

Max Weber and 20th-Century Sociology

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Abstract

This study aims to reevaluate the role of Weber in the history of sociology. In what ways did he influence sociology, and at what points did his periods of influence begin and end? As Weber has been widely known as a “turn-of-the-century sociologists”, it is often assumed that he became influential during the 1890s or, at the latest, during the pre-WWI period. But, is that really the case?

Weber did not become involved in the German Sociological Association because he had a reputation for himself as a “sociologists,” for he had not yet established himself as such during his life time. Ironically, Weber’s work became increasingly well known among academics after his death.

On what basis has Weber’s popularity grown posthumously? We argue that Weber provided a suitable framework for carrying out the fight against Fascism to win WWII. Intense interests in Weber grew in proportion with the progress of WWII and coincided with the paradigm shift from capitalism to rationalism. The trends in sociology shifted as a result of a need for a model of postwar recovery. We can identify three stages in the shift. (1) The Sociology of Mass Society (1940-1955): Weber as Democrat. (2) The Sociology of Comparative Modernization (1955-1970): Weber as Modernist. (3) The Sociology of Modernity (1965-1980): Weber as Critic of Modernity.

Weber ceased to be influential? That’s when the society that most closely matched the state of the “Iron Cage,” the USSR, collapsed in 1989. This developments undermined the validity of Weber’s view of the future. The specific paradigm of rationality based on interpretations of Weberian theory after the 1930s lost the influence of its true meaning in 1989.

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1. Was Weber a Turn-of-the-Century Sociologist?

This study aims to reevaluate the role of Weber in the history of sociology. How did he influence sociology, and when did his period of influence begin and end? I define sociology as the academic discipline of sociology, one of the fields within the social sciences, on a par with jurisprudence and economics. Sociology does not refer to social sciences in general or what Simmel referred to as “Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft.”

Ever since Parsons (1937) and Hughes (1958) introduced him to the public, Weber has widely been known as a “turn-of-the-century sociologist,” along with Durkheim, one of the greatest sociologists of the 1890s. Today, Weber, like Durkheim, is generally considered a “classic” sociologist. Judging from his date of birth, it makes sense to put Weber in the same category as his contemporaries, Simmel and Durkheim. However, because of this categorization, it is often assumed that Weber became an influential sociologist in the 1890s or, at the latest, during the pre-WWI. But, is that really the case?

In 1909, a several scholars gathered to establish a sociological association. They were Simmel, Tönnies, Vierkandt, Beck, and Herkner, the founding members of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (the German Sociological Association). This preparatory committee later increased its membership to 18, and Max Weber was one of those invited to join. His first official position was “Chairman of the Steering Committee” (Ausschussvorsitzender), but according to Yonezawa (1991), “Initially, Weber was not actively involved...at least, he did not play a central role in initiating the association.” (1991: 17)

Later, however, Weber became passionate about his post as Chairman and made significant contributions to the success of the first convention in Frankfurt-am-Main (1910) and the second convention in Berlin (1912) by taking the minutes and leading discussions. Nevertheless, he submitted his resignation to the association on the day that the second convention ended. Ultimately, he was only active in the association for fewer than four years.

On what basis was Weber invited to the association in 1909, and how was he regarded as a “sociologist”? *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, published in the form of journal articles during 1904 and 1905, had provoked heated debates and strong criticisms regarding Weber. But had these publications established his fame as a “sociologist of religion” before his involvement in the association?

At the first sociological convention, Weber delivered an “administrative report,” whose content went beyond the expectation of the title by defining the character of sociology as an academic discipline. He began his report by asserting that, “The term sociology is not clearly defined and remains unpopular in Germany. Therefore, it is

most significant for this Sociological Association to articulate its vision of the future by making as clear as possible the nature of the organization and identifying issues of importance.” He went on to mention the association’s principles. The first principle was “value neutrality” (Wertfreiheit). He then proceeded to identify appropriate themes to be investigated by the Sociological Association, suggesting collaborative work in three fields: sociology of journalism, sociology of groups, and the selection-mechanism of prominent occupations in modern society.

Weber’s expectation for sociology was empirical research on contemporary society. It was clear that he regarded the sociological association as an extension of the social policy association. While it was difficult to maintain value neutrality in Verein für Sozialpolitik (Association for Social Policy) due to deep-rooted resistance among influential members, Weber’s foremost hope was for the Sociological Association to embrace all consequences of value neutrality, welcoming those non-experts that the Association for Social Policy rejected and creating a place for value-neutral dialogue between all factions.

Weber was in fact invited to take part in the Sociological Association as a result of his achievements as an expert social policy researcher. (Herkner was also a major figure within the social policy association.) When the Sociological Association was established around 1909, Weber himself did not have a clear “sociological” vision distinct from social policy. (It was unlikely that Weber spoke about the above-mentioned principles simply because of his responsibility as Chair of the Sociological Association Steering Committee.) Thus, Weber did not become involved in the German Sociological Association because he had established a reputation as a “sociologist,” for he had not yet established himself as such. In this sense, we cannot put Weber in the same category as Tönnies and Simmel. Weber became a sociologist only through his active participation in the Sociological Association where his experience of repeatedly failing to advance his ideals within the association deepened his “sociological” thoughts and knowledge. Moreover, the bitter experience of leaving the association enhanced, instead of ended, his career as a sociologist. Weber officially left the Sociological Association in 1914, after laying out his position in *On some Categories of Interpretive Sociology [Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie]* (1913). His angry departure from the Sociological Association came only a few years after he had extended himself in traveling to Berlin and Leipzig to recruit new members. This bitter experience ironically helped him grow into Max Weber “the sociologist.”

Within German sociological circles, we cannot trace Weber’s influence to the pre-WWI period. Neither can we see any evidence that Weber sharpened his sociological vision through collaboration with specific colleagues or followers. These speculations are supported by the circumstances of Weber’s life history. After leaving his university post in 1898, he did not lecture or occupy himself with duties

appropriate to the position of professor until his comeback at the University of Vienna in 1918. Thus, Weber was known only as a public intellectual. All his academic works were published in professional journals, and he did not author any books on his own. His writings in newspapers all dealt with empirical and practical issues, such as contemporary politics and society. Thus, Weber's unique "sociological vision" was virtually unknown outside of the small circle of scholars belonging to the "Heidelberg Circle." How was it possible then that he exerted any influence on sociology?

2. Recognition of Weber during the Inter-War Period

Ironically, Weber's work became increasingly well known among academics after his death. Immediately after he died in 1920, the first volume of *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* appeared. Following this work, a series of books comprised of articles previously published in journals were issued one after another. Weber's last piece of work was published under the title *Economy and Society*. Weber's wife, Marianne, is responsible for several of his single-authored books appearing in such a short period of time. Thus, at last, in the 1920s, Weber and his works became known outside his circle of acquaintances.¹⁾

The 1930s saw further proliferation of Weber's works. During the 1920s, Weber's works were available only among those who were proficient in German: however, in the 1930s, they became accessible to English and French-speaking scholars. Some young foreign scholars went to study in Germany and wrote extensively about Weber's works in English and French. The efforts of two of these scholars are of decisive importance for contemporary sociology.

The first scholar is Raymond Aron, *La Sociologie allemande contemporaine* (1935). Contrary to what the chronological order may suggest, Aron deemed Weber to be the synthesizer of two schools of sociological thought: "systematic sociology," represented by Simmel and Tönnies, and "historical sociology," led by A. Weber and K. Mannheim. For Aron, Weber was the most influential German sociologist of his day.

Talcott Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) is second critical work on Weber. Mapping out the development of sociological theories over time, Parsons' book identified the voluntaristic theory of action as a new field of sociology, one that emerged at the confluence of the French and British tradition of positivism and the German tradition of idealism. Parsons identified Pareto, Durkheim and Weber's

1) Among German literatures in study of Max Weber in 1920's, I regard Albert Salomon's work (1926) as the best. He comprehended various branches of Weber's works and succeeded in extracting the theoretical system of Weber's sociology. Although his discussion was a short piece, his comprehensiveness and systematic character seemed to be compared with Aron's and/or Parsons's work in 1930's. Salomon was born in 1891, and came in contact with Max Weber while studying at University of Heidelberg before WWI.

contributions to this new field as being critically important. In discussing each of the three, Parsons allotted 1.5 times as much space to Weber as he did the other two.

Both Aron and Parsons pursued a comprehensive account of Weber's theories, beginning with *The Methodology of Social Sciences* and proceeding to *The Sociology of Religion* and *Economy and Society*. Parsons and Aron's powerful histories both placed Weber's sociology at the pinnacle of the discipline and their accounts of sociological theories left indelible impressions on their readers.

While these two books paved the way towards establishing Weber's status as the premiere sociologist of the age, it was Gerth and Mills who made Weber more accessible to "ordinary" sociologists through the publication of *From Max Weber* (1946). Thanks to their compact yet thorough introduction and clear translations, Weber became the common property of all sociologists, including those who did not read German or specialize in sub-fields other than social theory. In this way, Weber's status as a "classic" in sociology was established after WWII. Needless to say, it is only after his works were widely read that one can make assertions about Weber having an influence on sociology.

3. The Basis of Weber's Popularity

Weber's growing popularity was attributable to the supply of high-quality references and well-translated books. Yet, there also had to be a demand for Weber's works among sociologists. Without demand, it would not have been possible to explain why Weber became popular so suddenly. Why did he attract such a large audience?

I propose that Weber provided a suitable framework for carrying out the fight against Fascism to win WWII.

Before Weber became popular, sociology had long been dominated by the "capitalist paradigm." Through repeated arguments between various schools of socialism and liberal sociologists since the mid-19th century, a framework developed to analyze society using concepts such as class, social problems, proletariat, and bourgeoisie. In the 1890s, Marxism attracted progressive sociologists, and capitalism became a popular concept in sociology. Capitalism was understood as an antonym for socialism, and the above-mentioned "capitalist paradigm" referred to a way to analyze societies' macro structures and historical specificities in light of the diametrical opposition between capitalism and socialism.

This type of "capitalist paradigm" was not so useful for differentiating the political dynamics between the Allies and the Axis countries during WWII. As symbolized by the Atlantic Charter of 1941, WWII was not a fight to the death between capitalism and socialism. The war betrayed the predictions of the capitalist paradigm. Instead, it was a war in which the capitalist champions, the UK and the USA, joined forces with

the USSR, the sole socialist country at that time. The key question was whether the alliance between the capitalist and socialist countries would work in fighting against Germany (as well as Italy and Japan). The USA and the USSR united themselves against Germany under the slogan, “Beat Fascism, Promote Democracy.” This scheme – putting the USA, England, and the USSR on one side and Germany on the other – was clearly not a possible alignment under the capitalist paradigm. Some argue that democracy is what these three countries had in common, but this view is too naïve and groundless at least from a social scientific point of view. To understand the overall alignment of political forces during WWII, it was necessary to come up with a new perspective that would rehabilitate the dualism between capitalism and socialism. I argue that this new interpretive perspective was provided by Weber’s work.

Aron and Parsons organized Weber’s works systematically around the leitmotif of rationalization in the world. (Outside of sociology, Karl Löwith made a decisive contribution in his 1932 article, *Max Weber und Karl Marx*.) Subsequently, in the 1930s, Weber’s “rationalization paradigm” emerged as an increasingly important alternative to Marxism. This paradigm developed around the core concepts of rationality and rationalization. Intense interests in Weber grew in conjunction with the progress of WWII and coincided with the paradigm shift from capitalism to rationalism. Prompted by consideration of the interest in winning WWII, the “world picture” shifted from capitalism to rationalism.

4. Three Stages of Weber’s Influence

The Atlantic Charter did not simply give rise to a short-term, politically expedient alliance between UK, USA, and USSR. It also determined the basic direction of post-World War II societal reconstruction. After World War II, the sociological mainstream inherited the strong wartime interest in Weber’s sociology. The trends in sociology shifted in response to the question of where society should look for a model of postwar recovery. Along with this sociological shift, Weber’s image continued to be transformed. We can identify three stages in sociology’s process of absorbing Weberian theory.

(1) The Sociology of Mass Society (1940-1955): Weber as Democrat.

The first stage of postwar sociology was led by members of the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research), who were forced to flee Nazism. In their study of the Nazi experience, these scholars discovered the decisive role of the “masses,” diagnosed the age as one of “mass society,” and developed a theory with the same name. Invoking Weber’s sociology of domination, Emile Lederer (1940) outlined a fundamental structure explaining how bureaucratization’s advancement blotted out

intermediate groups and led to the appearance of charismatic leaders. Erich Fromm (1941) used *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as a guide to understanding the characteristic mass personality structure that supported Nazism. Theodore Adorno and his colleagues (1950) dubbed this personality structure “the authoritarian personality” and, using statistical methods, demonstrated that the condition was also prevalent in democratic countries.

Following Weber’s distinction between formal and substantive rationality, Karl Mannheim (1940) attempted to extract irrational elements in contemporary society based on the thesis that “functional rationalization does not promote substantive rationality.”

“Manipulation” by the mass media was an indispensable element for getting great numbers of people in large-scale societies to act as one. The term “mass communication” spread rapidly after the 1940s. It is possible to identify the “journalism sociology” advocated by Weber as the leading edge of sociological research on the mass media.

Assembled in the volume entitled *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Economy and Society)*, Weber’s works such as *Soziologie der Herrschaft (Sociology of Rulership)* and *Grundbegriffe der Soziologie (Basic Concepts of Sociology)* helped the theory of mass society clarify the dangerous phenomena of that age. Important ideas extracted from Weber’s sociology were elaborated to form the theoretical frame of the theory of mass society.

Nazism (fascism) was the model for mass society. It was the “pathological” form of modern society. UK, USA, and USSR were considered to be modern societies, and this connotation meant that they were always in danger of sliding into mass society. UK, USA, and the USSR not only had to combat the “foreign disease” of fascism in Germany, Italy and Japan, they also had to prepare to fight the “domestic disease” of “massification.” The opposition running through modernity can be diagramed in terms of “rational modern society” versus “irrational mass society.” The value judgment in the terms “normal” versus “pathological” is twice duplicated. Because WWII was a fight against “pathology” it was justifiable.

(2) The Sociology of Comparative Modernization (1955-1970): Weber as Modernist.

WWII ended in victory for the Allied Nations, however conflict between USA and USSR soon arose over which would lead the conduct of postwar affairs. The “Cold War” age began in the late 1940s, and with its emergence, the spirit of the Atlantic Charter collapsed. The expression “cold war” is intended to be in contrast with “hot war,” a direct clash between USA and USSR. The strategic locations chosen were in the developing nations of the “global south,” Asia, Africa, Central and South America, and elsewhere. Under the principle of national self-determination, USA and

USSR competed to provide aid to peoples who were making the transition from liberated colonies to independent states. Using aid as the inducement, USA and USSR battled to establish political order spread across the globe. In order to win the aid competition, these countries also called upon social science to conduct national research projects designed to ascertain how the southern countries could most efficiently be made to conform to USSR- or USA-models. This development marked the return of the paradigmatic opposition of capitalism and socialism.

As if refusing to assist national cold war strategies, the notable trend in research from the 1950s onwards was to relativize the opposition of capitalism and socialism. Although political scientists and economists could not remove themselves from distinctions between socialism and capitalism inherent in dualisms such as democracy versus totalitarianism or market economy versus command (planned) economy, by focusing on value orientations (cultural factors), sociologists bridged the gap between opposing terms, making possible the development of comparative modernization. Max Weber's *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen (The Economic Ethics of the World Religions)* provided the standard framework for those sociologists.

In his study of comparative industrialization, Reinhard Bendix (1956) focused on the similarities and differences between capitalist and socialist enterprises, especially mechanized factory systems essential to industrialization. He concluded that the differences derived from their divergent ideologies of labor management were the products of their adaptive endeavors to different environments.

To discover why Japan was able to become the only non-Western nation to industrialize, Robert Bellah (1957) investigated the value orientation of the Japanese. In "Shingaku," a representative of the Tokugawa era religions of the commercial class, he found aspects of an economic morality that promoted industrialization, similar to the Protestant Ethic of the West. Socio-politically, however, Shingaku's differences with Protestant morals gave Japan an affinity for imperial rule and made it antagonistic toward democracy. From the perspective of value orientation, Bellah thus explained simultaneously both of the major dimensions of Japanese modernity.

S.N. Eisenstadt (1967) produced a comprehensive account of modernization that gathered a wide variety of examples from many different places. He emphasized the important role of subjective condition in modernization, showing how resistance and setbacks were also parts of the many paths to modernity. The key was whether such deviance and breakdowns that might appear could be absorbed within the general flow of modernization. Nazism, socialism, and capitalism were understood as passing phases in the process of the "continuous growth" known as modernization.

Talcott Parsons produced the standard interpretation of Weber during this period. After having developed an interpretation of Weber that accented the value system of the 1940s and 1950s, Parsons (1966, 1971) attempted to reinterpret Weber's theory of

rationality within an evolutionary framework in the 1960s. He understood the process of rationalization in human history as the enhancement of adaptive capacity. Without doubt, industrialization and bureaucratization were the most forceful representative promoters of adaptive upgrading. Modern types of societies with enhancement of adaptive capacity as their axial principle succeeded in taking off in the 17th and 18th centuries in Holland and UK, but, after the 19th century, USA overtook them as the leading example of a modern type of society. In these leading societies, associational types came to be emphasized in functional requisite of integration. Opposing forms appeared in 19th century Prussia and in the 20th century USSR. However, both these countries were eventually swept along by the prevailing flow of historical development and redirected toward an associational, democratic structure.

The modern type of society is not perfectly realized when considering particular examples such as UK or USA separately. The type can only be fully recognized when varied societies are grasped as a coherent system. Conflicts between societies and successive hegemonies should be understood as mere stages of how modernity has manifested itself in our world.

Similarities and differences between capitalism and socialism should be understood as different phases that modernity takes and the historical position of USA and USSR, too, can be measured with that common metric. Because capitalism and socialism are seen to merge in the evolution of history, Parsons' theory of modernity has come to be known as convergence theory. Standing in opposition to Cold War structure, convergence theory can be located as an attempt to stem the reverse tide pushing the rationalization paradigm over the capitalist paradigm, a protest against forgetting the spirit of the Atlantic Charter, so to speak.

(3) The Sociology of Modernity (1965-1980): Weber as Critic of Modernity.

In comparative modernization theory, modernity was seen as the final cause, *the telos* of social evolution, in both developing and advanced nations. But this trend changed greatly in 1965, the rupture in styles of thought was characterized by the eruption of student power. The campus disturbances of the late 1960s were a storm that swept across the developed nations, involving in turn USA, France, Germany, and Japan. The modernity, so diligently built up until that time by advanced countries, including their academic institutions, was summarily derided as "nonsense." Instead of "heaven," modernity came instead to be seen as "hell." Critically confronting modernity in a variety of ways, gave form to several streams of sociology.

The works of Frankfurt School luminaries such as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse were acclaimed as achievements of critical sociology of modernity. It is thought that all these men had thorough knowledge of Weber's work, but their critical weapons for attacking modernity came from Marx, Freud, and ultimately Hegel. Weber

was likely seen as the “champion of bourgeois sociologists.” However, the situation changed with Jürgen Habermas, the second generation of the Frankfurt School. During the latter half of 1970s, Habermas (1981) traced the origins of critical social theory of modernity in sociological history and pointed to Weber as the founder of the tradition.

Weber’s criticism of modernity can be summarized in two theses concerning “loss of meaning” and “loss of freedom.” This understanding of Weber, that “rationality liberates the world from enchantment,” is a thread that can be seen running through his worldview in *Wissenschaft als Beruf (Science as Vocation)* and it takes a compact and fixed form in the “Vorbemerkung” (Author’s Introduction) and “Zwischenbetrachtung” (Intermediate Reflections) sections of *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion)*.

What does science give humanity? It provides the possibility of freely dominating all things through the calculation of their basic principles. The agent of this control over the world is “rational” organization, that is, bureaucracy. The possibility of calculation, that is, the possibility of control, completely dominates every aspect of people’s lives. Under such circumstances, the lives of individuals become completely controlled by social forces, resulting in the “loss of freedom.”

What does science take from humanity? Science robs the world of “meaning,” transforming the purposeful cosmos into a system of cause and effect. All existing things of the world, humanity included, lose original meaning and become nothing more than objects. In this way, the “loss of meaning” thesis is deduced. According to Weber, the process of rationalization is the liberation of the world from enchantment, promoted and pursued in the particular intellectual form of “science.” The regard for science as the core of modernity was derived from the Weberian interpretation of science, which recognized that science was a form of wisdom exclusive to Western modernity. Daniel Bell’s thorough study of the influence of science on social forms resulted in his construction of the theory of post-modern society.²⁾

According to Bell (1973), the product of industrialization and bureaucratization was “industrial society,” and the major problem of our time was how changes in this industrial society are giving birth to “post-industrial society.” The central principle, around which the coming of post-industrial society revolves, is how “theoretical knowledge” determines the direction of technological innovation and social policy. As information production and intellectual technology become more important than manufactured products and the techniques for producing them, the ruling class will shift from capitalists and corporate entrepreneurs to a “technostructure” of professionals and technocrats. The theoretical knowledge will become the sole driving

2) In the theory of post-industrial society, capitalistic societies and industrial societies were regarded as equal. The founder of the theory of industrial society was thought to be Raymond Aron. We meet Aron again here. He seemed to construct his theory by reinterpreting Marx’s theory of capitalism from viewpoint of Weber’s process of rationalization.

force of history of humanity.

The shift in the central principle of modernity is the reason that student power was able to alarm society where worker power would not have been able to. Like capitalism, socialism also became a tool for analyzing the stages of industrial society. Today it is not the contradictions of productive force and relation of production that move society but the paradox of theoretical knowledge and social relations originating in science.

Convergence theory renders the inherent opposition of the capitalism-versus-socialism paradigm obsolete. Modernity has to be comprehended as the embodiment of rationality guided by science. Can the spread of a view that recognizes the fatal significance of science be called the triumph of the rationality paradigm? In the theory of mass society, the opposite pole of rationality was "irrationality," an antithesis used to construct rational society. In the sociology of comparative modernization, the system embodied by the developing nations was seen as different from the Western type of rationality or as a non-rational form, that was irrelevant to rationality. The types of modernity that appeared in the West are the only types capable of creating modernity. Modernity seemed to be equal to rationality because both were the products of science. The rational is not on the plane of idealistic principle, but appears as the actual power dominating people's lives. Rationality is not the object of people's aspirations. It is already the evident reality that constrains their behavior. Romantic yearning for rationality is on its deathbed; only realism is possible. Only people's hopes and desires can go beyond the paradigm of rationalism, which may be seen to have already defeated the capitalist paradigm. But all that has been gained in this victory is the loss of all dreams and the collapse of the "grand narrative" associated with rationalism and reason. What Weber gave to the sociology of modernity was a way of thinking about rationality that was "freed from enchantment."

(4) Weber Studies Becomes Independent (1965~)

The third postwar stage was also a period of subtle change in the relationship between Weber's studies and sociological research. The change commenced in 1964, the 100th anniversary of Weber's birth. Symposia to commemorate the occasion were held around the world. As a result, Weber's name and work became widely known even among the general public. As Weber was studied in various specialized fields, documents relating to him were uncovered and published in comprehensive bibliographies.

As a result of this revival of a strong interest in Weber, a new era in Weber studies opened. Examples of the characteristics of this era include: 1) comprehensiveness of the discussed texts; 2) close bibliographical examination of the period during which the texts were produced; 3) sensitivity to the historical context of the writing of the

texts; 4) inclusion of the discussion details of the intellectual and personal networks that influenced Weber; and 5) a radical broadening of the thinkers to whom Weber is compared. An unprecedented volume of unique and rich studies was published. Instead of being relegated to a sub-specialty, Weber studies now became a theme worthy of lifelong academic pursuit and “Weber scholars”, specializing in the study of Weber, gradually began to appear.

Although the works of these Weber scholars had impact as Weber studies, most of them were not directly linked to sociology’s themes. As the number of citations of Weber in sociology research papers increased, individualistic readings that linked his ideas to present-day problems grew scarce. A trend appeared in which new interpretations of Weber were likely to be consigned to the category of “misreadings.” In Weber studies, the metric “level of contribution to sociological research” was not given much importance.³⁾

Starting in 1982, Weber’s collected works were published; however, it is at just this point in time when it becomes difficult to think of representative sociological research in which his work plays a role in solving urgent problems.⁴⁾ Although everyone knows his name, he has become a sociological “classic,” understood, lamentably, only through commentaries rather than direct reading of his original works.

5. The Limit of Weber’s Influence

Weber’s influence grew steadily during the 1940s and 1950s, reached a peak in the 1960s, and its impact was sustained well into the 1970s. Every academic theory has its limits and there is no case to make an exception for Weber. When did Weber cease to be influential?

Let us revisit the convergence theory. At what point was convergence to occur? Was it halfway between capitalism and socialism? According to Weber, bureaucratic organizations advance because they are technically superior to other forms of organization. He also believed that once relations of domination are bureaucratized, they are almost impossible to destroy.

Since rationalization leads to bureaucratization, over time, non-bureaucratic aspects of the capitalist system should become rationalized. It is the fate of capitalism, then, to

3) In the area of study on the influential role of science in social structure, Randall Collins’s contribution ought to be referenced. He clarified how education came to stratify the society, based upon Weber’s theory of status (1979). Studies on the interaction between educational career and social position in stratification resulted in the theory of social closure. This theory was formulated by Raymond Murphy (1988), who had been influenced by Frank Parkin’s theory of class (1979). But Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction seemed more influential in educational sociology and sociology of social stratification than these works.

4) I have argued (1995), that USSR has realized a different type of socialism from the rationalized socialism Weber postulated. Therefore its collapse could not falsify Weber’s theory of bureaucratization.

evolve eventually into socialism (or a highly bureaucratized society). Socialism does not become capitalistic over time. According to this logic, the point of convergence would lie in the ultimate stage of socialism. To be more precise, capitalism and socialism converge where socialism becomes highly rationalized. The “Iron Cage,” to use the well-known term that Mitzman chose for the title of his book on Weberian theory (1970), is the point of convergence.

In actuality, however, the society that most closely matched the state of the “Iron Cage,” the USSR, collapsed in 1989. Today, all of the advanced industrial countries are moving toward the ultimate stage of capitalism. Contrary to Weber’s prediction, it seems that at the end of history, there will be capitalism instead of socialism. Historical developments undermined Weber’s view of the future. Because of 1989, Weber’s rationality theory has to be renewed and reinterpreted. To be more accurate, Weber’s understanding, symbolized by the Iron Cage, reached the end of its influence in 1989.

Weber once defined “the sanctification of charismatic reasoning” as the ultimate form of charisma. The characteristic expression of this form could be observed in the French Revolution. Despite this definition, charisma continued to be used as a tool to analyze Fascism. If we were to continue to use the rationality paradigm after the “Eastern European Revolution” of 1989, we would at least need to free ourselves from the specific context in which Weber developed the notion of the “Iron Cage.” The specific paradigm of rationality based on interpretations of Weberian theory after the 1930s lost the influence of its true meaning in 1989.

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