

# Disenchanted Medieval Japan : Hōnen and Shinran in a Weberian Perspective

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In the years 1904 and 1905 the German economist and sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) published an article in two parts<sup>1</sup> that was to become one of the most influential sociological treatises of all time: *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*. In this article, which was reworked and republished in 1920,<sup>2</sup> Weber formulated a revolutionary theory on the relationship between religious ethos and economic action that has been widely and controversially debated ever since. In his own words, Weber in this treatise examines 'the influence of certain religious ideas on the development of an economic spirit, or the *ethos* of an economic system.'<sup>3</sup> The outcome of this study has become famous as the 'Protestantism thesis' which roughly runs as follows:

Modern capitalism as it first evolved in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and in North America, owes its emergence partly to 'ascetic Protestantism', namely Calvinism and Puritanism, that dominated these areas in the initial phase of capitalism.<sup>4</sup> It was only in these areas that a specific 'Protestant ethic' and the 'spirit of capitalism' could unfold. The decisive dogmatic starting point for the development of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism was the Protestant theology of predestination. Even for Luther, who "cannot be claimed for the spirit of capitalism,"<sup>5</sup> says Weber, "God's secret decree was [...] most definitely the sole and ultimate source of his state of religious grace." However, the idea did "not assume a central position for him."<sup>6</sup> It was

in the reformed theology, especially in Calvinism, that the notions of God's eternal decree, the eternal and most free purpose of His will, etc., were firmly established. Weber demonstrates this by referring to the so-called *Westminster Confession of Faith*, drawn up by the Westminster Assembly in 1646 (printed in 1647). In this document it is stated that "a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto" (Ch. IX, III); that "[b]y the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death" (Ch. III, III); that "[a]ll those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ" (Ch. X, I), etc.

Weber's central argument is that this theology of predestination inevitably lead to an existential uncertainty among Calvinists and Puritans regarding their being either elect or condemned.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence they desperately sought for *certitudo salutis*, the assurance of grace. According to the *Westminster Confession*, human beings "cannot" even by their "best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God" (Ch. XVI, V). Yet "however useless good works might be as a means of attaining salvation, for even the elect remain beings of the flesh, and everything they do falls infinitely short of divine standards, nevertheless, they are indispensable as a sign of election."<sup>8</sup> "They are the technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation."<sup>9</sup> The Calvinist, as Weber's widow Marianne puts it, "procures himself the certitude of future blessedness only by means of systematic self-control in order to overcome irratio-

nal drives, by means of a methodic life conduct, by means of *'inner-worldly asceticism.'*"<sup>10</sup> Thus, "in order to attain that self-confidence intense worldly activity is recommended as the most suitable means. It and it alone disperses religious doubts and gives the certainty of grace."<sup>11</sup> Worldly activity (*weltliche Berufsarbeit*) should be considered "the most suitable means of counteracting feelings of religious anxiety."<sup>12</sup>

For the religious ethos and practice the doctrine of predestination had two crucial implications: (1) the rejection of "salvation by works" (*Werkheiligkeit*), and (2) the "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*) of the world. I will come back to these two essential elements of the religious ethos of ascetic Protestantism below.

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In his studies on the *Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen (The Economic Ethics of the World Religions)* Weber attempted to uncover the causes and conditions for the establishment of a "specifically natured 'rationalism' of the occidental culture"<sup>13</sup> by contrasting this culture with others, namely those influenced by Confucianism and Daoism, Hinduism and Buddhism, and ancient Judaism. These essays, says Weber, are meant to reveal the differences of these cultural spheres to the "occidental cultural development." He concedes that in his earlier essays *Protestant Ethic* and *The Protestant Sects* he had only "traced one side of the causal relationship," namely the impact of the religious ethos on economic action. In *The Economic Ethics of the World Religions* he endeavored to provide "an overview of the relations of the most important cultural religions to economy and the social stratification of its environment" and now "trace *both* causal relations as far as necessary to find points of comparison to the occidental development which is to be further analyzed." Only by doing so it is possible to make any "causal assignment to those elements of the occidental religious eco-

conomic ethic which are peculiar to it in contrast to others.”<sup>14</sup>

Weber’s approach gained much recognition worldwide, especially in Japan. Here the question soon arose whether or not the fast and impressive process of economic modernization starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century might have been supported by a particular mentality or religious ethos of the Japanese. Weber himself had of course witnessed Japan’s ascension to an economic and military power, but he assumed that this was just the result of a successful adoption of western ideas and institutions. He supposed that the Chinese would probably be even more capable of fully adopting modern capitalism,<sup>15</sup> but both China and Japan lacked the cultural and institutional conditions to develop a spirit of capitalism out of their own.

Although this judgment was generally accepted, Japanese and Western scholars soon began to search for functional analogues to the Protestant ethic which might explain why Japan was apparently better prepared for modernization than any other nation outside of Europe and North America.<sup>16</sup> The best known attempts to examine Japanese religious history from a Weberian perspective were made by the American sociologist Robert N. Bellah (1927-2013), who inspired many scholars in Japan and elsewhere to search for functional analogues to the Protestant ethic in Japan’s religious history.<sup>17</sup> In short, according to Bellah the concept of an absolute transcendence is the single most important precondition for modernization. Buddhist thinkers of the Kamakura period, such as Shinran or Nichiren, did in fact develop concepts of an absolute transcendence,<sup>18</sup> but “the note of transcendence was soon lost. It was drowned out by the ground bass, so to speak, of the Japanese tradition of this-worldly affirmativeness, the opposite of denial.”<sup>19</sup> However, the question why “the note of transcendence was soon lost,” says Bellah, “has not yet by any means been fully an-

swered."<sup>20</sup>

For Weber himself, the answer to the question why Japan was unable to develop a capitalist economy by itself was quite simple. Thereby justifying the remarkable brevity of the section on Japan he maintains that "the peculiarities of the 'spirit' of the Japanese life conduct were generated by a completely different factor than religious momenta. Namely: by the feudal character of the political and social structure."<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, in Weber's eyes it was feudalism "that brought about the strangulation of foreign commerce [...] and the obstruction of a development of any 'bourgeois' strata in a European sense."<sup>22</sup>

In view of the complexity of the causal relationships between religious ethos and institutional conditions it appears to be all but impossible to explain why Kamakura Buddhism ended up as a "lost reformation"—to use James H. Foard's words<sup>23</sup>—and was unable to effectuate a modernization process in the same way as did the Protestant reformation in Europe. We should perhaps scale down our claims and expectations and confine ourselves to the question whether we can detect doctrinal elements in the religious thought of premodern Japan which, under comparable circumstances, might have had the potential of exerting a comparable influence on the economic development.

It suggests itself to start with religious ideas in Japanese Buddhism which resemble two of the main doctrinal effects of the predestination theory, namely: (1) the rejection of 'salvation by works' (*Werkheiligkeit*), and (2) the 'disenchantment' (*Entzauberung*) of the world.

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*Werkheiligkeit* — As indicated above one of the most decisive and influential consequences of the Protestant doctrine of predestination was the radical rejection of 'salvation by works.' Since salvation or condem-

nation is "from all eternity" preordained "by the most wise and holy counsel of" God there is nothing that men can do for their own salvation. Good works can never function as "a means of attaining salvation."<sup>21</sup> Weber clearly recognized that the same soteriological principle can be found in the teachings of Jōdo Shinshu—while the Jōdoshū, in his view, was a "ritualistic"<sup>25</sup> sect. The Shin sect, he says, "can be compared to occidental Protestantism at least insofar as it rejects all salvation by works in favor of the sole significance of the faithful surrender to the Buddha Amida."<sup>26</sup> However, "a rational inner-worldly asceticism has not been developed by it, no more than and for the same reasons as by Lutheranism."<sup>27</sup> At least Weber acknowledged that the Shin sect had many followers "in 'bourgeois' circles" and belonged to those strata in society "that were most sympathetic to the adaptation of occidental cultural elements."<sup>28</sup>

Weber was by no means the first European who recognized the similarities between Shin doctrine and Protestantism. In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century the missionaries Francisco Cabral (1529-1609) and Alessandro Valignano (1537-1606) deplored that the Ikkōshū 一向宗 (i.e. Jodo Shinshū) was the same as Lutheranism in Europe because they deny the soteriological efficiency of meritorious acts and one's own efforts. In the eyes of the missionaries they propagated a *sola fide* (by faith alone) doctrine that only differed from Lutheranism insofar as the 'person' in whom they believe and trust is concerned.<sup>29</sup>

Polemic as the missionaries accounts of Pure Land Buddhism may be, they clearly realized that the rejection of salvation by works was a central element of this tradition. As a matter of fact, Hōnen's and Shinran's rejection of self-power (*jiriki* 自力) in favor of total surrender to Amida's other power (*tariki* 他力) can be interpreted as a Buddhist version of the rejection of *Werkheiligkeit*. In order to prove the impossibil-

ity to gain salvation by self-power Hōnen and his disciple refer to, among other passages, a sentence in the *Amida kyō* 阿弥陀経 in which Śākyamuni says to Śāriputra: "It is impossible to be born in that land by means of the virtue of few good roots."<sup>31</sup> Hōnen interprets this as follows:

The words "It is impossible to be born in that land by means of the virtue of few good roots" mean that it is difficult to be born in that land through all the other miscellaneous practices: the miscellaneous good practices plant few good roots, while the nenbutsu plants many.<sup>31</sup>

Although Hōnen in his interpretation does not deny the soteriological efficacy of the "cultivation of good mundane and extramundane roots" (*shu se shusse zengon* 修世出世善根)<sup>32</sup> in principle, he strongly doubts that ordinary persons (*bombu* 凡夫) in the latter age of the Dharma (*maḥpā* 末法) are capable of cultivating enough good roots to achieve birth in the Pure Land by their own power. All efforts to plant and cultivate good roots besides the nenbutsu are classified as "miscellaneous practices" (*zōgyō* 雑行).

Sectarian tradition has it that Hōnen's disciple Shinran was even more radical in his rejection of self-power as a means to salvation. However, in the Daigo edition of the *Hōnen Shōnin denki* we find a passage which suggests that it was Hōnen who orally transmitted what is usually ascribed to Shinran, namely: "Even good persons attain birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will."<sup>33</sup> In the *Tan'ishō* where this statement is rendered in Japanese<sup>34</sup> the following reason for this position is given:

It is impossible for us, who are possessed of blind passions, to free

ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever. Sorrowing at this, Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the evil person's attainment of Buddhahood. Hence, evil persons who entrust themselves to Other Power are precisely the ones who possess the cause of birth.<sup>35</sup>

It is hard to tell whether for Hōnen the nenbutsu was a superior "skilful means" (*hōben* 方便) or something completely different.<sup>36</sup> Shinran clearly rejects the idea of the nenbutsu being a "skilful means" in the traditional sense of a means provided by a Buddha, chosen and applied by men. According to him,

The selected Primal Vow is the true essence of the Pure Land way; good practices, whether meditative or nonmeditative, are provisional ways (*hōben kemon* 方便假門). The true essence of the Pure Land way is the consummation of Mahāyāna Buddhism; the provisional gateways of expedience include the other Mahāyāna and the Hinayāna teachings, accommodated and real.<sup>37</sup>

Shinran's concept of *tariki* leaves no room for any self-effort whatsoever. In interpreting Tanluan's 曇鸞 (CA76-572) concept of "directing of virtue for going forth (*ōsō ekō* 往相廻向)," he says:

I find that there is great practice (*daigyō* 大行), there is great faith (*daishin* 大信). The great practice is to say the Name of the Tathāgata of unhindered light. [...] This practice arises from the Vow of great compassion."<sup>38</sup>

That means that Amida transfers both faith and practice to the believer. For Shinran, "it is through Amida's design that we come to say the nenbutsu." According to his interpretation salvation takes place in the



very moment when "true faith" (*shinjin* 信心) is realized. Since the realization of "true shinjin is awakened through the working of the two honored ones, Śākyamuni and Amida,"<sup>39</sup> it can only be waited for patiently. His radical doctrine of salvation by other power amounts to a doctrine of "predestination" which, as we have seen, is a distinctive feature of ascetic Protestantism. Salvation completely depends on Amida's grace (*sola gratia*). The nenbutsu definitely loses its character as a "sacramental means to salvation," in the sense of a means rationally applied for a specific purpose by the practitioner:

The nenbutsu, for its practicers, is not a practice (*higyō* 非行) or a good act (*hizen* 非善). Since it is not preformed out of one's own designs (*waga hakarai* ワカハカラヒ), it is not a practice. Since it is not good done through one's own calculation, it is not a good act. Because it arises wholly from Other Power (*tariki* 他力) and is free of self-power (*jiriki* 自力), for the practicer, it is not a practice or a good act.<sup>40</sup>

Shinran even rejects any attempts to calculate one's own "state of grace" and the "inconceivable working of the Vow" because "the wisdom of the Buddhas surpasses conceptual understanding." The only thing that you can do is "give yourself up to Tathāgata's Vow; avoid calculating in any way."<sup>41</sup>

To sum up: both the missionaries and Max Weber were obviously right in their judgment that in Pure Land Buddhism—especially in Shinran's version—*Werkheiligkeit* is as resolutely rejected as in Protestantism.

*Entzauberung* — The rejection of salvation by good works is a prerequisite for the *Entzauberung der Welt*. Any process of disenchantment

presupposes a preceding state of enchantment. Weber calls such a state "*Zaubergarten*" (enchanted garden) and claims that the *Zaubergarten* of Medieval Europe was gradually disenchanting by ascetic Protestantism. However, for "the various popular religions of Asia," he claims, "the world remained a great enchanted garden."<sup>12</sup> Even the comparatively sober "Chinese 'universist' philosophy and cosmogony transformed the world into *an enchanted garden*."<sup>13</sup> It was not only the "heterodox" doctrine of Daoism that contributed to this enchantment but the "preservation of this enchanted garden [...] was one of the most intimate tendencies of Confucian ethics."<sup>14</sup> Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, contributed even more to the transformation of the whole world into "an enormous magical enchanted garden."<sup>15</sup>

But what does *Zaubergarten* mean for Weber? And how was it disenchanting in Europe? The notion of *Zaubergarten* is closely related to Weber's idealtypical distinction between 'sorcery' (*Zauberei*) or 'magic' and 'religion.' In his definition, the "relationships of men to supernatural forces which take the forms of prayer, sacrifice and worship may be termed 'cult' (Kultus) and 'religion,' as distinguished from 'sorcery,' which is magical coercion."<sup>16</sup> According to Weber the absolute sovereignty ascribed to God in Protestantism made any form of "magical coercion," i.e. *Gotteszwang*, impossible. A Protestant can (and must) *serve* his god but he can by no means *alter* "the eternal and most free purpose of His will" (WC III.VI). This radical interpretation of the relationship between men and god inevitably lead to the disenchantment of the world which Weber simply defines as "the elimination of magic"<sup>17</sup> and the "devaluation of all sacraments as means to salvation."<sup>18</sup> "Sacraments" are, in Weber's definition, "magical acts which guaranty religious benefits [*Heilsgüter*]."<sup>19</sup> "The rationalization [*Entzauberung*] of the world," says Weber, was carried out with all consequences only by "the

Puritans (and before them the Jews),”<sup>50</sup> and the “radical elimination of magic from the world allowed no other psychological course than the practice of worldly asceticism.”<sup>51</sup> It is important to note, however, especially when using the sometimes misleading English translations of Weber’s works, that “*disenchantment of the world* does not mean freedom from what we are used to judge as ‘superstition’ in our days.”<sup>52</sup> That means: ‘disenchantment’ does not imply a materialistic or scientific world view, freedom from belief in extra-empirical beings or powers or in the efficacy of ‘magical’ acts *per se*. However, for the Puritans extra-empirical beings had become demons, magical acts satanic.<sup>53</sup>

To sum up, disenchantment for Weber meant the rejection of magical acts and sacraments as means for salvation, i.e. “relatively rational behavior”<sup>54</sup> aimed at a ritual manipulation of ‘relatively transcendent’<sup>55</sup> beings for the sake of acquiring (in most cases: worldly) ‘religious benefits’ (such as [*genze*] *riyaku* [現世] 利益 in Japan).

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In order to determine whether the Pure Land doctrines of Hōnen and Shinran entailed any form of disenchantment we must first analyze their attitudes towards magical manipulation of relatively transcendent beings such as *kami* 神, *jingi* 神祇, *kihaku* 鬼魄, *myōjin* 明神, *ryōjin* 靈神, *shinmei* 神明, or *kijin* 鬼神 motivated by the hope to obtain religious benefits.

First of all, it is conspicuous that both Hōnen und Shinran hardly ever mention relatively transcendent beings in their writings.<sup>56</sup> Their neglect of gods and ghosts is not only extremely unusual for 13<sup>th</sup> century Japan, when the theory of the *kami* being local manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹) had become a kind of national dogma; from the standpoint of mainstream religion it was downright egregious. As is well known, one of the accusations the es-

establishment most frequently and fervently articulated against the Pure Land movement concerned their "error to turn their backs to the numinous deities" (*ha reishin shitsu* 背靈神失; *Kōfukiji sōjō*).<sup>57</sup>

According to Ito Yuishin the remarkably few statements of Hōnen concerned with the problem of whether or not a Pure Land practitioner should worship any spiritual beings suggest that he

clearly distinguished between religious acts for the purpose of this life and those for the life to come. One must not confuse prayers to Buddhas and Kami with the practice of the nenbutsu which is for the purpose of the life to come. If one prays to the Buddhas and Kami for the purpose of this life, however, this is no obstacle.<sup>58</sup>

To substantiate his argument, Itō cites Hōnen's response to the question of the lay follower Tsunoto Saburō Tamemori (1163-1243) from Musashi. In his letter Hōnen states:

As regards worldly prayers you need not worry about prayers to Buddhas and Kami. For the purpose of birth in the Pure Land in the next life there is no other practice than the nenbutsu! [...] As long as it is not for the purpose of birth in the Pure Land you need not worry about prayers to Buddhas and Kami.<sup>59</sup>

Hōnen's position seems to be quite clear. In a traditionalist Buddhist manner he distinguishes between mundane and extra-mundane religious benefits. The former are implicitly defined as *laukika* (*seken* 世間), the latter as *lokottara* (*shusseken* 出世間).<sup>60</sup> But things are perhaps not as simple as they seem. Another statement of Hōnen suggests that he not only rejects prayers to Buddhas and kami as means for salvation in the next life but also doubts their efficacy as means for obtaining benefits in this life.

[...] it is said that all the deva kings and the spiritual beings, numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges, consider a person who takes his/her refuge to the Buddha, takes his/her refuge to the Dharma, and takes his/her refuge to the *saṅgha* as their kin and always protect him/her. Likewise all the Buddhas and all the kami surround and protect him/her. Furthermore, all the Buddhas and kami being present, there should be nothing to worry about or to obstruct you. Moreover, there are limitations due to accumulated karma, and if you are about to be taken ill you may pray to whatever Buddha or kami, but [your cure] does not depend on that. If ailments were cured and life prolonged by prayers, how can it be that only one person gets ill and dies?<sup>91</sup>

If my interpretation of this passage is correct, Hōnen does not only reject the idea that prayers to Buddhas and gods might bring about extra-mundane salvation, he even questions the efficacy of prayers as means of procuring the *Heilsgut* of health, at least if an illness is the consequence of past karma. That is to say, Hōnen only reluctantly accepts prayers for inner-worldly purposes—while questioning their usefulness and dismissing any active and organized cult for the gods. A nenbutsu practitioner should be aware that Buddhas and gods protect him within the limits determined by past karma anyway. No extra activity to gain their protection is needed. Thus, the practitioner can whole-heartedly concentrate on the only thing that truly matters: birth in the Pure Land, which only the nenbutsu can assure.

Such an attitude, according to Weber, represents a paradigm shift in the development of religion: “The normal situation is that the burden of all prayers, even in the most other-worldly religions, is the aversion of the external evils of this world and the inducement of the ex-

ternal advantages of this world,"<sup>62</sup> Weber claims and continues.

Every aspect of religious phenomena that points beyond evils and advantages in this world is the work of a special evolutionary process, one characterized by distinctively dual aspects. On the one hand, there is an ever-broadening rational systematization of the god concept and of the thinking concerning the possible relationships of man to the divine. On the other hand, there ensues a characteristic recession of the original, practical and calculating rationalism. As such primitive rationalism recedes, the significance of distinctively religious behavior is sought less and less in the purely external advantages of everyday economic success. Thus, the goal of religious behavior is successively "irrationalized" until finally otherworldly non-economic goals come to represent what is distinctive in religious behavior.<sup>63</sup>

If we replace 'god' by 'Buddha' this is exactly what happened in Pure Land Buddhism as developed by Hōnen.

This paradigm shift characterized on the one hand by the rationalization of the transcendent point of reference and on the other by the 'irrationalization' of the goals of religious behavior is even more visible in Shinran's writings. Shinran in his *Japanese Hymns on the Right, Semblance, and Last Dharma Ages* does not only reject prayers to the gods for extra-mundane purposes as useless acts of *jiriki*—he declares these practices 'non-Buddhist.'<sup>64</sup> What is most remarkable here is that Shinran openly stigmatizes popular practices such as the selection of "fortunate times" (*ryōji* 良時) and "auspicious days" (*kichijitsu* 吉日), "divination and rituals of worship" (*bokusen saishi* 卜占祭祀), veneration of the "gods of the heavens and earth" (*tenjin, jigi* 天神・地祇), "gods and spirits" (*issai kijin* 一切鬼神), and "gods and spirits of the heavens and

earth" (*tenchi no kijin* 天地の鬼神) as inapt for Buddhists.

Even though Shinran's rejection of extra-Buddhist practices of kami worship and the like sounds more radical—as usual—we can assume that Hōnen's position was not much different. When we look at his *Dialogues in 145 Sections* it becomes quite clear that he also rejects traditional popular practices as mundane (*seken* 世間; *laukika*) and thus 'non-Buddhist.' Hōnen's genuinely Buddhist attitude to distinguish these practices from what is extra-mundane (*shusseken* 出世間; *lokottara*) in orientation and thus soteriologically relevant, is perhaps best represented in his answers to questions concerning the problems of ritual 'impurity' (*fujō* 不淨) and 'taboos' (*imi* 忌).<sup>65</sup> "In the Buddhist teachings," he says, "there is no such thing as taboo. One should regard this as a mundane thing."<sup>66</sup> In the same text we find lots of similar statements.<sup>67</sup>

It is thus evident that both Hōnen and Shinran devalue or even dismiss the 'economic' rationality of 'magical' action for the purpose of acquiring inner worldly religious benefits and propagate a genuinely 'religious' orientation towards the achievement of the extramundane *Heilsgut* of birth in the Pure Land instead. Obviously, the transition from 'magical coercion' (*Gotteszwang*) to 'religious supplication' (*Gottesdienst*)<sup>68</sup> is more explicit in Shinran's writings than in Hōnen's. This is reflected in their respective attitudes towards the veneration of gods: Hōnen tolerates it but relegates it to the sphere of mundane action; Shinran insists that such practices are inappropriate for real Buddhists and should thus be avoided altogether. However, this radical stance was given up by Shinran's successors quite soon after the master's death.<sup>69</sup>

As we have seen, Weber asserted that the Puritans believed in the existence and power of relatively transcendent beings but demonized all attempts to communicate with them. In this respect they clearly went beyond Hōnen's skeptical but tolerant position. But what

was Shinran's position in that matter? Besides the above quoted hymns there is one highly interesting section in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* which suggests that Shinran held a position quite similar to the Puritans. Quoting the *Sūtra of the Vows of Medicine Master Buddha* he maintains that "Good sons and good daughters of pure trust must never serve gods (*ten* 天; Skt. *deva*) to the very end of their lives."<sup>70</sup> The sūtra explicitly warns against the disastrous moral, psychological, and soteriological results of any engagement in sorcery, divination, etc.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, Shinran refers to *The Sūtra of the Bodhisattva Precepts*:

The rule of the person who renounces worldly life is not to pay homage to the king, not to pay homage to one's parents, not to serve the six kinds of blood-relatives, and not to worship spirits (*kijin* 鬼神).<sup>72</sup>

These passages are remarkable because they provide concrete arguments against the worship of gods and spirits. Such practices are not only inappropriate for monks but also ineffective and even dangerous.

To sum up: inasmuch as Hōnen and even more explicitly Shinran reject both 'salvation by good deeds' (*Werkheiligkeit*) and magic we may say that their teachings amount to what Weber called 'disenchantment of the world.'

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In my view the old but—according to Bellah—"not yet [...] fully answered" question why the reformation of Japanese Buddhism has failed despite Hōnen's and Shinran's contributions to a disenchantment of the world, can in fact be answered with reference to the economic, social, political, and institutional frame conditions in 13<sup>th</sup> century Japan. These were entirely different from those in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Moreover, Pure Land Buddhism may have been influential but it was not the predominant creed in medieval Japan. As Kuroda Toshio and oth-



ers have shown the 'magically' oriented schools of esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教) remained the most powerful institutions throughout medieval times. Thus, Japan quite naturally kept being an 'enchanted garden.'

It is an interesting question, however, whether or not Hōnen's and Shinran's teachings would have had the potential of unfolding similar economic and social dynamics under conditions comparable to those in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Every answer to this question is speculative, of course. Nevertheless, rejection of *Werkheiligkeit* and *Entzauberung*, the two core elements of the religious ethos of ascetic Protestantism, can be found in Hōnen's and even more so in Shinran's teachings. Furthermore, Shinran's soteriology can be interpreted as a 'predestination theory.' However, there is one fundamental difference between Shinran's soteriology of complete dependence on Amida's Other Power and "Calvin's horrible doctrine of predestination"<sup>73</sup> (Marianne Weber) according to which God has predestinated some to (undeserved) salvation, and others to (guiltless) destruction. The difference results directly from the difference between the Christian view of God on the one side and the Buddhist view of Buddhas on the other.

In Protestantism God is a completely transcendent, absolutely sovereign and 'hidden God' (*deus absconditus*). No one can know his plans and intentions. Salvation and condemnation depend on his free will alone. He is not bound to any vows, in contrast to a Bodhisattva who promises to save all sentient beings.<sup>74</sup> The world is God's creation and it is the duty of men and women to prove themselves in this world, especially in their profession by restless, successful labor and exclusively "for the glory of God."<sup>75</sup> A Buddha, in contrast, is not responsible for this miserable world but shows ways how to overcome it. Accordingly, in Weber's view, the Buddhist has to prove him- or herself not *in* but *against* the world.<sup>76</sup> In Pure Land Buddhism even this is not necessary.

It is the very 'certainty of salvation' attained by the faithful who deem themselves saved by Amida that enables them to come to terms with this 'impure world' (*edo* 穢土) and calmly anticipate birth in the Pure Land (*jōdo* 浄土). Economic success neither leads to nor indicates salvation. Consequently, Pure Land Buddhism does not provide any psychological motive for inner-worldly asceticism since there is no "fear of damnation" one would have to get "rid of."<sup>77</sup> Hōnen's and Shinran's soteriology in fact resembles that of Martin Luther rather than that of John Calvin.<sup>78</sup>

However, with regard to the potential influence of a specific religious ethos on economic behavior, one interesting aspect has hitherto been largely ignored. The radical and genuinely Buddhist distinction between immanence (*laukika*), represented by the 'ruler's law' (*ōbō* 王法) including the worship of gods and spirits, and transcendence, represented by the Buddha Dharma (*buppō* 仏法),<sup>79</sup> clearly visible especially in Hōnen's doctrine, ideally results in a disentanglement of religious ethos and economic behavior. This disentanglement enables people to act according to the specific logic (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) of the economic system without any hindrances by religious taboos or ethics. It could be worth investigating whether this truly Buddhist dualistic attitude might have informed the rapid and successful modernization of Japan. It may be true that the disentanglement of the mundane/immanent and the extramundane/transcendent as propagated by Hōnen and his disciples was "drowned out by the ground bass [...] of the Japanese tradition of this-worldly affirmativeness" (Bellah) and the magical world-view of esoteric mainstream Buddhism. On the other hand it was not drowned out completely. Hōnen and Shinran provided the Japanese with an alternative world-view and approach to inner-worldly behavior which favored a functional differentiation of society (a core element of

modernization) and could easily be activated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It may therefore be no pure coincidence that—as even Weber acknowledged –it was the followers of the Shinshū who “were most sympathetic to the adaptation of occidental cultural elements.”<sup>16)</sup>

### Notes

1. Max Weber, ed., *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik in Verbindung mit Werner Sombart und Max Weber edited by Edgar Jaffe Ergänzungsheft I / XII, XVI* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1911-1919).
2. Max and Marianne Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1920). English translation: Max Weber, Talcott Parsons and Richard H. Tawney, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930).
3. Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York & London: Charles Scribner's Sons; George Allen & Unwin, 1950 [1930]), 27; original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 12.
4. *Ibid.*, 19-20.
5. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 82.
6. *Ibid.*, 102; original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 91.
7. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 110;
8. *Ibid.*, 115; original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 110.
9. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 115.
10. Max Weber, *Gesammelte Werke: Mit dem Lebensbild von Marianne Weber*, Digitale Bibliothek 58 (Berlin: Directmedia Publ. GmbH, 2001), 356. My translation.
11. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 112; original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 105-6.
12. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 112; original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 106.
13. *Ibid.*, 11.
14. *Ibid.*, 12-3.
15. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, 535.
16. For an overview see Wolfgang Schwentker, *Max Weber in Japan: Eine*

- Untersuchung zur Wirkungsgeschichte 1905-1995* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); idem, "Der 'Geist' des japanischen Kapitalismus: Die Geschichte einer Debatte," in *Max Weber und das moderne Japan*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Wolfgang Schwentker, 270-98 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). Among the internationally well-known experts in religion who dealt with this problem was Nakamura Hajime who in the end admitted that the results of his quest for modern elements in the thoughts of premodern Japanese thinkers were quite meager. And although Nakamura explicitly referred to Max Weber, he applies Weber's approach only superficially. Cf. Nakamura, "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund der Entwicklung Japans in der Neuzeit," in *Japan und der Westen. Bd. 1: Philosophie, Geistesgeschichte, Anthropologie*, ed. Constantin von Barloewen and Kai Werhahn-Mees, 56-94 (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1987); cf. idem, *Ansätze modernen Denkens in den Religionen Japans* (Leiden: Brill, 1982).
17. See Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985 [1957]), 2-3; translated into Japanese as *Nihon kindaika to shūkyō rinri: Nihon kinsei shūkyō ron* 日本近代化と宗教倫理: 日本近世宗教論 by Ikeda Akira 池田昭 and Horii Ichirō 堀一郎 (Tōkyō: Miraisha, 1966). Cf. idem, "The Contemporary Meaning of Kamakura Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42 (1974); idem, "The Meaning of Dōgen Today," in *Dōgen studies*, ed. William R. LaFleur, 150-8 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Pr., 1985); idem, "Japan: The Religious Situation in the Far East," in *Beyond belief: Essays on religion in a post-traditional world*, ed. R. N. Bellah (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991 [1970]); idem, "Reflections on the Protestant Ethic Analogy in Asia," in *Beyond belief: Essays on religion in a post-traditional world*, ed. R. N. Bellah, 53-63 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991 [1970]).
  18. Robert N. Bellah, "Japan: Values and Social Change in Modern Japan," in *Beyond belief: Essays on religion in a post-traditional world*, ed. Robert N. Bellah, 114-45 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991 [1970]), 119-20.
  19. Ibid., 119.
  20. Ibid., Cf. Robert N. Bellah, "Reflections on the Protestant Ethic Analogy

- in Asia," in *Beyond belief* (see note 18).
21. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, 296.
  22. *Ibid.*, 296-7.
  23. James H. Foard, "In Search of a Lost Reformation: A Reconsideration of Kamakura Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 7, no. 4 (1980).
  24. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 110. Cf. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 115, 141.
  25. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, 305.
  26. *Ibid.*, 303.
  27. *Ibid.*, 304.
  28. *Ibid.*
  29. See Hans Haas, ed., *Amida Buddha unsere Zuflucht: Urkunden zum Verständnis des japanischen Sukhāvati-Buddhismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 6; Franz Josef Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan; Bd. 2* (Rom: Edizioni die Storia e Letteratura, 1958), 384; George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 43.
  30. *T12*, no. 366, p. 347, b9-10.
  31. *JZ7*, p. 64, a6-7.
  32. Cf. *Senchakushū* 選択集; *JZ 7*, 40a13-41a3.
  33. "善人尚以往生況悪人乎事, 〈口伝有之〉". This passage suggests that Shinran simply adopted his "theory of the right disposition of evil persons" from his teacher. Cf. Kajimura Noboru 梶村昇, *Akuninshōki setsu 悪人正機説* (Tokyo: Daitō Shuppan, 1993). See also his, "Daigobon Hōnen Shōnin denki ni tsuite 醍醐本法然上人伝記について," *Journal of the Department of Liberal Arts (Asia University)* 4 (1969): 31-5; cf. Matsuo Ekō 松尾得晃, "'Tan'ishō' daigoshō no kōsatsu 『歎異抄』第五章の考察: Genshin 'Ōjōyōshū' to no shisōteki kanrensei kara (Tan'ishō) no shisōteki haikai no kenkyū) 源信『往生要集』との思想的関連性から(『歎異抄』の思想的背景の研究)," *Bulletin of Buddhist Cultural Institute, Ryukoku University* 44 (2005): 315. However, the Daigobon passage contradicts other statements of Hōnen, such as the one in a letter which reads: 罪人ナホムマル、イハンヤ善人オヤ (Ishii kyōdo 石井教道, ed., *Shōwa shinshu Hōnen Shōnin zenshū* 昭和新修法然上人全集 (here

- after: *HZ*) (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1991 [1955]), 500). Accordingly, the Jōdo priest Myōzui 妙瑞 (-1778) in his *Chinzei myōmoku mondō funjin shō* 鎮西名目問答奮迅鈔 harshly denounces the *akunin shōki* theory as “the wrong doctrine of a fool [i.e. Shinran] (*gutoku jagi* 愚禿邪義)” (*JZ* 10, p. 559a8-11).
34. T83, no. 2661, p. 728c16-17; English: Shinran and Dennis Hirota, *The Collected Works of Shinran: Volume I: The Writings* (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 663.
  35. T83, no. 2661, p. 728c25-729a1; English: *ibid.*
  36. For a discussion see Christoph Kleine, *Hōnens Buddhismus des Reinen Landes: Reform, Reformation oder Häresie?* (Frankfurt a.M. et al.: Peter Lang, 1996).
  37. *Mattōshō*; T83, no. 2659, p. 711b29-c3; Quoted from Shinran and Hirota, *The Collected Works*, 524-5.
  38. *Kyōgyōshinshō*; T83, no. 2646, p. 590a10-13.
  39. *Mattōshō*; T83, no. 2659, p. 716b10-12; quoted from Shinran and Hirota, *The Collected Works*, 540.
  40. *Mattōshō*; T83, no. 2661, p. 729b24-29; quoted from *ibid.*, 665.
  41. *Mattōshō*; T83, no. 2661, p. 715 b29-c03; quoted from *ibid.*, 537.
  42. Max Weber and Johannes Winckelmann, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 379. Cf. Max Weber, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 630.
  43. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 484.
  44. *Ibid.*, 513.
  45. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, 278.
  46. Weber, Roth and Wittich, *Economy and Society*, 424; Original: Weber and Winckelmann, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 259.
  47. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 117; Original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 114.
  48. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 147; Original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 156.
  49. Weber and Winckelmann, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 272.
  50. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 117; Original: Weber and

- Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* I, 114.
51. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 149; Original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* I, 158.
52. *Ibid.*, 513; my translation. In this context Weber reminds his readers of the witch trials which flourished in Puritan New England.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Weber, Roth and Wittich, *Economy and Society*, 400; Original: Weber and Winckelmann, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 245.
55. For the notion of "relative transcendence" see Christoph Kleine, "Zur Universalität der Unterscheidung religiös/säkular: Eine systemtheoretische Betrachtung," in *Religionswissenschaft: Ein Studienbuch*, ed. Michael Stausberg, 65-80 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 70-1; idem, "Religion and the Secular in Premodern Japan from the Viewpoint of Systems Theory," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 2, no. 1 (2013); idem, "Religion als begriffliches Konzept und soziales System im vormodernen Japan: Polythetische Klassen, semantische und funktionale Äquivalente und strukturelle Analogien," in *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. Peter Schalk et al., 225-92. (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2013), 241-5.
56. Ito Yuishin deplors that it is impossible to reconstruct Hōnen's personal attitude towards the gods from his writings. Itō Yuishin 伊藤唯貞, *Honen no seiki 法然の世紀: Genpei sōran no yo ni banmin kyūsai no toku 源平争乱の世に万民救済を説く* (Kyōto: Jōdoshū shūmuchiō, 2001), 134. I think, however, that Hōnen's silence is a very telling one indeed.
57. E.g. in *Kōfukuji sōjo* 興福寺奏状-edited in Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄 and Tanaka Hisao 田中久夫, eds., *Kamakura kyūbukkyō* 鎌倉旧仏教, *Nihon shiso taikai shinsoban* 日本思想大系新装版; *Zoku Nihon bukkyō no shisō* 続・日本仏教の思想; 3 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995 [1971]); translated in Robert E. Morrell, "Jōkei and the Kōfukuji Petition," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 10, no. 1 (1983); idem, *Early Kamakura Buddhism: A Minority Report* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1987)-and in *Sannon sōjo* 山門奏状 or *Enryakuji sōjo* 延暦寺奏状-edited in Itō Shin-etsu 伊藤真徹, *Nihon jōdokyō bunkashi kenkyū* 日本浄土教文化史研究 (Tokyo: Ryubunkan, 1975), 431, and in Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三, *Kamakura*

- ura ibun* 鎌倉遺文: CD-ROM ban CD-ROM 版 (Tōkyō: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 2008), vol. 5, 271-272; cf. Christoph Kleine, "Pluralismus und Pluralität in der japanischen Religionsgeschichte: Am Beispiel nonkonformer buddhistischer Bewegungen des 13. Jahrhunderts," in *Mauss, Buddhismus, Devianz: Festschrift für Heinz Mürmel zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Thomas Hase et al., 189-216 (Marburg: Diagonal-Verl., 2009).
58. Ito, Hōnen no seiki, 134.
59. *Jikkan den* 十卷伝, in: *JZ* 17, p. 323a16-b3; vgl. *HZ*, 504.
60. For the Buddhist distinction between *laukika* and *lokottara* see David S. Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée bouddhique de l'Inde et du Tibet: Quatre conférences au collège de France* 64 (Paris: Collège de France, Institut de civilisation indienne; Diffusion De Boccard, 1995); "A Note on the Relationship between Buddhist and Hindu Divinities in Buddhist Literature and Iconology: The Laukika/Lokottara Contrast and the Notion of an Indian "Religious Substratum?," in *Le parole e i marmi: Studi in onore di Raniero Gnoli nel suo 70. compleanno*, ed. Raniero Gnoli, Raffaele Torella and Claudio Cicuzza, 735-42 (Roma: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente; Distributed by Herder International Book Centre, 2001). For this concept in Japanese Buddhism see Kleine, *Zur Universalität*; idem, *Religion als begriffliches Konzept*; idem, *Religion and the Secular*.
61. *Wago tōroku* 和語灯録, *JZ* 9, p. 529b3-b13; vgl. *HZ*, 604-605; cf. Ama Toshimaro 阿満 利磨, *Hōnen no shōgeki* 法然の衝撃: *Nihon bukkyō no radikaru* 日本仏教のラディカル (Kyōto: Jinbun Sho'in 人文書院, 1989), 116.
62. Weber, Roth and Wittich, *Economy and Society*, 424; Original: Weber and Winckelmann, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 259.
63. Weber, Roth and Wittich, *Economy and Society*, 424; Original: Weber and Winckelmann, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 259.
64. *Shōzōmappō wasan* 正像末法和讃; *T83*, no. 2652, 668a1-12; English: Shinran and Hirota, *The Collected Works*, 422-3.
65. cf. Itō Yuishin 伊藤唯眞, *Nihonjin to Minzoku shinkō* 日本人と民俗信仰 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2001), 117-9.
66. *Ippyakushijūgo kajō mondō* 百四十五箇條問答; in: *Wago tōroku* 和語灯録; *JZ* 9, p. 590b11-13; cf. *JZ* 9, p. 598b13-17.



67. E.g. *JZ* 9, 593b17-594a3-6. Itō praises Hōnen's rejection of all kinds of taboos as "rational thinking" (*gōriteki-na kangae* 合理的な考え). Itō, *Hōnen no seiki*, 139. His notion of 'rationality' obviously differs completely from Weber's. As we have seen, magical behavior is by no means irrational in Weber's eyes because it presupposes that an action is methodically used as a means to obtain some goal. The assumption of causality between means and purpose may be wrong, but the motivation for the action is nevertheless 'instrumentally rational' (*zweckrational*).
68. Please note that there are no real equivalents for the terms used by Weber in English.
69. Kiriya Rokuji 桐山六字, "Shōki Honganji kyōdan ni okeru shingikan 初期本願寺教団における神祇観," *Dendō'in kiyō* 伝道院紀要 30 (1985): 23-4.
70. Original: *T14*, no. 450, p. 407, a7-8.
71. *Shinshū seiten hensan iinkai* 真宗聖典編纂委員会, ed. *Shinshū seiten* 真宗聖典, 11th ed. (Kyoto: Higashi Honganji shuppanbu, 1992), 386-387; English: Shinran and Hirota, *The Collected Works*, 273-274. Original: *T14*, no. 450, p. 408, a6-15.
72. *Ibid.*, 387; English: *Ibid.*, 274. Original: *T24*, no. 1484, p. 1008, c4-6.
73. Weber, *Gesammelte Werke*, 355.
74. Cf. *Ju bodaishin kaigi* 受苦提心戒儀 (*T18*, no. 915, p. 941, b16) or Zhiyi's *Maka shikan* 摩訶止観 (*T46*, no. 1911, p. 56, a11).
75. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 114; Original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 109.
76. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, 367.
77. Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic*, 115; Original: Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, 106.
78. Weber and Winckelmann, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 344-5; cf. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, 304.
79. cf. Kleine, *Religion and the Secular*.
80. Weber and Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, 304.