

Abstract

Is Weber's Analysis of China (circa 1913) Still Useful a Century Later?

The most pressing task for scholars interested in contemporary China is to establish a methodologically sound way to account for the developmental history of modern East Asia. The task is important because scholars worldwide are now in the process of constructing a new narrative accounting for the rise of China to global prominence, a narrative stressing Chinese exceptionalism. A century ago, Max Weber also set out on an equally pressing task — to account for the rise of the West. To accomplish this goal, Weber developed an extensive analysis of China, against which he set the developmental rise of Western Europe. In this presentation, I will criticize Weber's conclusions about China, but adopt his methodological approach to develop an understanding of Chinese exceptionalism.