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中國國族神學：
中國與韋伯一百週年
On China's National Theology:
Weber and China, 100 Years On

Student: Theo Poward
Advisor: Professor Yuan I

中華民國 108 年 12 月
December 2019

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Abstract

Recent scholarship in Political Theology, especially in how it relates to nationalism and identity formation, has often not factored into the discussion and concerns of mainstream International Relations and Political theorists. Most work has focused on the problematic category of 'religion' and mainly focuses on the topic of religious freedom in China and how it relates to wider issues in International Relations. There is a large divide between the work of scholars who have been reassessing and challenging the dominant paradigm for engaging with theology in IR: Secularisation, and the mainstream scholars who continue to operate under this paradigm. This piece attempts to bridge this divide by using the work of Max Weber, particularly his work on Ideal Types for Social formation, and adapting them in such a way that allows for an engagement with the Theological concepts that underpin contemporary societies.

To demonstrate this methodology in action, contemporary Chinese Nationalism is analysed using this adapted framework of analysis. Max Weber is doubly useful here because of his extensive engagement with China in his work 'The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism' which was published in the years before his death in 1920. This Thesis, therefore, updates both the methodology and analysis on the same subject, 100 years later.

Key Words: Chinese Nationalism, China, Nationalism, Theology, Political Theology, Sociology, Max Weber

摘要

在國際關係理論和政治理論領域內，政治神學理論很少在此領域被討論，更別說在民族主義理論或是認定形成理論裡討論。國際關係理論一般把政治神學理論歸類於“宗教”，這個分類造成了國際關係研究裡極大問題，導致政治神學只局限在中國宗教自由以及與其他國際關係相關議題。國際關係理論學者對政治神學沒有一致的看法而形成了兩個學派，包括認同世俗化理論的主流國際關係學者，以及反對世俗化理論的非主流國際關係學者。此論文將採用韋伯提出的理論來銜接雙方的歧異，並申論韋伯所提出的社會形成理念型理論，加以使用其理論來洞察政治神學是如何潛移默化地形成當代社會。

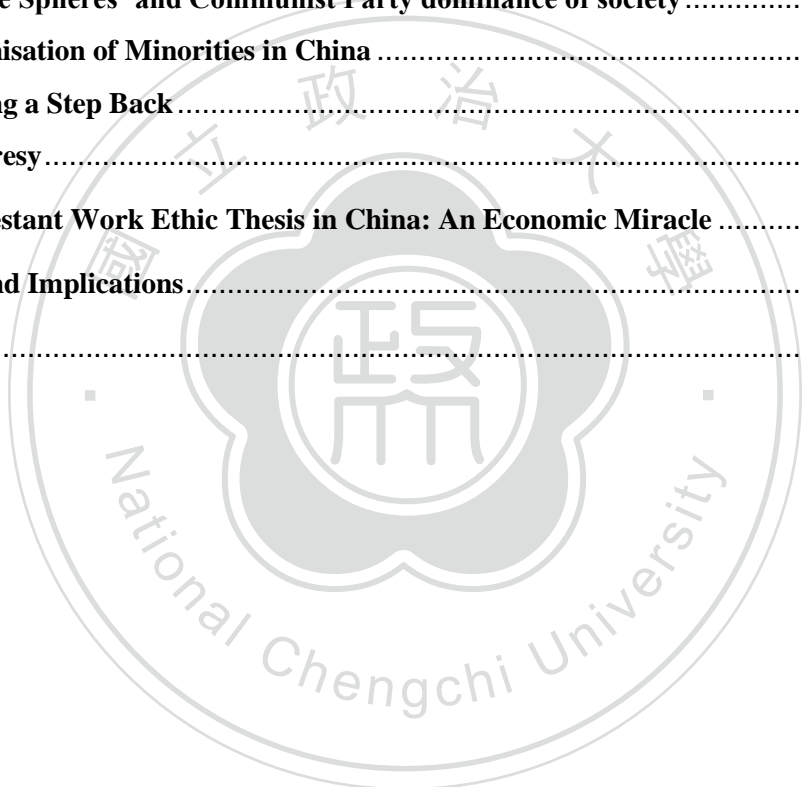
為了證明此方法可行，此論文將探討中國民族主義作為案例分析。韋伯曾在他 1920 去世前出版“中國的宗教：儒教及道教”一書申論中國宗教議題，本論文認為此理論對此研究論文具有相當大的實用性，本論文在韋伯去世 100 年後，針對了相同主題，同時也更新了原著的研究方法以及分析論述。

關鍵詞：中國民族主義、民族主義、神學、政治神學、社會學、韋伯

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1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale

This thesis will analyse the theological origins of Chinese Nationalism, especially in the form of the Communist Party of China. The rationale for such a project rests upon the following points.

The secularisation thesis: that 'religion' and politics are separable spheres of human activity; that any modern political system must be predicated upon the expulsion of 'religion' from said system; and that religion will gradually die off as the world progresses deeper into modernity; has come under intense criticism and scrutiny from many angles. However, this scrutiny has not been taken on board, or even recognised by most mainstream work looking at the origins of modern nations and political systems in general and China in particular.

The vast majority of scholarship written on the topic of theology and China is generally framed by discussion of a 'religious revival' in China, the fraught relations between the Communist government and various minority groups that inevitably falls into human rights abuses, and the effect that this has on China's relations with other countries, principally the United States. (Kindopp 2004) (Yu 2005) The assumption is that 'religious freedom' will forever be a sticking point in US-China relations. (Liu 2004, 149) In this context, the general arguments that are made are that China should adopt a more liberal/western approach to the 'religions' within its borders. (Chan 2004, 72) The most common arguments for engaging with theology are the positive role that so-called 'religious' groups can play in democratising, and the importance of understanding the threat of extremism. (Hamrin 2004, 175-176) Zhibin Xie offers a combined recommendation for China which he dubs 'liberal-constrained public religion'. (Xie 2006, 143)

There is a huge disconnect between this discussion and the recent works done in the field of political theology. The secularisation thesis itself can be traced to Max Weber and his thoughts that the 'increasing intellectualization and rationalization' had not improved our knowledge of the world so much as it had disenchanting it. (Derman 2012, 55) The negative view that Weber has of modernity (Gane 2004, 2) is often overlooked. He argued that at the end of the process of disenchantment we were faced with the prospect of "many old gods, demystified and thus in the shape of impersonal forces... rising up from their graves. They

strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another.” (Mommsen 1989, 140) Weber was talking about a conflict between different spheres of life. I'm talking about conflict over which social grouping dominates by commanding the lethal loyalty of a people.

This is an attempt to move the conversation on from the paradigm of secularisation. There is a paradigm shift underway in the field of Political Theology that so far has had little to no impact upon the scholarship in mainstream IR. The questions are changing from whether or not ‘religion’ is a factor, or whether or not people believe in a particular god. It is changing towards looking at how theology provides the concepts and ideas that help people in general make sense of the world around them, and what makes them willing to kill and die for those sense-making narratives. Weber believed that scholarship could not provide an answer to ‘the only question of importance for us: ‘What shall we do? How shall we live?’” (Derman 2012, 56) Picking a side in this endless war between the societies that control the lethal loyalties of the world’s population is not the aim of this thesis. The more modest aim of providing clarity of the origin of one of these modern gods: China.

In this way, this thesis seeks to address this gap in the literature by proceeding to study a modern nation, China, without reference or recognition to the assumed validity of the Secularisation Thesis. The choice of China as the subject of this thesis is no accident. Not only did Weber write extensively on Chinese theology, and not only does China hold a position of profound importance in contemporary global affairs, but the declared atheism of the Chinese government makes an analysis of their underlying theology all the more useful when attempting to demonstrate the relevance of theological concepts in areas where they are assumed irrelevant. In this way, the labels that people and groups assign themselves in terms of theology can be placed under greater scrutiny. These terms are complex and contested, yet this complexity is lost when nobody questions how they are used.

In many respects, the world in which he [Weber] came of age bears a striking resemblance to our own, perhaps more so than at any other point in the past half-century. The revolutionary consequences of economic globalization, the precarious nature of mass politics in an age of resurgent nationalism and geopolitical multipolarity, and the dwindling supply of natural resources trouble the imagination of scholars and policy-makers as they did 100 years ago. (Derman 2012, 226)

There is a tendency to naturalise the way the world is; to assume that the nations, identities, and power structures are somehow rooted in natural phenomena and are therefore ontological surds. One result of this type of thinking is that when problems occur, avenues towards potential solutions are blocked due to an entrenched lack of imagination. By taking something familiar, modern Chinese nationalism, and presenting it in light of constituent parts and influences that are not normally taken into consideration; by analysing it through a lens that is not normally used; a greater range and depth of understanding could be encouraged on the issues, opening up further avenues to pursue in the future. It is hoped that by taking such an approach with China's national theology, this thesis could contribute to such a thing.

This work is intended as a bridge. If this thesis can help in some way to open up the possibility for greater engagement on the topic being discussed between political theologians and more mainstream social scientists, then it will have achieved its rationale.

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis will address the following questions:

1. Can nations be understood and analysed as theological systems?
2. What is the nature of China's national theology?

The first of these questions will be answered positively through an adapted version of Max Weber's framework, which he outlines in his work *The Sociology of Religion* (Weber 1965), more work will be done going over the specifics of those revisions in the Methodology that is the focus of chapter three. The main issues surrounding Weber are his lack of clarity in his framework. Deeper analysis of these issues will form part of the Literature Review in chapter two of this thesis. These issues need to be addressed before a framework can be offered which can be used to answer the second question driving the research of this thesis.

The second question will be addressed through the application of the methodology to contemporary Chinese nationalism. The approach, like Weber's, is one that analyses the evolution of ideas and institutions throughout history to see how they led to the specific configuration that we see in our subject. The assumption that underpins this work is a strengthened version of one found in Weber; that theological principles and ideas can be found influencing the development of modern, supposedly secular, societies. The task of this thesis

is to outline the specific theological concepts and ideas that have been most formative in the construction of contemporary Chinese nationalism. This task, plus further analysis of the findings will form chapters four and five of this thesis before the work is concluded in chapter six.

1.3 Research Design and Analysis

The thesis builds upon two interconnected methods that are adapted from Weber. The first is a framework for analysing societal changes that looks at the interaction between orthodoxies and their challengers. Weber often deployed a genealogical approach to his work, measuring change through the personification of the Prophet, a charismatic figure who pushes for reform and, if the reforms won are insufficient, revolution. The Second is an oppositional framework composed of the theological-ideological makeup upon which these forces, and therefore the societies that they represent, can be mapped. For Weber, this was represented by the Priest and the Magician, and their related offices, roles and connected institutions. Here we have a method for tracing the development of the Chinese national theology by analysing key points in the history and measuring how they explain the development of contemporary China. It is important to point out that this is an interpretive piece, aimed at offering analysis of China, and maybe some hints towards predictions, rather than recommendations for the current Chinese leadership.

In Chapter four, the thesis will focus on the birth of the contemporary Chinese national theology. This will mean looking at the background factors; especially the Confucian Literati priesthood and the theological system they formed an integral part of since before China was first unified under the Qin. Following that the focus will be on the chaotic and violent transitional period between the Opium Wars and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party, often referred to by the Chinese as the century of humiliation. As is evident, these are periods of chaotic change rather than specific events. By analysing which specific theological concepts rose to ascendancy through these periods of turmoil we can trace the development of the theological system that is the contemporary Chinese nation. This will form the third section of this chapter.

Chapter five will analyse the major implications of chapter four. This includes to what extent the issues facing the Communist party are inherited from the Imperial leadership; the

theological reasons for the Communists winning dominance over the Nationalists, and the future and potential for reform in the Communist Party based on their theological configuration.

Finally, Chapter six will conclude the study by looking at broader implications and directions for further research that can be developed from this work. Including any weaknesses in this approach.

1.4 Key Terms

To avoid confusion, certain key terms are defined here. These terms are most likely used in a variety of ways outside this thesis but will be used uniformly as defined below.

- Theology – A theology is understood here broadly as belief that engenders action. This is done as belief takes the form of a narrative that gives shape to our experiences and allows us to interpret them into systems of thought that determine how we interact with the world around us.
- Priesthood – A Priesthood is a social grouping that have power over the narrative backbone of a theology. As a result, this is a group in society that is widely recognised in that society as having answers to questions; specifically, questions to do with existential matters and matters concerning the interpretation of experience. This is adapted from the work of Max Weber and will be explored in more detail in chapters two and three.
- Prophecy – Prophecy, and its medium the Prophet, is a force for change in a theological system. It is through this role, and its interaction with the priesthood, that socio-theological systems are shaped over time. This is another term adapted from Max Weber, and will also be explored in more detail in chapters two and three.
- Theological System – A Theological System can be understood in its most basic form as a Theology with a Priesthood and followers. It is argued in this thesis that any society can be seen as a theological system as all consist of lived narratives with leaders who maintain the health of belief in that narrative.
- Lethal Loyalty – The lethal loyalty of a person is the thing that said person is willing or compelled to kill or die for. In the context of theology and this thesis, it is akin to

true worship and devotion of a god.

1.4.1 On the term 'Religion'

The term 'religion' is almost always poorly defined. Writers who use the term 'religion' and its relation to social sciences, often do not give definitions. This is true of Huntington, and it is true of Weber. Weber starts his work *'The Sociology of Religion'* with a refusal to define it mixed with a hope that over the course of the work it will become clear what he is talking about. (Weber 1965, 1) Alternatively, writers may offer circular definitions. Zhibin Xie defines religion as 'a system of religious doctrines, religious believers, and religious organizations.' (Xie 2006, 3)

There is reason to believe that this inability or unwillingness to offer a concrete definition is not just because it is a difficult and contested term, like nationalism for example; but that there is little in the way of consistent and adequate conceptual grounding for the term to be useful. Furthermore, as William T. Cavanaugh argued in his important book *'The Myth of Religious Violence'* (Cavanaugh 2009) there is good evidence that the term is routinely used to cement power structures that allow for the persecution and discrimination of minority groups.

Talal Asad points out that the modern concept of 'religion' is an imposition that usually comes alongside colonial 'modernisation' efforts. (Asad 2003) Asad traces the concept of 'religion' to Western Christian theology, arguing that there is no possible transhistorical, universal definition of religion. (Asad 1993) This idea is backed up by William Cavanaugh. The fact that the term 'religion' is a western invention that sparked various neologisms in East Asia, (Yu 2005, 5) (Ashiwa 2009, 43) therefore comes as no surprise.

The recognition that defining 'religion' is an ongoing and often, though not always, voluntary negotiation informs Ashiwa and Wank's contribution to the topic. (Ashiwa 2009). Cheng-tien Kuo goes one step further and talks about how the Communist government can be seen as instigating a 'religion' of their own. (Kuo 2017, 13-14) This is much closer to the truth, but not the approach taken in this thesis. Instead, the approach here is that the CCP is not 'like a religion' but that it *is* the priesthood of a theological system, China, and secondly that it is not unique in this way. The term 'religion' confuses this point, so it has been dropped.

This leads directly into the widely held assumptions that this thesis is aimed at questioning. A principal one is the assumption that the distinction between 'religion' and

'politics' is a useful one to make. Using the term 'religion' often requires an implicit acceptance of this secularisation assumption. Seeing as this assumption is rejected in this thesis, so is the use of the term 'religion' in anything except the necessity of quoting or paraphrasing its use in other writers' work.

Another, related reason for not using the term, is the clarity that it then forces upon the author. 'Religion' can and is used as a placeholder for anything from charitable giving to irrational violence. It is therefore useful when writing to use terms that more accurately and relate to the meaning that is intended and are less open for misinterpretation.



2 Max Weber in Review

2.1 Political Theology

The mainstream assumption is that modern nations are predicated on the separation of 'politics' and 'religion'. That theology is irrelevant to political theory, and useless as far as analysing political institutions and forces. This can generally be described as the Secularisation thesis.

The strongest version of the secularisation thesis erects an insurmountable barrier between the public/rational/neutral and private/religious/subjective. A softer Habermasian theory of translation argues simply that theological concepts must be translated into secular terms in order to be relevant to the lives of the wider population. There have been multiple writers who have criticised such a position. Some have highlighted issues with how certain terms, like 'religion' (Asad 1993) (Cavanaugh 2009) and 'secularity' (Taylor 2007), are used. Others (Milbank 2013) question and sometimes explicitly reject the very foundations of the 'modern' paradigm of thought, arguing that all the secularisation thesis does is block us from analysing the theological foundations of our societies.

In this thesis, almost the opposite will be taking place. Political institutions, movements and parties will be translated into a theological framework to emphasize how pointless and backwards secularisation efforts are. A point of irony about this thesis is that the secularisation thesis can in part be traced back to the work of Weber and Disenchantment. This thesis seeks to use Weber to provide a framework, which is then improved by the inclusion of more recent work in political theology, to analyse modern China as a theological unit; complete with a priesthood and theological position driving its composition and action. The analysis of Weber offered in this Chapter draws primarily from Weber's work *The Sociology of Religion* (Weber 1965), but also is indebted to the interpretations offered by Joshua Derman (Derman 2012) and Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Mommsen 1989).

2.2 Weber's Framework

Weber is foundational to social science theory, and his work can be seen as a significant bridging point between work done in political theology and work done in social science. However, his work on political theology is often overlooked both by social scientists and political theologians, albeit for different reasons. The important thing to note for the purposes

of this thesis is the sheer difficulty of drawing only one coherent framework from Weber. Eric Voegelin wrote the following to Talcott Parsons on Weber's Method:

The prerequisite for having a school in science seems to me the development of a "method," of an "approach" on the part of the man who functions as the "head" of the school ... Weber's work is grandiose in its results, but the "approach" is precisely its weak point. Anybody who wishes to follow on the path of Weber, has first of all to create a new instrument for dealing with his materials. And the man who can do that is no "disciple" but inevitably a "head" in his own right.' (Derman 2012, 167)

I have no interest in setting myself up as the head of a new school on Weber. Instead, this thesis is probably better seen as the latest in what Guenther Roth described as 'a series of "creative misinterpretations"' of Weber's thought. (Derman 2012, 216)

Weber's framework of analysis shifted to fit whatever he was analysing. His study of 'religion' deployed 'ideal types to model the macro-causal effect of differences in religious ethics on economic development.' (Derman 2012, 157) It was for this reason that critics like Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued Weber's work on the topic should be seen as a work of history, as it traced developments within groups over time. (Derman 2012, 158-159) This seems to miss the plethora of causal connections that Weber drew between theological conceptions and sociological configurations. This thesis will build on this work in particular and turn it into another 'creative misinterpretation' that can help with the analysis of modern China as a theological system.

2.2.1 Weber's basic assumptions

In his analysis of Max Weber's work 'on Chinese Religions', Su-Jen Huang rightly points out that Weber's work is focused and built around answering the question of why modern capitalism developed in Europe and not in China. (Huang 1994) C.K. Yang confirms this in the introduction to the 1968 edition of Weber's *Religions of China*. He argues that the biggest question of the day concerned the 'causation of this mighty [industrial] revolution and the destiny of human society under its inexorable controlling influence.' (Yang 1964, xiv) A keen concern of Weber was that the historical materialism of Marxism had become the dominant paradigm for answering these questions. The Protestant Work Ethic Thesis was meant as a counter to this Marxist outlook. 'The Religion of China volume was intended as a

part of the substantiation for this thesis.’ (Yang 1964, xv)

Huang and Yang both point to the structure of Weber’s book; the first half of which looks at socio-political reasons and the second at theological reasons. (Yang 1964, xix) Huang’s criticism lies here; he points out a contradiction between ‘[Weber’s] official conclusion that the ultimate reason for the absence of rational capitalism in China (and, inversely, its rise in the West) was to be found in religion,’ (Huang 1994, 4) and the political analysis which ‘indicates that politico-legal conditions alone were sufficient to prevent the rise of rational capitalism in China.’ (Huang 1994, 4) This makes Weber’s further discussion of the theology of China interesting, but largely irrelevant. Huang writes that ‘This inconsistency mirrors the tension between Weber’s institutional and religious explanations for the rise of rational capitalism in the West that has long confused Weber scholars.’ (Huang 1994, 4)

Huang describes this as a ‘tension between his [Weber’s] political insight and his religious passion.’ (Huang 1994, 14) He notes that ‘abandoning the primacy of a religious argument in the Chinese case would not only have devastated his *Economic Ethic of World Religions*, but also jeopardized his Protestant ethic thesis.’ (Huang 1994, 14) Yang disagrees, for him Weber’s argument is that the material conditions do not favour either China or the West. So the differentiating factor is the ‘passive and traditionalist character of Confucian and Taoist values explaining why capitalism developed in the West but not in China.’ (Yang 1964, xix)

For Yang, the material and theological factors cannot be so clearly disassociated. Indeed, this is indicative of Weber’s thought ‘especially regarding his theory of religious values as independent voluntaristic influences on the nature of socioeconomic development.’ (Yang 1964, xiv) He notes the peculiarity of separating ‘Weber’s discussion on literati as a status group in the first chapter on Part II’ away from the other structural factors in Part I. (Yang 1964, xx) On this point Huang notes with interest that ‘Weber presents a historical insight concerning the causal relation between political and religious development – one which is usually overlooked by Weber scholars.’ (Huang 1994, 11).

Both authors seem to be hinting at a key basic assumption of Weber’s: the nature of this overlap between the socio-political and the theological. A key point of Weber is that people are proactive in how they understand reality, not reactive. This imaginative, theological, activity continues to shape socio-economic activity in direct ways. This was the point that made Weber’s thesis about the Protestant Work ethic so provocative.

The “inner affinity between the old Protestant spirit and modern capitalist culture” was to be found “*not* in its more or less materialistic or at least anti-ascetic enjoyments of life (as it is called), but rather in its purely *religious* features.” Seen from this perspective, the argument of *The Protestant Ethic* would have appeared entirely counterintuitive to Weber’s contemporaries. The sociologist Othmar Spann likely spoke for many when he declared that Weber’s thesis was as paradoxical as trying to “explain coldness from fire.” (Derman 2012, 88-89)

The point to make is that the causal chain does not flow from ideal to material or from material to ideal. It runs both ways with these factors co-influencing and combining to shape society in ways that are often impossible to separate. Weber’s separation of the socio-political and the theological should not be seen as him trying to identify independent strands of causation. For Weber, these things are separable in the same way that the proverbial chicken and the egg are separable. It is no surprise to Weber, as it seems to be for Huang, that we see great overlap both conceptual and institutional analysis of both the socio-political and the theological because for Weber these things endlessly feed into each other. A core principle for Weber was that you cannot have one without the other. (Parsons 1965, xxvii) In this way Weber’s broader project is more than offering a sociological methodology, it was an attempt to ‘explore one of the central problematics in the European tradition of moral and political thought: die entwicklung des menschentums (the development of the “human”), or how values and social orders shape individual personalities and capacities.’ (Derman 2012, 223)

Weber starts *The Sociology of Religion* by emphasising that the theological considerations he is focusing on are oriented towards this world and should be seen as fundamentally rational behaviour. (Weber 1965, 1) The question that Weber laboured over was not this, but rather how to analyse the connection between the theological and the socio-political. As Talcott Parsons tells us:

The central problem was whether men’s conceptions of the cosmic universe, including those of Divinity and men’s religious interests within such a conceptual framework could influence or shape their concrete actions and social relationships, particularly in the very mundane field of economic action... But Weber early became acutely aware, as many participants in the discussion still are not, that the problem of causation involved an analytical problem, one of the isolation of variables and the testing of their significance in situations where they could be

shown to vary independently of each other. (Parsons 1965, xxi)

In *The Sociology of Religion*, Weber does offer a starting point for what these variables that allow for such an analysis might be; it is to these considerations that we now turn.

2.2.2 A New Approach: Ideal Types as variables in Institutional development

Based upon the assumption that our theology influences and shapes our actions; specifically, the institutions we build to govern ourselves. Weber left himself the task of tracing the development of governing institutions. Such a project needed a new approach than the ones that were on offer. Weber's work can, to some extent, best be understood as a reaction against the German Idealism of his intellectual background 'which distinguished different or opposed methods as appropriate to the natural sciences and to humanistic studies.' (Parsons 1965, xxii) Weber's 'famous dictum that "not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's social conduct"' (Mommsen 1989, 147) stands in stark contrast to this.

Weber was famously against the materialism that would come to dominate the field of social sciences under the influence of Marx as 'he was convinced that the social action of particular groups is never determined solely by economic interests.' (Mommsen 1989, 62) However, he also 'repeatedly repudiated any imputation of an intent to "explain" all social developments as emanations and consequences of "idealistic" elements. His general position was as far removed from idealistic "emanationism" as it could possibly be.' (Parsons 1965, xxii) His protestant work ethic thesis was not trying to show that theology alone shapes society, but that it is a factor that cannot be ignored. (Mommsen 1989, 57) In Weber's mind, relying on materialistic or ideational explanations alone was too weak a position to maintain the complexity of the process of social development. This is paralleled by Weber's insistence that although 'values and scientific deductions were to be examined for their validity on a separate basis' it does not make sense to think of science as 'value-free' or even in the radical sense as 'value-judgement-free', that is, removed from politics or values.' (Mommsen 1989, 8)

This basic principle for Weber is tied to his rejection of 'approaches that claimed to discover objective historical laws or even an inner meaning to history' which he labelled "charlatanism." (Mommsen 1989, 55) His position was that interpreting reality was essentially impossible for the average person to do without a conceptual framework to rely on. 'Only when specific concepts and categories, formulated from the perspective of ultimate cultural values,

are applied to a limited segment of reality (which in itself is limitless), does it [reality] become meaningful.’ (Mommsen 1989, 55)

The methodological concept of ideal types should be interpreted in this context: ultimate values that can be used in analysis to notice patterns of change, not based on material or ideological factors alone, but how reality is constructed by the observer in relation to these fundamental, theological, constructions of reality. Through them we are thus able not to uncover objective laws of sociology, but law-like patterns of social development. (Mommsen 1989, 55) These ideal types are ‘nomological’ in nature, (Mommsen 1989, 123) meaning they do not have real form, they are useful interpretative constructions. Used for showing differences and trends in social development. And to do so without making ‘value-judgements.’ (Mommsen 1989, 123)

This accentuation is seen as value-neutral because ideal types are considered no more than instrumental in achieving the clearest possible conceptual understanding of given circumstances in the light of ‘ultimate’ viewpoints (Mommsen 1989, 124)

Mommsen tells us that ‘two categories of ideal types can be distinguished in Weber’s methodological writings.’ (Mommsen 1989, 124) The first he identifies as ‘Structural types’; i.e. constructs which represent structures, either ideal or material, that give shape to how reality is interpreted. To flesh out a framework, this set of ideal types are often presented as antinomies, ‘insoluble contradictions’, (Mommsen 1989, 66) between which lie spectrums that specific concepts and realities can be plotted. The second type of ideal types are ‘Types of social change’; i.e. constructs which represent historical processes in time, most specifically for our purposes social development. (Mommsen 1989, 124)

Both of these can be identified in Weber’s *The Sociology of Religion*. In this work, Weber attempts to develop his methodology by focusing on the process of change and how institutional changes are influenced and shaped by theological concepts and considerations. (Parsons 1965, xxii) In the distinction between different ideal types, we see the basis for the two parts of his methodology. One looking at the institutional process of change, which follows generally the same pattern regardless of the context; and the other looking at the theological concepts that inform the composition and direction of that change. This general structure informs the next two sub-sections of this analysis of his methodology.

2.2.3 Religious Virtuoso, Prophecy and Breakthrough

Weber's methodology focuses on the process of dominance, change and breakthrough. Put simply, the religious virtuoso is an office that represents the establishment and the prophet is a figure of change for Weber. The established order of a society inevitably involves some form of dominance of the general population under that order. The reason for this being tied to the 'religious virtuoso' is because it is theological constructions, produced by the 'religious virtuoso,' that give a society shape, people consent to their domination because of the sense-making work of the 'religious virtuoso'. Prophecy refers to strands of thought that rise up to challenge that order, and breakthrough refers to reform or revolution that comes as a result of more successful prophetic movements. This subsection will focus on outlining the relationship between them and therefore the basis of institutional dynamics that are present in every human society.

Domination and the Religious Virtuoso

For Weber, it seems that social formation begins with the search for questions.¹ In an imagined pre-history, Weber talks about those people who are able to answer questions and offer solutions to the wider society. An implicit assumption here is that such a role is necessary; that no society could do without answers to these fundamental questions. The one who provides answers, in Weber's imagined pre-historical society, is the one who is seen as able to channel 'extraordinary powers that have been designated by such special terms as "mana," "orenda," and the Iranian "maga" (the term from which our word "magic" is derived). We shall henceforth employ the term "charisma" for such extraordinary powers.' (Weber 1965, 2) We will return in more detail to the concept of 'charisma' later, for now, it is sufficient to say that these powers are the equivalent of being able to interpret and even shape the very fabric of reality; to channel divinity. This person is the 'Religious Virtuoso'.

This figure takes on a role of leadership over the process of interpretation of reality. They are theological leaders as they offer the primary means through which the wider society is able to interpret its existence and purpose in relation to reality. This is the nature of 'charisma' the ability to interpret and in some cases influence the nature of reality and draw information and lessons that are useful for the wider society. In this context, consent to the structure of reality as it is presented by a 'religious virtuoso' is the best way of interpreting what Weber

¹ I use the word 'seems' here because this is not explicitly stated by Weber, but can be easily inferred.

calls 'legitimate domination.' Within this Weber differentiated three separate types of legitimate domination: '*legal domination* [submission to the legal system and procedures] ...; *traditional domination* [submission to a custom or precedent] ...; and finally *charismatic domination* [submission to an individual leader.]' (Mommsen 1989, 21) These types will be the subject of greater focus in the section that discusses the antinomies charisma and bureaucracy.

It should be pointed out that in building up patterns of thought, action, and imagination within these systems, the 'religious virtuoso' is building up the society itself. The idea that Weber is playing with here is not the modern assumption that the 'religious virtuoso' is a self-serving parasite telling (at best noble) lies to ensure their own survival and position of power, dominance, within the society. Instead, the imaginative, theological, constructive work that the 'religious virtuoso' does; trying to bring meaning to the lives of those around them is seen to be a prerequisite for the society itself. Theology is not an aspect of the life of a society that has already been formed, it is the foundation that makes the existence of the society possible in the first place.

As Mommsen writes: 'There is... the insight that all social relations are ultimately relations of domination and that even the different types of democracy do not basically overcome domination, that is, the external determination of individuals by other individuals.' (Mommsen 1989, 32) This point might be easier to make if Weber had not framed it in terms of domination; the point is that every society is hierarchical and entails the acceptance either implicit or explicit, of a certain view of reality. As Parsons writes:

The ideas in question imply, not only social and behavioral patterns, but kinds and levels of motivational commitment required for the implementation of these implied patterns. The motivational commitments include both "belief," in the sense of seriousness of commitment to the cognitive validity of the ideas, and practical commitment, in the sense of readiness to put one's own interests at stake in the service of the ideas. (Parsons 1965, xxxiii)

This is what Weber means when he talks of democratic domination, (Mommsen 1989, 41) that is 'legitimate domination primarily in terms of acceptance of effective leadership' (Mommsen 1989, viii)

The specific insight that seems to cause the most problems here is the necessity of such domination. It is necessary to have some rudimentary ‘systematisation of a pattern or program *for life as a whole*, which is given meaning by an existential conception of the universe, and within it the human condition in which this action can be carried out.’ (Parsons 1965, xxxiii) Implied here is that without such theological systematisation, we would be unable to function, not because we would fall into some form of existentialist crisis, but because the raw information that we collect by our senses would be overwhelming and we would not be able to cope. In other words, theologising in this way is built into humans, it is part of our existence.

In this, we see the basis of drawing people into acts of devotion and dedication that we would call worship. The 'Religious Virtuoso' provides the foundation for the society; including all the actions that are done in its name. This finds its parallel in Durkheim’s idea that ‘worship of a god is the symbolic means by which people worship their own society, their mutual dependency.’ (Kertzer 1991, 86)

As is probably clear this presents a fundamental challenge to the liberal enlightenment vision of freedom. On the fundamental question of identity, there is no neutral frictionless ground where we are sovereign and able to choose our allegiances, there is no Archimedean point. The question is not if we choose to devote ourselves to something, but what we choose to devote ourselves to. It is a mistake to think that we are capable of believing in nothing, of worshipping nothing. The only capacity we retain is deciding what to believe in, what to worship.

Such a conception has led to fierce debates over Weber himself; from looking at his life and works it seems variously accurate to describe him as a nationalist and as a liberal. There is a lot of debate around which one is a better description. (Mommsen 1989, 24-25) Following this strand of thought, however, it seems correct to follow Mommsen and say that Weber was both a Liberal and a Nationalist. (Mommsen 1989, 25) Unlike Mommsen, we do not need to see this as a contradiction.

That there is no neutral place to stand, and no way of objectively determining a 'correct' place to stand, does not absolve us of the necessity of standing somewhere. In other words, nothing could tell us or compel us to stand in a specific place, to believe in a specific god. On this point, Weber could be described as a liberal.² In fact, the increased knowledge of other

² On this point, we can see huge similarities with Charles Taylor's re-conception of the meaning of ‘Secularism’

societies and theological systems gave us greater leverage when forming our choices. 'Weber ultimately appealed to what he called the "polytheism" of modern life - the notion that the highest values capable of guiding human action were locked in a conflict so fundamental that no scholarship was capable of mediating among them.' (Derman 2012, 10) However this increased level of choice did not permit us to avoid choosing an altar, or multiple altars, to worship at. Weber is quoted as saying the following:

We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense. As Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity. (Gane 2004, 28)

If you have to choose your god, then Weber chose Germany. He was a nationalist in that he wanted Germany to be strong, to defeat its enemies in wars if it came to that. He was also a liberal in that he saw the importance of maintaining free competition between different groups in order to make that society stronger. In this way, he thought that competition between different theological systems, societies and sub-societies maintained the health of a society. This will be explored in more detail as part of the discussion on bureaucracy and charisma.

In all this, we can see that this role of 'religious virtuoso' is used by Weber to personify the sense-making activity of any theological system. And how such paradigms for operating within reality come to dominate people's minds, either through unquestioned obedience or a wilful submission. In this way, the figure is related to the established or orthodox position of a society.

It is within this framework that the place of Weber's key concept of prophecy is to be understood. The prophet is above all the agent of the process of breakthrough to a higher, in the sense of more rationalised and systematised, cultural order, an order at the level of religious ethics, which in turn has implications for the nature of the society in which it has become institutionalised. (Parsons 1965, xxxiii)

It is to this process that we now turn our attention.

Prophecy and Breakthrough

Weber asks the question 'What is a prophet, from the perspective of sociology?' (Weber 1965, 46) In the context of an established socio-theological system a prophet, for Weber, is an agent that seeks to bring change to that system. This could either be a figure that wants to engender a radical break with the orthodox establishment or one who wants to return to a purer, older interpretation of it. As opposed to the 'religious virtuoso' 'the enterprise of the prophet is closer to that of the popular orator (demagogue) or political publicist than to that of a teacher.' (Weber 1965, 53)

Weber outlines different types of prophet, (Weber 1965, 54-55) what unites them all is leadership. This is one way Weber distinguishes them from the 'religious virtuoso' who are normally 'organized into guilds or official hierarchies.' (Weber 1965, 60) If successful then the followers of the prophet form a permanent community 'helpers, who are active co-workers with the prophet in his mission and who generally also possess some special charismatic qualifications.' (Weber 1965, 60) Weber dedicates a lot of time to analyse the reasons that such prophetic breakthroughs might take place, what circumstances might result in them being successful, and what might the possible responses be from the establishment. These questions will all be engaged with when we encounter the more practical examples in China's history in chapter four.

For now, a basic point can be made. As has been explored above, Weber was 'firmly convinced that individuals are consciously guided by ultimate values of whatever sort.' (Mommsen 1989, 58) These ultimate values are systematised into a theology that seeks to make sense of reality that surround the person. With this background it seems clear that 'the more these values stand in opposition to everyday reality, the more far-reaching their effects.' (Mommsen 1989, 58) In other words the greater the disconnection between the theology that underpins the society and the material reality that people experience, then the greater the call for prophecy. This fits perfectly with the idea that society is shaped not by either ideas or materiality alone, but an interplay of the two based on a theological grounding that helps people to make sense of their reality.

Prophets and their followers present a challenge to those 'religious virtuoso' by presenting or representing an experience that does not fit with the narrative that is offered to make sense of everything. The 'religious virtuoso' in response must 'assume the obligation of

codifying either the victorious new doctrine or the old doctrine which had maintained itself despite the attack of the prophets.’ (Weber 1965, 67)

What is important to note here is that ‘at each primary decision point... the alternative is between a direction which makes for a source of evolutionary change in the “established” order, and another direction which tends either to reinforce the established order or at least not to change it drastically.’ (Parsons 1965, xxix) The theology at the heart of the society is constantly systematised based upon ‘the power of prophetic charisma and the enduring habits of the masses.’ (Weber 1965, 79) We can see that the evolutionary nature of this method is not intended to be read progressively. Weber does believe in the inevitable progress of history and leaves the option open for regressive as well as progressive change. This leads us to an oppositional that runs throughout Weber’s work.

2.2.4 Priest and Magician: Bureaucracy and Charisma

The above can be seen as an exploration of the principle ideal types of social change that will be central to this thesis. Alongside it, there needs to be an exploration of the equally important structural ideal types. It is to this that we now turn.

Weber’s focus on change means that ‘already present in this underlying thesis is Weber’s evaluative distinction between what we may call progressive and regressive changes.’ (Parsons 1965, xxxi) This will help set the stage for a set of structural antinomies that run throughout Weber’s work: charisma and bureaucracy. If the previous section gives us the general process of societal change, these two concepts decide the shape and direction of that change. Priest and magician are presented in Weber’s methodology as representative of this dichotomy. Weber’s analysis looks at societal development by considering priest and magician as a ‘set of two principle alternatives of social structuring, after which his methodological problem is to clarify the differences and relations between these alternatives, as well as to clarify the conditions relevant to tipping the balance in one or the other direction.’ (Parsons 1965, xxix)

It may seem strange considering the word's prevalence in common parlance; but, before Weber, the term 'charisma' was a specialised word from Christian theology meaning 'grace' and referring to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on true believers. 'By lifting the Greek concept of charisma from its original theological context, Weber introduced both a new

word and a new concept into the modern social sciences.’ (Derman 2012, 12) Weber uses the concept of charisma in terms of perceived power or knowledge over reality. That or those who have answers to the big questions and are thus able to bring meaning to people’s lives and shape reality.

The question is whether we are active in pursuing that knowledge or passive during ecstatic episodes of possession. This distinction can be seen everywhere from the faith vs works debate in Christian theology to the nature vs nurture debate concerning general talent. How the question is answered determines whether the society comes to view theology as an art or a science.

For Weber, the magician works in a state of ecstasy; gaining power through possession by, and coercion of, gods and spirits; this is the nature of magic. The priest, on the other hand, seeks to merely understand the forces that are at work in the world and thus offer guidance and predictions that help the society to harmonise itself with these universal powers. The magician's idea that divinity can be coerced is anathema to the priest and the reason why many monotheistic theological systems decry the use of magic. We see the difference through their effects on the societies that they influence. Weber finds it essential to:

set up as the crucial feature of the priesthood the specialization of a particular group of persons in the continuous operation of a cultic enterprise, permanently associated with particular norms, places and times, and related to specific social groups. There can be no priesthood without a cult... magicians may wield considerable power, and their essentially magical celebrations may play a central role in the life of their people. Yet they lack a continuously operative cult, and so the term “priest” cannot be applied to them. (Weber 1965, 29)

In other words, as is natural to his project, you see this difference in theology through the practical effects that it has on the wider society. The unifying, systematising work of the priesthood necessarily lends itself to building societies that are centrally organised and highly ritualised with a class of officials who oversee that these rituals take place and that the wider society is educated on their function and the theology they represent. The individualised, ecstatic work of the magician naturally lends itself to the development of a parochial and diffused society where the experts are leaders that are approached on an ad-hoc basis to solve specific problems as and when they arise, normally with only a vague knowledge of each

other's work. New magicians are found, as opposed to educated, to have this gift.

For Weber, the direction that society develops in depends upon which of these experts is listened to and approached for answers. The more a virtuoso is listened to, the more their voice shapes the theological narrative that underpins the society's existence, and therefore necessarily gives it a precise form.

It is in this context that Weber's differentiation between the types of domination is to be understood. The more charismatic the leadership the more the society submits to an individual leader (Charismatic Domination). One level of abstraction away and a society may submit not to a particular person but more the custom or precedent that a certain charismatic leader laid down for the society to follow (Traditional Domination). A system that is further abstracted away from charismatic leadership sees a society that submits to a legal system and certain impersonalised procedures (Legal Domination). (Mommsen 1989, 21)

Despite these categorisations, Weber has difficulty giving specifics in the differentiation between the people associated with these two opposing positions. He gives multiple options for doing so (Weber 1965, 28-29) but ends up admitting that 'the two contrasted types flow into one another.' (Weber 1965, 29). We can see this in the contrasting ideas about education. The priest needs to learn skills and knowledge by rote as they are a blank slate whereas the magician would undergo 'an "awakening education" using irrational means and aiming at rebirth.' (Weber 1965, 29) In reality, these two types are impossible to clearly delineate. This is equally true of different societies; it is a spectrum between charismatic domination and legal domination, with traditional domination somewhere in between.

The various effects of this dichotomy is laid out neatly by Mommsen who characterises the effects that these have on social change as either 'Value-rational change', which is charismatic change, and 'Instrumental-rational change', which is change bureaucratic change. This can be seen below:

Value-rational change [Charismatic]	Instrumental-rational change [Bureaucratic]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Otherworldly world-views ● Ideal interests ● Substantive-rational life-conduct ● Value-rational social action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Innerworldly world-views ● Material interests ● Formal-rational life-conduct ● Instrumental-rational social action

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charisma, leading to substantive rationalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routinization, leading to formal rationalization
<p>Amounting to: Challenge to given social order on the basis of various forms of otherworldly life-conduct ranging from extreme asceticism to restless innerworldly activity</p>	<p>Amounting to: Adaptation to given social order; progressive forms of realization of its immanent principles via routinization and rationalization’ (Mommsen 1989, 154)</p>

Rationalisation and the Benefits of Bureaucratisation

Weber does not hide his view that the priest represents rational progression and the magician irrational regression. At one point he goes as far as to paint the magician as merely the priests undoing, a destructive force that offers nothing. ‘On the one hand, there is an ever-broadening rational systematization of the god concept and of the thinking concerning the possible relationships of man to the divine. [The Priest, Bureaucratic domination] On the other hand, there ensues a characteristic recession of the original, practical and calculating rationalism. [The Magician, Charismatic domination]’ (Weber 1965, 27)

This fits with a general assumption we have that more rational, and therefore efficient, effective, and productive societies are preferable to less rationally organised societies. It is indeed true that Weber welcomed bureaucratic organisation as a means by which less violent, more economically productive societies come about. In fact:

Weber welcomed the techniques of bureaucratic organization for moral reasons as well. Rigorous rationalization of one’s own life-conduct in order to maximize the chances of achieving one’s personally chosen goals appeared to him an essential element of a moral code of behaviour in consonance with the ‘ethic of responsibility. (Mommsen 1989, 110-111)

As previously explored, for Weber, meaning is chosen, self-given. Rationality helps us to determine the best way of ordering our internal lives as well. At a glance, we might assume that the further we move towards bureaucratisation in terms of constitutionally bound societies where everything is governed by legal codes and not the charismatic domination of personal wills, the better.

This seems to be true only to a certain extent in Weber's thought. In fact, pushing too far in the direction of bureaucratisation, perhaps the defining characteristic of the disenchanting

and secular modern world, had brought about a whole new set of problems that Weber was highly concerned by.

The Dangers of Disenchantment

A key feature of a bureaucratic system for Weber is the separation of the owner and operator in any system. This depersonalised system then could operate free of irrational concerns and fears, simply growing and spreading in accordance with its own internal rationality. Since it originated in Europe, the rationalised processes of industrial, modern, capitalism had spread across the world in what Weber recognised as an irreversible manner. It had brought with it rationalised systems of governments, constitutions, and codified legal systems that allowed for business to run smoothly. This single bureaucratic system had spread to all corners of the globe and had already in Weber's time come to incorporate not just economics, but academia and politics as well. (Derman 2012, 74)

Usually, Weber noted that 'as the masses increasingly became the object of the priests' influence and the foundation of their power, the priestly labors of systematisation concerned themselves more and more with the most traditional, and hence magical, forms of religious notions and practices.' (Weber 1965, 77) The specific dangers of Disenchantment is that the Priesthood of a society, the 'religious Virtuosos' concern themselves solely with producing a more highly rationalised operation; they do not see themselves as owners of the system. The importance of preaching and pastoral care in this system is the primary means of contact, influence and control over the laity. Present in all rationalised systems. (Weber 1965, 75-76) Disenchantment means that even preaching and pastoral care become depersonalised. Thus in every profession and in all sectors of society leadership is replaced with bureaucracy.

This scared Weber. We might think that the death of God frees us to order our lives how we want. But the separation of owner and operator only solidifies the operator as a functional part of the system, making them homogenous machine-people, unable to break free. As Gane puts it 'The rationalization process ... while seeming to contain a heterogenous or *postmodern* moment ... in fact intensifies the underlying sameness of culture, and with this contributes to the increasing sameness of modern life itself.' (Gane 2004, 28) In this way industrial capitalism leads to the bureaucratization that destroys individual liberty. (Mommsen 1989, 34-35) Central to Weber's thought is the point that as the world becomes increasingly devoid of charisma, increasingly disenchanting, we may become free from *relationships* of domination but we become increasingly subject to *rationalised systems* of domination. Weber

wrote, “The Puritan *wanted* to work in a vocation; we are *forced* to do so.” (Mommsen 1989, 37)

As may be clear, it can be difficult to make sense of Weber’s thought here. According to Mommsen:

There is a paradox here. On the one hand, Weber argued that the immanent tendencies of capitalism were working for stagnation and for the ossification of social relations. Yet, on the other hand, he viewed the principle of capitalist market competition as an instrument which above all would guarantee a maximum of dynamism in the economic as well as in the political system. (Mommsen 1989, 39)

To solve this paradox, balance is fundamental. Weber has been consistently misunderstood on this point, Mommsen thinks this is an inconsistency and weakness in Weber’s thought. (Mommsen 1989, 19) As a result, clarification will be the focus of the next sub-section.

The Importance and Possibility of Balance

What becomes clear from reading various works by Weber is that he views the charisma-bureaucracy dichotomy as running through all societies, and a balance between them is necessary to preserve the health of any particular society. The resolution to this supposed paradox is a creative balance between a bureaucratic system, which manages the rules of engagement, so to speak, and the charismatic leaders of different competing groups. Politics and economics become sport, with redistribution written into the rules to ensure fair competition. The aim is the promotion of competition. Weber, writing in the context of the Weimar republic saw excessive bureaucratisation as a threat to freedom. This feeds into his criticism of Marx who would remove competition by systematizing everything so that the workers always win. Weber argued that even if this were possible it would destroy the freedom of the individual in the same way that unfettered capitalism does.

For Weber, the way to redress this imbalance was for system to allow for the rise of charismatic leadership. For Weber, this is the proper role of the politician, somebody who would not merely operate within the system but also take a degree of ownership over it. (Mommsen 1989, 15) 'Weber saw in bureaucracy both a potential danger to individual liberty and an effective instrument in the hands of great personal leaders' (Mommsen 1989, ix) For

Weber this was the only way to ‘counter the secular trend towards the petrification of free society in routine, mediocrity and general misery.’ (Mommsen 1989, 43)

This has drawn plenty of attention especially because of Weber's avowed German nationalism and the fact that he was writing in the immediate prelude to the rise of Adolf Hitler. This is compounded by the fact that a frequent correspondent of Weber, Robert Michels, became a famous supporter of Mussolini and consistently tried to convince Weber to join the new fascist movement. 'The perpetuation of an element of 'recognition by the ruled' in the form of democratic elections, already formalized to an excessive degree in Weber, was declared by Michels, as it was by Carl Schmitt, to be dispensable.' (Mommsen 1989, 102) Weber died before the Nazi's rose to power, but he was viewed by some in the regime favourably because of his opposition to the objectivity claimed by liberal values. Some Nazi's argued that

The anarchy of political values under liberalism was itself a thing of ill repute, they argued, and Weber had been right to prevent it from contaminating German scholarship. [they mean remove scholarship from the intellectual foundations of liberalism, keeping it open to competition from different foundations] Now that a prophet and savior had arrived in the form of Adolf Hitler, bearing “objective” values that were binding on all Germans, the war of the gods had ceased. Under these conditions... scholarship could be oriented toward the German *Volk* and its historical destiny. (Derman 2012, 76)

It is important to stress how much of a misinterpretation of Weber's thought that this is. Weber argued that the only way of preserving individual freedom was for the 'war of the gods' to never cease. He fought against the liberalist claim of objective foundations just as he argued against claims to objective foundations that are scientifically demonstrable. Once you argue to know the 'right' answer then the conversation is brought to an end and with it the freedom of the people to continue disagreeing. For Weber, science ‘was not in the position to formulate definitive truths, but only a number of alternative models of thinking or alternative models of conduct which ultimately cancelled each other out.’ (Mommsen 1989, 43) The lack of concrete foundations ensured liberalism for Weber.

‘Unlike political utopians from the left and right of the political spectrum, Weber abjured all claims to represent totality. His personal commitments were always directed at concrete goals instead of dogmas or universal systems.’ (Derman 2012, 134) Contrary to liberal

constitutionalism, liberty cannot be ensured by bureaucracy. Contrary to fascism, it cannot be ensured by a charismatic leader. Both of these positions destroy freedom by removing the creative tension between charisma and bureaucracy. If secularism means anything it means ensuring that no single group or institution is allowed to dominate society.³

With Weber, therefore, we end up with a version of 'heroic pessimism' with noticeable similarities to Nietzsche. (Mommsen 1989, 26) The only thing that can be expected of a person is to pick a place to stand, an altar to worship at; and fight for that without ever gaining total victory or suffering total defeat. For Weber open competition between these different theological positions is the basis of liberty.

Weber was a German nationalist. He was also a liberal, but his understanding of liberalism meant ensuring the health and freedom of the German people by ensuring that no one group came to dominate German political or intellectual life. He did not see an endpoint of the competition, a utopia, or final victory, as at all desirable, because an end to the conversation was the loss of freedom. The disenchantment that defined modernity for Weber is therefore not a good thing, nor a bad thing, it is merely the realisation that we remain in an endless struggle for meaning, and that it can be no other way.

2.3 Problems with Weber

It is hopefully clear why Weber has been chosen for a project focussed on China's national theology. By adapting the two types of ideal types that he deploys we will be able to produce a methodology that helps us identify the key actors and institutions in the socio-theological system and analyse the theological concepts that motivate and shape their actions. This will be the focus of the next chapter. Before this, it is necessary to highlight issues that stand in the way of such adaptation and deal with them appropriately.

2.3.1 Disenchantment and the End of History

As we have seen above Weber balked at the suggestion that there is an overarching direction of history. However, he also argued that

³ As noted before, the case can be made for the similarity between this definition of secularism and Charles Taylor's.

one of the most significant achievements of the West was the creation of a bureaucratically organized institutional state, with a clearly delimited territory, a rational legal order and its own staff of bureaucrats serving only the reasons of state and operating within the framework of clearly defined competences, but above all in possession of the monopoly of physical violence. (Mommsen 1989, 13-14)

As pointed out above, however, the impressive nature of this achievement does not mean Weber was not concerned about its implications.

As early as 1893, Weber predicted that, within a few generations, capitalism would destroy all tradition-bound social structures, and that this process was irreversible. He described modern capitalism as an essentially revolutionary force and believed that it was not possible to arrest, by any means, its triumphal march. (Mommsen 1989, 53)

Disenchantment means that our institutions are stripped of their charismatic underpinning and origin. Weber did not see this development as natural or determined, but he did see it as present, and now that it has started it seemed irreversible. This unfortunately and unnecessarily, lends his thought to everything from the myth of progress and the end of history narratives that he despised.

Weber saw the Weimar republic as an overly bureaucratic, soulless system, which threatened people's freedom due to it being unable to produce an effective charismatic leader who could properly direct the system. He wanted a balance between bureaucracy and charisma, as he saw that as the only way to ensure personal freedom. However, in much of his writing, he seemed to be resigned that the march of bureaucratic disenchantment was, if not irreversible, 'obviously the dominant trend of our time.' (Mommsen 1989, 109) For somebody who was so opposed to totalising views of history, we might wonder where this line of thought comes from.

If we look at Weber's bureaucracy-charisma opposition in the persons of the rational priest with the magician, then it seems that contained within this the idea that a rational system leaves no room for so-called 'magical thinking'. That eventually a bureaucratic priesthood will leave such things behind, only focussing on 'this-worldly' phenomena. The link that is drawn here is that rationalisation means greater focus on 'this-world', therefore irrationality draws people to care more about 'other-worldly' phenomena.

Weber's primary concern is the exploration of these different possible natures, and the directions these natures may take when attempting to answer by rationalising the problems of the meaning of life. Weber's "rationalisation" is thus intellectual, in that it has special reference to "existential" (though nonempirical) ideas, but is also teleological or normative, in that it places obligations on men with respect to their conduct in *this* life. (Parsons 1965, xxxiii) (Emphasis added)

The underlying assumption here is that greater focus on 'other-worldly' concerns makes for more useless or wasteful action, action that does not produce anything substantial or measurable in 'this-world'. The problem with this is that it seems to contradict one of Weber's foundational assumptions; that people only listen to a religious virtuoso if they see benefits from doing so. When your role in society is to produce answers that bring noticeable benefits to the people of that society, then as soon as you are seen as unable to fulfil that role you and your answers will be ignored. The rejection of this basic premise also seems to limit the role that prophets might play in Weber's system as agents of change; placing much more power in the camp of the conservative forces opposing the prophet and the effectiveness of their theodicies and responses to the challenge that the prophet brings. Weber himself argues that the development of a theodicy is part of the process of social development. (Weber 1965, 139) Therefore even a prophet who does not bring about a breakthrough will still engender change and development in society, forcing the socio-theological system to respond to the experiences of the people living within it.

The only explanation for people dedicating themselves to a social configuration that does not produce any benefit for them is that they are being deceived into doing so. This fits with the modernist and materialist assumption about the origins of theological systems. It also gives far too little credit to people in assuming that they could be deceived in such a large scale manner, and too much credit to the people supposedly able to pull off such a deception. Weber, in some places, seems intently against such an assumption. As we have discussed, a key observation of Weber is that theological considerations are primarily concerned not with 'otherworldly' concerns. Indeed 'particularly important is Weber's insistence that the conception of a supernatural order does not imply any "transcendental" goals or focus of interest for man. The aid of the supernatural is sought... entirely in the interest of mundane, worldly concerns: health, long life, defeat of enemies, good relations with one's own people, and the like.' (Parsons 1965, xxviii) With this assumption, it seems that such a large scale and

long-lasting deception, where people are made to work against their interests in perpetuity, would be unsustainable. This tension in Weber leads us to a greater contradiction, to which we now turn.

The argument that is being made here is that perhaps Weber saw this process as inevitable because he tied the excessive bureaucratisation of Disenchantment with the loss of belief, the Nietzschean 'Death of God'. The problem with doing so is that it blinds the user to the persistence of charismatic infusions of personalised faith in the modern world. By this, I do not simply mean people returning to traditional theological systems like Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. The more interesting, significant, and overlooked charismatic turn in the modern world is the explosion of nationalist fervour. Nations, after all, are the dominant systems of the planet, and they demand the devotion and lethal loyalty of the people of the world. This became violently obvious in the time shortly after Weber's death, and remains true today. The nation is the dominant theological system of our time.

Tied to this is the recognition that the modern world was never disenchanted. The highly bureaucratised systems of global economics, business, and politics has constantly come into conflict with the more localised charismatic associations; be they nations, insurgencies, caliphates. Neither can claim or is likely to claim victory. Indeed it is only by divorcing Weber's methodology from his totalising view of disenchantment that we free it from the 'end of history' narrative that he so opposed.

In reality, just as with any spectrum of creative tension, all social systems require charisma to win devotion and bureaucratisation to direct said devotion. The concept that one side of this spectrum could come to dominate for all time is misguided. It is not clear if Weber recognised this. But regardless of whether he did, with this recognition in mind, we can use an adapted version of Weber's method which retains the dynamism and adaptability that was originally envisioned.

2.3.2 Secularisation contradiction

The secularisation thesis is born from a certain interpretation of Weber's thoughts on Disenchantment. The thought is that increasing bureaucratisation leads us to a historical moment wherein 'The individual was called upon in all intellectual honesty to confront the basic fact 'that he is fated to live in an age that is ignorant of God and in which prophets are unknown.'" (Mommsen 1989, 133) Gane is not alone in tying this to the nihilistic Nietzschean

'death of God' thesis where 'the highest values devalue themselves.' (Gane 2004, 21) The way to understand this idea of values 'devaluing themselves is through Weber's analysis that this bureaucratisation started with the removal of the 'old gods' by the 'universal religion' (Gane 2004, 33) which is Christianity. The shift from polytheism to monotheism also contained with it the shift from charisma to bureaucracy, this bureaucratic mind-set then undid itself by its own rational progression.

As we said above, the origin of this idea of rational progression is born from the distinction between 'this-worldly' and 'other-worldly' concerns and actions. This is a familiar construction and one that brings us to another major problem in Weber's thought. As Parsons writes:

The next very essential step in Weber's analytical construction is the definition of the religious community... The type of collectivity in which Weber is here interested is one specifically organised about religious interests as such, which is thereby distinct from other "secular" collectivities in the same society. (Parsons 1965, xxxvi)

Parsons tells us that Weber is in this case not looking at a society as such, 'but rather a religiously specialised subgroup within a society, a "sect" or a "church".' (Parsons 1965, xxxvii) This is despite the recognition in the previous sentence that whole societies can be and are underpinned by theological considerations. (Parsons 1965, xxxvi). We might ask why this distinction. Why focus on a sub-society when the issues so far discussed involve all of society; indeed societies in general. Furthermore, what are 'religious interests' and what are they opposed to? Analysing the responses given to these questions, and where they perhaps fall short will be the focus of this subsection.

This line of thought leads to a seeming contradiction. As we have already discussed, central to Weber's work is the idea that no society exists without some form of theological underpinning. Yet here, Parsons seems to be saying that we are not talking about societies at all, but sub-societies. Earlier in the same introduction, Parsons writes:

Every society possesses some conceptions of a supernatural order, of spirits, gods or impersonal forces which are different from and in some sense superior to those forces conceived as governing ordinary "natural" events, and whose nature and activities somehow give meaning to the unusual, the frustrating and the rationally

impenetrable aspects of experience... This view that belief in the supernatural is universal has been completely confirmed by modern anthropology. Religion is as much a human universal as language or an incest taboo, which is to say a kinship system. Any conception of a "natural man" who is not encumbered with such "cultural baggage" belongs to a fictional picture of prehistory, for which there is no solid evidence for the human, socially organised stage. The view that such "baggage" ought to be dispensed with and that rational man should "face reality" without any "superstition" is a product of a sophisticated culture, in no way true of the original human condition. (Parsons 1965, xxvii-xxviii)

The contradiction that is the focus of this subsection can be found on full display here. After placing theology in the same category as language, Parsons then seems to suggest that it is somehow dispensable. The possibility is even assumed when Parsons writes that attempts to dispense with it are the 'product of a sophisticated culture'. How could this be the case if this human universal is to be placed in the same category as language? We might ask if a society is considered more advanced if it rids itself of language. Does such a question even make sense? Parsons is not alone on this point, this idea that theology is somehow both a human universal and something that we can dispense with ties back to the previous point about disenchantment.

As noted above, Weber 'considered history to be in principle an open-ended process,' and yet he believed that 'all the social indicators were pointing towards the predominance, and the eventual triumph, of formal legal domination.' (Mommsen 1989, 117) Seen in Weber's different forms of domination we can see a gradual and potentially irreversible shift from more charismatic means of domination as the foundation of society, to more legalist or bureaucratic domination defining society. In this way, theology becomes dispensed with as human societies come to reflect "The lifeless machinery is solidified human spirit." (Mommsen 1989, 117)

The different forms of domination 'Taken together... are supposed to cover all historically possible forms of legitimate government.' (Mommsen 1989, 46-47) They flow into each other in that over time Charismatic domination becomes Traditional when not focussed on an individual leader. Legal legitimacy is then an extension of this to an entire system. (Mommsen 1989, 47) This observation leads us to another that potentially solves the above problem. It seems that domination, of legitimate or accepted rule, is an outflowing of charisma, the only difference is in the level of abstraction.

This is a significant point because while ‘In a single word, *charisma* captured the argument - increasingly popular in the 1930s - that mass dictatorship represented a form of secularized religion.’ (Derman 2012, 179) We are thus enabled to point out that theology, through an abstracted charisma, also underpins the most bureaucratized of domination. What Weber fails to recognise or fully explore, is that even the most ‘secularised’ or disenchanted of systems is still fundamentally theological at its basis, relying on a more abstracted form of charisma; worshipping a more abstract and depersonalised god. As Gane writes:

this form mirrors the ancient order of polytheism in appearance but not in reality. His thesis is that the whole fabric of life and therefore ‘culture’ has changed with the transition to the modern world, for we now live in a *different sense* from the ancients, whose lives were, and in some cases may still be, conducted according to charismatic powers. (Gane 2004, 29)

Gane argues that because the old gods are ‘stripped of their charismatic power and thus reduced to *impersonal forces*. This means that their power to generate new forms of community *has been lost*’ (Gane 2004, 30)

It is argued in this thesis that ‘modern disenchantment’ of the world is not a world-changing ‘moment’, but part of a process of constant change. The rise of identity politics, nationalisms and populisms; along with the delusion that we have somehow escaped theological modes of thinking, show that humans are just as susceptible to charismatic domination as they ever were, and this is not going to change. The interplay of the charisma and bureaucracy, which will be reimagining in the following chapter, does not lead us to a final resolution or end-point in history. Contrary to Gane, new communities are certainly able to arise. The gaping hole in this discourse is that of nations. Nation-building, new national communities etc. These are the new gods, given life by charismatic leaders, who claim the lethal loyalty of the people of the world.

In a lot of these writers, we see various versions of the claim that “modern man must face reality”. This itself prompts the question if, before the modern era, humanity was really unable or unwilling to ‘face reality’ as this idea suggests. Contrary to this modernist arrogance we would do better to stress that there is no great distinction to be made between ‘modern’ and ‘ancient’ people. All are required to take a position on the questions that give shape to our lives. If disenchantment means anything it is not the escape from the socio-theological systems that

define our lives, it is the recognition that we are never free, and that this is not necessarily a bad thing for it helps us to properly analyse them, to ask more of them and to build a stronger foundation for bringing prophetic change in the future. More theology, not less, is the answer to the problems we face.



3 Weber's Methodology Adapted

Weber is a great starting point for anybody interested in political theology and the analysis of socio-theological systems. But, considering the issues that were raised throughout the previous chapter, his work needs to be revised before it can be used to undertake the task of this thesis in analysing China's national theology.

3.1 A Theological System

The origins for many of the issues that were explored in the previous chapter can perhaps be found in the term 'religion'. The conventional definition, and the one present in Weber, ties 'religion' to belief in spirits, gods, supernatural powers, etc. The fact that it is tied to such a specific set of beliefs based on their content, rather than their function in shaping human institutions explains the confusion at the heart of Weber's thought.

The solution is simple. It seems that this contradiction, and perhaps the main problem with Weber, is the confusion of the function of theology with the content. In other words, confusing 'why do we believe?' with 'what do we believe?' Alongside dropping the term 'religion' and thus avoiding these confusions related to its definition. We should double down on theology as describing functional belief that shapes human institutions, this maintains theology as a human universal and avoids these contradictions.

This rationalization of religious belief, which entails the functional specialization of the gods, is connected to the economic demands of a people and to the progressive delimitation of political jurisdictions. For with the pursuit of shared economic goals and the demarcation of political territory, particular gods are called upon to secure a group's economic and political success. Indeed, Weber proposes that "it is a universal phenomenon that the formation of a political association entails subordination to its corresponding god ... every permanent political association had a special god who guaranteed the success of the political action of the group" (Gane 2004, 17)

This means that all societies are the result of practical outworking and interaction between specific theological configurations that hold influence over the imagination of a populace, and the populace's experience and application of said theology. This symbiotic relationship between individual experience and social theological sense-making is reflected in

Weber, who begins *The Sociology of Religion* by writing ‘Thus, religious or magical behavior or thinking must not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive conduct, particularly since even the ends of the religious and magical actions are predominantly economic.’ (Weber 1965, 1)

That this is a universal process leads directly into the foundation of Benedict Anderson work on nationalism; namely that ‘All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.’ (Anderson 2006, 6) Theology is the practice of forming shared conceptions of the nature of reality that answer questions concerning how we are to conduct and organise ourselves in relation to it. Theology can rightly be placed alongside language as a human universal because humans are social animals and the practice of societal formation and development, that inevitably involves theology, is a universal practice. The choice of Anderson to reinforce this point is not accidental. Nations are the dominant theological system of our time. What is meant by this is that they boast a near-monopoly of control over the lethal loyalty of the global population.

The privilege of our modern position, if any, is one where we can see the results of some experiments. Thanks to the historical record we know the effectiveness of some practices before we embark upon them. But the mental leap that this means we can somehow dispense with theology from our socio-political considerations is a category mistake. Processes of worship/devotion and sense-making, the core of any theological system, are present in every society. A parallel for this point can also be seen in Samuel Huntington’s impressive and controversial work ‘*The Clash of Civilisations*’. Rational action and choice comes after issues of belief and identity. Any choice can only be understood as rational for the individual once we know who the individual is. ‘People do not live by reason alone. They cannot calculate and act rationally in pursuit of their self-interest until they define their self. Interest politics presupposes identity.’ (Huntington 1997, 97)⁴

It is therefore of fundamental importance to separate the contents of a theological position, which may or may not yield positive results for the believer; and the function of holding a theological position that is necessary if we want to make sense of our surroundings.

⁴ It seems that Huntington’s problem and the reason for the weaknesses in the *Clash of Civilisations* is that he gets caught up with ‘religion’ as a category, without defining it, and thus blinds himself to the rise of other identity politics of various types: racial, gender, nationalist. The inclusion of which would have provided much more nuanced and accurate predictions than he ends up offering based upon his ‘civilizational’ approach.

The relation between the two is better understood as equivalent to the relation between English as a language, and language in general.

The universal nature of this process means that Weber's methodology can be applied universally. This means that for each society, change and development can be understood through the same processes that involve Priesthood, Prophecy and Breakthrough. For this thesis, this means highlighting these factors at play in the development of China's national theology. However, before doing so, Weber's ideal types must be revisited. First, the ideal types of social change' need to be clarified in how they will be used in this thesis. Then the antinomian structural types of charisma and bureaucracy will be reimagined so that they can be used to provide a more detailed analysis of the theological underpinning of a society. This will be the focus of our next two sections.

3.2 Priesthood and Prophecy

As discussed previously Weber uses the role or function that certain agents and institutions play in the process of societal development as the dependent variables and the theological positions that determine the form and action of these agents and institutions as independent. In this way, Weber's methodology focuses on the process of change and breakthrough. He does this by looking at the office of 'Religious Virtuoso' and Prophet. In this section, we will adapt the 'Religious Virtuoso' into the more neutral Priesthood, and also reinterpret the role of the prophet and the process of breakthrough in a way that will hopefully clarify some points.

As explored in the previous section, theology is seen here as the universal process by which humans develop their conception of themselves, their societies, and the world around them. This idea runs parallel to both a central assumption of the work of Max Weber and the central point in Benedict Anderson's work 'Imagined Communities'. The general framework that Weber used to talk about the process of change and evolution can largely be moved across and used in the analysis with little change. The principle change comes from clarifying how these offices transform over time and can be seen in processes and society that secularisation biases may obstruct us from seeing.

Weber uses the concept of 'Charisma' to create a category of 'charismatic' people who are able to mediate divinity, either by interpreting it or coercing it, in a way that benefits the

wider society. This is the equivalent of being able to interpret and even shape the very fabric of reality, to maintain the link between humanity and divinity. The way to understand this relationship is that these people (from here on the Priesthood) are those that are seen as authorities, as holding answers and solutions to the various questions and problems that people might have. They are seen as experts, knowledgeable about the nature of reality. Their knowledge, answers and solutions, are usually systematised into what can be called a theology that is the foundation for the society's self-conception and their conception of reality. It follows, therefore that Weber sees a key role of the priesthood as the education of the general populace in the practice of these systems, as well as the formulation of the whatever legal code forms the basis of the society. This group, after all are the source of truth for the society, it makes sense that their work forms the basis of educational and legal systems.

When the guild of magicians finally develops into the priesthood, this extremely important function of educating the laity does not cease, and the priesthood always concerns itself with maintaining this function. More and more, secret lore recedes and the priestly doctrine becomes a scripturally established tradition which the priesthood interprets by means of dogmas. Such a scriptural tradition subsequently becomes the basis of every system of religion, not only for the professional members of the priestly class, but also for the laity, indeed especially for the laity. (Weber 1965, 68)

As their role is sense-making, their position relies on their ability to answer questions and satisfactorily explain things. The more successful the priesthood is in offering guidance and leadership for a society, the more their specific vision of society and reality shapes society in the form of patterns of thought, action, and imagination that should properly be understood as devotion or worship. These acts of devotion, of worship, are how we see the success of a priesthood. The general assumption here is that the more meaning that people can glean from the theology offered by the priesthood, the more they are willing to sacrifice in its service. This sacrifice can be seen in any dedication of time or resources; at the extremes, it can be seen in ritualised sacrifice of life or property, most commonly in warfare.

If the priesthood is unsuccessful, i.e. unable to offer satisfactory explanations, solutions or leadership for the society, then they leave themselves open to the challenge that is personified in the prophet. Contrary to Weber, who argues that 'none magical prophets only occur under 'very unusual circumstances.' (Weber 1965, 47) Prophecy here is directly related

to pragmatism. Do the answers offered by the priesthood relate to and explain the experiences of the general population. If they do not then some form of prophet is likely to rise up and challenge the priesthood. In fact priesthoods, after gaining dominance over a population, often weaken through higher levels of abstraction which brings them further and further out of touch with the general populace. The argument could be made for this being the root of the current identity crises seen across Western societies. Leaders (experts, academics, politicians) of a society are perceived as increasingly out of touch, then prophetic (change) movements win increasing levels of support.

We should bear in mind that such a challenge is aimed at the very foundations of the society, as such prophets will likely be seen by the priesthood as an existential threat. An unsuccessful prophet will be explained away and incorporated back into the theology of the priesthood (though this could also be seen as success depending on the aims of the prophet). A successful prophet would mean a paradigm shift in how the society conceives of itself. In this way, Mao Zedong, Sun Yat-Sen, George Washington, Henry VIII can all be seen as prophets for their respective societies.

Such a process finds a very clear expression in Thomas Kuhn's book 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.' In fact, the world of modern science offers the clearest example of this process in action in a way that is readily understandable to us 'modern' people. Scientists themselves form a priesthood in the way that we have described, especially in the way that they offer a vision of humanity; its origins, nature, and how it relates to the world around it. The commonly accepted foundations are at any time liable to a dramatic paradigm shift, as per Kuhn's analysis. By this view, Charles Darwin or Copernicus should rightfully be seen as some of the most successful prophets of all time due to how they shifted the foundations of how humanity in general perceived reality.

This view of societal development allows us to analyse the specific agents and events that lead to the formation of different societies. It is this method that allows us to trace the changes and developments that brought us the specific theological system that is China's national theology. However, an important distinction is made between the function and content of theology. This process shows the function. To properly analyse China we need to look at the differences in theological content and how they relate to different avenues for societal development. When this is done we will have a method not just for tracing the interactions between various Priesthoods and Prophets that led to China's national theology, but also the

content and shape of China's national theology and how this continues to shape China and its interactions with the world around it.

3.3 Theology and Societal Makeup

The idea that the end of the process of disenchantment would see the 'struggle between the gods of various orders and values' [is] ... still going on, perhaps 'demystified' and divested of its mythical manifestations, yet basically continuing in exactly the same way' comes as a shock to Weber scholars like Mommsen. (Mommsen 1989, 139) That the scholar of disenchantment would end up providing an explicitly theological basis for the modern world is for many simply a sign of Weber's inconsistencies.

Mommsen recognises Weber's presentation of charisma and bureaucratisation as 'dichotomous interrelated forces' that 'constitute social change.' (Mommsen 1989, 142) But he, perhaps correctly interpreting Weber, sees disenchantment as an intrinsic feature, rather than a bug, of bureaucratisation. Really the two can and should be separate. As we have seen, in description and in practice increased bureaucratisation does not mean the removal of theology from societal formation. Mommsen's confusion seems born from the failure to grasp the theological underpinning of bureaucratic social systems. This is perhaps because the concept of bureaucracy is not explicitly theological enough, at least not in the same way that charisma is.

This can be redressed through a reworking of the structural ideal types. In this adapted framework we have so far distinguished between the functional, value-neutral, process of societal change, which was the focus of the previous section, and the theological content that drives the direction and shape of societal developments, which is the focus of this section. This section will take the idea of different types of changes having corresponding theological beliefs from Weber, but drops the issues with charisma and bureaucracy. Ideal types may become antiquated, no longer useful. The charisma - bureaucracy ideal types can be reinterpreted as well. As a result, the author has identified two spectrums implicit in Weber's analysis and teased them out into a framework that can be used to analyse the theological make-up of any particular socio-theological system. To understand the spectrum the extremes are often used as examples, but it is appreciated that in both cases these two contrasting positions flow into each other, and societies are placed at points on the spectrum, rather than in boxes with the respective labels.

These differences in theological belief can be used to analyse the content of both the system that is maintained by a priesthood and the changes to such a system that are proposed by a prophet. As previously discussed, the priesthood is defined by the function that it plays in society. Here we move on to engage with the question of method, not function. The question is how does the priesthood go about their work: which beliefs give their actions its specific shape? In this way, the generalised process of societal change and development, which is outlined in the previous sections, can take on specific life and form depending on the theological beliefs that are at play. This, therefore, will allow us to analyse the specificities of China, and how the processes of change driven by particular theological considerations gave shape to China's national theology.

3.3.1 Monotheism and Polytheism

The first spectrum that will be explored runs between monotheism and polytheism. This has been hinted at already and, along with the other spectrum, is based upon the charisma – bureaucracy antinomy provided by Weber. The question at hand is a numeric question, concerning not just the nature of ‘this-world’ but the nature of reality. This question is reflected in the conception of divinity.

To ground this discussion, it is important to return to perhaps the defining feature of a bureaucracy in Weber's mind: that the owner and the operators of a system are kept separate. In a system of charismatic dominance, they are blended, and so the loyalty and willing dedication is not to the system but the semi-divine leader in the system. The theological implications of worshipping a charismatic leader are well explored. (Weber 1965, 157-160) The theological implications of devotion to a system itself, are not. This can be redressed by the simple equation of the 'owner' of a system to that system's divinity. From here it follows that a monotheistic system draws a firm distinction between divinity (owner) and humanity (operator), whereas a polytheistic system, tied to Weber's vision of Charisma, see the human leaders as themselves embodying divinity to varying degrees; able to channel and share in divinity to some respect, thus being worthy of worship themselves, blending divinity and humanity, owner and operator.

A useful way of conceptualising this spectrum, therefore, is the level to which divinity is anthropomorphised. Monotheists place greater distance between humanity and divinity; (Weber 1965, 25) we are recipients rather than participants in divine work. Theology in such a

system is a science, we are observers. To a polytheist, however, divinity reflects the messy, capricious nature of humanity. Divine work and human work are similarly diverse and conflictual, akin to the battlefields of Troy in the Iliad. This makes theology an attempt to convince or coerce divinity to do humanity's bidding, (Weber 1965, 26) this is an art, not a science. A good way to judge where a society can be placed upon this spectrum is how clearly and regularly the society's divinity is pictured in human or humanoid form. But it is important to note that this does not necessarily refer to a human literally being described as a god, but a leader being highly venerated or idolised. This is a very common phenomenon even in the most nominally secular societies.

Keeping this in mind, Weber writes that a fundamental distinction 'was and remains: who is deemed to exert the stronger influence on the individual in his everyday life, the theoretically supreme god [monotheism] or the lower spirits and demons [polytheism]?' (Weber 1965, 20) This struggle between competing visions of divinity determines the shape of the priesthood and therefore necessarily the shape of society as a whole.

This reflects the difference in style between the bureaucratic priest and the charismatic magician; the priest rationalises and systematises beliefs into a unified and coherent system, the magician diffuses and mystifies, thus creating a decentralised network of locally relevant theological practices. A magician claims to have power over things. A Priest claims to understand those external forces that have power over things. As an adaptation of Weber's thought, this aspect of the distinction between priest and magician is explained here as the difference between monotheism and polytheism.

A monotheistic theology equates divinity with universal, positive, principles. Weber writes that '[u]pon these gods depend both rational economic practice and the secure, regulated hegemony of sacred norms in the social community.' (Weber 1965, 22) Such a belief in a singular creative force, and therefore singular intention behind reality is the primary driving force behind the priesthood's organisation and centralisation. As the imaginative bedrock for a people, this centralisation and unification prefigures an imagined community that is similarly united and centrally organised.

A polytheistic theology can be similarly systematised, but even when this is the case it carries over specific characteristic traits that are reflected in the conception of divinity. The obvious point about the number of gods belies a more significant point about the essential

disunity that this signifies about reality itself. Polytheism is marked by a chaotic and dynamic conception of reality; one where no single force (god) is willing or able to establish order.

The perceived singularity of divine intention translates into societies that are organised around certain principles that are believed to be universally true. Such a society sees itself as cosmically central, geographically and/or ideologically, and divinely sanctioned to combat and reject anything which contradicts the principles that are seen as written into the fabric of reality by a creator God who are themselves without peers or restrictions. Alternatively, when disorder and chaos is written into the very fabric of reality, as with polytheism, then it is true that any society adopting such an imaginative basis for its conception must be more tolerant of the plurality, not just of peoples but of ethical standards. This is because any position is simply one of many; diversity and dynamism are the default position. However, the constant parochial bickering of the gods naturally translates to endless violent conflict between the different people of the world.

As with all ideal types, the important point to take away from this section would be that these extremes feed into each other, that no society is a 'pure' form of anything, societal developments can be traced by looking at movements in one or other of these directions. Also important is the view that each side is likely to have of the other. A polytheist would look at a monotheistic society and see a Kafkaesque nightmare where everything is determined and structured and everything must conform to universal standards. A monotheist looking at a polytheistic society would see a people without purpose, disordered, provincial, even narrow-minded and excessively individualistic. These types flow into one another, and systems can develop in either direction.

Using this framework, we can see that Weber himself was a polytheist. His polytheism is inherently tied to his nationalism. His value-neutral approach to science belies his aversion to the monotheistic claim that there are universal truths. For this bureaucratisation of truth made a system 'totally unable to bring forth leaders'. (Mommsen 1989, 115) For a polytheist, the core of reality is contested, as humans take a part in shaping it just as they take part in divinity. Weber was not an extreme version of this; he argues that you need bureaucratization and charisma in order to maintain freedom and competition within a system (Mommsen 1989, 29)

‘Weber welcomed, in principle, an international system in which a number of strong nation-states confronted each other in permanent rivalry.’ (Mommsen 1989, 29)⁵

This discussion of nationalism brings us to a key weakness of Benedict Anderson. This is focused on his insistence on the uniqueness of the nation as he presents it, especially when contrasted with the cosmically central ‘Religious Community’ and ‘The Dynastic Realm’ as types of imagined communities.

On the point of the nation being limited he writes that '[t]he most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet.' (Anderson 2006, 7) This is true of Christianity and other monotheistic theological systems that are Universalist. But there are plenty of examples of more polytheistic theological systems that do quite closely reflect the world of nations as Anderson presents it. In almost all polytheistic systems the god is very much a reflection of the territory and the people that live within it. Consider the sheer strangeness of picturing a Caucasian Nuwa, an African Zeus, or a Chinese Ra.

Worshippers of Marduk, or Baal, or Jupiter, did not see their goal as converting their neighbours. They did not see their neighbours as worshipping false gods; they saw them as worshipping weak gods. Conquering a territory or simply being more powerful than your neighbours was equivalent to proving that your god was stronger; it was not equivalent to convincing your enemy that their god does not exist. Being the dominant power in a region meant that, either through conquest or immigration, these powers faced the same issues of how to assimilate or integrate populations that remained 'other' in much the same way that modern nation-states deal with issues of immigration and minority populations from colonised or economically weaker areas. Nations may be distinct from monotheistic societies in how they conceive of themselves, but they are nearly identical with polytheistic societies. It follows logically from this that the more globally aware set of nations that make up the *international* system itself closely resembles a polytheistic system. Where varying levels of conflict, competition, and cooperation are seen as the natural state of affairs between sovereign societies. This is an important thing to bear in mind before we enter into our analysis of China's national theology. The fact that China is a nation and we are studying the development of it as a nation

⁵ Leo Strauss' criticism of Weber's value-neutrality can, therefore, be seen as a monotheist criticism of Weber's polytheism. (Gane 2004, 38)

necessarily restricts the range of positions that it could be placed on this spectrum; although not by much.

3.3.2 Transcendentalism and Immanentism

The second spectrum, which helps to complete our framework of analysis, runs between transcendentalism and immanentism. Again this takes inspiration from the priest-magician or bureaucratic-charismatic oppositional. Weber talks about the process of rationalist disenchantment in a near deterministic manner. The benefits contained in this development are progress towards the modernist rational and especially material systems of thought that define and dominate what we call 'modern' societies. In describing the development of more materialistic patterns of thought Weber inadvertently gives us the basis for our second spectrum.

Through greater bureaucratic (priestly) rationalisation, Weber sees new bases for ethical systems developing. Alongside coercing and convincing divine powers, greater systematisation and rationalisation allows for 'obedience to the religious law as the distinctive way to win the god's favor.' (Weber 1965, 37) This requires greater levels of abstraction as the significance of our actions can be measured as either good or bad depending on how they relate to the foundational theological principles that govern reality. The reverse of this is taboo (Weber 1965, 37-38). Weber ties Taboo with magical thinking and Religious ethics with rationalist thinking, systematisation. (Weber 1965, 42)

The key difference between the systems is that taboo relies on things being restricted or prohibited. Evil in this system takes on the form of a plague, it is external and physical and must be avoided. All who encounter it must be ritually cleansed. A legal system, on the other hand, sees all action as being potentially good or bad, different actions can be codified into an entire system; this is the theological basis of legal systems. Evil in this sense is much more internal and much less physical, perhaps best understood in terms of possession by an immaterial force. The difference between a taboo system and a religious ethic system is the characterisation of evil. In a taboo system, it is like an infection. In the religious ethic system, it is a force, more fluid. (Weber 1965, 45)

This distinction in Weber is reworked into a spectrum between transcendentalism, characterised by a system of ethics and law, on the one hand, and immanentism, characterised by a system of taboo, on the other. To develop and clarify the differences it is useful to first focus on the conception of evil and its connection to how the society is constructed.

A transcendentalist places the threat of evil internally, evil is often portrayed as a temptation that threatens the body only indirectly through the mind. To avoid evil, great emphasis is placed on self-control, discipline, and indeed self-denial. Immaterial forces are seen to be at work twisting and corrupting the materially weak and the materially strong alike. In fact, often it is thought that to be materially strong or wealthy is to invite evil. Material power is seen to invite corruption. Control over other people is seen in the same way. In the extreme, a transcendentalist becomes an ascetic. This translates to a priesthood that separates itself from society in an attempt to remove itself from the temptations associated with material power. The society that forms around such a priesthood is expected to follow the example laid down by this priesthood. However, due to the aversion on the part of the priesthood away from having control over others, any legal code that is produced is not strongly enforced outside of the priesthood itself. Anybody can join the priesthood, therefore these societies often enjoy a high degree of social mobility. Monastic communities represent an extreme version of this theological position. As their '[c]oncentration upon the actual pursuit of salvation may entail a formal withdrawal from the "world"' (Weber 1965, 166)

The other end of the spectrum belongs to immanentism. The construction of evil in such a system is much more physically grounded, evil is avoided or removed from a community through action and ritual. Evil is placed externally, and it is material strength and power, renounced by the transcendentalist, which is the means the immanentist recognises as necessary for their defence and preservation. An immanentist priesthood would actively seek power and, rather than remove themselves from wider society, would work together to control and guide the society in the direction that they think best ensures its peace and prosperity. The ethical code of such a society would be much more strictly enforced, reflecting the immanentist priesthood's desire for control. It would also be less socially mobile. An extreme version of such a society exists in the caste system built around India's traditional priesthood of Brahmins. Weber describes such a system whereby focus on the physical labour that the wider society requires of you is imagined as the path to your salvation:

Caste ethics glorifies the spirit of craftsmanship and enjoins pride, not in economic earnings measured by money, nor in the miracle of rational technology as exemplified in the rational use of labor, but rather in the personal virtuosity of the producer as manifested in the beauty and worth of the product appropriate to his particular caste. (Weber 1965, 42)

Both of these extremes can be equally undesirable, depending on your perspective. The extreme transcendentalists could easily be portrayed as quietist abdicators of their responsibility to the wider society. Extreme immanentists alternatively can be seen exerting totalitarian control over their followers, justifying systems of exploitation through instilling fear of outsiders. An analysis of this spectrum offers a way to understand a fundamental point about the complexities of human's social lives. As societies can be placed at different points along this spectrum, and have different non-overlapping aims; it is entirely possible, in fact, it is the norm, for societies to overlap and for people to belong to multiple societies simultaneously.

In fact, this author would argue that by looking at this spectrum, it is possible to see the origins of the confusion over secularisation, a frequent issue in the works discussed in Chapter 2. The question is the relationship between the societies that do overlap. They can only overlap if they are different in terms of occupying different spaces on the transcendent-immanent theological spectrum. If they are too close, then they come into conflict. Secularisation, based on this observation, is the argument that when societies do overlap in this way, they should be made separate and the space between them should be policed.

Such a position usually has its origin in handovers and conquests of territory that leave the priesthood of the conquered territory painting itself in a more transcendentalist light in order to survive the new power of the territory by relinquishing their grasp on power. Alongside this, it could also be the conquering power that maintains them as a way of pacifying the local populace who still recognise them as authoritative. Weber writes about exactly this process:

...the transition from a priesthood serving a political association into a religious congregation was associated primarily with the rise of the great world empires of the Near East, especially Persia. Political associations were annihilated and the population disarmed, their priesthoods, however, were assigned certain political powers and were rendered secure in their positions. This was done because the religious congregation was regarded as a valuable instrument for pacifying the conquered, just as the coercive community resulting from a neighbourhood association was found useful for the protection of financial interests... In Egypt, after the decline of political independence, the national priesthood built a sort of "church" organisation, apparently the first of its kind, with synods. On the other hand, religious congregations in India arose in the more limited sense as exemplary

congregations. There, the integral status of the Brahmin estate, as well as the regulations of asceticism, survived the multiplicity of ephemeral political structures. (Weber 1965, 63-64)

If we introduce the nation as a category into this debate we see that its demand on both territorial control and the lethal loyalties of its citizens immediately paint it as an immanentist theological system. However, we should be careful not to fall into simplistic divisions of political (immanentist) vs 'religious' (transcendentalist); as with monotheism and polytheism, these ideas flow into one another, with each society being some blend of the two positions. We will see in our discussion of China that this question comes up again and again when discussing the 'religious' policies of the contemporary Chinese nation.

However, before we enter into an exploration of the findings that this method brings, due to the amount of ground covered it would no doubt be helpful to offer up a short summary of the methodology that has been the focus of this chapter.

3.4 Summary of Method

Weber's primary problem, when analysing the connection between a society and its theological underpinning, was to do with the method. The problem, as with any method of analysis, is working out the variables. What stays the same and what changes? He identified the priesthood as the place to start and defined a priesthood of a society through its function. This function and the presence of a priesthood is the thing that does not change, every society needs such a thing in order to be a society. What is less clear from looking at Weber's writings, is what he considered to change, and how he hoped to analyse his subjects through this change. Here, we have offered up an adapted version of Weber's methodology that highlights two things that change and can help us to analyse our subject.

The Priesthoods method and the content of their beliefs are intrinsically connected and can be measured along two spectrums. The first question relates directly to the monotheism or polytheism of the society that they head; this translates into questions of centralisation and scale. The second to the transcendence or immanence; this translates into questions of control and power. An analysis of where a particular priesthood lies along each of these spectrums can be done by looking at the shape of the priesthood, their methods and, consequently, the shape of the society itself. The theological content of a system determines its shape, its structure, and

its actions. For China we will look at why it can be described as a nation, a culture, a civilisation, and a race; we will look at why its leadership is structured in the way that it is; we will also look at how its actions both internal and external can be understood.

It is with this methodology that we will undertake our analysis of China's national theology. This will be done first of all by identifying the process of societal development that has given birth to contemporary China. The specific development in question is identified in this work as the century between the Opium Wars and the Communist Party's rise to power. Fitting into our framework this is a period of prophecy and breakthrough, the establishment of a new priesthood. It is important to understand both the priesthood that was removed from power, the Literati priesthood, and the priesthood that rose to power and continues to define contemporary China's national theology, the Communist priesthood.

With these actors in place, each priesthood will be assessed based upon where they fall on the two spectrums of monotheism-polytheism and transcendentalism-immanetism. This analysis of the content of their theologies will shed light on the functional role they played in shaping China's national theology. This will give us enough findings to enter into a deeper discussion about the theological basis of China that will form Chapter five.

4 China's National Theology: An Overview

China as a theological system has an incredibly long history, perhaps the longest in the world. Even more unique is the fact that it has only seen a single theological revolution (despite multiple military revolutions, civil wars, conquests, and upheavals.) This is all down to the history of the Priesthood, which will be the focus of this chapter.

The following is an analysis of contemporary China's national theology through the use of a methodology adapted from Weber's method as found in his 'Sociology of Religion'. It is genealogical in nature. Contemporary China is at once very old and very new, this makes tracing its genealogy difficult. The author has traced back the origin of the oldest strand that persists in China's National Theology today to China's unification and the Literati-priesthood that held China together up until the fall of the Qing. The rise of 'China' as an imaginative self-conception was incredibly slow, and it continued after a century of turmoil that saw it fundamentally reassess its theological makeup.

Following this, there will be an analysis of the revolutionary period that runs roughly from the Opium wars till the mid-1900s; a period commonly referred to in China as the century of humiliation. This will be analysed in terms of the process of prophecy and change that Weber developed.

This chapter will end with an analysis of the new priesthood that arose from this chaotic and violent period; the Communist Party of China. The final part will spend time analysing what they inherited from the Literati priesthood, and what they rejected. This allows us to get a clearer view of China's national theology as it currently stands.

4.1 The Literati Priesthood and China's Slow Unification

Weber described Imperial China as 'a cult without a specialised Priesthood'. (Weber 1965, 29) He wrote that in 'a cult without priests, as in the case of a magician without a cult' the society usually lacks a fully rationalised metaphysical system and therefore a complete religious ethic. (Weber 1965, 30). Weber states that no such system exists in China; which had a cult without priests in the form of the imperial bureaucracy, and many magicians without a cult in the form of Daoist and other local theological experts. Weber is partially right, as we shall see. But this thesis argues that this partial development is not because of the priesthood's

independence from the state, but the fact that China's theological system grew out of a compromise between two rival theological systems that gave meaning to the lives of the people in this region: the imperial bureaucracy and the sib/clan network.

It is clear that the Literati itself can be described as China's priesthood because they provided the imaginative/theological construction that gave shape and life to the entire society. As Yang writes, 'The literati are characterized first of all by their preeminence as China's undisputed ruling stratum for the past two millennia.' (Yang 1964, xxviii) not because they were the most powerful group, but because they were the only group who consistently led the way in shaping and bringing China itself to life. The Literati can easily be conflated with Confucianism itself. Weber tells us that in China:

[T]here is no independent, unofficial intellectualism apart from the Confucian education. Confucianism is *the* ethic of the aristocratic man (i.e., the "gentleman," as Dvorak has correctly translated the term). Confucianism is quite explicitly the ethic of a particular social class, or more correctly, a systematization of rules of etiquette appropriate to an elite class, the members of which have undergone literary training. (Weber 1965, 127)

This elite educated class, however, was not strictly Confucian, even though Confucianism dominated. The defining factor of China's priesthood at this time is their mastery of the language that was at the centre of the civilisation. Therefore, rather than get involved in the inter-school rivalries, it is sufficient to rely on the term Literati to describe this class as a whole, while recognising that Confucianism was the dominant school of thought within the Literati. Various schools of thought rose and fell in dominance at different times, Buddhism is perhaps the best example of this, shaping the Literati in different ways. But, the reason these changes are not seen as revolutionary, even though the changes were no doubt profound, is that the shape of the Literati priesthood still maintained its general form. As Weber writes 'the whole imperial administration was controlled by an essentially theocratic board of literati. This was the oft-mentioned "Academy" (Hanlin Yuan) which safeguarded Confucian orthodoxy and perhaps corresponded to a congregation of the papal Curia.' (Weber 1968, 103) The school that members belonged to is less important for this study than the theological concepts that they bring to bear through their actions. This will be the focus of this first sub-section.

The reason we can talk about the literati being the priesthood of China is because they, through the imperial bureaucracy, were intent on building a unified system that our concept of China is directly developed from, whereas the theology that characterised sib/clan networks contributed to this conception only indirectly. China developed through the tireless work of the literati who at various points compromised and fought with the great and small families of the land in a process that gradually shaped the collective self-conception of the population as a whole. In this way, we can hold off on looking at the exact nature of the compromise between sib and literati that gave birth and shape to China, and first look in more detail at the theology of the literati itself, China's first and longest-serving priesthood.

4.1.1 Chinese Monotheism: 'Tao' Theology, Tien Xia, and the Middle Land

If there is any concept about the nature of reality that was common to all members of the literati in China it is the 'Tao' "the immutable order of harmony, tranquillity, and equilibrium underlying the universe and human society." (Yang 1964, xxix) It is important to note that 'Tao' can be interpreted in a plurality of ways, and the various interpretations are part of the dynamism of the concept. Without getting too far into such a discussion, we can say one key thing about the concept. According to the framework for analysing different theological positions provided in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, belief in 'Tao' is a monotheistic theological position. It claims a central unity of reality, even if this central unity or nature is ineffable or mystical. This concept provides the foundations from which the literati built 'both rational economic practice and the secure, regulated hegemony of sacred norms in the social community.' (Weber 1965, 22)

The Tao is impersonal, and therefore our relationship with the Tao is not necessarily good or bad (as in Abrahamic theology) instead we are either in tune with it or not. Not being in tune with it, for whatever reason is not the same as the Abrahamic idea of 'living in sin', there is no fall away from divinity in this theological system. This is the basis for Weber's insight that a Confucian would be highly offended at the suggestion that he or she was 'sinful', especially by nature of their birth. Such a thing would have been 'reprehensible to [their] sense of honour.' (Weber 1965, 85)

Instead through cultivation of a proper disposition, humanity (as an individual or as a society) can make itself harmonise with reality (the Tao). 'The Confucian orientation for man lay in making rational adjustment to the eternal cosmic and social order.' (Yang 1964, xxix) You fit perfectly with reality, like an interlocking part, but this requires cultivation of character

and skill. The more immanentist version of this means being in power to perfect nature and ensure its order and stability.

According to Weber 'The Confucian acceptance of the world "as given" contrasts with the Puritan rejection of it on God's command. For Weber, "Confucian rationalism meant rational adjustment to the world, Puritan rationalism meant rational mastery of the world.'" (Yang 1964, xxix) As Yang points out, it is not quite as simple as this, the mainstream of Chinese theology does not accept the world as is but rather 'kept harking back to the ideal qualities of the tao (governing principle of the cosmic and social order) and the "golden past" when the tao was thought to be in perfect operation.' (Yang 1964, xxxvii)

Having said this, the general point that Weber is making still stands, and Yang concedes this as well, (Yang 1964, xxxviii). In Chinese theology, as opposed to Abrahamic theology, the world is not corrupted and proper ordering is possible. (Weber 1968, 148) The problem with this world is that the order that we achieve is never permanent. But that does not make it impossible to achieve. This is different from the Christian 'City of God' which is recognised by mainstream Christian theology as impossible to realize. The same is true of the other possible equivalent: Eden. Abrahamic theology sees the Fall, the removal from Eden to be irrevocable.

Weber argues that Confucianism does not have the concept of salvation. (Weber 1965, 90) It is more accurate to say that it does not have an Abrahamic view of Salvation. Evil, in Chinese theology, is not a force but a state of disorder. Goodness, proximity to divinity is maintaining continuity with the proper ordering of the past which is known because of the literary tradition that has been preserved by the literati-priesthood. We can see this in the stories about the floods, and the "Holy" Emperor Yu's construction of canals, which operates as an origin myth for the Literati priesthood. (Weber 1968, 52) That the birth of this civilisation, the theological basis for the literati is found in the written record of centralised planning is demonstrative of this point. 'Irrigation was already developed at the time when the art of writing emerged and perhaps the latter was connected to the administrative needs of the former.' (Weber 1968, 20)

An ordered state was seen as central in maintaining the universal order of reality. To the Confucian, the order of reality was predicated on a strong unified human society at the centre of the world.

The impersonal power of Heaven did not “speak” to man. It revealed itself in the regimen on earth, in the firm order of nature and tradition which were part of the cosmic order... All bad events were symptomatic of disturbance in the providential harmony of heaven and earth through magical forces. (Weber 1968, 28)

Transcendentalist strands and schools were unmistakably present in the Literati. But the literati as a whole can be seen as immanentist, concerned as they were with the proper ordering of society in order to make it strong, united, ordered and peaceful. The more transcendental elements blur into a class of what Weber would call magicians that worked with a more parochial and diffused theological framework. This can be seen in the literati’s view on office holding: “Confucius, like his counterpart, Lao-tzu, lived alone and without office. The only difference was that the mystics, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, declined office-holding because of their quest for salvation, whereas Confucius felt himself deprived of office.” (Weber 1968, 198) The more transcendently inclined literati were tolerated as long as they did not openly contradict the monotheist theological position of the literati. It is important to note that the diffuse wandering mystics of china only later agreed to consider themselves as ‘Daoist’. The local practices adopted the term, and this makes it nearly impossible to separate them out. The attempt, however, is irrelevant according to our methodology; part of the ‘project of modernity’. (Dean 2009, 180)

Cultivation, in terms of harmonisation with the tao, was, therefore ‘assisted by a rationalized system of regulated subordination of subjects to their overlords.’ (Weber 1965, 22) In this way ‘The growth of a world empire in China... favored the rise of both universalism and monotheism.’ (Weber 1965, 23) The heart of human civilisation, this was the original conception of China. The Middle Kingdom. Civilisation itself was therefore born out of central organisation to overcome a chaotic and disordered world. This was the understanding of Tao from the literati. Strong unified society mirroring and interlocking with the unified and ordered reality.

As the literati itself was the source of knowledge and what separated them out from the rest of society was their education in literature, this precipitated the idea that language itself is the basis of civilisation as it is the connection point between humanity and the divine. ‘The ideograms of Chinese, Latin, or Arabic were emanations of reality, not randomly fabricated representations of it.’ (Anderson 2006, 14) And it is also the basis for the division between the civilised person and the barbarian:

ontological reality is apprehensible only through a single, privileged system of representation: the truth language of Church Latin, Qur'anic Arabic, or Examination Chinese. And, as truth-languages, imbued with an... impulse towards conversion. By conversion, I mean not so much the acceptance of particular religious tenets, but alchemic absorption. The barbarian becomes 'Middle Kingdom'... The whole nature of man's being is sacrally malleable ... It was, after all, this possibility of conversion through the sacred language that made it possible for an 'Englishman' to become Pope and a 'Manchu' Son of Heaven. (Anderson 2006, 14-15)

All this meant that the literati saw their role as defending the order that existed. The work that needed to be done was preservation, not radical change. The best of all possible worlds was this one, with its specific socio-political configuration, and it needed to be defended.

This theological system was not just to be defended, but expanded where possible. The history of China also sees the control of the bureaucracy slowly spread, turning neighbours and rivals into vassals and tributary states. (Weber 1968, 33-34) It is not normally presented in these terms, but as with any society built on monotheism and immanentism China was a colonial force in the region. And this drive was based on its demand for a universal ordering of social reality. China was the middle kingdom and anybody who disagreed or disrupted the order that it maintained, was to be removed. This is most obviously true when looking at Taiwan, Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang. However, more interesting and often overlooked here is the difference between Northern China, the home of this theological system, and Southern China, which can be seen as the first place that was colonised by this system. Consequently, sib/clan associations are a stronger pull on people's loyalties and a place where nominally Daoist traditions and temples are better preserved. (Weber 1968, 86-87, 192) It remains as no surprise that the South of China has forever been the breeding ground for rebellions against Northern Imperial rule.

China's cultural diversity is a product of its theological diversity. This is the topic of our next subsection.

4.1.2 Internal Diversity but No External Dissent

For the literati priesthood, the monotheism, which imagined the civilisation that they were the custodians of as the sum of human civilisation; i.e. the geographic, political and most importantly theological centre of humanity, was non-negotiable. This sinocentrism was learned

through studying and passing on the knowledge contained in the literary tradition that they were part of. In this way secessionism and theological heterodoxy were tied together an ‘almost every rebellion was intimately connected with a heresy.’ (Weber 1968, 214)

The fact that Chinese literature was at the centre of this theological system meant that polytheistic practices were accepted as a part of tradition. The Literati were concerned with the conservation of order, this meant tolerating the presence of traditional rituals. This is the basis of the Confucian belief that we should take part in rituals ‘as if’ they were true’. The danger of was the preservation of rituals that directly contradicted the monotheism at the heart of the Literati theology, as it allowed for families (through ancestor worship) to forge their own connections with their own conceptions of divinity without recourse to the Literati or the imperial bureaucracy. This will be explored in more detail in the following sub-section. In Confucianism we see attempts to remedy this in the attempts to control social relations and outlining the ‘proper’ way of doing everything, based upon what Confucius did, ‘it wasn’t emulation so much as standardisation, the bureaucratisation of social relations.’ (Yang 1964, xxxii)

While monotheism vs polytheism is primarily a question of the size and scope of society, transcendentalism vs immanentism is a question of societal control. We see here the immanentism that drove schools of the Literati to extend their control over society in any way they could. Transcendentalism is more fluid, less hierarchical, more respect for the desire to 'opt-out'. Immanentism holds less room for people to 'opt-out' and holds people in very specific and rigid social positions or classes. We see this in the difference between different schools in China's literati priesthood. The literati were tolerant of all the transcendental musings and theological abstractions, so long as they didn't serve to benefit polytheistic elements in the society that would seek to rebel or separate themselves from the universal empire. The example of Daoism is key to understanding this:

Like Confucianism, Taoism assumed a “cosmos of internally harmonic order of nature and society.” There was a total absence of tension toward the world which was assumed to harbor no intrinsic ethical deficiency or evil. To the religious Taoist, the world seemed to be a wonderful place for enjoying life, not an object for struggle and transformation. (Yang 1964, xxxv)

Taoism has the same concept of adjusting to the Tao, but the active cultivation of character that is required for such an adjustment is not interpreted as the control and repression of emotion. Daoism is much more passive, adjustment can mean letting go of control, just as much as cultivating it. It is a much broader theology than Confucianism. Daoism became much more confused as it willingly lent itself to any socio-political order. This transcendentalist stance simultaneously saved it as a legitimate school and brought it into conflict with mainstream literati as 'the leading heterodoxy existed in heretic status under the official dominance of the Confucian orthodoxy.' (Yang 1964, xxxiv)

Yang points out that Weber did not consistently differentiate between Daoism as a 'philosophy' and Daoism as a 'religion', but yang agrees with Weber's overall point that Daoism's 'otherworldly orientation and its traditionalist qualities led to the same social consequences as that which stemmed from Confucianism.' (Yang 1964, xxxiv) Putting the complications surrounding the word 'religion' for a moment, we can say that the difference in question was with whom the more transcendental elements of the Chinese literati associated, and at what level they operated, including even if they can be described as part of the literati at all. Daoism as a 'philosophy' can be seen as a term used to describe the elements of the mainstream literati with more transcendentalist leanings. This is exemplified by works such as the *Dao De Qing*, which can be rightfully interpreted as a work of political theory. On the fringes of the mainstream, however, the literati blurred together with localised theological leaders, priests that operated in isolation (Weber would call them magicians). They worked alongside sib networks and helped see to the needs of the general population. This is what is often referred to when talking about Daoism as a 'religion'. In truth, the difference between these two is whether they more closely associated with the monotheistic imperial bureaucracy as a normal member of the literati, or if they associated with the local, polytheistic, clan/sib and temple networks.

We see here that diversity of thought is accepted but if it ever goes over into separating into a rival system, it was fought tooth and nail. This is especially true in the fighting for offices and therefore income through pre-bends. Anthony Yu's book (Yu 2005) includes a great exploration of the conflict and competition between these different schools. However, this leads our focus back to an earlier point that the literati were not in firm control of the imagination of the people. In fact, any control they did win was won through a compromise

with what we have called 'sib theology'. It is important to now to look in more detail at the exact nature of this compromise.

4.1.3 Balancing Transcendence and Immanence

The problem with the Literati's non-negotiable monotheism, their interpretation of Tao theology seen in a rationally organised, cosmically central state bureaucracy, is that it does not seem to be shared by the general population. For most people throughout China's history, the most meaningful connection was to their sib/clan. As Anthony Yu writes: 'Traffic with "the sacred" is nothing if not in many of its crucial aspects family bound in Chinese civilization.' (Yu 2005, 26) In fact, the base level of theological association in China, as with the rest of the world, is the 'household and the sib, in which the primary bond is the relationship to the spirits of ancestors, actual or imaginary.' (Weber 1965, 14) These sibs can each be seen as their own socio-theological system and were the polytheist undercurrent that the monotheist literati used the imperial bureaucracy to assert their theological vision over and against. When considered in this way, it is the polytheist theology of the sib/clan that is the primary heterodox in Chinese theology, not Daoism.

Because of this, throughout Chinese history, we see conflict and competition between these two types of theological association. Weber tells us that the most prominent reasons for the 'failure of a consistent monotheism to develop' (Weber 1965, 24) was either that a priesthood that was too diffused and localised, or a rival, polytheist system that answered by an 'accessible and tangible familiar religious object which could be brought into relationship with concrete life situations or with definite groups of people to the exclusion of outsiders' (Weber 1965, 25). It can be argued that the first of these was the case for Catholic Europe's conception of 'Christendom', the second the case in Imperial China.

To overcome this challenge, the literati, a class of people who identified and recognised each other as a social group, allied themselves with the most powerful families in order to bring the wider society more in line with their theological beliefs which were of a much broader scope than those which were tied to the sib. (Weber 1968, 35) We should see this as a compromise because to push for greater unification the monotheist Literati needed to ally themselves to specific families from specific places with specific, therefore polytheist, theological backgrounds. The nature of the compromise is thus that the greatest family fulfils the role of guarantor of a universal system by pacifying and unifying the whole world under their rule on the advice of the literati. The more successful the literati were at delivering

strength and dominance to that great family, through the advice that they offered. Then the more they were listened to and the more their theological vision was fulfilled. (Weber 1968, 40-41) Alongside that, the theology tied to the ancestry of the greatest family is elevated to not just one among many, but the pre-eminent sib theology of the land.⁶ This happened when the Qin first unified China: ‘the ancestors and personal gods, the numina and genu, of the most powerful household took their place beside the domestic gods belonging to subject households and thus lent a religious sanction to the position of the ruler.’ (Weber 1965, 16) This is how the monotheism of the literati slowly became adopted. This initial compromise set the tone for the history of China’s theological development.

The monotheistic theology of the Tao was interpreted through the 'ethically proper conduct of government, that followed the correct path of virtue, the Tao; without this everything would fail.' (Weber 1965, 56) In this way, China saw 'patrimonial rule of a royal joint household over comparable joint households of the subjects.' (Weber 1965, 16) This compromise was clearly not a single event, or a historical turning point, but it is seen in the literature and history of China again and again that enlisting the help of a genius advisor who is an educated member of the Literati is a prerequisite for geopolitical success. This mutually beneficial arrangement of royalty and trusted advisor became the necessary bedrock for any political aim, and a near-sacred bond in itself. For this reason 'again and again the literati won out. Every drought, inundation, eclipse of the sun, defeat in arms, and every generally threatening event at once placed power in the hands of the literati.' (Weber 1968, 139)

It should be noted that in this compromise that brought monotheism to China, the literati are the junior partners, they do not hold power and their influence is conditional. Having said that, if there is any discernible trend of Chinese history, it is the gradual acceptance of the general population of the theological vision of the literati priesthood. (Weber 1968, 29-30) This happened in line with what Weber describes happening in similar situations: ‘Once a political association as such has come to be regarded as a society under the tutelage of a particular deity, it would seem to be unprotected until the gods of the individual members were also incorporated, amalgamated, and even adopted locally in a sort of synoecism.’ (Weber 1965, 21) In China we see an ‘amalgamated totality... [with]... the empirical and functional

⁶ Weber cites a quote about the necessity of the Confucian literati accepting ‘magical thinking’: “Who will hinder the emperor from doing as he pleases when he no longer believes in the omnia and portent?” (Weber 1968, 200)

specializations of the gods, whether original or subsequently determined by new experiences concerning the special spheres of the gods' influences.' (Weber 1965, 20)

This can be contrasted with the development of monotheism in the Jewish tradition where 'there developed a special god of the political organisation as such, as was the case of Yahweh. That he was a God of the federation.' (Weber 1965, 16) The result of this was that the loyalty of the people in China belonged to the Imperial family as the guarantors of universal order; whereas in Israel, through covenant, the loyalty of the people belonged to God. The difference in how monotheism is conceived translates into a different understanding of political authority:

In China, the emperor is the rainmaker. The harvest and prosperity of the land depended upon the moral standard held by the emperor. In contrast, the Near east depended upon irrigation, not rainfall, which meant that the king himself was the creator of prosperity, not relying on external forces, but ensuring prosperity through the loyalty of his subjects. (Weber 1965, 56-57)

In China, the imperial family is performing their sanctioned role in the theological order. (Weber 1968, 30) To know how to perform they need the advice of the literati. (Weber 1968, 31) This means the monotheism so valued by the literati is preserved because there remains a separation between the divinely favoured emperor, who operates the socio-theological system, and the dao, which the Literati push the empire and emperor to harmonise with as the ultimate owner. It also provides a basis to remove the imperial family, when they fail to perform their role properly then they invite disaster by disordering reality. Different families could perform this role, and they did. This cycle of different rulers falling out of theological favour was known as the mandate of heaven. Crucially, however, the literati did not choose which family to put into power. It was simply written into the theological system that the family that takes power, by definition has won the mandate of heaven by restoring order. This flexibility meant that China throughout its history saw many military revolutions as the greater households rose, fell and competed, without seeing corresponding theological revolutions. Even when China was conquered by outsiders (Mongol Yuan, Manchu Qing) they became Chinese by virtue of the fact that they performed their role in maintaining the order of reality. In each case they literati priesthood largely maintained their place in society.

The City and the Bureaucrat

The people of China were called to be loyal to the imperial family, but this consistently came into conflict with the other primary draw of loyalty for the people; their family and clan networks. We can, therefore, see why ‘Much of Chinese history was given to incessant struggles between the central power and local interests. (Yang 1964, xxii-xxiii) The frontline battleground for this tug-of-war was in the urban areas, either towns or cities. Weber notes that Chinese cities were much less autonomous than cities in occidental antiquity. (Weber 1968, 13) Cities that were part of the imperial bureaucracy did not revolt to assert autonomy, they revolted in order to remove ‘a concrete official or a concrete decree, especially a new tax.’ (Weber 1968, 14)

Indeed the city itself can be seen as a method for extending Imperial control by relocating whole populations into easily defensible locations, thus cutting or weakening the rural ties to the sib/clan. (Weber 1968, 16) ‘[T]he “city” was, therefore never the “hometown” but typically “a place away from home” for the majority of its inhabitants.’ (Weber 1968, 90) The literati made inroads by incorporating the great families further into the imperial bureaucracy until the families status was tied so closely to the imperial system that they could do nothing but support it. A key way of doing this was through examinations, another was the use of imperial offices. In China

The bureaucracy recruited its members from the literati by examinations, hence bureaucratic status was based neither on birth nor on supernatural consideration or divine grace. This universalistic feature such as the triannual system of shift of official posts, the prohibition of holding office in one’s home province, and the full removability of the official by central command served to detach the bureaucrat from developing permanent local interests detrimental to the central power. (Yang 1964, xxiii)

‘[T]hese centralization measures had adverse effects they weakened the relations between formal bureaucratic rule and local life’ (Yang 1964, xxiii) This was further exacerbated by the fact that Confucian scholars were generalists, they did not specialise. This was based on the ‘fundamental Confucian position that, “a cultured man is not a tool.”’ (Yang

1964, xxxii)⁷ This further compounds the Literati's inability to extend their control further into the lives of the populace. In this way, we can see the compromise that brought them into power begin to shape and indeed corrupt the Literati itself, as it stretches itself thin and brings great families into situations where they may just as likely seek to enrich themselves. The key issue, and an unsolved problem in China's history, was land-ownership and landlordism. The aim of the bureaucracy was to 'secure direct tax payments from the peasants.' (Weber 1968, 64-65) However, their inability to provide salaries for their officials threatened to simply offer replacements for the landlords rather than remove them.

The tax quota system allowed the official to meet administrative expenses, and to make a profit from official revenues and unofficial fees and "gifts," so long as the quota was handed over... Consequently, "the empire resembled a confederation of satrapies under a pontifical head," (Yang 1964, xxiii)

We can see therefore that although the Literati were immanentist in their theological vision, they were unable to extend their control over and against the great families and sib networks of the land. The meeting point between powerful families and the centralised bureaucratic academy existed in a symbiotic, yet contested relationship, in an endless tug of war over control that the Literati never won. The imperial bureaucracy was often overstretched, not providing pay for its officials who were expected to pay for the costs of their work through taxation and landlordism. The problem with this is that from the centre it is nearly impossible to tell a corrupt official from an upright one, even when it was blindingly obvious to the people working under that official. The peasants had a hatred for such officials, but this hatred was almost always directed at specific officials and specific taxes and policies, never the imperial system itself. In the same way, the literati could survive the fall of an imperial family, so they could dodge the hatred directed at one of their own official representatives.

The Blessing and the Curse

It can be said that this compromise at the heart of Chinese political theology was wildly successful in one way, and the bureaucracy's failure to extend its control could potentially be seen as a blessing in disguise. However, this all came at a price: a rigidity and inability to

⁷ Yang questions Weber's characterisation of a person as a means to an end (Yang 1964, xxxiii). The point that Yang is making is that this Confucian principle is not the same as the Kantian Categorical Imperative, but more of a vision for what the upper-class priesthood of the society should be.

absorb prophecy. Both of these things can be seen through a comparison with the Catholic priesthood of medieval Europe.

We can compare their success to the failure of the more transcendentalist Catholic Priesthood to effectively shape Europe into a unified imaginative construction (Christendom). Geography is also undoubtedly a factor here, Europe's various seas and mountain ranges mean it is naturally much more geographically divided than China. The Chinese literati stamped out polytheism in a way that the Catholic Priesthood of Europe never did (they preferred to co-opt it). This ensured greater unity, centralisation and peace in China. But it also meant a lack of competition and innovation, because, as with monotheistic theology, the emphasis is on maintaining order, not revolutionising or innovating on it. In the Abrahamic tradition, the voice of God comes from the fringes of society, this is directly opposite to the theology of the literati priesthood in China.

In Europe, the Catholic Priesthood, due to their transcendentalist tendency, were happy to cede power and enter into power-sharing agreements with other power bases on a pragmatic, ad hoc, basis. They were involved in local matters, defined by them. In contrast, the control that the literati slowly won and jealously defended from rivals had a side effect:

The emphasis on peace, order, and tranquillity was the cause for consistently purging ecstatic expressions and emotional upheaval from official cults. Popular religion, deprived of any official status, was oriented towards pluralism which had a divisive influence and a crippling effect on the ability of popular religion to challenge the unified power of the state. (Yang 1964, xxii)

In other words, the monotheism of the Confucian priesthood was both a strength and a weakness. They did not try to strengthen themselves against an enemy because in their theological system no enemy existed. (Weber 1968, 206) Everything, including the sib/clan theology, was absorbed into a single cosmology. There was no tension between divinity and the accepted social order in Confucianism, therefore no basis for Prophecy. Apart from when an Imperial family stops acting right, then they lose the Mandate of Heaven. Prophecy was not incorporated into the system.

This point about the literati priesthood being inflexible comes to a head with the Opium Wars. The Opium Wars, as we shall see, marked an existential threat to China's theological system, one that could only be solved by reform. But the compromise that lay at the heart of

the Chinese system meant that reform was near impossible, because of the outsized power of the officials and their divided loyalties between the imperial bureaucracy and sib networks, which was exacerbated by the weakening of the imperial bureaucracy after its defeat at the hands of the foreign powers. Yang points out exactly this observation in Weber:

An interesting point in this sense is his observation on the collective “appropriation” of privileges by Chinese bureaucratic officialdom as a whole. This collective pattern of vested interest turned the entire officialdom against any reform or change which was viewed likely to damage established privileges. Consequently, “only military conquest of the county, or successful military or religious revolution could shatter the firm structure of prebendary interests.” (Yang 1964, xl-xli)

One correction must be made here. Military revolution alone would not have worked, China had had many military revolutions, one for every new dynasty. It had never had a theological revolution. That was what was needed to bring about change, and that was what happened.

4.2 Nationalism, Prophecy and Revolution

A Theological revolution happens when the priesthood is no longer effectively able to defend the theological system that they have used to define reality in the imaginations of the populace. The question of Theodicy at its heart then is a justification for the existence of the system itself. The internal logic of this theological system that claims to explain everything; how does it explain the bad things that exist within it, or that threaten it from the outside?

The standard theodicy in the Chinese system was the argument that the current leaders are behaving inappropriately; that the actions of those in a system are causing disorder; they need to hark back to the established patterns of behaviour in order to overcome the current threat to the system. 'In the event of failure... priests may find ways of interpreting failures in such a manner that the responsibility falls, not upon the god or themselves, but upon the behavior of the god's worshippers.' (Weber 1965, 32-33) This is what we saw with the literati's insistence on proper conduct of the imperial family, lest they lose the mandate of heaven.

This theodicy falls apart when the established patterns of behaviours offer nothing in terms of solutions to a particular type of threat. The foreign imperial powers were such a threat. For the traditional member of the Chinese literati priesthood, it would be hard to overstate just how much of a shock the empire's defeat and subjugation at the hands of these barbarians would

be. Not because of the defeat itself necessarily, but because the barbarians had no interest in accepting the cultural superiority of the Chinese Literati as other barbarian conquerors had done before. Here was something totally alien to the Literati's theological system, something that could not be explained. This was an existential problem that the Literati failed to solve. This theological problem is the root of their inability to reform. This means that either the god is powerless or the methods are now unknown. Therefore the god is abandoned. (Weber 1965, 32)

It is in situations like this in our adapted Weberian framework, that prophets emerge. By looking at the exact nature of the Chinese theological system that was being challenged we can then go on to look at why certain prophetic voices rose to dominance through offering what were seen as effective solutions.

4.2.1 Polytheism and Nationalism: The Copernican Theological Shift

The fact that there were outsiders who embodied an explicit and undeniable rejection of both the cultural superiority of the Chinese Literati, and therefore the cosmic and theological centrality of China itself, placed huge questions over the assumed monotheism behind the literati. This monotheism was based upon the idea that China was the centre of the world, the theological and cultural centre of humanity. The existence of these western powers alone was disproof of this fundamental tenant of Chinese theology at the time. This proof that the specific brand of monotheism that the Chinese theological system was built on was false shaped the direction of the coming theological revolution.

The only adequate response to the challenge posed was to embrace a certain form of polytheism. This is exactly the change that shaped the collective self-conception of what China was. This is when China became a nation. These proposals for reform were indicative of a deeper shift in the theological makeup of the Chinese system. The primary basis of the prophetic movement was a rejection of the monotheism that the literati had built itself upon. This was a Copernican revolution in thought, a shift in the conception of the divinity, the devotion to which held the society together.

We see this in how the conception of the language and how it was used. As noted previously, tied to the fact that the priesthood was the literati, culture itself is seen to be born from the written word, knowledge of which gave the wielder of language the power to divine the true nature of reality. This is what made China the centre of the world. '[T]he literati were

adepts, strategic strata in a cosmological hierarchy of which the apex was divine.’ (Anderson 2006, 14-16)

Weber notes that ‘even in the oldest tradition the ancient scriptures were considered magical objects, and the men conversant with them were considered holders of magical charisma.’ (Weber 1968, 108-109) We can see the fear that the literati felt in the veneration that the written word was shown in this time of crisis. In the face of wholesale abandonment of Chinese heritage and dominance of new western ideas and teachings, a worship of the written word (xizizhi) was revolutionised and championed as a practice among literati in China. It involved a reward and punishment system based on how far you revered the written word. (Chau 2017) For the last generation of the Confucian Elite, this became seen on the national scale; the fate of China was tied to the fate of the writing system. ‘There was writing first and then there was a country and a society.’ Writing is seen as the basis for everything, justice, relationships, and commerce. Natural disasters became linked to people not caring for the written word. Chau calls this ‘Script Fundamentalism.’ This period saw attempts to share this principle across society, not just the literary elite, but everybody should seek to preserve the written word, the fate of the country rested on it, individuals in the stories were rewarded for preserving the written word.

However, a failure of Anderson is that he only sees the loss of that sense of the divine being communicable through the language. Nations have a different conception of the divine to empires, not no conception. Both nations and empires are theological bodies, but as their understandings of divinity is different so their understanding of how divinity is mediated to the community is also different. This is the importance of the printed vernacular is well explored in Anderson’s work, but the theological implications are not. In chapter five of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson aims at explaining the populist and liberalist idea of the nationalisms in Europe, which made them different from those earlier ones of the Americas. Here the fact that language was central to the conception meant that ‘the ultimate locus of sovereignty had to be the collectivity of [the languages] speakers.’ (Anderson 2006, 82) In other words; the imagined collectivity of the people themselves, the god *demos*, becomes the locus of divinity.

This theological revolution, Copernican in scale, prompted much work among the traditionalist literati to try to salvage as much as possible from the old system. Initially, the reforms took on the form of what Anderson calls the ‘The ‘naturalizations’ of Europe’s dynasties’ (Anderson 2006, 86), or ‘official nationalism’. Anderson writes of this process as it occurred

in Europe ‘Romanovs discovered they were Great Russians, Hanoverians that they were English, Hohenzollerns that they were Germans and with rather more difficulty their cousins turned Romanian, Greek.’ (Anderson 2006, 85)

The imaginative shift from monotheism to polytheism mirrors the imaginative shift in changing China from an empire to a nation. This is the same process that Anderson describes happening in Russia and Britain as a national conception is invented in order to cement the control of what is a heterogeneous group of people, who, if measured by language, cultural heritage, history, etc., would normally not be classed as a 'nation'. 'It is stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire.' (Anderson 2006, 85-86)

This was easier for the Chinese to imagine because their basis for the imperial family was different. As already discussed the impersonal nature of the core concept in the literati's theological system meant that loyalty to the imperial family could already be conceived of as conditional upon their performance of their role. Something alien to Europe before the rise of nationalisms. (Anderson 2006, 85)

Important to note that these ‘official nationalisms’ were reactions from power bases that had already been established. (Anderson 2006, 110) And in China, as in Russia and Britain, the idea of these people belonging to the same ‘nation’ was not a grassroots phenomena but an imposition from above. ‘At that time, (1900s) nationalism, that is, the theory that nation and state should be congruent and that every nation should have a state, became known among Chinese reformist political thinkers and quickly gained popularity.’ (Schneider 2017, 93)

The Qing Empire was diverse, the most popular conception of Chinese nationalism meant the marriage of Han Chinese ethnicity with Qing territory through the concept of ‘assimilative power.’ (Schneider 2017, 93) This is the idea that there are ‘stronger ethnicities’ than can ‘swallow weak ethnicities and erase their frontiers.’ (Schneider 2017, 94) Many of these thinkers associated a strong state with a homogenous state. In this view the ‘sinicization’ (Hanhua) of the “lesser races” of China was either nearly completed, as with Liang Qichao, (Schneider 2017, 95-96) or that it was easy and the best course of action for these people, as with Zhang Taiyan. (Schneider 2017, 96-97) The Manchu ethnicity of the Qing Imperial family was held up as an example of the positives and success of sinicization. However, as the Hundred Days’ Reform period failed, and many of the reformers were exiled to Japan, ‘more

and more came to believe that the problem was exactly the non-Chinese identity of the Qing emperors and the ruling elites.' (Schneider 2017, 99) As a result:

...they did not aim at a constitutional monarchy with Manchu emperors anymore, but a republic with a Chinese [Han] ruling elite who would lead the non-Chinese inferior people towards their integration into a Chinese [Han] nation-state. This integration would be based on 'China's assimilative power' which the Chinese possessed because of their cultural and ethnic superiority. (Schneider 2017, 99)

When the Republic was finally established in 1911, the assimilative power of the Han ethnicity and culture showed itself to be much weaker than assumed, with all significant non-Han ethnic groups fighting for, and often winning, effective independence. (Schneider 2017, 99) The full significance of this, and the racial elements that come with it, will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

The key theme here is a Copernican revolution in terms of China's self-conception and theological makeup. The principle shift theologically was from monotheism to polytheism. When this is blended with the immanentism of Chinese theology, a strand that remains consistent throughout this period, we see the Chinese people divinised; one of the strongest 'peoples' of the world and deserving of respect in a global system.

One thing to note is that whilst transcendental divinity translates into a priesthood sub-community separated from the laity. Because it is difficult to master the internal evil, therefore fewer achieve this exemplary status. (Monasticism). Immanentist divinity, which sees evil as external, provides much lower separation of the exemplars. In fact as with any nationalism, the most common of people is seen as an exemplary member of the society (Populism).

China thus became the centre of a region, the centre of one civilisation among a handful, as opposed to the centre of the world itself. However, the Communist priesthood initially rejected its culture and traditions, placing the people alone as the sole occupants of the centre. This is born from this theological shift that saw the Chinese people themselves as the source of divinity.

4.2.2 New Conception of Time and Salvation: Salvation in the Future

As previously noted, Weber talks about Confucianism not having a concept of salvation. (Weber 1965, 90, 147) This is not strictly true but can be understood clearly by analysing the

consequences of the Literati's emphasis on cultivation and the steady-state. Cultivation is the task of the individual but it is less a reward in itself as it is a duty to the wider society. As we have said the emphasis in this theological system is one of preservation, the proper ordering of society, exemplified by the accomplishments of ancient leaders, must be maintained. This model of salvation, as with all models of salvation, shaped people's conception of time. The Confucian literati had the connection to the divine being universal and emanating from the origins of Chinese civilisation. When the theological revolution that was the focus of the previous section happened, it shifted how both salvation and time are conceived in China's national theology.

On the point of salvation, Weber rightly points out the following:

Now the various ethical colorations of the doctrines of god and sin stand in the most intimate relationship to the striving for salvation, the content of which will be different depending upon what one wants to be saved from, and what one wants to be saved for. (Weber 1965, 147)

Of the different models of salvation that Weber highlights, the one that best suits Chinese theology after the theological revolution that saw the fall of the literati priesthood is an eschatological model. This is a system that promises the future transformation of the world. (Weber 1965, 139) More specifically the vision that seems to occupy China's national theology is polytheist, a divinised conception of the Chinese people. This means that the theology is based on a promise to restore the entire society to prominence over and against the needs of the individual, (Weber 1965, 140) rather than focusing on the individual first.⁸ (Weber 1965, 143)

This often takes the form of a promise or covenant with a community that is passed on generation to generation. Included in this is the belief in reincarnation and the afterlife. However, it is important to include more immanentist and material views of salvation, which Weber overlooks. In a transcendentalist version of salvation, judgement belongs to the god; the priesthood is often unwilling to get involved in matters of justice. In the Immanentist version, the priesthood is tasked to enforce God's will and making sure reality reflects it. China is and always has been an immanentist system, this was true before and after the theological

⁸ The focus on the individual is linked to monotheism and is often connected to an emphasis on the eternal nature of the punishment or reward, as well as the eternal nature of the soul. This is in line with the singular power of the god, tied with the idea that creation is ex nihilo.

revolution. Important to note that transcendentalism links to abstractions in terms of justice (life after death, karma, etc.) Whereas Immanentism leads to things like messianism and calls for violent revolution.⁹

This striving to ensure China's material salvation places salvation itself firmly in the future. This is in stark contrast with the model of salvation maintained by the Literati priesthood. We see here the weakness of Anderson's conception of 'empty time'. (Anderson 2006, 26) Anderson tries to make the point that a new, objectively neutral conception of time prefigured the rise of nationalism. He writes that '[i]n the secular story of the 'person' there is a beginning and end.' (Anderson 2006, 205) It is important to point out not just that all stories have a beginning and end, but that, of course, a new type of society will have a new conception of time because every society tries to make history fit a narrative that legitimises and centralises that specific society.

The theological shifts that took place in China shaped the actions of its new priesthood. The response to the challenge that the Chinese theological system faced was eschatological, group-based: nationalism. And immanentist, Chinese people need to fight for their salvation. This is born from the same narrative that gives the century of humiliation. Tradition was rejected as it was no longer considered the connection to the divine. The people are the divine, the task of the priesthood is always to make the voice of the god heard. This extends to china's role in the international system, and the priesthood's internal composition. This leads us to our next point.

4.2.3 Polytheism and Immanentism Reflected in the Composition of the Priesthood

It is important to look at 'the varieties of types of "soil" in which such movements may or may not be expected to grow.' (Parsons 1965, xxxviii). These theological shifts were born from a particular class, middle-class bourgeoisie, literate, educated, but not in a classical sense. Many were educated abroad. And, counter to the Confucian ideal, they were all specialists in various fields. They were likely the second or third sons and daughters of wealthy families which may well have seen many generations of officials. This disconnect from the traditional

⁹ Weber also offers two other theodicies: Dualism (Weber 1965, 144-145) and Karma (Weber 1965, 145-146). But these seem less like rival frameworks and more like different types that fit in the same framework.

education made them the prime place for such prophetic voices to grow.

No reforms allowed from the traditional literati meant the growth of a new breed of literati: foreign-educated specialists, Sun Yat-Sen types, happy to learn from foreign powers, something anathema to the traditional literati, which is why reforms failed so badly. Unsurprisingly, this revolutionary class was in many ways similar to the Literati priesthood apart from three points; specialisation, foreign education, alienation from the imperial bureaucracy. These three points, especially the third, meant that this group had none of the rigidity that restricted innovation and reform in the Priesthood, thus making them the logical vessel for prophetic challenge. This fits perfectly with Weber's analysis of prophetic movements, as he argues that both the lower (peasant) and upper classes hold a natural conservatism. (Weber 1965, 107).

As Anderson writes about the development of nationalism in Europe, the changing conception of language as a tool for communication between a sovereign people, strengthened this bond. This is a class of people who 'did come to visualize in a general way the existence of thousands and thousands like themselves through print language.' (Anderson 2006, 77) Anderson doesn't talk about this. But state education is central to this effort because this new tool of printed vernacular as a vehicle for the imagined community is only effective if you have a literate population. Thus, we see vast massification of education at this time, one of the few reforms won in China. These educational reforms perhaps lie at the bottom of the shift in power away from the literati priesthood and the vastly different system of education that they grew from.

No Rival Priesthoods

If there is one man who might be singled out as *the* prophet of China's National theology, it is Sun-Yat Sen. Around him there grew a group of followers; 'helpers, who are active co-workers with the prophet in his mission and who generally also possess some special charismatic qualifications.' (Weber 1965, 60). Both of the other men who could claim, in different ways, the title of prophet, Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai Shek, painted themselves as the true inheritors of Sun's vision.

On the shift from monotheism to polytheism, this prophetic movement in China was in agreement. This shift from monotheism to polytheism was the key point that defined this theological revolution. On the question of immanence vs transcendence, there was general

agreement and continuity with the earlier literati priesthood. That is, internal diversity was accepted, but any rival group was not. This meant the continuation of another key feature of the Chinese Priesthood; intolerance towards rival priesthoods. For this reason, the two main priesthoods that emerged as the leading forces in the revolution; the Nationalists and the Communists ended up refusing to share power as rival political parties (as happened in the US revolution, for example). They ended up fighting until only the Communist party was left on the mainland. Why the Communists won is a question that we will attempt to answer in the next chapter. For now, it is important to look more closely at how the polytheism of the revolution theology, shaped the internal composition of the Communist priesthood itself.

Chinese Polytheism and the Rule of Law

The primary implications of this move towards Polytheism, that China is one nation amongst many rather than the centre of the world, has already been discussed. This sub-section will look at how this idea extends to the internal structure of the Communist Priesthood; the ideal of competition means that the strong shape the system.

Weber goes on to talk about different offices of grace. The leaders who establish any theological system in the way that the Communist priesthood did need to hold some form of charismatic dominance over the society. Originally this is held in the person of a single individual, in this case, Mao Zedong. To survive this father of the priesthood, this personal charisma is transferred into the institution of the priesthood itself. Weber described this as "'institutional grace" (Anstaltsgrnade)'. (Weber 1965, 187)¹⁰ Weber offers a broader description of such institutional grace; no salvation outside the society, personal virtue of the priest irrelevant, and lastly that salvation is broadly available throughout the society regardless of the individual virtue of the people. It is interesting to note that this description is held largely in common between all nationalist theological systems. This should not come as a surprise when we consider the polytheism that is implicit in nationalist theological systems. This is true of China as well, but China is less institutional than other systems in its charismatic domination of the populace, hence more polytheistic than many. Questions of how far the Communist priesthood can regulate and reform its operations have never taken into account the theology that undergirds the priesthood.

¹⁰ It is important to note the parallel here between this and the shift from Charismatic domination and institutional domination, which is explored in chapter two of this Thesis.

As previously stated, polytheist theological systems view the nature of reality as more chaotic and therefore hold on to a greater necessity for human shaping of reality. The communist party theology bases its external legitimacy on its ability to restore the strength of the Chinese people and give them a voice in shaping how the international system operates; this will be looked at in more detail in the next section. It is important to note that this theology also shapes the internal operations of the priesthood. Most obviously in how binding previous revelations are on the future leadership. Weber explains that 'Once an injunction has achieved the status of a divine commandment, it rises out of the circle of alterable conventions to the rank of sanctity. The regulations enjoined by the religion are therefore regarded, like the arrangements of the cosmos as a whole, as eternally valid - susceptible of interpretation, but not of alteration, unless the god himself reveals a new commandment.' (Weber 1965, 207) In a more monotheist theology, such injunctions are both rare, often final, and therefore hard to alter. In more polytheistic systems they are highly alterable because divinity constantly interplays with humanity in shaping reality and so new revelations are as common as new leadership. There are many examples of this from the Qur'an to the Bible, to the US Constitution.

The Constitution of China can be changed by a powerful leader; Ruled by Law rather than Rule of Law. The shape of the system that the operators act within is decided by the strongest operator. In other words, the strong write the rules. In this way the General Secretary rises through the perception that they embody the priesthood's theology:

What, finally, is the general secretary's core function? It is not to gain power on the back of a specific manifesto. That, in a consensus-based organization, is already in place and functioning. It is not to direct the government, but to give it broad political and ideological leadership. In that sense, it comes closer to a spiritual position like that of the Pope, or the Archbishop of Canterbury. Its role is to supply a vision, to exemplify particular moral qualities and, finally (most importantly of all) to display a profound and convincing belief in the Party, and the Party mission. (Brown 2017, 96)

The Communist party has only seen three leaders that have been able to properly rewrite the rules of how the party operates: Mao, Deng, and Xi. The difference between them is again a matter of theology, that Deng attempted to enact reforms that all subsequent officeholders would be beholden to, demonstrates a shade of monotheism because the system itself should

be set in stone. That Mao and now Xi believe that they have the right to rewrite the rules to better reflect their vision, this belies greater polytheism, as only the weak are expected to follow the rules that have been laid down. The strong are the ones who write them.

The point to make against Weber is that he seemed to see institutional charisma flowing one way. The case of the Communist Priesthood of China is a prime example of it moving in whichever way the leadership demands.

4.3 Communist Party Theology

Weber was working on 'The Religions of China' up until his death in 1920. Interpreting what has happened in China since his death is something that offers many fascinating avenues for discussion. The primary interest in adapting his methodology has been using it to analyse the continuity and change between the Literati priesthood that was his focus and the Communist priesthood that has since emerged.

If the Literati priesthood had their foundational myth in the control of floodwaters, then the Communist priesthood has theirs in the narrative of The Long March. This was a strategic military retreat after Chiang-kai Shek turned on and sought to wipe out the Communists as a rival. The Long March is an Exodus of sorts, and it saw Mao emerge the undisputed leader of the movement and we saw his followers, the permanent community of the followers of the prophet, (Weber 1965, 60) gain a near-mythic status as the Iron Generation of Communist leadership. The fact that all the major leaders of China have been directly linked to this generation is no coincidence.

The influence any religion exerts on the conduct of life, and especially on the conditions of rebirth, varies in accordance with the particular path to salvation which is desired and striven for, and in accordance with the psychological quality of the salvation in question. (Weber 1965, 151)

The influence that the Communist party has on Chinese society is directly related to how far they justify that control and think it necessary to ensure the salvation of China, which is understood as China taking its rightful place as a great nation of the world.

A key point of continuity throughout Chinese theology is the flexibility of the priesthood on specific policies, so long as the uncompromising vision of China is maintained,

under the Communists this vision of China changed from a monotheist one to a polytheist one. This flexibility is why the Mao's vision of communism was dropped when it proved disastrous. And why the official line from the Communist Party on Mao's legacy is that he was 70% right and 30% wrong. As with the literati, who were willing to compromise on their control of society in order to slowly bring about their monotheistic vision, the Communist priesthood has proven itself willing to compromise on everything apart from their core vision of themselves leading China to the position of global power. This is because a core component of their theology is the so-called Mass Line. It is to this that we now turn.

The shift towards a nationalist theological system meant that the justification of the priesthood had to be reimagined. What was their legitimacy, their connection to the divine; how were they able to interpret the will of their god, the Chinese people. Most national systems do so on the basis of elections. The Communist party came up with a unique answer to this specific question. The Mass Line has its basis in democratic centralism, it envisioned a direct link between the masses and the leadership of the Communist party. Not unlike the ontological link between the Christian God and the Papacy in Roman Catholicism. The Communist leadership interprets the will of the people directly and bases its decisions for policy direction upon this.

This material salvation has been achieved for the most part by the economic advancement that has happened in China under the watch of the Communist party, the scale and success of this economic transformation has seen it dubbed by many to be a 'miracle'. The nature of this thesis allows us to take this name seriously, as the priesthood, the communist party, has finally enabled the god, the Chinese people, to make itself known as a power with global reach. Offering salvation to the country and its people from weakness and poverty. The Communist Priesthood, therefore have tied their legitimacy to their ability to bring about this salvation for China. Though they do not accept the legitimacy of any rival priesthood, they have proven themselves to be surprisingly flexible and pragmatic towards this end. It is the polytheistic system that enabled such pragmatism, exemplified by Deng, to be enacted in China. As Weber writes:

The needs of economic life make themselves manifest either through a reinterpretation of the sacred commandments or through a by-passing of the sacred commandments, either procedure being motivated by casuistry. Occasionally we also come upon a simple, practical elimination of religious injunctions, similar to

the actual practice in the ecclesiastical dispensation of penance and grace. (Weber 1965, 208)

In his work, Weber offers a unique argument about the theological factors that must be in place for modern capitalism to take hold in a society. Something that he was unable to do is look at how Capitalism arrives due to the Communists removing many of the inhibiting factors that were the focus of his work. (Yang 1964, xli) Weber argues that you need a specific breed of immanentism, one where material wealth is not an end in itself but a sign of salvation. The strict immanentist or materialist is actually a worse businessman because their lack of morals means that no system can be built. (Weber 1965, 182-183). In the same way that complete free-market capitalism leads to monopolies and inequalities that then destroy the system in a boom-bust cycle. In this way to have economic advancement, you need a moderate to strong immanentism and moderate balance of monotheism and polytheism. This gives you a rationalist, materially grounded society, which is based upon a specific shared and enforced moral principles; and yet is still open to competition.

Weber suggests here that economic activity arises within Christianity here because there isn't the resentment of the pariah groups. They are not segregated, nor are they economically frustrated. But also key is the indifference towards (as opposed to Buddhism's rejection of) material goods. There isn't resentment or hatred of the material, it is an important part of life even if it not the most important thing. (Weber 1965, 116)

This additional factor is intellectualism as such, more particularly the metaphysical needs of the human mind as it is driven to reflect on ethical and religious questions, driven not by material need but by an inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and to take up a position towards it. (Weber 1965, 117)

This is systematisation, but one that is neutral on the issue of materialism. Immanentist theology that is not too immanentist thus requires control, means engaging in mainstream society, but on the terms of rules that have set for oneself that keep you safe from the temptations of the world.

Hence, as the field provided for this active certification, the order of the world in which the ascetic is situated becomes for him a vocation which he must fulfill rationally. As a consequence, and although the enjoyment of wealth is forbidden to the ascetic, it becomes his vocation to engage in economic activity which is faithful

to rationalised ethical requirements and which conforms to strict legality. If success supervenes upon such acquisitive activity, it is regarded as the manifestation of god's blessing upon the labor of the pious man and of god's pleasure with his economic pattern of life. (Weber 1965, 167)

In this model, China failed in the past to develop modern capitalism because it was too immanentist. The pursuit of material wealth was not symbolic of salvation in any way. In Confucianism, it was necessary in order to pursue cultivation, but being increasingly wealthy if anything was a sign of a failure to cultivate.

Weber argues that a system is necessary whereby 'the unique concentration of human behaviour on activities leading to salvation may require the participation within the world (or more precisely: within the institutions of the world but in opposition to them).' (Weber 1965, 166) The literati priesthood of Imperial China never saw themselves as in opposition to material wealth. Puritan Christianity is for Weber the earliest example of such a theological formulation. The interesting thing to note for our purposes is that the more reformist theology of Deng's Communist party would also fit.

This is why an economic miracle was possible under Deng whereas it wasn't under Mao. Weber links the systematisation/rationalisation to the encroachment onto all aspects of life, laying the ground for the protestant work ethic - capitalism argument. (Weber 1965, 160-161) Looking at this in terms of disenchantment is useful. As this links to the Witch-hunts. Mao went too far in terms of exerting control, bureaucratising everything under state control, in some ways the old literati's dream. But terrible for economic development. Mao was too immanentist, and therefore less pragmatic, and wanted to build a true communist society rather than simply make China great by any means necessary. He was convinced that salvation would be won through making a socialist country. He wanted China great by Communist means, and when that didn't work and he was pushed to the side-lines he started another revolution (the Cultural Revolution) just to hold onto power. He was wrong. The reforms opening up was the communist priesthood retreating from claiming to have the answers on the economy. The shift is towards collaboration with the people. A more transcendentalist shift.

It is the priesthood redefining itself. Instead of Mao, who had a clear vision of how the economy and society should work, there was a transition to a more pragmatic approach of Deng, where the priesthood was a partner and a parental figure. Under Xi, the view of the economy

has not shifted, he seems to agree with Deng, but on the role of society he is very uncompromising about the respect and singularity of the Communist priesthood in society. It is the only priesthood. He is more stringent than Deng on this point, but maybe not as much as we might think.



5 Further Analysis of China's National Theology

5.1 Balancing Immanentism and Transcendentalism

On China and the 'official nationalism' of revolutionaries. Anderson writes '[T]he model of official nationalism assumes its relevance above all at the moment when revolutionaries successfully take control of the state, and are for the first time in a position to use the power of the state in pursuit of their visions.' (Anderson 2006, 159) The relevance for our study is the continuity in the theology of China. The revolutionaries saw themselves as fully part of the theological system, a priesthood in waiting. We can see this in how easily they adopted much of the trappings of imperial power,

the CCP leaders congregate in the Forbidden City of the Sons of Heaven. In fact, there are very few, if any, socialist leaderships which have not clambered up into such worn, warm seats... We are not thinking here simply of Djugashvili's self-identification with Ivan Groznii, or Mao's expressed admiration for the tyrant Ch'in Shih Huang-ti,... The more the ancient dynastic state is naturalized, the more its antique finery can be wrapped around revolutionary shoulders. (Anderson 2006, 160).

It is also seen in how fiercely they defended the imperial borders. Contra Anderson, it was not just power, it was piety that fed the opposition to secessionism. This feeds into the uncompromising stance the Communist party takes over territorial issues, like Taiwan and the South China Sea. This is a continuity in the priesthood, not the population because, as Anderson writes 'it is leaderships, not people, who inherit old switchboards and palaces.' (Anderson 2006, 161)

What we see after the revolution is the Communist priesthood achieving what the literati priesthood never did in terms of the extension of their control. This has been aided by the high levels of urbanisation that has been encouraged by the Communist party. The importance of preaching and pastoral care in this system is the primary means of contact, influence and control over the laity. This is present in all rationalised systems. (Weber 1965, 75-76)

The city was the site where that control was extended. Rapid urbanisation has made the population easier to control, The Communist priesthood does not face the same opposition that

the Literati priesthood did. Weber argues that a disconnection from nature and a reliance on the larger economic system (which is rational at its core) means that the lower-middle-class city dweller is not prone to 'magical' thinking. (Weber 1965, 97) He conflates magical thinking with the sib theology of the family networks. This means that urbanisation, as it does everywhere, saw the breakdown of the grasp that traditional theological systems had over large swathes of the population. This, in turn, makes them more prone to the imaginative construction promoted by the dominant priesthood.¹¹

Chinese society had been brought together under imperial power, therefore loyalty was less exclusive in terms of outsiders, based solely as it was upon loyalty to the royal family. Once the Communist priesthood took over, there was a much clearer delineation between insiders and outsiders. The polytheism they embraced meant that it only made sense to demand the loyalty of Chinese people. But, as previously explored (4.2) the loyalty has come to be directed towards the Communist party itself as the mediators of the divine through the Mass line.

...every permanent political association had a special god who guaranteed the success of the political action of the group. When fully developed, this god was altogether exclusive with respect to outsiders, and in principle he accepted offerings and prayers only from the members of his group... The stranger was thus not only a political, but also a religious alien. (Weber 1965, 17)

Whilst it is true that all nationalisms that have generally strict lines and requirement separating citizens from outsiders, the exact definition of a Chinese person is not always clear. This problematizes the expansion of control that the immanentist Communist priesthood experienced. This has different implications for different groups. Governmental control means different things to a Han East Coast factory worker, and a Muslim Uyghur living in Xinjiang. An exploration of this will be the focus of this section.

5.1.1 'Value Spheres' and Communist Party dominance of society

As Gane points out, Weber himself argues that 'with the disenchantment of religious legitimation a number of autonomous life-orders, each with their own value-spheres, separate

¹¹ It is interesting to note the similarities between Literati officials and Confucian officials who work under equal suspicion of building up their own power bases. The difference is that the weaker grasp that the literati had over society meant that the concern was secession, whereas for the communist it is internal power struggles.

out and enter into conflict with one another: the religious, economic, political, aesthetic, erotic and intellectual.’ (Gane 2004, 8) Both Gane and Derman tie this to ‘the emergence of ‘an incoherent, unstable, and meaningless world of polytheistic values and nihilism’.’ (Gane 2004, 8) In other words, by embracing polytheism the Communist priesthood admits that they are only one answer amongst many for the general population to establish meaning in their lives.

However, it is clear that the Communist priesthood inherited the literati priesthood’s immanentism and along with it the war to control society. The continuity in this pattern of monitoring and regulation from the imperial period, through the republican period, to now is well documented. (Bays 2004) Timothy Brook points out that the main difference after the Republican revolution is the shift in terms with ‘superstition’ and ‘religion’ replacing ‘heterodoxy’ and ‘orthodoxy’ respectively. (Brook 2009)

The Communist government made use of ‘different functional spheres in society that are similar to (or rather imitative of?) the functional constituencies or interest groups in Western liberal states.’ (Chau 2017, 128-129) Spheres are a ‘fuzzy, semi-formal socio-political domain comprising certain politically recognized social actors accompanied by related institutions and activities.’ (Chau 2017, 130) They are a place for negotiation between formal state power and power wielded by local elites, and can be seen as the legitimate forum for civil society. They exist to serve the needs of two communities. They represent the interests of the Chinese people, and they maintain the hierarchy and control of the government over society. ‘Religion’ here was used as a category for defining the Chinese pantheon and more importantly, the dominance of the Communist Party over every rival by defining them as transcendentalist, even if they were not.

The looming threat of consequence for those who criticise the government works alongside this system where potential rivals are domesticated and defanged. ‘Religion’ works in this context by forming a place in society where rivals are expected to provide stability and peace. (Chau 2017, 135) So long as they do this they are free to act as part of the private life of the citizens. When these groups step out of line, narratives quickly paint them as actively working against the Chinese people. Different groups have experienced different levels of persecution, not because of their foreign ties as some have suggested, (Wiest 2004, 91) but because of the internal theological composition of these groups. This can be seen in how the Communist government persecutes home-grown versions of theological traditions. (Xu 2004, 109) ‘Sinicization’ does not mean cutting foreign ties so much as it means loyalty to the

Communist Party. 'Modernization' means adopting the mould cut out for acceptable 'religion'; something different groups have found easier (Wank 2009) than others. (Gladney 2009)

At present, there are moves to encourage the kind of worship of the Party that Kuo would describe as 'Chinese Patriotism'. (Kuo 2017) In this context, the Communist Party tolerates theological systems that do not claim the lethal loyalties of people, and actively tries to root out those that do or are perceived to be a claim on people's loyalties. Abuses of human rights in this context are numerous and well documented. (Kindopp 2004, 6)

We should remind ourselves that this was also true under the Imperial Bureaucracy, which at various times 'systematically looted monasteries' and persecuted minorities in a way that Europe only saw at the turn of the Protestant Reformation. (Weber 1968, 8) Indeed, this jealous defence of the lethal loyalties of the people is common amongst dominant priesthoods. However, the Communist party represents an extreme version of this, what William Cavanaugh would call the 'Myth of Religious Violence.'

5.1.2 Colonisation of Minorities in China

If Christendom failed as a state, it was not because it was unattractive in the minds of the general populace but because the central bureaucracy lacked the ability to enforce its vision, the opposite is true of China. As previously noted, the god of modern China is the Chinese people themselves. This divinity rested on the unified, cultural, understanding of what it meant to be Chinese. The problem with this is that China is diverse, and many people did not fit with this vision of the Chinese people. This meant intense colonisation of those who were in Communist borders but not culturally Han.

We see as a result of this the colonisation of the non-Han Chinese territories that the Communist party inherited from the Qing. 'Census, Map, and Museum' have been used here by the Communist party towards this end much as Anderson describes in his chapter of the same name. 'The 'warp' of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state's real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore - in principle - countable.' (Anderson 2006, 184)

It is in this context that we return to Julia Schneider's work tracking the racially infused cultural superiority that informs the Communist government's treatment of minority groups. (Schneider 2017) The near cultural genocide currently playing out in Xinjiang against Uyghurs shows that this is ingrained in China's national theology. This push towards immanentism is the source of endless human rights abuses being perpetrated by the Communist priesthood.

5.1.3 Taking a Step Back

People belong to multiple socio-theological systems; I can be both Christian and British at the same time. How immanentist a system is can be measured by how externally their ethical achievements are measured. Transcendentalism leaves such measurements to the individual, this is important because it allows for peaceful coexistence between the different societies that people belong to. The Communist priesthood is doing a similar thing to every other national government in their demand for the exclusive control of the lethal loyalty of the population within their borders. It is necessary for the psychological health of the individual for one of the theological systems to take precedence; I am either British first or Christian first. Nationalist theological systems have a baseline of immanentism but they vary in how much control they demand over their people's lives. The Communist government is more immanentist than most in its theology. They do not tolerate ambiguity when it comes to the lethal loyalty of their population. Loyalty to the nation must be explicit and publically measurable, especially for those on the fringes of what it means to be Chinese.

The control that the Communist priesthood has gained that the literati priesthood never had, means that they have much less space to deal with challenges to the current system. The literati priesthood's compromise with the great families of the land gave them a measure of plausible deniability that no doubt contributed to their long life span. The Communist priesthood has no such defence. This, tied to the increasing immanentism of the Communist priesthood means that there are little to no avenues for genuine prophetic voices to emerge. Most other systems, especially ones that would be described as democratic, incorporate a space for such voices to be heard. This is important because it allows for the theological system itself to respond and adapt in the face of challenges. Failure to do this was the problem that destroyed the literati priesthood, and our analysis makes clear that the Communist priesthood's immanentism leaves it open to being destroyed in a similar way. However, a move towards greater transcendentalism is certainly a possibility. Accepting and engaging with rival systems has already been demonstrated not just possible, but successful in Taiwan, with the KMT

opening up to rival priesthoods, principally the DPP, in the form of contested, multi-party elections.

5.2 KMT Heresy

As we previously noted, if there is one person who could be given the name prophet of China's national theology, it is Sun Yat-Sen. We have looked at the Communist priesthood which sees itself as his inheritors. The splintering of the priesthood that was to some extent unified under Sun is going to be the focus of this section. Primarily it aims to answer the question why did the Communists emerge victorious and not the Nationalist KMT of which Sun himself was the founder?

A basic portrait can be painted as follows. According to Communist party theology; if Sun Yat-Sen is the prophet, Mao is the one who followed through on his vision and made it a reality. Chiang Kai Shek is seen as a heretic who twisted the vision and ended up fulfilling a role not too dissimilar from Yuan Shikai. But, considering the unity held amongst this class of revolutionaries on the polytheistic shift in the Chinese theological system, what is the theological difference between Communists and Nationalists? And how did it contribute to the Communists eventually taking control of the mainland?

As we have previously noted (4.2) this class arose out of educated elites that were not part of the imperial bureaucracy and had not been educated along the lines of the Confucian ideal. They were not social elites, and could probably be placed as part of China's, infant modern middle class. This is exactly the class that Weber would expect us to 'encounter an apparent increase in the diversity of religious attitudes.' (Weber 1965, 95) Weber (Weber 1965, 99) talks about the spread of Christianity through unfree, aspirational and economically active slaves. These people are prone to rationalism and ethical systems of compensation, reward and punishment. This is the parallel for the spread of immanentist theological systems of nationalism, socialism, communism, amongst the equivalent class of unfree, aspirational and economically active Chinese citizens in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

As stated before their primary enemy was not necessarily the imperial family, many reformers were fine with maintaining the imperial family in a constitutional monarchy like Britain or Japan. The primary enemy for this revolutionary class were the members of greater and lesser families who, unlike this group, fit into the imperial bureaucracy. And, at this time

of weakness, were enriching themselves and even at times declaring a form of independence. The prime example of such a person was Yuan Shikai, who purchased a minor official title in 1880 after failing the imperial examination twice. It is at the feet of people like this that Weber places the blame for the failure of reforms in China in this period; it seems that this thought was shared by the revolutionary class themselves.

For Communist theology, this hatred of the corrupt landlord officials turned warlords, fit perfectly with the deification of the hardworking, downtrodden Chinese people that defined their strand of nationalism, as this peasant class saw the landlords as their traditional enemy. (Weber 1968, 79) In other words, the section of the population that had been most 'alienated' by the traditional theological system and therefore 'those which are relatively "available" to be stirred by prophetic movements.' (Parsons 1965, xxxix) was the rural peasantry, and as such, it was their support that was likely to be crucial in emerging as the dominant priesthood.

Weber notes the following: 'That the peasant has become the distinctive prototype of the pious man who is pleasing to god is a thoroughly modern phenomenon' (Weber 1965, 83). He compares this with Christianity where the word 'pagan' (paganus), originally the word for rural worker, came to mean someone who was theologically backwards. (Weber 1965, 83)

We can understand this difference through the theological makeup of the revolution. A possible explanation for this, which can be worked through thanks to our framework, is the immanentism that these theological systems have in common. In essence, transcendental divinity translates into a sub-community separated from the laity. Because it is difficult to master the internal evil, therefore fewer achieve this exemplary status. (Monasticism) Immanent divinity, therefore externalised evil, provides much lower separation of the exemplars. Nationalism, for example, the most common of people is seen as an exemplary member of the society (Populism).

We see this also in the differing targets of the variously transcendentalist and immanentist movements. Transcendental movements that seek to master inner evil often encourage movement into the countryside and possibly also view the poorer or lower class people as somehow inferior in their sense of lacking discipline or self-control. Immanentist movements, on the other hand, target the city as a den of iniquity that must be taken back from the corrupt upper classes. 'Thus, what was involved...was very largely a reaction against the development of modern rationalism, of which the cities were regarded as the carriers.' (Weber

1965, 83-84) These are extreme cases, but the more tangible result is that more immanentist revolutionary groups are likely to be more popular among rural populations, and also be willing to pursue more and more radical and violent means to achieve their ends. (Parsons 1965, xl) Whereas more transcendental revolutionary movements are likely to be more closely tied to urban populations, perhaps more highly educated, and less prone to radical and violent actions. (Parsons 1965, xli) Another dimension of this is that for the middle classes the focus becomes the family and domestic life. 'The tendency is toward inwardness and edification.' (Weber 1965, 103) Is this the reason that middle-class revolutions (Christianity, Buddhism) tend towards transcendentalism, and lower-class ones (Nationalism, Communism) tend towards immanentism.¹²

We see this same narrative played out by various factions fighting for power throughout history. For our purposes, however, it is necessary to highlight the different wings of the revolutionary movement in China. One wing, which it is not too difficult to equate to the Nationalists, was slightly more transcendentalist and likely viewed the modern cities as beacons of progress, the best of humanity. The Communists, on the other hand, were slightly more materialist and immanentist and as such were much more successful early on with rural populations who likely equated the city to a den of sin, corrupt and the worst of humanity. As has already been explained, this does not mean that the prophetic voice comes from the rural areas. (Weber 1965, 81) It means that the rural, peasant class need a champion to represent them, and a prophetic movement is likely to be influenced into doing so. (Weber 1965, 81). Those on the extremes of society are locked in, unable or unwilling to engender change. Change comes from the middle classes.

From this point it is not too easy to engender support from the rural population of China, at this time the vast majority, by doubling down on messaging that was anti-landlordism; and more importantly, equating the corrupt officials with the Nationalist party that had by this time won power. The nationalist party themselves became seen as corrupt and from here it was perhaps too easy for the communists to paint them as a threat, that disdained China's rural population. (Weber 1965, 80) It was this stance that enabled the Communists to emerge as the dominant priesthood of China's new nationalist theological system. This is a very subtle

¹² Another aspect that can be highlighted is that immanentist systems tend to be more exclusive against women. Also more militaristic. Chinese, Roman, Brahmin groups explicitly exclude women. Christianity and Buddhism included women from the start, Judaism and Islam have mixed records. (Weber 1965, 104)

theological difference. And probably wouldn't have been a problem if they had not inherited the insistence on unity in the Priesthood that the literati had held on to before the revolution.

5.3 The Protestant Work Ethic Thesis in China: An Economic Miracle

Weber argues that high levels of intellectualism present in the general population, which he links to the move away from this polytheist, magical thinking, is a sign of people taking a greater burden of building the socio-theological systems that they belong to for themselves. (Weber 1965, 195) This is perhaps the reason, or another reason, why too much control from the priesthood, immanentism, leads to economic stagnation. In fact, it has consistently been argued that authoritarianism is bad for economic development. China proves, however, that it is not so simple.

Thinking about this as a necessity for economic development is strong support for the modernisation thesis or a different version of it. Because while the last chapter talked about how you need an inner world (moderate immanentism) in order to have economic development because wealth is valued but not excessively. This will talk about how there needs to be limits on polytheism: competition is good, but it needs to be controlled and follow a set of transparent rules.

The reason that freedom from state control, transcendentalism, is necessary is that insistence on any system has its own problems. The issue is one of motivation. In China's case, the polytheist focus on strength and competition is not necessarily a bad thing for economic growth. But the immanentism also normally translates to the ossification of social class. Intense inequality is already a problem in China. When fewer people see the benefits of the system's growth in their lives, they become less supportive of the system.

The weakness that persists, and is a danger to China's economic growth, is the conflict at the heart of the system, if you can do anything to win then business ethics, alongside fair competition, go out of the window as a reflection of how the priesthood operates. Nothing is transparent, the strong write the rules. Greater transparency, i.e greater monotheism goes some way to addressing this problem. (Weber 1965, 207)

Weber argues that it is necessary to have a level of trust across society. 'The material development of an economy on the basis of social associations flowing from market relationships generally follows its own objective rules, disobedience to which entails economic

failure and, in the long run, economic ruin.’ (Weber 1965, 217). In this way, we can see that the most effective economic system, i.e. surely the most rational is indeed depersonalised because personal motivations are bad for business (nepotism, corruption, etc). But surely this suggests the system is not amoral. Honesty, integrity, fair competition are all fundamental economic goods that are highly valued in business.

Tie to this the idea of taxation without representation. The Communist Party relies on State-Owned Enterprises, but these can suffer from being economically inefficient and ripe for corruption. Strong parallels can be drawn here between this system and the traditionalism of the pre-bends system to which Weber attributes the Literati priesthood's downfall.

This point can be extended in two key directions. First international competition; the US/Western-led international system is largely the inheritor of a colonial and monotheist theological system, it has never accommodated a multipolar (polytheistic) state of affairs. China's polytheism means that it will not seek to be a global hegemon. It is not aiming at tearing down the international system but it will expect to be able to rewrite the international system from the inside as it grows in influence. The key question is if the new age of great power competition of the future spills over into out and out great power conflict. China does not seem to want this, but history tells us that it must work hard, alongside other great powers and rising powers, to avoid it.

Second, this line of thought can be extended to the competition that is internal to the Communist Party in determining its hierarchy. This competition is written into the theological fabric of the polytheism of the Communist theology. There is nothing wrong with competition in itself, but it poses problems for reform in terms of the lack of transparency, the lack of respect for conventions as the next strong leader can rewrite the rules; it means that transitions of power are messy when they do happen, the system is ripe for dictatorship.

This chapter began with the assessment that excessive immanentism is a persistent characteristic in China's national theology, and that this is the same characteristic that saw the downfall of the previous literati priesthood. ‘The Chinese literati-politicians, trained in ritual, were primarily oriented toward problems of internal administration.’ (Weber 1968, 110) Similarly, the Communist party famously spends more on internal policing than on external matters, this point is simply further evidence of the Communist priesthood's continued immanetism. The Communist priesthood is immanentist, but their polytheism means they do

not have a clear image of what an ordered society looks like, apart from the agreement on the idea that everyone should be loyal to them exclusively. Pragmatism rules in the place of traditionalism, each new strong leader sets about implementing their vision, so long as they are strong enough to do so, the end they are serving is to win or ensure the loyalty of the Chinese people. This suggests that they will only become more transcendentalist when it is proven to be a more effective way of maintaining the lethal loyalty of the population.

Chinese Nationalism is diverse. There are already three Chinese language parties that have held power over the levers of a government. On this point, we turn to the work of Weatherley and Zhang, who point to two main strands of Chinese Nationalism that contribute to the shaping of the China Dream, based upon focusing on different periods of Chinese History. First, there are those that focus on events like the destruction of the summer palace, and the Japanese occupation contribute to a confrontational nationalism. With an increasingly muscular China taking its rightful place over and against others on the world stage. Second, there are those that focus on the republican period, and the collaboration at that time with the KMT contributes to a consensual nationalism. With a peacefully rising China seeking to peacefully reunite with Taiwan and enmesh itself in a shared leadership role on the world stage. (Weatherley and Zhang 2017, 143)

Chinese civil society is also dynamic and resilient. Both in terms of the literati and the sib/clan socio-theological system provide numerous avenues for sense-making for Chinese people, that the Communist Party is well placed to tap into. Positive experiments on the rural scale do exist. (Otehode 2009) The trans-national nature of these connections, and their general resilience in rural areas, despite the increased urbanisation under the Communist government, (Yuan 1996) and expansion in recent years, (Chau 2009) means that they may be the best option for opening avenues for reform and prophecy. It seems incredibly unlikely that the Communist priesthood will open up to some form of power-sharing relationship with a rival priesthood, either in the form of a rival political party or a free and independent class within society. It is more likely that the path to greater transcendentalism lies in greater decentralisation and greater experimentation with power-sharing on a local level. There are also options for the expansion and blending of various theological traditions, as happened at the Catholic Pilgrimage to Sheshan. (Madsen and Fan 2009) After all, it seems unlikely that the avenues for Communist control could be co-opted as counter-flows, (Vala 2009) especially considering the disdain that many social elites in China have for these groups. (Yu 2005, 136)

The timescale for these or any similar changes is long and they are not likely to take place any time soon. Greater pressure is likely to build as the Communist priesthood loses, through slowing economic growth, a central plank in its claim to legitimacy. 'As Mao wrote in another context, when a critical mass is achieved under such conditions, "a single spark can light a prairie fire."' (Spiegel 2004, 54)



6 Conclusion and Implications

China boasts perhaps the oldest continuously operating and surviving socio-theological system in the world. The Communist Priesthood inherited a powerful vision for a unified people that remains a strong pull on the lethal loyalty of a huge number of people. They strengthened it by adapting it to a more pluralist and complete vision of humanity. However, they also inherited perhaps the most fundamental weakness of the system; the desire for greater and greater levels of control over society. This makes reforms difficult as the prophetic voice is given no legitimate outlet to voice concerns. Using an adapted version of Weber's ideal types has helped construct this interpretive work that looks at the Theology of China over the course of its long history.

This study was unfortunately limited, not just by space but also by perhaps an overreliance on Weber and Yang in their analysis of Imperial China. It is hoped that a fuller picture can be fleshed out as more updated analysis of this rich and complicated history is added to the framework that this study offers. This is both a weakness of this paper and an invitation for corrections and updates. This thesis is aimed primarily at bridging a gap in the scholarship rather than rewriting the historical record; and, with such a long a storied historical record as its subject, there are bound to be mistakes and omissions for which the author begs the reader pardon.

The gap in the scholarship in question concerns theology and politics, and how they can be brought together to offer analysis. This thesis offers one avenue for doing so. But there are others. The difference between a state and a nation is well explored. In this piece, it has been argued that Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as an 'imagined community' need not be restricted to nations. In fact, racial, familial, civilizational groupings also fit the definition of 'imagined community' the difference between them being the way that they are imagined. This question is a question of theology. Statehood, on the other hand, is a much more clearly defined concept. In conventional international relations theory, a state is a state when it can claim some level of recognition from other bodies that are recognised as states. This is either in a performative sense of official recognition or in a functional sense of being able to enter into negotiations. This mutual recognition, theologically speaking, is an interesting concept when we think of the international system as an overlap of different socio-theological systems. It is the implicit recognition of all parties involved that the system we take part in is polytheistic, yet there is some measure of mutuality cements the system as somehow 'natural' to the level

where a world without states is now difficult to conceive of.

These questions feed into how we conceive of ourselves as a species. The fact that we can speak of humanity as a single coherent block, and that ‘the global/international community’ do not sound strange, suggests that as an ‘imagined community’ humanity is finding its feet. Further exploration into the theological make-up of the global system, and whether a global socio-theological system even has a sound theological basis, is a fascinating set of questions that could easily form the basis of a new project that follows on from issues raised in this thesis.

This brings us back to the implicit criticism of the secularisation thesis that animates much of this thesis. It is important to note that this is not simply injecting theological terms into political discourse. Nor is it translating between theological and political terminologies. It is unmasking the theological foundations behind all political discourse.

Words are important. Secularisation as a concept allows for certain systems, like the Chinese nation, to avoid analysis because they become seen as ‘natural’ or part of the ‘rational’ way of ordering the world. Weber argued that by thinking of something as ‘sacred’ it becomes blocked off from all rationality. (Weber 1965, 207-208) The response to this is simple, that every system is built upon an idea of the sacred. So while it is true that different systems, built of different constructions of sacrality, variously encourage and restrict the process of rationalisation. It is not true that you can have a system that is not based upon some version of sacrality. Purely rational social systems do not exist, just as the archimedean point does not exist.

Weber made it clear what kind of commitments he hoped to find at the end of the historical process of demagification. They were ultimately profoundly individualistic ones: the demagification of the world would enable each individual to find the “daemon that holds the thread of *his* life.” (Derman 2012, 221)

In this way, this thesis can also be seen as a work of disenchantment. Because it should also help people to realise the nature of the theological system that they are living in. That the threads of our lives are held by others should not be a cause for concern, they could be held by angels or demons, but it is of fundamental importance that we understand that they are held by someone, and if we want to ensure that those holding our threads are more angelic than demonic, then we must understand the processes by which they came to hold them in the first place.

Weber is famous for talking about the Disenchantment of the world. But the end of this process should not mean no theology, it means understanding theology.



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