



Confucian Adaptation and Vitality in the Twenty First Century  
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While China's intellectual schools are vast, this study focuses on the Confucian school for two reasons: 1) its leading role in China's political and social history, and 2) its prominent place in Weberian social science literature, and more specifically, Max Weber's position regarding the relationship between Confucianism and economic underdevelopment in China. The present project rejects the dominant research trend in Western social science that measures China's incorporation into a Western model. Instead, it offers a research paradigm that explores how China continues to incorporate new ideas into a regionally pervasive and enduring Chinese worldview.

The Confucian sociohistorical phenomenon of social change, a model of adaptation, developed only in China for three reasons: 1) the nature of the Confucian ideological superstructure; 2) the method of ideological adaptation we call "syncretic conditioning," and 3) China's geography.<sup>5</sup> This sociohistorical model developed in response to indigenous intellectual debates and later foreign ideological and territorial intrusions. Within this continuum, we can identify and explain pertinent events and resulting intellectual shifts.

#### Model of Adaptation

History demonstrates that Chinese civilization developed an enduring propensity to be unified over the longest span of time over the largest territorial expanse.<sup>6</sup> Like the undulations of a silk festival dragon moving along a procession, Chinese history is characterized by a flow from the rise to unification to collapse into disunity, followed by reunification, a succession of rise and fall known as the dynastic cycle. Because this history of reunification is linked to and defined by Confucian assumptions and debates within the Classical literary heritage, we argue that they can be thought of as a Chinese model of rational thought with implications for socio-economic and political stability, and for development. Similarly in the West, Western scholarship suggests that links can be made between current social and political structures and tendencies in the West, and the Classical literary heritage of Western civilization. Similarly, the same argument can be offered in the East, with respect to Classical Chinese literature beginning in the Warring States period, and continuing to China's present development model.<sup>7</sup> Seminal ideas of Chinese intellectuals C both of the Axial Age and within what can be called the process of "syncretic conditioning" suggest that core Confucian ideas are critical in understanding current social, political, and economic issues. For example we can find significance in ideas concerning self cultivation.

Over the course of this long history, the scholastic tradition and the concept of setting an example as a means of self cultivation were substantial and enduring contributions of Confucianism to Chinese society. Education and study of Classical literature developed into a scholastic tradition and cultural identification with scholarship that is uniquely Chinese. Thus, education can be seen as a primary, if not the most significant, effect of the Confucian tradition. Drawing on this unique Chinese, original and indigenous literary tradition, the "people of Han," as the ethnic Chinese refer to themselves, take pride in a cultural identity of humility, integrity, pursuit of wide learning,

and powerful ethics.

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