

S24. Neo-Weberian Approaches to China: Cultural Attitudes and Economic Development *Annie Tubadji, Don Webber, Peter Nijkamp*

Cultural relativity in local attitudes creates bounded rationality in decision-making and generates socio-economic disparities that vary across space. Cultural relativity is both a classical and a contemporary issue that has remained relevant since the classical contribution of Max Weber (1904) (“The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism”) who elicits an enormous role for cultural attitudes in differentiating between groups defined by their cultural attitudes and in shaping asymmetric socio-economic success across groups with different cultural backgrounds. Associated empirical research assesses the importance of cultural attitudes in stimulating socio-economics differentials and do so either between or within countries.

Weber’s contributions to socio-economic science have been prolific and many adoptions of his approaches label themselves as neo-Weberian but what is a neo-Weberian approach remains contestable. A possible interpretation of what a neo-Weberian approach may mean in economics relates to Weber’s emphasis on culture and religion, which undoubtedly stands out as one of his major contributions and is the interpretation adopted for this special issue. Guiso et al. (2006) observed an increase in interest by economists in religion and cultural attitudes with empirical approximations using religion as a proxy for cultural attitudes, such as Becker (1996) and Botticini and Eckstein (2005). The quest to identify the neo-Weberian perspective and the role for cultural attitudes in shaping economic development has evolved into what is known today as New Cultural Economics (NCE) (Hahn, 2014; Alesina and Giuliano, 2015). NCE contributions do not necessarily self-identify as a neo-Weberian approach, although NCE research belongs to this category from a history of economic thought perspective. Studies on Culture Based Development (CBD) (Tubadji, 2012, 2013, 2018) belong to the field of NCE and continuously self-identify as neo-Weberian.

The economics approach to studying cultural attitudes and neo-Weberian effects on spatial variations in socio-economic development has foci on extroversion and introversion. On the one hand, the extroversive literature analyses the socio-economic aftermaths of spatial differences in cultural attitudes often using economic history contributions or gravity models. On the other hand, contributions within the introversive perspective belong mainly to the field of regional economics or economic policy and explore differences in development associated with differences in cultural attitudes within one country.

Surprising, China has not featured much of the literature on neo-Weberian economic debates even though China’s importance in the international economy is growing rapidly. Weber’s work on China followed his seminal book on Protestantism and he studied in great detail the local specificities of the Chinese culture and religion that lead to the development of Chinese cities as a product of local beliefs. Nevertheless, the various neo-Weberian debates rarely involve analyses of the rich cultural variety of China as a source of its economic development even though Irene Sun (2017) underlined the critical importance of differences in cultural attitudes between China and the West in shaping modern world economic development.

This special session will focus on “Neo-Weberian Approaches to China”. All articles will empirically test neo-Weberian claims that differences in cultural attitudes drive differences in socio-economic development, with an explicit focus on Chinese regions (introversive) and/or between China and the rest of the world (extroversive). The first part of the special issue will deal with the extroversive approach, and the second part will focus on the introversive approach. Thus, this special session on “Neo-Weberian Approaches to China” will contribute to the New Cultural Economics field in the study of China as a highly important agent in international economic life.