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# Ecology, Religious and Economics in China: A Study in Old Institutional Economics

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## Résumé

### Ecology, Religious and Economics in China: A Study in Old Institutional Economics

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#### Abstract

The paper studies contemporary China through old institutional economics lens, through which institutions are both processes and structures. According to this perspective, while studying economic institutions is important, evaluating their transformation and embeddedness (Polanyi 1944) is equally, if not more, crucial for understanding and improving human wellbeing. In fact, agency needs to be brought to life in order to show that everyday life, inherent habits, culture, and customs prompt agency to transform, accept, and/or react to structural changes. What has been lacking is a framework for understanding the grassroots dynamics and meanings of non-Western realities (Joseph 2008: 19). Studies of this nature seem ever more pressing given the generalized crisis of the western model of development manifested by economic, political, ecological and sociological worldwide instabilities and heated popular responses sparking in several points of the globe. The western model clear signs of exhaustion, moreover, pose the question of whether economists' prescription of its reproduction is responsible and ethical. Meanwhile, as if farsightedly foreseeing the current crises, East Asian countries have successfully pursued their own model of development since the 1980s—a process, though displaying many peculiarities, also initiated in China. In fact, since 1978 the Chinese Communist Party has managed to introduce many market-oriented reforms, while, in contrast to the Asian Tigers, resisting the infiltration of capitalist relations of production (Arrighi 2007). Through the creation of a "socialist market economy," the country has experienced rapid economic growth and increased participation in the international market. China's transformation is not without contradictions and has resulted in a paradoxical society. The list of paradoxes is long and ranges from the creation of a consumer society in a politically repressive environment to the simultaneous implementation of global norms and attempts to modify them. It includes, but is not restricted to, an increasingly open economy led strong-handily by a protectionist government and the official rehabilitation of Confucius by a laic State. While these paradoxes are interconnected, my starting point lies on the renewed influence of Confucianism. While banned by Mao's regime, the practice—that is deeply connected with environmental preservation—remained dormant in many rural areas of China. The recent governmental endorsement of Confucianism stems

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from the belief that the path of modernization for China lies on Chinese traditions rather than on a Westernized ideal of modernity. Our objective is to analyze the roots, forms, and consequences of the reawakening of Confucianism for Chinese economy and ecology as well as its possible impact on a new globally recognized model of economic development.

**Mots-Clés:** Ecological Economics, Development Economics, Institutional Economics