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THE IMPLICATIONS OF WEBER'S
SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION FOR
THE UNDERSTANDING
OF THE PROCESSES OF CHANGE IN
CONTEMPORARY NON-EUROPEAN
SOCIETIES AND CIVILIZATION

Weber's studies of non-European (or non-Christian) religions constitute the largest part of his *Sociology of Religion*—comprising most of the *Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (1920-1923), as well as large parts of his treatment in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1956). Included, as is well known, are relatively full-blown studies of Jewish, Chinese (Confucian) and Indian (Hindu and Buddhist) civilizations, and more dispersed, but very rich appraisals of diverse aspects of other religions. These studies are focused on the internal dynamics of religions and on their relations to crucial aspects of social structure—especially political organization, economic life and social stratification.

Quantitatively, these studies of the non-Christian religions comprise a much larger part of Weber's work than his analysis of Christian religion in general and of Protestantism in particular. And yet, they seem to be mostly—if not only—a derivative of

his concern with the Protestant Ethic thesis. This is most clearly evident in the analysis contained in the *Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (1920-23) which seeks to explain why these religions or civilizations—the Jewish, Chinese and Indian—have not given rise to that type of orientation which generated the development of “modern” rationalism in general, and modern capitalism (and also modern bureaucracy) in particular.

This question is especially pertinent for Weber because all these “Great Civilizations” or Religions—and also by inference Catholic Europe and to some extent Japan and Islam, with which he deals only passingly—have developed many of the structural characteristics or “preconditions” of capitalism.

His well-known answer to this problem, as put forward in the essay on the Protestant Ethic (1930), was that in Europe it was the specific type of this-worldly religious orientation which developed out of the Protestant (especially Calvinist) Ethic that provided, *from a broad comparative point of view*, the “potential” push to such developments.

Accordingly he attempted then to analyze the various non-European religions or civilizations to see what it was in the structure of their beliefs, orientations and organization that “prevented” them, as it were, from generating the same type of push towards what nowadays would be called “modernization.” He found it, as is well known, in the respective “Wirtschaftsethik” of these different religions.

The general lines of his argument in this respect are rather well known and we can follow Parsons (1937), Bendix (1960) and more recently Warner (1970) in summarizing them.

In general Weber judged that religions may influence the direction of such *Wirtschaftsethik* in three basic ways—one, religious prescriptions of conduct, especially the more realistic ones, could have a direct impact on economic activities; two, religious ideas could be a source for the legitimization of social and political institutions; and three, through religious sanctioning, human motivations and interests might be channelled in the direction of different types of “goals.”

Thus, with regard to China, he depicted Confucianism as containing a utilitarian and worldly ethic whose practical precepts are without a metaphysical foundation and are concerned with man’s conduct in this life for its own sake. The hereafter is

disregarded except for the imperative of leaving this world with a good and honored name.

The Confucian *Weltanschauung* depicts an ordered cosmos and world which is extended to a belief in the "sacred" structure of the state. Great value is placed on classical Literary education. Socially there is the overriding injunction to honor and obey the head of the family; an injunction which extends from the emperor to the mandarine, to the artisans in cities away from the ancestral villages, etc. The acceptance of order, static learning, and filial piety is essentially conservative and preserving of a social structure at an early stage of development, a society which is pervasively traditionalistic.

In the economic sphere, these and other elements of Chinese society mediate against the development of a capitalist economy. The extended kinship groups function as protective associations by defending the "individual member against economic adversities in his relations with landlords, moneylenders and employers...". The sale of land is made difficult by the central government or the family. The prevailing ethic of becoming a universal man by studying the classics precludes specialization and the acquisition of new knowledge. The particularistic tradition of Confucianism precludes a universalism needed to institute natural law. Finally, capitalism is prevented due to the Confucian tolerance of the masses' interpretation of Taoism's mystical contemplative doctrine; as magical superstition arises among the masses, technical inventions are opposed in the belief that they will disturb ancestral spirits. Indeed, the emotional satisfaction which magic gives to the people is used by Confucians to defend the social order against reforms as well as against dictatorship by the emperor.

In India, the Hindu *Weltanschauung* is based on the beliefs in transmigration (each soul exists perpetually and passes through an unending series of rebirths) and in ethical compensation (each act has an immutable effect on the actor's soul). Tied to these beliefs is the additional one of "dharma," the duty to continue the prescribed tradition of one's caste so as to improve chances of reincarnation into a higher caste.

Thus, the real interest of the individual lies not in upsetting the system, but in improving one's caste in the next life.

Orthodox Hinduism excludes the possibility of a personal transcendental god-creator. God is to be found within the order and

thus the explanation of the universe justifies the existing social system. Popular Hindu belief in the pantheon of Gods develops as a concession to the need for a personal God. Different Gods become the inspiration for the emergence of sects which are taught by gurus (teachers) some of whom later become so revered by the people (despite their lack of knowledge of Sanskrit) that they overshadow the status of the Brahmins. Neither such gurus nor the Brahmins, however, seek an improved caste status (although they could have become gods) but rather "salvation"—a permanent escape from the worldly existence by mysticism or asceticism.

Buddhism, which at one time held dominance in India, carries the contemplative life and other worldly orientation to a further extreme. Without sanctioning any social system, Buddhists are ideologically anti-caste; the egalitarian principle is used by conquerors to popularize the religion. However, the religion's commitment to contemplation, to dispassionate intellectual discourse and to the belief that the layman could do his best toward salvation only by supporting monks are scarcely supportive of upturning existing social arrangements and the caste system is effectively retained during both Buddhism's ascendancy and decline as a major religious force in Indian life.

The caste system, according to Weber, originated and spread for several reasons. The conquest of the Indian subcontinent by the Aryans created a color line with typical disdain of the invader for intermarrying with the natives as well as differentiation of tasks and tax collection from the natives. The Hinduization of tribes which possessed varied occupations and degrees of wealth and territory also augmented the caste system. The resulting subdivision of existing castes had the effect of further elaborating the system.

Weber sees the caste system as insulating the Indian people from the political realm; its tenets effectively freeze economic development as well. While craft and merchant guilds emerge, and trading, war material, tax farming, etc., contribute to the initial stage of capitalism, these developments are hampered by the immobility imposed by caste on vocational choice and on place of residence. Again, the imperative of attaining salvation through the performance of traditional acts and the deprecation of this world effectively prohibits the emergence of the capitalist system.

But however much his analyses of the non-Christian religions were geared to issues bearing on the Protestant Ethic, Weber also undertook in his comparative studies very detailed investigations of many other aspects of these civilizations and their religions. In so doing, he provided a much fuller analysis of their origin, structure, and development than he did of Protestantism (or Catholicism). Moreover, as shall be seen in greater detail later, his comparative work also went beyond some of the analytical concepts and emphases which he developed in the *Aufsätze* (1920-23) and even beyond some of the richer analytical concepts and problems which he has developed in the chapters devoted to the analysis of religion in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1956).

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Given Weber's own emphasis on the analysis of the non-European religions from the perspective of the Protestant Ethic thesis, including his stress on the "Wirtschaftsethik" of these various religions, it is not surprising that most of the initial criticism or exegeses of Weber's analysis focused on these problems. It is only much later that the broader implications of Weber's work for the study of modernization are given widespread attention. To understand the development of the studies which take up from Weber's analysis of non-European religion, it is necessary first to survey briefly the development of the response to the Protestant Ethic thesis itself.

In another place I have traced two stages in the controversy about this thesis (Eisenstadt 1968: 3-45). In the first stage Weber was understood to be claiming a direct "causal" relation between the rise of Protestantism (and especially Calvinism) and the development of Capitalism (and, in other places in Weber's version of modern institutions in general). But as the comparative studies began to be published and the initial work on the Protestant Ethic came to be widely known, it was recognized—even if often only gradually and uncommittently. This is not the correct interpretation of Weber's thesis. In this second stage Weber was conceived to be dealing with the *transformation* potentialities of Calvinism—i.e., its possibility to create from within itself new types of orientations and activities, after the

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failure of its initial totalistic socio-religious orientations and types of formal organization.

This shift to the analysis of the transformative capacities of religion pointed to the possibility that, under certain conditions, different religions may foster new types of activities which go beyond the original "Wirtschaftsethik," i.e., that there may take place a transformation of the original religious impulses which may in turn lead to far-reaching changes in social life and institutional organization.

This interpretation of Weber's work with its emphasis on the transformative potential of religion on individual behaviour, and social organization in particular, has been of special importance when attempts are made to draw a comparative implication from Weber's analysis.

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The evaluation of Weber's analysis of non-Christian religions has to a degree paralleled the stages of controversy around the Protestant Ethic thesis.

The first stage is characterized by a detailed exposition and criticism of Weber's analysis, first of his exposition of the respective "Wirtschaftsethik" of these religions or civilizations and secondly, of his more general analysis of the major institutional aspects of these religions and their repercussions on historical development.

Here mention may be made of the older work of Julius Guttman (1925), which provides a very detailed, and on the whole, only partially favorable criticism of Weber's analysis of Judaism. Guttman judges that Weber overemphasizes the importance of the distinction between prophetic and rabbinical Judaism. He also finds unacceptable Weber's contention that there developed a tendency, in poste-exilia religious orientations, towards a double standard of morality in economic activities for "inside" and outside groups. Weber's conception of a "pariah" religion also draws Guttman's criticism.

More recently J. Katz (1961: 72-75) in his work on traditional Jewish society briefly analyses Weber's evaluation of the different types of religious sanctioning of economic activities. Largely following Weber, Katz notes that Jewish religion did not negate

the pursuit of mundane affairs. Moreover, its tradition of learning greatly facilitated the development of a rational attitude toward such pursuit. At the same time, however, Katz points out, economic activities were never sanctioned in religious terms as the *central* dimension of human endeavor; (see also F. Raphael [1970] for an even more recent overall evaluation of Weber's analysis of ancient Judaism).

As to Weber's work on China and Confucianism, the most important evaluators are O. Van der Sprenkel (1964) and C. K. Yang (1964). Both acknowledge overall validity of Weber's analysis of Chinese civilization in general and of Confucianism in particular, a fact made all the more remarkable, they note, given the relative paucity of data available to him. Yang, while recognizing some limitations, conceives Weber's analysis to be useful to understanding Chinese modernization in the more recent past as well.

Among the criticisms of Weber's work on India, Milton Singer's (1961) is among the most detailed. Singer expresses a high appreciation of Weber's work but is skeptical about its adequacy especially that it does not afford a perspective from which to address the contemporary scene. Singer writes:

"... To evaluate Weber's conclusions is not easy. In view of the complexity of Hinduism, and of Asian religions generally, any characterization of them or any comparison of them with Western religion is going to involve large simplifications. Certainly Weber has brilliantly constructed a characterization based on an impressive knowledge of both textual and contextual studies. But one may wonder whether the construction does justice to elements of Asian religions. Some of these are: a strand of this-worldly asceticism; the economic rationality of merchants, craftsmen, and peasants; theologically consistent system of impersonal determinism in Vedanta and Buddhism, with direct consequences for a secular ethic; the development of "rational empirical" science; religious individualism; and personal monotheism. Weber is certainly aware of all these elements and discusses them in his study. . . . But in the construction of the "Spirit" he does not give very much weight to these elements. With the evidence today before us of politically independent Asian states actively planning their social, economic, and scientific

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and technical development, we would attach a good deal more importance to these elements and see less conflict between them and the religious "spirit" ...".

Singer and the critics referred to earlier provide a detailed appraisal of Weber's analysis of specific religions or traditions, and very often are contributions in their own right to their study.

By and large, however, these critics are not concerned to examine and to assess the broader comparative implications of Weber's hypotheses. Such commentary came from other sources and on the average somewhat later in time.

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The upsurge in the social sciences of interest in "development," or modernization and the general broadening of the scope of comparative macrosocietal studies has generated widespread new interest to explicate and to test the broader implications of Weber's analysis of the non-European religions. These studies have developed in directions roughly parallel to those adopted in the discussion of the Protestant Ethic thesis proper.

As in the search for a causal link between Protestantism and capitalism, the religious beliefs and practises of different religions have been re-examined to assess the degree to which they facilitate or sanction the undertaking of some continuous, "systematic" this-worldly, secular, and especially economic activities.

In these studies (for a discussion of these studies see Bellah 1963, 65), two aspects of various religions, which Weber singled out in his analysis, have been taken up as possible explanations of differences among religions to facilitate the development of "secular" institutions in general and economic ones in particular.

One of these is the extent to which any religion or religious system is focused on a "multiple of very concretely defined and only loosely ordered sacred entities" which emphasize separate, discrete, ritual, magical activities and which encourage a continuous dissipation of energies and resources in such immediate situations.¹ Or, stated obversely, the extent to which religious concepts are "rationalized" and remain "apart," "above" or "aloof" from the concrete details of ordinary life.

The other aspect is the degree to which such religions tended to emphasize “this-worldly” as against “other-worldly” orientations and concerns in their doctrine, ritual and precepts.

The general conclusion that can be derived from these studies is that, of these two aspects, it is the first—the extent of “rationality”—that has more potential influence on whether or not economic and other secular activities are encouraged.

Religions which have in principle positive orientations to this-worldly activities may yet, insofar as they emphasize discrete, magical orientations and activities, give but little support to any more continuous systematic activities in any field of activity.

Thus in many of these studies (some of which are discussed in Pieris 1963; Eisenstadt 1968: 3-45), it is often claimed that the more “magical” or “discrete” a religious system, the less does it facilitate the development of more continuous secular activities. This is the claimed effect of the multitude of dispersed religious rituals found in most “primitive” religions. It is also seen to be the result of the many non-rationalized religious emphases which can be found in many of the peripheral areas of the “higher” religions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Eastern Christianity. Muslim Ramadan, for example, is one of many customs of such “other-worldly” higher religions which is inimical to sustained economic effort.

On the other hand, religions whose main stress is “other-worldly” may yet facilitate a positive attitude to certain types of secular activities in two different ways. They may first enjoin their adherents to perform their “secular” duties. Second, insofar as they have developed a certain level of “rationality,” they may also encourage some continuous systematic effort and activity in various secular spheres.

But although such rationalization constitutes, in some instances, a basic prerequisite for the encouragement or facilitation of more sustained activities in various secular fields, it does not in itself tell us the extent to which within these religions there may also develop more positive, transformative orientations to the secular world. That is to say, the existence of some broad, generalized, support for economic or other secular activities does not in itself inform us as to the extent to which these religions give *full religious legitimation* and sanction for continuous secular activities, how much they endow various activities in the secular

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world with direct religious meaning, or the degree to which such activities became the focus of religiosity (see Pievis 1963).

Such full religious legitimation of secular activities is a relatively rare phenomenon in the major world religions—whatever their concrete attitudes to this world—especially so long as their activities are set within a relatively “traditional” setting. This does not necessarily preclude the possibility however that in the more “congenial” environment of modernizing situations there may develop from within them some such transformative orientation, just as was, according to Weber, the case with Protestantism.

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This brings us naturally to the second—to some degree chronological, but mostly analytical—stage of the effort to draw out the implications of Weber's thesis about the non-European religions. The major characteristic of this stage is the search for more or less exact equivalents to the “Protestant Ethic” within these religions, i.e., a search for ascetic, religious groups with a strong emphasis on this-worldly—and especially economic, commercial or industrial—activities. Included in this stage are studies of Islam, especially in South Asia, of Hinduism, of Buddhism, and of the religions of Japan.

The expansion of Islam into Southeast Asia provides a fascinating case study because its carriers, among others, were ascetic, especially Sufi groups. These groups strongly emphasized personal discipline in work and in daily behavior, and they appealed successfully to “Middle-class,” “urban” (mostly merchant) elements. The result was the development of a new strata in the society, most notably of the Santri groups in Indonesia.

In a series of articles and books, Clifford Geertz (1956, 1960, 1963) has described the development of different parts of this stratum and examined their potentialities for and ultimate failure to evolve a modern or capitalistic type of entrepreneurship (as distinct from the more politically based economic activities developed by the more traditional aristocrats and from the more traditional market small entrepreneur). Geertz's rich and intricate

analysis of Javanese religions treats of considerably more than the “Weberian” problem and belongs in a sense to the next generation of studies concerned with religious changes in Southeast Asia. Yet in various parts of Geertz’ work—especially in *Peddlers and Princes* (1963)—the older Weberian starting point is still very discernible. It is a point of departure for several later studies of Java as well. (See Castles 1967 and Peacock 1968, 1969).

Also characteristic of this stage is Singer’s (1956, see also Srinivas Karve and Singer 1958) already mentioned critique of Weber’s analysis of Indian society. As has been seen above, Singer, contrary to many current interpretations of Weber’s analysis of Hinduism as necessarily leading to economic stagnation, emphasizes that there does exist within the whole of Hinduism strong emphasis on this-worldly activities. These may be reinforced by many aspects of the family and caste structure and, under propitious circumstances, may indeed generate a more active, generalized orientation. In this same vein, Joseph Elder (1959) has presented evidence that the Indian caste ethic is being transformed into a universalistic ethic of occupational responsibility detached from its earlier anchorage in the hereditary caste structure. This theme has been taken up and further developed in other studies of contemporary India, as for instance Khave (1970) and Rudolph (1967).

Similarly, Ames (1963, 1967) in his study of Ceylonese Buddhism attempts to connect certain internal transformations among some Buddhist groups in the direction of greater asceticism and a weakening of the emphasis on ritualism with a tendency to engage in organized, self-disciplinary, this-worldly activities—in the economic, educational or political sphere.

The systematically most far-reaching study of this stage is undoubtedly Robert Bellah’s *Tokugawa Religion* (1957). Bellah looks for appropriate equivalents of the Protestant Ethic and finds them in the general ethos of the Samurai with its stress on achievement orientation, on responsibility to collectivity and on relatively autonomous criteria for judging the exercise thereof. This ethos is backed up by a combination of Shintoism and Confucian as developed by the Singaku sect. Its ascetic this-worldly orientations are found by Bellah to be an important factor in promoting Japan’s modernization.²

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Most of these studies parallel to a very large degree those which analyzed the spread of Protestantism in Catholic countries, such as Italy or various parts of Latin America. The latter have shown how these minority Protestant groups tended indeed to develop very vigorous entrepreneurial economic activities—even if they could not diffuse their ethos into a broader society.

But the further study of impact of the various religious groups and movements in the setting of their respective “New States” showed that it differed greatly from that of the Protestant minority groups.

Out of these further studies there developed in the literature four major themes—all of which implied some far-reaching criticisms of the major assumptions of those studies analyzed above which focused around the search for the equivalents of the Protestant Ethic and non-European countries; Moans (1969).

The common denominator of all these themes is the stress on the importance of the specific social setting within which these religions operate and of the different possible links between such settings and these religious groups—in a much more differentiated way than assumed by those who have searched for the direct equivalents of the Protestant Ethic, non-European settings.

The first such theme was that, unlike the stories of the Protestant groups in Catholic countries, those of the Islamic or Buddhist groups in Southeast Asia have but seldom been stories of full success, and that there have often been stories of the failure of potentially “modernizing” entrepreneurial groups, even when they are possessed of some equivalent of the Protestant Ethic, to develop a continuously viable “modern” institutional structure.

We may use here Castles' (1967: 90-91) conclusions of his study of the Kudus Cigarette industry of Java as representative of the conclusions developed out of this theme.

“In the struggle of Indonesian leadership groups in the present century to step into the shoes of the departing colonial elite, the group rooted in the *santri* business class and its Outer Island allies was a strong contender... Ignoring the part played by the wisdom and skill of individual leaders

and other fortuitous events (important though these may have been), the chief proximate causes of the failure of this group seem to have been two. In the first place by the strictness of their Islamic emphasis they alienated vitally important sectors of Indonesian society, both of the masses and of the elite. And in the second place the leadership group closest to the *santri* businessmen was unable to retain the support of the *santria* in general.

"This political failure of the *santri* middle class (especially its inability to retain sufficient support among the *santri* masses of Java) can be attributed largely to its continued precarious and marginal economic position."

"What light does the Kudus case, and especially the failure of the Kudus group of entrepreneurs, throw on the question of the economic limitations and consequent political weakness of the *santri* business class? First the successes of the Kudus group should be mentioned. They did create the industry. They also met successfully a series of shocks and challenges in changing economic and political conditions.

"The other failures of the Kudus entrepreneurial group have been political or social rather than economic. On the one hand the distinctive middle class ethos which was developing before the war in contradistinction to the aristocratic *prijaji* ethos has been diluted. In a sense this is a social victory, as it indicates that the doors to higher education and intermarriage with the elite are now open to the children of Kudus businessmen. But the result is that the possibility of a self-conscious middle-class ideology overcoming the ideological legacy of Indonesia's two-class system is diminished."

"Yet on the other hand the Kudus *santri* business men have failed to maintain their functional links with other social groups. They have little influence in the trade unions. They are out of sympathy with the most influential religious and political leaders in the Kudus region, the Nahdatul Ulama *kiajis*. And their relationships with the regional administration are generally characterized by dependence and avoidance...".

The second such theme—most fully represented by Bellah (1963) in response to some Japanese criticisms of his Tokugawa Religion—stresses that even when, due to the existence in a given society of some equivalence of Protestant Ethic, some aspects

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of modernization—especially economic development—have successfully developed in it yet they may not give rise to a full-scale, “total-value transformation” of this society; that they may in fact distort its development.

To quote Bellah's conclusion (1963):

“...Looking at economic growth as our criterion, we are inclined to consider Japan as a rather unambiguous success story. But to Japanese intellectuals who feel as acutely as Weber did the failure of modern Japan to carry through certain critical structural transformations which are associated with modern society, the evaluation of Japan's modern history is much more problematic. It would be convenient for social scientists and policy makers if economic growth were an automatic index to successful structural transformation. This does not, however, seem to be the case. Indeed, where economic growth is rapid and structural change is blocked or, as in the Communist cases, distorted, social instabilities result which, under present world conditions, are serious enough to have potentially fatal consequences for us all. A broader perspective than has often been taken, would seem then to be in order...”

The third such theme is best represented in the work of M. F. Wertheim (1961, 1964) and S. H. Alatas (1963, 1970), which stresses the difference of the social setting of potentially modernizing of religious and social movements in Southeast Asia from that in Europe, especially their being mostly rooted in the peasantry and much less in urban groups, and that many of the innovative entrepreneurial functions in the economic and political spheres alike are not initiated or implemented by the structural equivalents of the middle-classes but mostly by politicians and bureaucrats.

A fourth such theme (Mendelson 1964, Tambiah 1970, also Saakisyantz 1965, von der Mehden 1963, King 1964), explicitly attacks Weber's supposed assumption about the other-worldliness of Buddhism, Islam (Kessler, forthcoming; Robb, forthcoming; Binder, 1963; Moans 1969) or even Hinduism (Smith 1966, 1970, 1971). It points out, to begin with, the high degree of this-worldly-political and economic commitment and involvement of the Sangha in historical Buddhism, Islam or Hinduism.

Secondly it stresses the this-worldly, mostly populist, political orientation of many of the new religious movements which have recently developed in many of these countries.

They demonstrate in great variety of movements and activities—ranging from communal-populistic through more esoteric sects up to more fully developed organizations—which tend to arise from within these religions. They also show such movements to be much more oriented to the political than to the economic field. Moreover, they point to the great importance of religious “messianic” symbolism for the development of nationalistic and communal symbols and aspirations.

Thus these studies indicate, as Weber himself did in his broad comparative studies of religion, that not all religions or religious movements are necessarily change oriented; and that what seems as change or heterodoxy in the religious sense need not necessarily always have direct impact on broader institutional settings, that is, provide religious sanctioning of general institutional changes.

They do also show that very often religious organizations develop far-reaching accomodative relations to the existing political regimes, and that such accomodations may, in situations of change, have far-reaching consequences but not necessarily in the institutional directions envisaged by the original “Protestant Ethic” thesis or by the search for its equivalents.

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In sum, a large body of contemporary scholarly opinion appears committed to two different, yet complementary views about the possible implications of Weber’s work for the analysis of Asian religions and societal development. One view calls for continuing analysis of religious organizations and movements as these are related to social and political order in general and to processes of change and modernization in particular. This view is largely in accord with Weber’s *general* work in the sociology of religions, especially that contained in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. There, it will be recalled, he developed a series of typologies of religious organizations and of their relationships to the social, political and economic order.

The other view would place the emphasis on continuing

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examination of the possibility of a "total" value transformation of these societies.

It may seem—as some critics (see for instance Singer 1966) have claimed—that both views seem to constitute a shift from the relatively clear analytical focus of an exclusive concern with the specific "narrow" form of the Protestant Ethic thesis, and for the search of its equivalents as the harbingers of modernity in countries and civilizations beyond Europe to a more general, rather unfocused comparative study of different types of relations between types of religious movements and various aspects of the process of modernization in non-European societies.

Criticisms such as Singer's seem justified insofar as they refer to these works from the point of view of the specific equivalents of the Protestant Ethic. They are less persuasive if examined from the broader perspective of the sociology of religion in general or of transformative potentials of different religions in particular.

Such criticisms do not fully recognize that most of these studies derived from Weber as well as a further development of Weber's own insights indicate the possibility of a much differentiated and yet analytically focused approach to the study of the transformative potentials of different religions (see also Eisenstadt 1968).

Such an approach is possible if we take into account—indeed on the basis of these studies—that first the process and direction of such transformation is much more variegated than often assumed by the initial expositions of Weber; and second, that, unlike what has been supposed or assumed in many of these studies we have to take into account not just the possibility of a total transformation in the direction of an overall "western"-like modernity but rather of different types of such modernities, of different responses to the impingement of forces of modernization, each of which may crystallize in a specific way and each of which may be influenced both by different types of developments—transformative, accommodative and other—within their respective religions.

In order to develop this approach in a systematic way it is necessary to distinguish between the various aspects of social action and structure with which Weber dealt in his studies of the Protestant Ethic—that is, the different motivational orien-

tations to this-worldly activity stemming from different religious backgrounds, the different directions and possibilities of change which can be developed through such motivations, and the rationalizing and transformative impact of such orientations on different institutional settings. Similarly, it need not be assumed that the way in which these various elements of social action have appeared together in Europe in a certain way, is the only natural way of their convergence. Instead, it is important to analyze the different ways in which they may converge, under the impact of modernity, within the broader, "total" setting of the different non-European civilization.

Through such "decomposition" and recombination the full implications of Weber's own work for the analysis of the response to modernity of the non-European religions—implications which, go, however, beyond his concrete work—can indeed be most fully drawn out. Such decomposition does not, however, necessarily denote a regression to a purely classificatory approach. On the contrary it opens up the possibility of a more differentiated approach to the study of the relation between religious change and modernization.

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The starting point of such a differentiated approach can best be the re-examination and elaboration of one of the central analytical concepts developed by Weber—namely that of "Wirtschaftsethik."

It is perhaps no chance, from the point of view of our analysis, that it is only when we study Weber's analysis of non-Christian religions that the full analytical meaning of the concept *Wirtschaftsethik* is revealed. As is by now well known, *Wirtschaftsethik* neither connotes specific religious injunctions about proper behaviour in the economic field, nor is it just a logical derivative of the intellectual contents of the theology or philosophy predominant in a given religion. Rather, as especially Weber's analysis of the non-European religions indicates, *Wirtschaftsethik* has to do with a general mode of "religious" or "ethical" orientation. Included in this orientation is an evaluation of a specific institutional sphere based on the premises of a given religion or tradition about the cosmic order and its

relation to human and social existence, and consequently, the organization of social life.

Thus, "Wirtschaftsethik" is, in a sense, a "code," a general "formal" orientation, a "deeper structure," which programs or regulates the actual concrete social organization. Unlike many modern structuralists, however, Weber did not conceive the code as a purely "formal" means to organize only a set of abstract, symbolic contents. Rather he conceived it as the key to unlocking the basic symbolic structural and organizational elements of human and social existence.

Although most of Weber's work dealt explicitly with the relation of such "codes" to the economic sphere, his work in general and on the non-European civilizations or religions in particular, contains extremely important analyses into what may be called "Status Ethic" and "Political Ethic" of the Great Religions, i.e., the religious evaluation of the political sphere or of different dimensions of status. (See Eisenstadt 1968). Throughout this analysis, especially of the non-European religions, he usually showed how such different codes of any given religion exert their influence on the institutional setting of the society or civilization within which the given religion operates, and on the direction of change within it.

Especially important in this respect is his exploration of the relation between organizational and structural aspects or religions in general, and of movements of heterodoxy within them in particular, on the one hand, and the respective "Ethik" or "codes" of these religions, on the other. It is in this combination that the special strength in Weber's analysis can be found. The movements of "orthodoxy" and "heterodoxy" were identified by him both as carriers of continuity in the basic codes of these civilizations as well as indicators of possible changes in their range, and he showed how out of different constellations of such movements were, in specific institutional settings, there developed the potentialities of change of the major religions, and the different concrete ways in which such potentialities were actualized.

His analysis of the non-European religions or civilizations provides a very detailed exposition of the interrelations between these codes and of different changes within them, of the limits of these changes and the variety of structural organizations in

general, and of movements or heterodoxy in particular—but only within the limits of their traditional settings, of the parameters and codes of their historical traditions.

But in this analysis he did not go beyond the traditional settings of these civilizations. In the more central parts of his work on non-European religions Weber's major question was, as we have seen, why they did not develop in the direction of European modernity—and he did not ask himself whether they might develop beyond their traditional settings in a way different from capitalism or modernity in Europe.

Because of this he did not envisage—or at least did not discuss—the possibility of the development of parameters of modernity differing from the ones that developed in Europe. In a sense he took this type of modernity for granted. It was only in his exploration of the specific characteristics of Western rationality and of the relations between “Zweckrationalitaet” and “Westrationalitaet,” that he did also, even if only implicitly, touch on the possibility of the existence of different combinations of these various rationalities; hence also—very indirectly and only implicitly—on the possibility that there may perhaps develop types of modernity differing from the European ones.

But in principle the type of analysis he attempted with respect to the historical development of non-European civilizations and religions could also be transposed to the modern setting of these societies, to the process through which these societies have been developing their own responses to the challenge of modernity, their own types of post-traditional social and political orders.

* * *

The starting point of such an analysis should be the recognition of the possibility of the development of a great variety of different patterns of modernity, of a post-traditional order—a possibility rooted in the fact unlike what has been often assumed in the “classical” paradigms of studies of modernization, “development” or “modernization” do not constitute a “unilinear” demographic, social economic or political process which leads up—even if haltingly or intermittently—to some plateau, whose basic contours—whatever the differences in detail—will be everywhere the same.

Rather, modernization has to be seen as a process or a series of processes with a common core which generates common or similar problems, but to which different responses are possible.

These processes—those of growing differentiation, social mobilization and breakdown or weakening of central premises of traditionality unparalleled in the history of human societies—pose before the societies on which they impinge certain basic problems, of regulating the various continuously developing and newly emerging groups and the necessarily increasing conflicts which develop among them, of integrating these groups within some common institutional framework and of developing some new foci of collective national identity.

The most general and common problem attendant on modernization—in which all these others tend to merge—is that of the ability to develop and maintain an institutional structure which is capable of absorbing changes beyond its own initial premises and of dealing with continuous new and changing problems, and which may also develop, within the ways in which they develop the parameters of their traditions, the qualities of participation, liberty and some degree of types of rationality.

But although these processes of change and development and the problems to which they tend to give rise have some common cores, yet the structural and cultural conditions under which they arise—and the responses to them—may vary greatly among different societies.

These responses to the impact of the forces of modernity have varied greatly among different societies on almost all the crucial dimensions of social and cultural organizations. First, they vary according to the basic socio-demographic composition of populations, the occupational distribution, the bases for strata formation, the relative importance of agrarian vs. urban occupations, types of organizational structure, and the nature of allocative and regulative mechanisms.

But beyond these structural differences they varied also in the symbolic dimensions, in the ways of defining the basic symbolic parameters of social and cultural orders which developed in these societies under the impact of the forces of modernity.

Thus, they vary in the definition of the relative importance of different dimensions of human existence; or the nature of the

relation between the social and cultural orders and their mutual relevance.

Second, they vary as to whether an active or passive attitude toward participation in the social and cultural orders and in their formation is emphasized.

Third, and closely related to the preceding, they vary also in the definition of concepts of change, of attitudes to change and of the possibility of an active as against more passive participation in the formation of such changes in the major social and cultural spheres.

All these have indeed several important structural repercussions—among which the most important are in the types of the new political and cultural centers, that have been constituted there; in the definition of the boundaries of different collectivities and orders; in the definition of rights or of demands of various groups for access to the major socio-cultural orders and their centers; in the conception of the centers' post-traditional legitimation, of its self-image or goals and of its relation to the periphery; in the basic policies of the center and in the demands of the periphery; and last in the system of stratification—in the conception of social hierarchy, in the organization of different strata and their relative autonomy.

It is these differences which at least partially explain the dynamics of each of these post-traditional orientations—dynamics which take them beyond the original scope of the Protestant Ethic thesis.

* * *

These different responses to the impingement of the forces of modernization were greatly influenced—in the European and non-European cases alike—by the specific combination of “codes” predominant in a society, by the structure and orientations of movements of heterodoxy and their placement in the broader social structure and the consequent possibility of change that developed from within them.

Thus the major components of elements of European codes and traditions were very closely related to the Imperial traditions, the city-states, and the feudal societies of earlier times, which Weber did indeed study, even if not always in this context.

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These components, which became especially predominant in Modern Europe, combine the strong activist orientation of the city-state, the broad and active conception of the political order as actively related to the cosmic or cultural order of many Imperial traditions, and the heritage of Great Religions and the pluralistic elements of feudal society.

These elements in European (especially Western-European) tradition were rooted in a social structure characterized by a relatively high degree of commitment of various groups and strata to the cultural and political orders and their centers, as well as considerable autonomy in excess of these orders and their respective centers.

It was indeed against the background of these symbolic and structural characteristics of European civilization that there tended to develop the specific conditions which facilitated its modern transformation. This transformation was greatly facilitated by the specific structure and orientations of the more influential Protestant groups—especially by the fact that they were secondary, mostly non-political élites, which combined a strong orientation to political center with autonomous access to it, as well as their specific religious-transcendental orientations. These characteristics have been decisive in enabling them to develop—after the failure of their initial totalistic efforts to establish a new religious society—in the this-worldly direction which could also influence the broader trends of change of European modernity and of the combination of these codes, orientations and structural characteristics of European society on the one hand and the transformative potentials of the various religions, (Protestant) groups on the other; there developed in many parts of Europe a high degree of congruence between the cultural and the political identities of territorial populations; two, a high level of symbolic and affective commitment to political and cultural centers, including a close relation between these centers and the more primordial dimensions of human existence; and, three, a marked emphasis on common political defined, collective goals for all members of the national community. (See on this in greater detail, Eisenstadt 1971, Ch. IX-XII).

It was out of these assumptions that some of the specific propositions about patterns of participation and protest of the

nation-state developed. The most important of these propositions were:

- that both political groups and more autonomous social forces and elites crystallize in relatively antithetic, autonomous yet complementary “units” or “forces” of “State” and “Society”;
- that those continuously struggle to gain ascendancy at the cultural and political center of the nation-state and the regulation of access to it; that the various processes of structural change and as a result of processes of modernization—gave rise, not only to various concrete problems and demands, but also to a growing quest for participation in the broader social and political order; and
- that this quest for participation of the periphery in such social, political and cultural orders is mostly manifest in the search for access to these centers.

But as has already been shown (see Eisenstadt 1968), even in Europe, it was only in those circumstances in which structural pluralism reinforced the potential transformative orientations of these groups that the fullest development of this modern socio-political order took place.

* * *

The whole process of the spread of modernity beyond Europe was already characterized by much more different features and variety. Here several basic, closely interrelated, considerations have to be taken into account.⁴

By and large, modernity was an indigenous development in Western Europe, whereas its spread to Central and Eastern Europe and beyond was much more the result of external forces impinging on traditional societies and civilization. This impingement took several forms.

First, it took the form of undermining the traditional bases of economic, political and social organization, making various new demands on them and opening up new possibilities before their members.

Second, the forces of Western modernity impinged on the world beyond it by creating a new international order within

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which differences in strength in modern (economic or political) terms became the major determinant of relative international standing.

Third, the forces of modernity created in traditional societies a vogue or demand for a growing participation of citizens in the center, most clearly manifest in the tendency to establish universal citizenship and suffrage and some semblance of a "participant" political or social order.

Under the situation of change analyzed above, the political sphere came to be the major focus of possible internal development and the lever for effecting changes in other spheres, as well as in directions other than purely transformative ones.

In this regard, it is to be recognized that the parameters of the political spheres and their relation to status-ethos and to society differed greatly from those predominant in the European tradition. Indeed, in many of these societies—especially in those which developed from tribal societies, the strong autonomous units associated with "State" and "society" in the European tradition simply did not exist. It was relatively rare for there to be a distinct structural political center and where one existed, it was imposed by external sources, rather than developed internally. It was also rare for there to be relatively homogeneous, ethnic or national communities in these societies.

But even in societies—like the imperial or patrimonial—in which there could be no doubt about the existence of a specific center and State-apparatus, the interrelations among the state, and the political and social orders, were vastly different from those which prevailed in Western Europe. These societies did not share the Imperial, city-state and feudal past which Europe had experienced. Thus, for instance, in the Imperial, Asian societies—especially in the Chinese Empire—the pluralistic elements were much weaker than in the feudal or city-states of Western-Europe. In many other societies—in Southeast Asia, in Africa, and to some degree in Latin America—the forces of (later) modernity impinged on patrimonial systems where the level of commitment to a socio-political order was much weaker and where there was little active, autonomous relation between the political and the cosmic order, even if there existed a closer coalescence between the two.

Non-European political traditions rarely envisaged the same type

of split or dichotomy between State and Society as in European tradition. Instead, they tended more to stress the congruent but often passive relations between the cosmic order on the one hand, and the socio-political order on the other. Unlike the Western tradition, the interrelation between the political and the social orders was not envisaged in terms of an antithesis between the entities or powers. Rather, it was more often stated in terms of the coalescence of different functions within the same group or organization, centered around a common focus on the cosmic order.

For all these reasons the challenge of modernity was perceived and responded to by these civilizations in ways which were often in harmony or continuity with codes prevalent in these societies and with patterns of social and cultural change that had developed in the traditional historical framework of these civilizations.

* * *

But such harmony or continuity was never just naturally given. Moreover, there was never, of course, just one pattern of response within the confines of any such civilization—whether in its historical or modern setting. It is in the attempt to understand the variations in responses, both within single civilizations, and between different ones that we may come back to Weber's analysis of the possible place of religious orientations and movements in governing them.

In this situation of change the importance of heterodoxy and movements of reform and rebellion as carriers of changes tended here to become even more fully articulated than in Europe, mainly because of the fact that the very encounter with the West tended to give rise, first of all, to the intensification of such movements of protest.

But at the same time here the protest tended to become much more closely interwoven with processes of formation of new centers. Hence these two aspects or referents of various basic codes—that of protest and that of centerformation—tended to become closely combined.

Moreover, in these situations it was indeed in the political sphere that the major impact of change and impulse to institution-building tended usually to develop and the major orientation of

the various movements of rebellion and change were focused above all on this sphere. Therefore, it is especially important to analyze here different movements of heterodoxy and protest in their impact on the political sphere, on the "Politische Ethik," on the codes relating to the political sphere and through them on other institutional spheres.

Such analysis may help us to bring out the different cultural and institutional implication of some of the codes prevalent in these groups, the possibilities of changes and transformations within them and their impact on the concrete constellations of different post-traditional social and cultural orders.

It may help us in the understanding of the development of new combinations of "rationalities," especially of different types of "Wertrationalitaeten," with the "Zweckrationalitaet" characteristic of modern, differentiated structural and organizational settings.

In this way it may indeed build on Weber's analysis of non-European civilizations to the study of the relations between the codes of the great non-European religions, their carriers, and the responses of their societies to the impact of modernity.

Truly enough by this way they will be going beyond Weber's concrete concern with the question, but—to some degree—building both on Weber's vision of those religions as well as on the elaboration of many of his central analytical concepts.

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