnocentric attitudes of the emperor and the Chinese leadership, more than a millennium of fruitful and peaceful coexistence was ended during the 18th and 19th century and culminated in the Opium Wars.

Those wars were of course military disasters for China and led to a painful ambivalence among Chinese intellectuals toward the West. On the one hand the failure of China to defend herself effectively and the humiliation the emperor and his staff suffered at the hands of European invaders caused deep-seated

1 Even though of course people in the West have their own problems on the issue.

doubts about the *Center Country's* own cultural traditions. On the other hand, Europe appeared *superior* in many respects and that view caused curiosity and interest in Western ideas among open-minded Chinese. But much of what happened in Western nations was understandably seen with disapproval and disappointment.

Interaction between Orient and Occident had started with successful trade along the Silk Road that “was used regularly from 130 BCE, when the Han officially opened trade with the West,” until alas in 1453 CE, the Ottoman Empire boycotted trade with the West and closed the routes... “The closing of the Silk Road forced merchants to take to the sea to ply their trade, thus initiating the Age of Discovery (1453–1660 CE) which led to world-wide interaction and the beginnings of a global community.”² Exchanges within that community included peaceful relations between China and the West until their contacts erupted into war in the 19th century.

China's self-perception as *special* and not merely a part of the global community contributed to the two Opium Wars (1839–42 and 1856–60). Europe had clearly become a threat to China. Those two wars resulted in a drastic humiliation of the Center Country. Having been defeated militarily, China was forced to allow foreign powers to install independent enclaves, primarily in important trade regions like Shanghai and Hong Kong.

In addition, Christian missionaries were given the right to settle without restrictions. From a Chinese perspective the “inferior and barbarian” nations of the West including the United States mutated to members of a threatening culture. As a result, the most convincing intellectual contribution to a recovery of China was expected from those authors in the West who were themselves critical of the West.

Trying to find answers to the question, what could motivate one side of the divide to learn from the other, we find here indications of individual Chinese wanting to study Western ideas to help strengthen their country because they felt threatened by the West. The military strength of Japan, Britain, France, and Germany and the condescending diplomacy of Western powers toward China in the era in question were interpreted by Chinese intellectuals as a historic situation compelling the Center Country to take over Western ways.

Chapter 3 on what had been called “Thucydides' Trap” has the headline: *China and the US: A Balance of Power?* It starts with the question if China is, or might become, a military threat to the rest of the world. Some theorists have referred to what they call “Thucydides' Trap” as a warning: Conflict and even war seem to be on the horizon unless China and the United States find ways to

² Joshua J. Mark, Silk Road, Ancient History Encyclopedia, http://www.ancient.eu/Silk_Road/.

avoid confrontation. This threat scenario from ancient Greece is confronted in this chapter with the discovery by Elman R. Service (1915–1996) of the fading evolutionary potential of established cultures (Service 1968). The latter tend to become stable, institutionalise themselves firmly and then resist any type of change. The trend toward rigidity contradicts development and peaceful adaptation. Service's theory shows that peaceful measure are available to regain the ability to adjust to needed change.

The chapter interprets a passage from Homer's *Iliad* and shows how bellicose behaviour was presented as *heroic* there as well as in countless other examples of celebrated Western epics, like the *Song of the Nibelungs*. Whereas their bravery and *fighting to the death* are presented as admirable, the Chinese story about the nobleman Zhuge Liang on the significance of intelligence and of controlling fear represents an interesting alternative.

In the continuity of Max Weber's analysis of capitalism, the two nations, China and the U.S.A. are seen as sharing economic ambitions as a common goal that can and should become a point of departure for peaceful cooperation based on compatible interests. China has taken over Western methods of doing business on a global scale. On another issue of learning, there is no question that China learned from the West, to arm its military forces to the point where they have atomic weapons and space rockets at their disposal. Computer technology too has been an area of expertise Chinese experts learned in the Occident.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the religious dimension of life under the heading *Religions: Core Components of Cultures*. Belief systems everywhere share the conviction that death does not end the existence of the person and that the living may experience getting some personal attention from the beyond. Some immortals are well known because they lived on this earth at one time. That applies to Chinese ancestors as it does to Christian saints. Others are defined as deities or spirits who have never been mortal humans, but who entertain a relationship of mutual dependence with them, be it that the living depend on the immortals, be it the other way around that the immortals depend on sacrifices or other rituals performed for them by the normal humans.

Compared to contacts between different religions in other part of the world, the interaction between Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism have been fairly peaceful in China. In this chapter therefore conflict in connection with religion is not primarily concerned with religions fighting each other as with the respective government or emperor in power allowing or prohibiting certain religious activities that were perceived as threatening to the rulers.

The Christian Jesuit mission developed well as long as the emperor supported the learned Western priests, but when the Catholic Church itself withdrew

its approval, the emperor faced the missionaries with the alternative to obey him or the pope in Rome. Since the Jesuits of course obeyed Rome, their mission in China, which started successfully in the early 17th century, failed in 1742 (Neuner 2015).

A reason why different religions can coexist peacefully is potentially the awareness that they share an evolutionary origin in the distant past. Shamanism is discussed from this perspective and seen in certain respects as a precursor of Daoism and of Confucianism.

As virtually every other Chinese person, members of the Communist Party too will visit the graves of recent ancestors on Qingming day (清明) to pay respects to them. But “the Party” does not consider that to be religious behavior, rather it is regarded among the cadres merely as Chinese tradition, and is therefore not seen in conflict with Marxist orthodoxy. If in China today some Christian activities need to be tolerated, then the Chinese leadership prefers Christianity in the form of – what in Max Weber’s terminology are – the *sects*, typical for America, to a global *church*, which is seen as a potential competitor of the party, when it comes to being the promulgator of a global ultimate truth.

Does this chapter contribute anything to the question, if there is the possibility, or even the necessity, for the Orient and the Occident to learn from each other? And if this is so, what could be the motivation for either side to want to do that? Christianity has been successful in spreading its faith all over the world in a unique way. But intolerance has been in the background of much of its missionary history. Communist China has taken over the intolerant stance from the West but became much more moderate over the decades compared to how Communism was propagated in Eastern Europe until the end of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 5 is called *Religious Vitality in Contemporary China*. The chapter is largely a report of what happened to religions there since the founding of the New China in 1949. In his book of 2012 Fenggang Yang (Yang 2012) showed that the expectations of persons representing the official party line has proven wrong, according to which Western religions would gradually fade away and be given up by the faithful even faster under pressure. Yang finds the opposite to be true: Statistics, even those published by the government itself, show that the numbers of Catholic priests and nuns, Protestant ministers, Muslim imams, and Buddhist monks and nuns have strongly increased in the years between 1982 and 2009. He concludes that the religion-politics of the party have failed and that religion in China does not show weakness but resilience.

Opposition against the Christian faith has a long tradition in China: The quote from the gospel, according to which Jesus himself denied his closest relatives and added the words: “Everyone who does the will of my father in

heaven is brother, sister, and mother to me" (Mathew 12, 50) has been viewed as a provocation in countries with a Confucian tradition and beyond, long before Marxism appeared on the Asian scene. But neither Confucianism, nor Buddhism, and certainly not Daoism have been and are being perceived as questioning or weakening the native *family-oriented religion of China*.

In Europe there has been a sad tradition of governmental interference with religious affairs. The struggle between Catholics and Protestants led to the compromise *cujus regio ejus religio* (he who rules the region determines the religion) that was agreed upon in the peace of Augsburg of 1555. With reference to that pact large segments of the populations of certain areas were deported for belonging to the wrong denomination. "In 1731, *Prince-Archbishop von Firmian* of Salzburg decided to compel the practice of Catholicism in his territory. The Prince-Archbishop requested Imperial and Bavarian troops to aid in the suppression of approximately 20,000 Lutherans living in Salzburg" (Clark 2006: 141–144).³ It is not necessary to mention on that subject what happened in the 20th century in the Soviet Union and in Germany under Hitler. The communist leadership of China had a choice of European cases of religious persecution to follow.

Chapter 6 is about *Max Weber's View of Religions in China*. Max Weber points out that in Chinese history the emperor was expected to bring about peace and harmony in the country, and that he was also expected to guarantee sufficient rain and a generous harvest. The emperor of China combined in his elevated position the powers of a religious, a political, and a military leader, but in addition he was always seen also as a family man. In popular television shows today viewers enjoy seeing emperors of the past surrounded by various types of family problems. Weber could not include phenomena of the New China into his reflections because he died in 1920.

Money making in Weber's interpretation appears to be rational on the surface. But when Weber analyses the cultural foundations of the Protestant Ethic it turns out in his view to be a type of behaviour with irrational, religious foundations, at least at its outset. This opens up the possibility for kinship influences to play an important part in economic behaviour in China. A Calvinist Protestant capitalist's view of having become wealthy is this: God counts me among the Chosen Few, and thus He made me rich. The oriental business person can base a similar attitude toward his or her own wealth on Chinese tradition: My ancestors support what I do, therefore I became wealthy.

The following is one of the central theses of these pages: The orientation toward ancestors as members of the preceding generations is mediated via

3 Quoted in Wikipedia, entry: *Cuius regio, eius religio*.

parents and grand-parents. It combines the principle of *immortality* with the requirement of *reality* and thus results in a religion that is not weakened by fundamental doubts. Just as according to Weber the Calvinist Protestant Ethic had a profound impact on economic development, so does the belief in support from the ancestors in the beyond. This comparison presupposes of course, that the Chinese veneration of the forebears has religious qualities.

Chapter 7 introduces some basic ideas about *Daoism: China's Native Religion*. Among the founders of Daoism, it is primarily Lao-tze (or Laozi) who is known worldwide. The eternal order of the universe was to be recognized by the ruler's cosmological liturgy. According to Daoist belief the individual does not depend on personages in heaven, not on gods, saints, or even ancestors, but rather fate is in his or her own hands, because the powers in the beyond gave mortals the might to solicitate the proper responses from nature himself. They must thus learn how to make good use of the potential awarded them and accept responsibility for the results themselves.

The Chinese cultural tradition is deeply indebted to Daoism: For more than two thousand years the philosophical tradition of Daoism, its visions of the beyond, its cosmology and its principles of ethic have contributed to the evolution of Chinese culture. The ruler's adherence to the instructions and admonitions of the *Tao-te ching* had the potential of making him the guardian of the equilibrium of the universe which was to subject itself in obedience to his priestly person. The Confucians as partners of the Daoists who together with the latter were trying to improve the ruler's conduct, introduced the ritual worship of the cosmos by the king or emperor as celebrating priest: The eternal order of the universe was to be recognized by the ritual of the ruler's cosmological liturgy.

There was no longer the same living and dying for everybody, but rather by observing certain ritual and dietary rules, the Daoist could make himself or herself qualified to bypass physical death and ascend to heaven like Elija. In addition, certain religious activities of a devoted Daoist could deliver the dead members of his or her own clan from the realm of shadows in the underworld, even after having resided therefore some considerable time, and enable them to ascend to heaven as well. This is obviously one of the meetings points between Daoism and the tradition of venerating the ancestors.

But Daoism is also a source of independence and individualization by reducing the impact of the Confucian family rituals. As was mentioned above, according to Daoist belief the individual does not depend on personages in heaven, not on gods, saints, or even ancestors, but rather his fate is in his or her own hands. He must thus learn how to make good use of the potential awarded him. In the case of failure, he or she has nobody to blame but themselves.

In Chapter 8 we looked at the inscriptions on Oracle-Bones and turtle shells. The title is: *Oracle-Bones: The Mandate of Heaven*. The research resulting from those interpretations explain in part why Confucius idealized the past. By teaching his disciples, he spread the firm belief in a historical reality that was worth being brought back from the past. He inspired generations of Chinese with that dream. To him it is quite clear that the concepts and ethical rules for a peaceful and cultured society have already been implemented in his country. During his lifetime Confucius (551–479) witnessed nothing but phases of decay, because the splendor of the Zhou era which he admired so much ended before he was born.

Life is a ritual; ethics are the duty to perform that ritual with as much perfection as possible. Neglect of the ritual obligations towards living family member as well as toward the departed is sinning against one's ancestors. Whereas in *Christian* cultures marriage and childbirth are attributed religious meaning from a religion located primarily *outside* the kinship system, i.e. in congregation and church, the *Chinese* tradition provides religious orientation directly from *within the clan*.

The ritualized behavior required by Chinese kinship reality is expected from the imperial family all the way down to the simplest peasant household. Its unifying effect has for centuries counteracted the development of class struggles in a conflict society: The primary source of inequality was the position in a kinship group, not in a class of society! Only the first son of the principal wife inherited the status of the father. His younger brothers grew up as members of lower status groups. Their membership in the same family context overarched the status differences that would separate them as members of different social classes. (Gassmann 2006: 34).

In the tradition of the West the individual had the alternative to lead a family life or to join a monastery or nunnery: Faced with disaster, Hamlet tells Ophelia: "Get thee to a nunnery." The Chinese were typically not confronted with – or did not have the benefit of – such an alternative: In China the ritualized life inside the clan was (and is) the sanctioned way of life for everybody. There Hamlet cannot tell his Ophelia to join a nunnery; instead he must face being responsible for her.

The royal clan was not merely a model to emulate as far as possible, but it was a kinship unit governed strictly by identical rules as every other family! "The king is the 'high priest' of his lineage's ancestor cult." (Schwartz 1985: 35). And the oldest healthy male has *that same function and duty* in every family. That is the *religious reason* for the need of at least one son. This concerns the simplest peasant family in the same way as it matters to the family of the emperor. It has the potential of creating solidarity across class divisions. Yet the

ultimate source of authority was not the clan, but the Mandate of Heaven. It empowered a royal family to rule. The oracle-bones and turtle shells point to the warnings that the beyond can confer the Mandate, but can also revoke it, should the clan in question not or no longer prove worthy of ruling.

In Chapter 9 some ideas of Confucianism are summarized. It is called: *Confucius: Recapture the Lost Splendor*. We show, following the research of Benjamin I. Schwartz (Schwartz 1985), that the Chinese feudal system was based on the principle of *entrusting family members*, who would be bound to their monarch by the sanctity of kinship ties, with the duty of acting as deputies of the king in remote areas. In addition, in the era of the Duke of Shao at the latest, a monarchical ethic including the ruler's moral ability to reflect his own quality, replaced an archaic absolute rule during which the exercise of power had been self-explanatory and was in no need of any justification.

Such self-critical attitude of the royal family toward its own performance as rulers was precisely what Confucius considered necessary, but found missing in his own days. Confucius was an untiring advocate of subjecting monarchical reign to objective ethical standards. He saw those standards largely disregarded by the power holders who were his contemporaries.

The chapter refers to an ancient text mentioning alcohol as cause for the destruction of ritual. The gentlemen class flourished as long as each participant in ritual celebrations behaved in a sober and ritualistic way observing the *quasi liturgical* prescriptions for correct social conduct. But a poem depicts how then the use of alcohol sets in with its ugly consequences, and as a result, the ritual gatherings tend to break up more and more frequently in complete chaos of drunkenness. (Schwartz 1985: 55).

Ethical virtues become uniquely Chinese by culminating in the kinship context: The special love for one's own parents is called *xiao* (孝) with an emphasis on behaviour rather than attitude. Because the living and healthy body is regarded as a gift from the parents, loving one's parents implies taking good care of one's body. Originally the *act of xiao* was the performance of the sacrificial rite which the son as "family priest" offered for his deceased father (and his other ancestors) in the beyond (van Ess 2009: 22f.).

The hope to recapture the lost splendor of a glorious past was reinforced at various occasions in Chinese history, for instance during the Mongol occupation that led to the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 CE). The familiarity with the literature and art of the past was a badge of membership in the group of cultured Chinese families. It served as an invisible bulwark against unwelcome innovators. The Confucian answer to chaos and decay is this: The *model of the Zhou* (Western-Zhou-period 1046–771 BCE) can become reality again, if the social conduct which reliably produces the effects of that model is ritualized and can thus be institutionalized.

China has been ruled by *persons*, not by *principles*: The notion that everybody including the holder of the highest position in government is subject to a law binding to all, is absent to this day: “As a result, the ruled, including the officials themselves, have never sought for efficiency in administration. Rather the opposite has been true. Inefficiency and parasitism, on the one hand, remoteness of imperial control and a do-nothing policy by the emperor, on the other – this has always been the ideal” (Fei 1953: 26).

The absence of the Western notion of equality from China is related to the central position of family values there. The inner order of family life is not egalitarian; it is instead hierarchical. In the context of family interaction, a parent surely claims rights from which smaller children must be banned. Whereas an egalitarian society can produce social order based on the notion of universal brotherhood, a hierarchical tradition cannot do that, but must rely on obedience of the weaker plus responsibility of the stronger, as is typical for the interaction among members of different generations.

Confucius sees that for himself and for his disciples there is a scholarly task at hand, to construct – or rather re-construct out of familiarity with cultural history – the normative knowledge that is needed to lead a cultured and ethically spotless life. Since the family is the central social structure of Chinese society, the field of application of that normative knowledge *is the family*. From this principle originates at the same time the way the country has been governed.

Chapter 10 is called: *The West: Individualism at its Limits*. It starts in Part 1 with the topic of *Individualism and the Family* in the West. It confronts – with Chinese kinship principles – the *Family as Tragedy* in examples taken from European literature, where typically the clash between a normative family order and an individual's wishes lead to the demise of the clan. In China groups of relatives will go through phases of flourishing and declining, but their clan will not die.

The Chinese kinship group wields a level of authority, which a Western family will hardly ever attain. In the West the family is as finite as the life of the individual, imbued with the potential of failing, disintegrating and ending in divorce. In China the family is immortal, with individual persons serving as agents to carry it through the ages and if need be, to lead it out of tragedy and return it to a splendid come-back. It is plausible that in China under those historical conditions the government and the economy have the task of enabling and supporting kinship, not improving the lives of isolated individuals.

It seems that in the Occident individualism leads to *various forms* of family life, whereas in the Orient society is based on a firm and *unified* kinship tradition served by individuals. Rather than adjusting the behavior style of the person to the requirements of kinship, government, commerce, and religion as in the West, in China there is the tendency to adjust the requirements of each

of those segment to the needs of families: In a case where a father is known to have stolen something, his son is not expected to be among his father's accusers. – Next, in Part 2, the chapter presents Simmel's ideas on cultural evolution of kinship in the West

The third part of Chapter 10 deals with *Individualized Family Life*. While in China upon the birth of an infant the mother-in-law and possibly the mother of the young woman too will be available to assist with advice and active intervention, in the West increasingly kinship ties no longer function even in emergencies: The respective government has to come to the aid of weak or failed individuals. This observation leads to the insight, that individualization can be sustained only, and a sound and stable family structure can be successful only, provided it enables individuals to become bearers of the identifying core of their *traditional culture*.

Chapter 11 is about *China: The Kinship Society*. Part 1 explains *Cultural evolution of kinship in China*. As sources we use Granet's research and the Analects; Father and son were first related as superior and underling, because what initially created a lasting relationship between them, was "a bond of infeudation, a juridical and not a natural bond, and moreover, a bond of extra-familial nature" (Granet 2013: 311). Following the model of assemblies at the imperial court, domestic life forbids all familiarity. Etiquette rules there, not intimacy.

Part 2 presents Fei Xiaotong's: *Field Work on Contemporary Family Life in China*. Fei reports about flexible family arrangements in his book *The Social Structure of Hualan Yao*. He gives a detailed description of the Yao ethnic minority in the subtropical area of Guangxi. Fei compares the matrilineal roots still visible among the *Yao* with the more typical Chinese patrilineal families of the *Han*. Against the backgrounds of comparing cultures, monogamous marriage entails an evolutionary advantage.

Part 3 is called *Altruism and Selfishness: A precarious Balance*. The centrality of kinship in the Chinese culture is demonstrated by pointing to the fact that every Chinese name starts with the family name referring to membership in the kinship unit as crucial. Even in the early history of China "the political and economic organizations were wholly assimilated to that of blood relationship" (Li 1996: 67, quoted by Gassmann, 2006: 14).

In addition, young and modern Chinese increasingly see the option of combining loyalty to their relatives, dead as well as alive, with overarching religious belief systems as they are known and taken for granted in the West. The divine person in the beyond, whichever shape or imagery human imagination attributed to him or her, is worshipped as the giver of life. According to Yutang Lin unquestioned loyalty to one's relatives is the case "first of all" because of "the Chinese family system, which was so well-defined and organized as to make it

impossible for a man to forget where his lineage belonged" (Lin1936: 32). The vitality of the Confucian ethics guaranteed that.

Concluding Queries about Threats and Promises

1 *The Environment*

In this book I try to balance the evolutionary progress of Western societies toward increasing individualization and rationalization, against the disadvantages or threats these developments carry with them. I ask how Chinese culture succeeded in arriving at its specific balances: The demands in China on the individual in the context of his or her kinship unit are enormous by Western standards. They would be unbearable unless they were balanced by freeing the person from additional duties outside the family in areas which in the West are called "the public sphere." There, the demands on the person resulting from kinship obligations are limited if compared to Chinese conditions. Because of that, investing time and devotion to public service can more forcefully be expected in Western countries than in China as a duty supported by ethics and religion.

In general, what we are faced with world wide in the various periods of cultural history with regard to the tension between individual and society, are either balances or problems resulting from imbalanced conditions. The agonizing demands in China on the individual in the context of his or her kinship unit could continue to be a crucial component of Chinese culture through the ages because they were balanced. This theoretical approach does not excuse, but it helps explain Fei's complaint about throwing garbage where it does not belong, as I reported here in Chapter 1.

In China, at least till now, the balance has consistently tipped in favour of the private world and against the public realm. The latter was (and is to this day?) typically perceived as the *private sphere of interest* of a ruling dynasty. This observation is consistent with a number of types of largely ritualized social behaviour: In China people in general tend to be good husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, daughters and sons, but they will not form an orderly line at a bus station, as I stated above in the summary of Chapter 1.

The absence of an objectified public sphere in a culture impacts measures intended to protect the environment, but there are other significant consequences which could not be debated in the preceding pages: Such absence of an objectified public sphere precludes the successful establishment of the rule of law and of a parliamentary democracy. To the extent to which such conditions do in fact prevail, our hypothesis about the rule of law and about

parliamentary democracy would apply not merely to China, but to portions of the Muslim world and to other (including Western?) cultures as well.

These reflections justify looking at the prevalence of ethical exclusivity in a culture as a threat. Such exclusivity may take the form of racism, nationalistic chauvinism, religious intolerance, or others. In the Introduction here we saw that Bertholt Brecht discovered the universalistic teachings of Mozi about brotherly love among all humans, and that Confucians rejected that as animal-like. Then, in Chapter 1 it appeared – and be it by implication – that a religious foundation for acting in the interest of the entire human race can be a convincing point of departure for saving the environment, but that the Confucius-based ethic of exclusivity as described by Fei Xiaotong kept this from happening, because its ethical orientation resulted in rejecting *universalism*.

But still, as a reaction to Fei's reporting about the canals in Suzhou there is the *promise* that recognizing the responsibility for saving the environment can become a motivation among Chinese, supported more and more by the negative experiences with air pollution in the big cities of the present. To the extent to which that happens, the family-centered attitude toward the environment may be overcome, since it must be perceived as a *threat* of increasing magnitude.

2 *Religion*

Respecting the ancestors as immortals endows the ancient Confucian family traditions with a degree of religious power that surpasses ethical traditions of other cultures. As a result the individual Chinese person lives under considerable restrictions with regard to shaping his or her individual life, restrictions that are unfamiliar to the average Western person. This is particularly obvious if compared to a Western person whose family life has largely been secularised.

In the context of gradual modernization and individualization Buddhism opens up more options for contemporary Chinese than Confucianism does. Daoism too has potentially an effect as religious source of independence and by reducing the impact of the Confucian family rituals. As I mentioned above, according to Daoist belief the individual does not depend on personages in heaven, not on gods, saints, or even ancestors, but rather his fate is in his or her own hands. He or she must thus learn how to make good use of the potential awarded them. However, the effects of Buddhist or Daoist influences appear marginal against the overall Confucian background of Chinese culture. Neglect of the ritual obligations towards living family member as well as toward the departed is sinning against one's ancestors. Whereas in *Christian* cultures marriage and childbirth are attributed religious meaning – if at all – from

sources located primarily *outside* the kinship system, i.e. in congregation and church, the *Chinese* tradition provides religious orientation directly from *within the clan*, which reaches over into the beyond.

On the one hand the effect of religious familism in China results in ethical exclusivity: If I am Chinese, my primary ethical orientation is toward relatives and friends. Since that usually also effects the conduct of a public (and party) official, the results are threatening to public order. On the other hand, there is a promising ambivalence inherent in the familistic ethical system: It is expected of everybody to place his or her kinship group first, but because these prescription, which basically are rules of exclusivity, become general and apply to every Chinese, they create – as it were in the background – a quasi universalistic attitude, which, however, is of course limited to fellow Chinese. It may be looked at as universalistic as long as the only persons that matter in this world, are the Chinese. On a higher lever of global thinking, the effects are again those of exclusivity.

There is a similar ambivalence in Western ethics. Religious intolerance has been in the background of much of Christianity's early missionary history in spite of the fact that in its original and most ancient form Christianity propagates universalistic claims, including love for non-Christians. This was in agreement with Mozi's teaching of the principle of brotherhood of all humans. Communist China has taken over the intolerant stance toward alternative religious convictions from the West but became much more moderate over the decades, as Yang Fenggang found in his research (Yang 2012).

3 *Kinship*

The ritualised behavior required by Chinese kinship reality was expected from the imperial family all the way down to the simplest peasant household. Its unifying effect has for centuries counteracted the development of class struggles in a conflict society: The primary source of inequality was, and is, the position in a kinship group, not in one of societies classes! This made a revamping of Marxism necessary to meet the political needs of China. Whereas an egalitarian society can produce social order based on the notion of universal brotherhood, a hierarchical tradition cannot do that, but must rely on obedience of the weaker plus responsibility of the stronger, as is typical for the interaction among members of different generations in the family.

Confucius saw for himself and for his disciples that there was a scholarly task at hand, to construct – or rather re-construct again and again out of familiarity with cultural history – the normative knowledge that is needed to lead a cultured and ethically spotless life. Since the family is the central social structure of Chinese society, the field of application of that normative knowledge is the

family. From this principle originates at the same time the way the country has been governed.

We looked at European literature, where typically the clash between a normative family order and an individual's wishes lead to the demise of the clan. In China groups of relatives will go through phases of flourishing and declining, but their clan will not die. In the West, by contrast, increasingly kinship ties no longer function even in emergencies: The respective government has to come to the aid of weak or failed individuals whose relatives cannot help them or who do not have any relatives.

This observation leads to the insight, that individualization can be sustained only, and a sound and stable family structure can be continually successful only, provided it enables individuals to become bearers of the identifying core of their traditional culture. Unless individualization is based on that foundation it becomes a threat to peace. Could there be the promise that the Western countries combine their progressive tradition of believing in the blessings of change with some Confucian reflections about evaluating past experiences as a source for guidance?

4 *Business*

A Calvinist Protestant capitalist's view of having become wealthy is this: God counts me among the Chosen Few, and thus He made me rich. The oriental business person can base a similar attitude toward his or her own wealth on Chinese tradition: My ancestors support what I do, therefore I became wealthy. The Weberian thesis that earning money is widely thought of "as an end in itself" opens up the economy for a variety of value motivations, be those religious, patriotic, familistic, or others. All of these can be used to justify participation in capitalistic acquisition.

The distinction between getting rational capitalism started and keeping it going, shows that optimising the rational results in money making activities can be combined with and justified by a variety of value orientations that do not need to clash, if a rational interest as it were overarches them. Accordingly, economic cooperation can be carried on across deep divides of political ideology. This promise applies to commercial exchanges between China and Western countries.

Western business persons who are on an occupational assignment in China may feel threatened by differences in the style of oral communication. One Western businessman complains that: „In Chinese you sometimes you have to... guess the meaning...“ (Schreiter 2015: 107). If a Chinese person says „yes“ it does not mean „yes, I understand“ or „yes, I agree,“ but it merely means „yes, I am listening.“ In the culture context of China the primary task of an

interpreter may not be to transfer precise replicas of meaning but rather to enable a harmonious conversation (*ibid.* 116).

Obviously, as everything else, business related behavior is part of the overarching culture, which in China functions with a strong component of personalized rules and frequently rituals of conduct. Trust lies not as much in the ancient Roman demand *pacta sunt servanda* (contracts must be kept) but rather in the person, one is dealing with. Personalization of rules requires not to disappoint the ancestors, not to disappoint the parents, and – to a lesser degree – not to disappoint the foreign investors. The experience of Westerners that in China long-term – and even medium term – business success hinges largely on the trustworthiness of persons, who are known personally, may be a promise as well as a threat.

5 *Government*

In the area of “government” Confucius and his disciples saw the authority of the king (there were no emperors yet in those days) not as absolute, but as tied to ethical knowledge and as subject to judgment by a higher authority in the beyond. These are the conditions Confucius took as his vision of an admirable past and hoped to bring back to social and political reality. This intellectual tradition has repeatedly been revived as worthy after suppression. It cannot fail to have a gradual and long term influence on political conditions in China itself. Therefore over time it created a measure of self-confidence in dealing with members of other countries and cultures that had the threatening potential of degenerating into arrogance. The latter contributed to the problems in international relations that beset the 19th century.

The Opium Wars suggest that on the one hand the failure of China to defend herself effectively and the humiliation the emperor and his staff suffered at the hands of European nations caused deep-seated doubts about the Center Country’s own cultural traditions. On the other hand Europe appeared superior in many respects. That view caused curiosity and interest in Western ideas among open-minded Chinese. The military threats and aggressions from Japan, Britain, France, and Germany and the condescending diplomacy of Western powers toward China after World War I were interpreted by Chinese intellectuals as a historic situation compelling the Center Country to take over Western ways as a promise.

In the present time, some Western readers will perceive it as a threat that the Chinese learned from the Soviet Union and the United States to arm their military forces to the point where they have atomic weapons and space rockets at their disposal. Computer technology too has been an area of expertise Chinese experts learned in the Occident, and their military training includes

select specialist whose competence can be noticed world wide as threatening hacking activities.

6 *Cultural Evolution*

In general, the human condition implies a two-directional social orientation, inside toward the closest members of one's own small group, and outside toward members of other groups. This double orientation was enforced early on in the history of cultural evolution by some form of incest taboo, commanding young members of the in-group to marry someone from outside. We find it preserved all the way to the village in Fujian Province that was mentioned here in the Preface.

As we compare China to the West it seems that on a very broad level of generalization we are dealing with two different solutions for coping with the challenge of that duality of social contacts:

- a. In China solidarity can be based on the principle that everyone is imbedded in a kinship group following the same rules, everyone is subject to the same obligations and ritual standardization. Thus Chinese individuals potentially experience equality on the basis of the shared background of kinship duties. This gives the Chinese culture considerable flexibility to differentiate and develop multiple special forms of social conduct in the occupational world and what in the future will evolve as a public sphere.
- b. In the West the family experience of individuals varies greatly and produces life situations for adults – and even infants – with little significance attributed to kinship relations. In addition there is a retreating religious sphere, based in some cases on a God, who does not have a family around him. In traditional China, by contrast, even the most sacred being, the emperor, used to live in a family context. The conflict within Western culture between individualism and family-mindedness is reflected also in the fundamental thesis of the book by Cherlin (Cherlin 2010). It would be irresponsible not to acknowledge the threatening potential inherent in that trend.

Finally, I want to thank the reader for having had the endurance and patience to follow me all the way to this end: I want to take my leave from her or him by making a concluding statement that expects tolerance for gross simplifications as well as a sense of humour: It is a promise in the East-West-Relation that the Chinese wanted to learn from the West. It is a threat that they did.

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