

## CULTURAL TRADITION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS: WEBERIAN PERSPECTIVE ON CAPITALISM AND MODERNITY IN UKRAINE

*The essay is seeking to defend centrality of Weber's comparative-historical sociology of modernity and capitalism in general and its validity to concerns of post-Leninist Ukraine in particular. The paper addresses the question what the conditions are which preclude the development of rational capitalism in Ukraine and finds the answer in the influence of broadly defined cultural tradition.*

### **Introduction**

Endless mantras of Ukrainian policy-makers about democratization and radical systemic market reforms have not been able to cover up the grim reality of the politics of shock therapy which has become a permanent shock without therapy. Domestic defenders of vulgar liberal paradigm tend to ignore that Adam Smith authored not only principles of the laissez-faire in his monumental "Wealth of Nations" but was concerned with "Theories of Moral Sentiments" as well. Thus, their expectations of swift recapitulation of the economic, social, political, and last but not least cultural institutions developed in the West in the course of centuries under completely different conditions in post-Leninist context appear to be more unrealistic than ever. Naive enthusiasm over self-organizing, progressive and universal force of market has been challenged by the steady pattern of economic decline which finds few parallel in recent history — Ukraine is producing now less than one third of its GDP of 1990, while more than 60 % of all economic transactions take place within the frame of reference of black market [1].

### **Post-Leninist Ukraine: Transition to Transformation / Degeneration**

Given such background of a failing society sketched above, the most immediate task for academic commentators — both Ukrainian and Western — is to embark on a generalized debate which might be instrumental for understanding the sources of Ukraine's current catastrophic situation and developing policy alternatives to deal with its causes and implications.

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I am developing my argument in the vein of Bryan Turner's line of reasoning [2] who set out to defend the validity of Weber's ideas for contemporary social and intellectual concerns. My purpose is, firstly, to defend centrality of Weberian approach to the methodology of social sciences in a context of its applicability to the case of post-Leninist social transformation and, secondly, examine Weber's vision of the rational capitalism developmental history and prospects for the emergence of such a type of social organization in Ukraine.

In this essay I am seeking to deconstruct the concepts and definitions which often impose a social, political, economic, and epistemic stability that does not adequately reflect the various and ambiguous practices of social life. The debate will focus upon conceptual deliberation as well as analysis of practices and traditions that mold societal outcomes. My hypothesis is that there are different types of capitalism (e. g., rational capitalism vs. political versions of it), and this economic form does not always and necessarily have an elective affinity with such traits we usually associate with Western liberal capitalist civilization as prosperity, equality, and democracy.

Among central classical Western social thinkers my attention was drawn to Max Weber, who elaborated a comprehensive research program of a social science as objective and value free enterprise at presuppositional level, and realized it in his comparative-historical sociological and political studies of fate of Western rational capitalism, economic ethics of world religions, types of legitimate domination and problems arising from everyday workings of modern democratic mass politics. As Weber forcefully put it "it is, of course, not my aim

to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic casual interpretation of culture and of history. Each is equally possible, but each, if it does not serve as *the preparation*, but as a conclusion of an investigation, accomplishes equally little in the interest of historical truth" [3].

Human pursuit of knowledge is always, according to Weber, determined by culture understood as a final fragment of meaningless reality which, in human mind, has a meaning. Weber realistically claimed that "in this, obviously, are contained all our problems. For this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. It can only be *interpreted* with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position toward life" [4]. In other words, social and cultural science, dealing with political and social phenomena in terms of their origin "give us no answer to the question, whether the existence of these cultural phenomena have been and are *worth while*. And they do not answer the further question, whether it is worth the effort required to know them" [5]. Fundamentals that motivate research activity are beyond rational calculation and validation, for "'scientific' pleading is meaningless in principle because value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other. ...It is commonplace to observe that something may be true, although it is not beautiful and not holy and not good. Indeed it may be true in precisely those aspects. But all these are only the most elementary cases of the struggle that the gods of the various orders and values are engaged in. I do not know how one might wish to decide 'scientifically' the value of French and German culture; for here, too, different gods struggle with one another, now and for all times to come" [6].

#### *The Rise of the Modern Rational Capitalism in the West*

In accordance with his vision of the role of values and interests theoretical pursuit, Weber defined the major specific trait of European culture as rationalization: "The great historic process in the development of religions, the elimination of magic from the world which had begun with the old Hebrew prophets and, in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought, had repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin, came here to its logical conclusion. The genuine Puritan even rejected all signs of religious ceremony at the grave and buried his nearest and dearest without song or ritual in order that no superstition, no trust in the effects of magical and sacramental forces on salvation, should creep in" [7]. Intellectualization and rationalization should not be confused with the "increased and general knowledge

of conditions under which one lives. It means... the knowledge or *belief* that if one but wished one *could* learn it at any time. Hence it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all thing by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One needs no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service" [8]. At the same time rationalization is not a general law of social evolution — it is an ambiguous notion itself and this ambivalence and multiplicity of meanings is built into the process of its manifestation as well as forms which are assumed by rationality under different circumstances.

The most impressive application of the background assumptions of Weber's research program was his comparative-historical studies of economic ethics of world religions and its implications for the worldly life. The study of religion aimed at explaining the practical motives and incentives offered by psychological and pragmatic contents of world religions. Religion understood by Weber as a complex of ideas about salvation was presented as a cornerstone of a world view. Weber asserted that "not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet, very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest" [9]. The image of the world or world view is a mediator between ideas and interests. This dialectics of ideas and interests can be interpreted through the application of the notion-metaphor of elective affinity [10]. Every concept of salvation makes a distinction between meaningless and meaningful segments of the universe and every religious message is initially addressed to masses of those who are in need of salvation. Religion satisfies "the need for ethical interpretation of the 'meaning' of the distribution of fortunes among the men..." [11]. Religion is also a set of ideas explaining how to reconcile the promise of theodicy with everyday suffering and dying. As Weber rightly observed, even at the beginning of 20th century members of the working class asserted atheist world view not because of the convincing argument of natural sciences but because of inequality found in a social world and power relations.

According to Weber, every religion is determined by a certain type of rationalism — either theoretical or practical. The former is an inherent trait of intellectuals, while the latter is a feature of classes like artisans and merchants. Destruction of syncretic concretely-magic world image led, on the

one hand, to the rise of rationality and control over nature, that is, to formation of the idea of a "space" controlled by impersonal laws, and, on the other hand, it generated "mystic" experience with inherent to it other-world orientation that could ensure individual salvation and blessing.

It's important to note the centrality of Weber's sociology of asceticism and its profound effect on the conceiving of ways to salvation as well as its implications for orientation of a social action. As Weber put it, "salvation may be viewed as the distinctive gift of active ethical behavior performed in the awareness that god directs this behavior, i. e., that the actor is instrument of god. We shall designate this type of attitude toward salvation, which is characterized by methodical procedure for achieving religious salvation, as 'ascetic'" [12]. Religious virtuoso does not only subject his wants to systematic conduct but also exercises the control of his relations and interactions with everyday life of community which he considers inevitably unheroic and utilitarian. Religious virtuoso views the world of social relations as a realm of temptation, for it is a "site of sensual pleasures which are ethically irrational and completely diverting from things divine, but even more because it fosters in the religiously average person complement self-sufficiency and self-righteousness in the fulfillment of common obligations, at the expense of the uniquely necessary concentration on active achievement leading to salvation" [13]. Asceticism, elaborates further Weber, may assume two forms — world rejecting asceticism and inner-worldly asceticism.

The typology of economic ethics, elaborated by Weber, helps increase our understanding of their elective affinity with certain types of economic action and economic rationalism. Weber was seeking to conceptualize the emergence of a radically new social, political and economic order which developed in the West in 16–17 centuries as an element of bourgeois rationalization of life — "revolution of saints", as Michael Walzer [14] dubbed the phenomenon — eventually leading to rational capitalism. It is worth noting that Weber made a clear distinction between robber capitalism whose structure and spirit "differs radically from the rational management of an ordinary capitalist large-scale enterprise and is most similar to some old age phenomena: the huge rapacious enterprises in the financial and colonial sphere and occasional trade... The double nature of what may be called the 'capitalist spirit', and the specific character of modern routinized capitalism with its professional bureaucracy, can be understood only if these two structural elements, which are ultimately different but everywhere intertwined, are conceptually distinguished" [15]. To sum up, adventurous capitalism

which develops under the framework of patrimonial system "gives free rein to the enrichment of the ruler himself, the court officials, favorites, governors, mandarins, the tax collectors, influence peddlers, and the great merchants and financiers who function as tax-farmers, purveyors and creditors. The ruler's favor and disfavor, grants and confiscations, continuously create new wealth and destroy it again" [16]. It is worth noting that according to Weber, rational capitalism was a distinctive outcome of the developmental history of the West and was characterized by rational organization of formally free labor — alienated from the means of production — and industrial production of a factory type.

Protestant world view was opposite to the spirit of traditional economy, the chief purpose of which was satisfaction of human wants and preservation of traditional mode of life in the whole. Marx came up with a structuralist explanation of withering away of traditionalism, stressing the role of objective external circumstances, i. e. productive forces and relations of production, while Weber primarily was concerned with the emergence of a new type of personality which, firstly, without changing production system, introduced a new ethos — spirit of modern capitalism. It was confronted with a vigorous resistance of traditionalism, and, therefore, along with extraordinary strong will and reckless activism, businessmen of new type had to master specific ethic qualities that could provide them with necessary trust of clients and workers. Moreover, growth of intensity and productivity of labor, incompatible with hedonistic attitude to life, required ethic legitimacy which could only be an irrational feeling of well done duty in accordance with one's mission. Every ascetic Protestantism believer through rational control over his own life helped to transform a mundane everyday life into rational activity in the world, but not of this world and not for this world.

Neither passivity nor enjoyment but only activity in the world was viewed as increasing glory of God. Ascetic Protestantism regarded contemplation as less welcome to God than active execution of God will within framework of one's profession. Apostle Paul in one of his epistles demanded that "if any one will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10) and this became obligatory requirement addressed to everyone without exception, making an unwillingness to work an indication of lack of grace. Inner-worldly asceticism of Protestantism denied enjoyment from mere fact of accumulation of the wealth.

Ernst Troeltsch thus commented Weber's approach to asceticism: "Weber explained the transformation of the term in its particular Calvinist manner from rigorous other-worldly way of

thinking into an economic-capitalist activity in religious and psychological terms" [17]. Weber himself described the role of Protestant sects in developing ascetic way of life and activist attitude to the world in a letter to Adolf von Harnack in following terms: "Luther towers above all others, but Lutheranism is — I don't deny it — in its historical articulation the most frightening of terrors for me. Even in the ideal form in which it appears in your hope for the future, it lacks, I fear, in its impact on us Germans, sufficient transformative power to shape life. It is a difficult and tragic situation: None of us could be a sectarian, a Quaker, a Baptist, etc. Everybody must recognize the superiority of the institutional church in non-ethical and non-religious [i. e., cultural] respects. The time of the sects, or of something equivalent to them, is definitely over. But the fact that our nation never went through the school of hard asceticism, in no form whatsoever, is the source of everything that I hate about it (and about myself). I can't help it, but in religious terms the average American sect member surpasses our institutional Christians as much as Luther excels, as religious personality, Calvin, Fox, et tutti quanti" [18].

According to German sociologist Richard Munch, "this penetration of ethics into the domain of business is for Weber the specific mark of modern capitalism, in comparison with all non-Western and premodern forms of economic behavior" [19].

No doubt, methodical labor was praised by literature of ascetic sects of all confessions, but only Protestant asceticism added to it psychological impetus and premium transforming it into effective norm of everyday life. This impulse developed from one's attitude to work as one's mission in a world and confirmation of predestination to salvation. Ascetic Protestantism was an integral part of modern Western European "*homo economicus*" type of personality which destroyed traditional "organic" order of absolutism by creating new units for individual membership — "democratically" organized autonomies religious sects — in contrast to corporate social organization of Middle Ages.

In Weber's view, the main trend of Western cultural evolution was transfer of asceticism from monastic cell to professional life and its dominance over world. He himself was quite pessimistic about future of capitalist ascetic civilization: "Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today the spirit of religious asceticism — whether finally, who knows? — has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer.

The rosy blush of its laughing heir, the Enlightenment, also seems to be irretrievably fading, and the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs [20]. Furthermore, even in a country which Weber considered a paradigm example of a realization of ascetic Protestantism ideal, "the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport [21], thus making capitalism an impersonal and empty cosmos deprived of its initial moral impetus. It is important to remember that Weber was not a champion of capitalism, considering it only as a "lesser evil", in comparison to total bureaucratization of life under prophetically envisaged by him, state socialism. From this perspective British sociologist's John Eldridge comment about Weber, which revokes often cited Weber's self-description as a bourgeois thinker — "bourgeois he may be, happy is not" — [22] does not seem to be an exaggeration.

### ***Weberian Approach to Post-Leninist Ukraine***

Experience of some East Asian countries rush to or catch up modernization provides evidence supportive to both Weberian and structuralist state-centered approaches — despite the critical role of the state as a main economic agent and instigator of change — the success of Asian Tigers' economic development was possible, because the policies were compatible with mode of action sanctioned by traditional political and economic culture.

Neotraditionalist Ukrainian state of patrimonial bent is vested with a task of setting up the pillars for the Western type rational capitalism but as it was observed by Weber "the mercantilistic regulations of the State might develop industries, but not, or certainly not alone, the *spirit of capitalism* (italics added); where they assumed a despotic authoritarian character, they to a larger extent directly hindered it..." [23]. In addition, accelerated development instigated from above always cherishes corruption as its indispensable side effect.

Therefore, we again confront problems first raised by Weber in his "Protestant Ethic", namely the question of interrelation between generalized system of values and economic activity. In a light of above remarks on the role of capitalist spirit and forms of economic organization adequate to such a world view it might be helpful to review the impact of mentality or habitus in Bourdieu's terms which developed in domestic socio-cultural context upon specific features of this country socio-cultural evolution. We cannot ignore the fact that despite the singularity of socio-cultural and political development of Ukraine it was a part of Russian

and then Soviet world-empires for 350 years and this had profound effect upon structural and cultural dimensions of Ukrainian society.

More than 150 years ago, advancing the idea that nations like individuals have moral characters, Russian philosopher and thinker Piotr Tchaadaev emphasized the dynamic influence of Christianity on the social development of the West: "Only Christian society is actually inspired by spiritual interests, these new nations are capable of perfecting themselves, this is the secret of their culture... Of course, this interest will never be satisfied; it is unlimited by its nature. Thus, the Christian peoples perpetually move forward with a necessity. At the same time, although the aim that they try to achieve has nothing to do with welfare for which non-Christian peoples are striving, they also find this welfare and use it" [24]. Tchaadaev went on arguing that Western Christianity formed a base of European and, even more, Western civilization with its ideas of duty, justice, right, and order, while Russia adopted moral ideas from Byzantine coupled with its religious isolation. In Tchaadaev's mind that was the reason of weakness of societal forces at the beginning of Russian history. Russian empire was an exemption from the general law of the mankind — it gave nothing to the world and taught the world nothing, its peoples did not offer any great truth, thus, the history of empire could only serve as a negative example.

Slavophiles did not share Tchaadaev's ambivalent style of thinking: they came up with rather mythological frame of reference based on the sharp dichotomy of Rus (East) and Europe (West). By presenting its elements as mutually exclusive values, they defined "right" and "wrong" types of social system. I deliberately simplify rather complex picture of the Slavophiles ideas, focusing upon the ideal features of cultural tradition that prevented the realization of Western model of societal order.

Slavophiles had no doubts about the correctness of their Utopian image of Rus (East) contrasted to the West where law was a formal compulsion without inner justice, while in Rus (East), law was an inner truth and genuine right; selfishness of utilitarian owner was restricted by the communal fraternity without private property. Finally, "all-destroying personality logically developed by Protestantism" (A. S. Khomiakov), leading to isolation of an individual was juxtaposed with the communal system that limited ambitions of private persons and supported communal-orthodox spirit in the society [25]. Slavophiles could, therefore, have little sympathy to the cornerstone of a Western market economy — *homo economicus*.

Religious messianism inserted into political life, legitimated the centralization of power and derived

its strength from the centralization; these two factors severely hampered all attempts of private initiative, bringing the development of capitalist spirit to standstill. Its opposite side was political radicalism viewing the secular power not as relatively neutral tool — an outcome of a European bifurcation of political and religious authority that emerged in Middle Ages — but as an embodiment of the Kingdom of Darkness. (It should not be ignored that "Old Believers" were preaching the strict adherence to the norms of a traditional way of life and their economic achievements can be attributed to isolation from the mainstream society and necessity to have sufficient resources to resist to permanent pressure of the state.

At the beginning of 20th century the authors of "Vekhi" captured the gap between a ruling political class, cultural elite, and the masses. This situation, in a conceptual language of functionalist sociological theory, can be perceived as an estrangement of central cultural system from central institutional system (E. Shills). This led to the formation of incompatible value systems inherent to every social stratum. It was also one of the major reasons of the failure of modernization attempts from above which ended up as mere formal recapitulation of Western institutions. Intellectual elite (intelligentsia) was alienated both from masses and ruling establishment and, therefore, was inclined to construct Utopian projects, directed at destroying foundations of existing social order. In a line of reasoning resembling that of Tchaadaev, one of the authors of "Vekhi" S. Bulgakov insisted that Western European culture was rooted in religion in general and Reformation in particular. Protestantism affected even Catholic realms which had to undergo religious revival to survive the competition of a new religious world view. Bulgakov who was familiar with Weber's "Protestant Ethic" thesis shared his background assumptions and conclusions concerning the role of a "new personality of a European man ... born in Reformation" [26]. Moreover, he held that political freedom, freedom of religion and human rights experienced profound impact of Protestantism, especially in its ascetic forms. In 1922, Bulgakov voiced his concerns over a dominant pattern of religious and more generally cultural development of Kyiv Rus and then Russian empire in a dialog titled "By the Walls of Khersones". One of the participants of the dialog points out that adoption of Christianity from Greeks brought along Byzantine closeness and narrow-mindedness; it separated the country as a Great Wall of China from Western Christian Europe reducing the faith to mere formalism and empty ritual while enforcing dangerous imperial conceit: "In a single article of any Protestant confession there was more dogmatic depth and

commitment to the church than in those endless controversies over rite and faith. It is there were fatal Byzantine closeness and conceit — the belief that we became the Third Rome" [27].

Defenders of Ukrainian singularity and its natural link to Europe which is claimed to have been only temporally severed by foreign oppressors often employ pseudo-historical arguments to buttress their claims. In a light of such an approach [28] Ukraine's return to Europe is interpreted as the restoration of intrinsically European tradition and rejection of superficially imposed by Russia and Soviet Union rulers "Eurasian" patterns of culture and societal organization. Interestingly enough, that Mykhailo Hrushevskiy, a framer of an independent Ukraine and a historian known for sober and shrewd judgment summed up the legacy of Cossacks in general and Bohdan Khmelnytskyi in particular for development of Ukrainian state in the following terms: "I fully acknowledge that Khmelnytskyi was a great man but his greatness did not lie in a domain of political and state building of new Europe. There is too much from Asia in him, from great Asian nomad invaders, founders of state-hordes... The elementary state economy, the hand of 'state master of Ukrainian terrain' are totally unnoticed in him" [29].

### Conclusion

Unfortunately, little seems to have changed over decades. Political radicalism of Netchaev, Tkachev and Lenin bent has been replaced by market bolshevism whose belief in a possibility of modern liberal-democratic capitalism on post-Soviet terrain "is simply a dream, a fantasy displayed on television in second-rate American films. It has, of course, a special magic in a shortage economy. But it is no less Utopian than the idea of socialism in the United States" [30].

Contemporary scholarship influenced by the debate over "Orientalism" thesis and considerations of political correctness is tackling the issue of rational capitalist economy and modernity in general in more careful and balanced manner, arguing that there are multiple modernities, which differ from Western, Protestant modernity. The former attained hegemony in this epoch and was conceptualized so brilliantly and powerfully by Weber. The idea that modernization equals Westernization is receiving now rather skeptical treatment. Western modernity called by British sociologist Nicos Mouzelis Protestant one — I myself think that European version of modern society can be termed as Weberian modernity, for this thinker's treatment of the phenomenon in question shaped not only our perception of social, political, economic, and cultural orders associated with it, but influenced the workings of the system of modern societies them-

selves — is considered as one of possible modes of social development which does not preclude alternative paths to modern society. Therefore, it is more productive to speak of "original" Weberian modernity which "developed in Europe and combined several closely connected dimensions. In structural terms, these included differentiation, urbanization, industrialization, and communication...; in institutional terms, they included the nation-state and the rational capitalist economy; in cultural terms, they allowed for the construction of new collective identities bound up with the nation-state but embedded in a cultural program that entailed different modes of structuring the major arenas of social life" [31]. In more general terms of Parsonian sociological tradition — enriched by synthesis with Marxist oriented historical sociology — non-Western modernity can be conceived of as "a type of social organization which, from a social-integration point of view, is characterized by an unprecedented level of social mobilization / incorporation into the centre; and, from the point of view of system integration, by an equally unprecedented level of institutional differentiation" [31].

Under current circumstances, institutions of market, substantive political democracy, and civil society can be embedded in Ukraine only in case of the emergence of values — dominant over socio-cultural system — capable of providing normative control over selfish strives for self-interest of market actors. Without such interpenetration of ethics and sphere of market the "free play of means-end rationality" (R. Munch) will inevitably lead to chaos in society and the destruction of the social order.

Perhaps one of the most insightful students of Leninist societies Ken Jowitt discovered the existence of capitalism in the Soviet Union in 70s. He emphasized the "political" nature of that arrangement which critically distinguished it from the rational capitalism [21]. Subsequent development of the Soviet Union vividly demonstrated that capitalism and market — especially if the profit and rent seeking activities tend to occur under the aegis of state patrimonial protection — can not offer universal solutions to the problems arising in a course of social development. It is plausible to think that "radical market reform" alone — even if really attempted — is unlikely to lead automatically to the emergence of a new type of personality and values.

To sum up, my concern in this essay has been how to deal with the consequences of the "post-revolutionary hangover" (as L. Kolakowsky dubbed the situation) which came after a short-term euphoria generated by the fall of Leninist regimes. This "hangover" with its painful and unpleasant side-effects can last for a long time. Lord Dahrendorf, using an apocalyptic symbolism of number six,

claimed that the countries of Eastern and Central Europe may need six months to implement the constitutional reform, six years for society to benefit from the economic reform, and even sixty years might not be enough to lay down the foundation of vibrant civil society and make the changes irreversible [34]. When Dahrendorf's prediction came out,

he was accused of being too pessimistic. If we bear in mind that Ukraine spent five years framing and adopting its new constitution — almost ten times as long as Dahrendorf expected — we may conclude that he was overtly optimistic and, therefore, experts on post-Leninism and "transition" need not worry about finding jobs in decades to come.

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**Кутуєв П. В.**

## КУЛЬТУРНІ ТРАДИЦІЇ ТА СОЦІОЕКОНОМІЧНА ДИНАМІКА: ВЕБЕРІВСЬКА ПЕРСПЕКТИВА НА КАПІТАЛІЗМ І СУЧАСНІСТЬ В УКРАЇНІ

Есе прагне захистити центральність порівняльно-історичної соціології сучасності М. Вебера для концептуалізації проблем сьогодення в цілому і постленінської України зокрема. Стаття зосереджується на питанні визначення умов, які унеможливають розвиток раціонального капіталізму в Україні та знаходить відповідь у впливі культурних традицій.