"Adjustment" and "Tension" in Max Weber's Interpretation of Confucianism

Kolchi Shinohara
McMaster University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/CCR

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/CCR/vol15/iss15/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
“ADJUSTMENT” AND “TENSION” IN MAX WEBER’S INTERPRETATION OF CONFUCIANISM*

KOICHI SHINOHARA

Max Weber’s interpretation of Confucianism in terms of the concepts “adjustment to the world” and absence of “tension” continues to be a topic for serious scholarly discussion. Wm. Theodore de Bary begins his introduction to an important volume on the “unfolding of Neo-Confucianism” with a critique of Weber’s views (1975: 1-37). From a different viewpoint, one that is more sympathetic to social sciences, Thomas Metzger analyzed the “political culture” of traditional China with an emphasis on the high level of tension (1977). What does it signify that a work written almost 70 years ago by a non-specialist continues to draw the attention of serious scholars in the field? My paper is a response to this intriguing question.

Weber saw scholarship in social sciences take shape as projects that begin with seminal formulations of questions, concepts, and hypotheses, develop with the accumulation of studies based on these ideas, and end when “the significance of the unreflectively utilized viewpoints become uncertain and the road is lost in twilight” (1949:112). Diagnosed in the light of this view of scholarship, the continuing interest in Weber’s interpretation of Confucianism testifies to the fact that the intellectual project which began with Weber’s comparative sociology of religion is still alive with us. From this point of view, the recent critiques by de Bary and Metzger can be read not as refutations of Weber’s overall project but as contributions to the continuing refinement and development of the project itself.

Weber himself emphasized the imperfect and provisional character of his studies. He saw large parts of them as works of a non-specialist and called for corrections and refinements by specialists (1958: 28f.). My examination of certain issues involved develops the above diagnosis by

*I would like to thank Mr. James Robinson for his editorial assistance in the preparation of this paper.
pointing to important continuities between the concerns of Weber and his recent critics. Also the examination suggests some directions in which further stages of the Weberian project may develop.

In order to highlight the dynamic character of Weberian sociology as a continuing project, I want to examine certain core issues in different phases of Weber's work in sociology of religion. I will first explore the relationship between economic rationalism and religious rationalization depicted in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958a), a work which introduces seminal ideas that later develop into a systematic comparative sociology of religion ("The Economic Ethic of World Religions"). Secondly, I will move to review Weber's theoretical proposals in sociology of religion in *Economy and Society* (1978: 399-634) and in two shorter essays in *Collected Works in Sociology of Religion* (1958b: 267-301; 323-359). Here I will focus on his discussion of the tension that arises in religious rationalization. In the third section Weber's interpretation of Confucianism as "adjustment to the world" and absence of "tension" will be the focus and I will highlight the manner in which key concepts of his sociology of religion are used in developing his analysis. Finally, I will conclude by examining briefly the critiques presented by de Bary and Metzger. In this concluding section I will isolate parallels in the theoretical concerns behind Weber's interpretation and those of his critics. Just to anticipate, I think that the critics' identification of tension in Confucianism has two important consequences: (1) this identification reveals an important inadequacy in Weber's interpretation of Confucianism, (2) but, at the same time, it invites a fuller and more careful analysis of the tension in Neo-Confucianism based on Weber's own theoretical suggestions.

As a preparatory step toward this larger task I conclude by suggesting and exploring two possibilities:

1. The inadequacy of Weber's interpretation may be partly due to certain ambiguities and biases in his theoretical formulations. Identifying these ambiguities and biases would lead to modifications and refinements of his theoretical framework.

2. The critics' analysis may in fact confirm the soundness of some of the basic theoretical assumptions guiding Weber's comparative project and also validate elements of his discussion of Confucianism. Clarifying this circumstance will indicate the extent to which the critics' works can be properly understood as contributions to the continuing Weberian project.
1. Religion and Economic Rationalism in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Weber’s discussion of “tension” has its source in his analysis of the “spirit” of modern bourgeois capitalism. He describes this spirit by highlighting its contradictory character: it makes money-making, or the increase of wealth, an end in itself, and disciplined work to increase wealth becomes an ethical duty; yet, at the same time, the enjoyment of wealth is discouraged. Increased wealth is reinvested to increase it still further. This “irrational” attitude (“one lives in order to work”) is contrasted with a more natural attitude (“traditionalism”) which gives a relative place in one’s life to both the production and the consumption of wealth, while limiting one’s economic needs to what is required to maintain the accustomed way of life (“one works in order to live”). This contradiction in the “spirit” of modern capitalism has a crucial consequence: it leads one to carry out radical and methodical, economic rationalization beyond natural and traditional limits. How does this irrational and contradictory attitude, which paradoxically brings about unprecedented economic rationalization, come about?

Weber answers this question by pointing to the paradox of religious rationalization. In one form of a highly rationalized religiosity, that is, the ascetic Protestantism best represented in Calvinism, the attitude toward wealth takes a similar contradictory character. Ascetic Protestantism severely discouraged the enjoyment of wealth. Wealth represented the temptation of the creaturely world. The sole concern of the followers of this form of Protestantism was religious salvation. And yet, these followers sought economic success as a sign of their salvation. Since the meaning of wealth is no longer understood in its natural sense as a means toward the enjoyment of life, the quest for wealth becomes an absolute goal, breaking down the limit found in less highly rationalized forms of religion (e.g., medieval Catholicism).

Weber is here using a relativistic concept of rationalism and rationalization: the meaning of rationalism changes depending on the sphere and viewpoint (1958a: 26; 76ff.). The attitude toward wealth that characterizes both the “spirit” of modern capitalism and the ethic of ascetic Protestantism is economically rational in that they make one go about the task of increasing wealth in a methodical and systematic manner. At the same time, from a traditional point of view, the attitude toward consumption is irrational. Religious rationalism is clearly distinct in content from...
economic rationalism and the rational seekers of the religious goal of salvation are generally hostile in principle toward economic goals. Yet, one important form of religious rationalization results in an unprecedentedly radical economic rationalization.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber’s analysis of religious rationalization in Calvinism is presented as an analysis of the doctrine of predestination. The contrast with medieval Catholicism illustrates the difference in degrees of religious rationalization. Catholicism with its doctrine of sacrament, basically a magical concept, is less rational. The comparison with Lutheranism illustrates differences between two major types of religious rationalization. Luther with his ideal of becoming the "vessel" of God (*unio mystica*) stands close to mysticism, while Calvin with the ideal of becoming the "tool" of God represents asceticism. The analysis of the religious ethic focuses on the relationship between the religious and other forms of rationalism.

These themes in Weber’s analysis of religious rationalization are further developed systematically as a set of major hypotheses in his presentation of the theoretical framework of the sociology of religion. In this more systematic presentation we would also note that the shift from the typology of Christianity to the comparative study of world religions introduces new dimensions to Weber’s basic viewpoint.

2. "Tension" in Weber’s Theoretical Framework for Comparative Sociology of Religion

Weber’s general theoretical framework for the sociology of religion develops as an examination of the conditions and consequences of religious rationalization (1978: 399). The theme of "tension" is a major focus in this context. Religious rationalization involves the rejection of magic and the emergence of salvation religiosity. Magic is oriented to this-worldly ends such as health, longevity, wealth, and numerous offspring. Salvation religiosity centers around the other-worldly end of salvation which involves relativizing this-worldly ends by contrast to the superiority of the other-worldly end.

The conditions that produce religious rationalization are analyzed as the interaction among two types of religious leadership (priestly group and prophecy) and different lay groups. The sociological aspect of the differentiation of religion from magic is the formation of a religious institution ("cult") offering services on a regular basis, with the emergence of the priestly group as its professional staff. The crucial agent
of religious rationalization is the prophet ("ethical" or "exemplary"). Comparison with other types of teachers emphasizes that the teaching of religious salvation is the distinguishing characteristic of the prophet (1978:446). The degree and direction of religious rationalization are also conditioned by the basic religious orientation of the dominant lay groups. Weber notes that the life of a peasant is subjected to the unpredictable, uncontrollable, and thus ethically neutral forces of nature. Consequently he is susceptible to the influence of magic that claims to control these forces. (1978: 465; 1958b: 283). The unpredictable nature of death in battle, for which a warrior has to be prepared all the time, makes him more open to such religious ideas as fate (1978: 476; 1958b: 283). A typical official of the secular bureaucracy is sober and religiously skeptical, and yet he is willing to exploit religion for the purpose of domesticating the masses (1978: 476; 1958b: 283). An artisan or a middle to small scale merchant living in a city sometimes shows remarkable responsiveness to the ethical salvation religion.

Weber’s discussion of the consequences of religious rationalization concentrates on the analysis of "tension." His analysis throws light on different aspects of the phenomenon, using the term in two or three related but clearly distinguishable senses. The main phases in Weber’s discussion on this concept may be summarized as follows:

(1) Prophecy creates "a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated meaningful attitude toward life" (1978: 450). Prophecy gives a religious answer to the ultimate question of all metaphysics: "if the world as a whole and life in particular were to have a meaning, what might it be, and how would the world have to look in order to correspond to it" (1978: 451). The prophet's answer to this question is "a conception of the world as a cosmos," "a 'meaningful', ordered totality," according to which its particular manifestations are "to be measured and evaluated" (1978: 451). Weber says that such a conception of the world conflicts with "empirical reality" producing "the strongest tensions in man's inner life as well as in his external relationship to the world" (1978: 451). Weber appears to refer to the experience whereby the realization that certain events in our lives do not "make sense" according to the accepted religious teaching disturbs our thought and behavior.

(2) Weber sharpens his focus on this problem by introducing the concept of theodicy. In the Judeo-Christian context, the problem of theodicy takes form in the question: "how the extraordinary power of a transcendent, unitary, universal god may be reconciled with the imperfection of the world he has created and rules over" (1978: 519). Focusing
further on the problem of evil and suffering, Weber traces "idealtypically" how the problem is answered in theories of future retribution in this world or in the world beyond. The problem of evil is dealt with as a part of the teaching of religious salvation. Such teaching always specified the "from what" and the "to what" of salvation, and the meaning of evil is given in its account of the power or the state from which one is to be saved. With deepening rationalization, however, the problem of theodicy becomes radicalized. Within the framework of the Judeo-Christian monotheism, the fundamental problem of theodicy is the "difficulty" of "reconciling the punishment of human acts with the concept of an ethical and at the same time all-powerful creator of the world, who is ultimately responsible for these human actions himself" (1978:552).

The problem is not simply that of the meaning of particular instances of evil, but of the meaning of the fact that any form of evil exists at all. Weber lists the Zoroastrian dualism, the doctrine of karma, and the Calvinist doctrine of predestination as truly consistent forms of theodicy. All three answer the question of theodicy ultimately by setting a limit to human knowledge and removing the question in principle. For example, in the doctrine of predestination the will of the transcendent God is held to be beyond human understanding and it becomes inappropriate for man to entertain the problem of theodicy at all. Interpreted in this way, Weber's discussion of theodicy illustrates how the problem of tension between the religious meaning and empirical reality becomes the dynamic force, stimulating the clearer articulation of the meaning of religious salvation, and ultimately setting limits to human capacities. One important consequence of this would be the relativizing of human values.

(3) The "tension" between religion and other this-worldly spheres of life (such as economic, political, artistic, sexual, and intellectual spheres) is discussed by Weber as the phenomenon of "world rejection" (1978: 576; 1958b: 323ff.). The quest for the specifically religious end of other-worldly salvation leads to relativizing and ultimately to rejection of this-worldly ends of human life. Weber notes that the tension becomes sharper and more self-conscious in each case if religion and the given sphere are both more highly rationalized. In an idealtypical presentation Weber describes the highest degrees of religious rationalization by the ideal of radical religious ethic ("acosmism of love," "brotherliness," 1958b: 330) and the typology of mysticism and asceticism. The logic of rationalization in other spheres is described variously. In each case, the model of rationalization provides the framework not only for identifying
the tension but also for analyzing the nature of compromises between religion and the given this-worldly value.

Throughout, the parallels between Weber's theoretical analysis of tension and his discussion in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* are frequent and often explicit. For example, Weber's discussion of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination calls attention to its emphasis on the transcendence of God and the fact that the problem of theodicy is removed in principle (1958a: 102f.; 109). This fact has an important consequence: the absolute unknowlability of election triggers the psychological process that drives one to seek economic success not for itself but as a sign of the elect status. The importance of this consequence explains Weber's interest in the manner by which the problem of theodicy arises and is eventually resolved in different religious traditions. The analysis of a religiously motivated attitude toward other spheres of life, often but not always negative, forms an important preoccupation in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958a: 155ff.). This analysis, particularly the paradoxical relationship between the ascetic Protestants' attitude toward wealth, is recapitulated in the theoretical presentation (1978: 587ff.; 158b: 332f.).

Some shift in emphases are also notable. The focus on the concept of tension provides Weber with a framework for restating his earlier analysis in a broader context. His analysis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* identifies a specific mechanism of psychological dynamics ("psychological sanctions," 1958a: 97) in ascetic Protestantism and emphasizes its uniqueness by contrasting it with very different types of psychological dynamics in medieval Catholicism and Lutheranism. In the theoretical presentation the concept of tension enables Weber to describe the nature of this specific type of psychological dynamics characteristic of ascetic Protestantism as an example of a more universal phenomenon that arises with religious rationalization. Thus, the tension in different degrees and in different forms exists not only in ascetic Protestantism but also in all forms of Christianity and in other major traditions of the world. Its origin is explained more generally in relation to the nearly universal religious phenomenon of prophecy. The difference in the degree and consequences are explained in terms of a number of different circumstances (e.g., types of prophecy, degrees of rationalization in all relevant spheres, compromises between different types of rationalism). Our next task is to see how this expanded analysis works in Weber's interpretation of Confucianism.
3. Weber's Interpretation of Confucianism

Weber's analysis of Confucianism turns around two themes: (1) it is an expression of the "rationalism" of patrimonial bureaucracy and (2) it represents a very low level of religious rationalization. The first theme is developed primarily from the viewpoint of his sociology of domination (Herrschaftssoziologie) through a contrast between feudalism and patrimonialism. The second theme involves the use of the theoretical framework of sociology of religion. In working out this second theme, Weber emphasizes that in Confucianism there is an absence of the "tension" that arises with religious rationalization and the resultant life orientation he characterizes as the "adjustment to the world."

The Ch'in unification (221 B.C.) was the most fateful event for Chinese civilization according to Weber. The period prior to it he characterizes as "feudalism": the world-view and ethos of warrior heroes dominated the ruling class and kings competed with each other seeking the service of intellectuals advocating a wide variety of philosophies. The situation was similar to other societies of warriors and philosophers such as those found in ancient Greece and India. The Ch'in unification changed the status of the elite from that of warriors to that of bureaucrats. Confucianism eventually emerged as the state ideology that protected the status and power of both the dynastic ruler and his officialdom.

Weber's analysis of this transition is many-sided and complex, but the major points can be summarized in the following way. The charismatic world-view was preserved with important modifications in the later Chinese conception of the political order. The charisma conferred by Heaven upon the ruler legitimates his status and power. Following the logic typical of all forms of magic, this charisma had to be proven by visible material successes in this world. Any natural or social disaster may be interpreted as a proof of the lack of charisma on the part of the ruler or his officials. Since the educated officialdom controlled the interpretation of the charismatic principle, this view of the political order ultimately served their interests.

In a manner characteristic of the secular bureaucracy, the orientation of Chinese officialdom was this-worldly and religiously skeptical. Confucian officials produced an ethical interpretation of this charismatic order (1968: 31): virtue is held to be more powerful than magic, and the old heroic world-view of the Book of Poetry was reinterpreted in a moralistic vein (1968: 113). The state ritual was very sober and purged of all traces of ascetic or ecstatic elements that form an important part of the magical
The "rationalism" of the educated officialdom did not challenge the magical religiosity of the masses. The officialdom was openly hostile only to elements that may lead to religious rationalization. According to Weber, a fundamental duality characterized the orientation of the Confucian officialdom: while preserving the magical worldview as the basis of power and status, it nevertheless subjects it to a higher, more "rational," ethical conception of virtue. Weber’s discussion of Confucian education illustrates an important aspect of this dualism. Weber begins by formulating two basic ideotypical conceptions of education. The "magical" conception regards it as a means of awakening charisma. The idea is that a magician or a warrior hero is born with a special gift that sets him apart from others, but this gift of charisma must be cultivated and awakened before it becomes effective. The "rational" conception regards education as a way of transmitting some specialized knowledge or competence.

The Confucian conception of education was humanistic and stood between those two extreme poles. In this context education provides a cultural qualification for the ruling class. Its content is not magic but literature and its purpose is not to awaken the charisma but to nurture a certain mental outlook and way of thought suitable for a cultured man. From the popular point of view, however, written words had charismatic (that is, magical) power. Literary competence was regarded as an important charismatic qualification for the official’s status. The emphasis on literary style, on the other hand, discouraged the development of specialized knowledge and competence. In this regard, the dominant orientation was that of "adjustment to the world," and the "world" is the cosmic and social order that continued to be understood primarily in magical and charismatic terms.

Weber maintains that basic conditions which produce religious rationalization were absent in China. He argues that there was no independent and powerful hierocracy (i.e., the organized priestly group) since the religious and political order were not clearly differentiated. The head of the political order was at the same time the head of the magical and charismatic order of the cosmos ("caesaro-papism", 1968: 30). Also Weber argues that there was no influential prophecy. While Weber interpreted Lao tzu as an instance of "exemplary" prophecy, the consequences of this prophecy were only magical. Weber understood the influence of Buddhism to be minimal. So Confucianism dominated as the unhindered expression of the rationalism of the patrimonial bureaucracy, while the magical worldview was preserved among the masses.
The conception of religious salvation and the conception of radical evil, crucial marks of religious rationalization, were absent in Confucianism. Confucians desired not other-worldly "salvation" but long life, health and wealth in this world and beyond death the preservation of good name—all clearly this-worldly ends. "Sin" in Confucianism consisted of "offenses against traditional authorities, parents, ancestors, and superiors in the hierarchy of office" and "for the rest . . . magically precarious infringement of inherited customs, of the traditional ceremonial, and of stable social conventions" (1968: 229)—"he who complied with the commandments, fashioned for the men of average ability, was free of sin" (1968: 228). For a Confucian, "all transcendental anchorage of ethics, all tensions between the imperatives of a supra-mundane God and a creaturely world, all orientation toward a goal in the beyond, and all conception of radical evil were absent" (1968: 228). This orientation characterized by a marked absence of tension Weber describes as adjustment to the world:

A true prophecy creates and systematically orients conduct toward one internal measure of value. In the face of this the "world" is viewed as material to be fashioned ethically according to the norm. Confucianism in contrast meant adjustment to the outside, to the conditions of the "world." A well-adjusted man, rationalizing his conduct only to the degree requisite for adjustment, does not constitute a systematic unity but rather a complex of useful and particular traits . . . Such a way of life could not allow man an inward aspiration toward a "unified personality," a striving which we associate with the idea of personality. Life remained a series of occurrences. It did not become a whole placed methodically under a transcendental goal. (1968: 235).

Weber goes on to analyze the Confucian economic ethic by contrasting it with the Puritan ethic. Basic themes, first formulated in his comparison with the "spirit" of capitalism and "traditionalism", reappear in this contrast:

(1) Weber argues that although "a calculating mentality and self-sufficient frugality of unexampled intensity developed," and despite the "much bewiled crass 'materialism' of the Chinese," "rational" and "methodical" business conceptions did not originate in China (1968: 242). In making this point Weber reiterates important emphases of his earlier work: "sheer greed," a natural human tendency and a phenomenon found everywhere, has nothing to do with the "spirit" of modern capitalism which makes the disciplined control of economic life into an ethical duty (1958a: 57f.).

(2) Weber does observe that a positive orientation to wealth on the part
of Confucianism finds expression in certain economic policies. But the influence of these economic policies is limited and does not give rise to the "civil and methodical way of life" (1968: 238). This analysis here recapitulates the important emphasis on the distinction between political capitalism and modern bourgeois capitalism (1958a: 58, 74f.).

(3) The crucial distinction between the attitude toward production of wealth and the attitude toward its consumption reappears in the following manner. Weber observes that "for the Confucian wealth was the most important means for virtuous, i.e., dignified life and for the ability to dedicate oneself to self-perfection" (1968: 245). At the same time, the decisive factor was that the "cultured man" (gentleman) was "not a tool": that is, in his adjustment to the world and in his self-perception he was an end unto himself, not a means for any functional end. The core of Confucian ethics rejected professional specialization, modern expert bureaucracy, and special training; above all, it rejected training in economics for the pursuit of profit (1968: 246).

Here a positive evaluation of wealth as a means toward a higher non-economic purpose is combined with an attitude that discourages rationalization in the production of wealth.

(4) Finally, Weber contrasts the Confucian emphasis on personal relationship with the Puritan emphasis on "a holy 'cause' (Sache) or an 'idea' (Idee)" (1968: 236). The Confucian attitude is rooted in the organically given personal relations. The Puritan "impersonal rationalization" (objektivierende Rationalisierung) (1968: 236) results from the shattering of these organic ties. This occurs when ethical religions establish the superiority of the community of faith over the community of blood. This "objectification" (Versachlichung) (1968: 236) of personal relationships has favorable consequences for economic rationalization. Its absence is an important part of Confucian traditionalism.

4. The Criticism and New Issues
   For the Weberian Discussion

Several important difficulties are evident in Weber's analysis. I will first comment on the theoretical aspect of these difficulties and then briefly examine the criticism posed by both de Bary and Metzger. In this examination I will attempt to clarify the relationship between their own interpretations and the broader context of Weber's sociology of religion.

Weber's attempt to interpret Confucianism from the viewpoint of
sociology of religion presents the following difficulties:

(1) Weber interprets Confucianism making use of his relativistic concept of rationalism. As an expression of the rationalism of patrimonial bureaucracy, Confucianism is "rational." At the same time, it is not "rational" from the viewpoint of sociology of religion since there was no significant religious rationalization behind it. The relationship between these perspectives is not sufficiently clarified and a degree of ambiguity remains.

In analyzing the rationalism of Confucianism, Weber points out that it placed "virtue" over "magic" (168: 31, 113, 155). Confucianism made use of the magical world-view prevalent among the masses, but its primary orientation was ethical. In spite of the argument that there was no religious rationalization in Confucianism, it would be wrong to characterize it simply as a magical religion. Yet, the basic structure of Weber's sociology of religion dictates this as the only possible conclusion.

(2) Weber's analysis of the Confucian "traditionalism" involves two perspectives, probably reflecting the two stages in the development of his own theoretical reflections in the sociology of religion. The more detailed analysis of the Confucian economic ethic, based on the comparison with Puritanism, recapitulates major themes in his discussion of traditionalism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The contrast between "greed" and "spirit," the attitude toward consumption, the distinction between "policy" and "ethos," the analysis of personalism and impersonal objectification form a picture of traditionalism as a natural and in some sense perfectly rational economic attitude. On the other hand, Weber repeatedly emphasizes his basic theoretical thesis that a magical world-view lies behind the orientation of "adjustment to the world" and traditionalism. According to this thesis the magical world-view discourages innovation since innovation is believed to disturb the charismatic order and cause the anger of spirits. In contrast, salvation religiosity liberates one from this hold of the magical world-view and may have the effect of encouraging innovation. Again, the relationship between these two perspectives on traditionalism is not entirely clear.

The theoretical framework that explains the relationship between magic and salvation religiosity as the contrast between this-worldly and other-worldly orientations leads Weber to interpret all this-worldly orientations as ultimately magical. As a consequence, traditionalism, which approves the enjoyment of wealth within appropriate limits, comes to be identified with magic. Confucianism with its pronounced this-worldly
and traditionalistic orientations is then interpreted as a fundamentally magical tradition.

One may, however, question this identification of all types of this-worldly orientation with magic. As I suggested above, some forms of this-worldly orientation, e.g., that of the patrimonial bureaucracy, may not be simply magical. The relationship between Confucian traditionalism and magic may be a good deal more complex than Weber’s analysis assumes.

(3) In one important passage Weber recognizes the presence of an element of religious rationalization in Confucianism. He notes that “the actual distribution of fortunes and unpredictability of man’s destiny” gave rise to “the eternal problem of theodicy” even for Confucianism (1968: 206). Referring to the Confucian concepts of Heaven and fate, Weber describes the Confucian attitude as follows:

Only the “superior” man . . . knows of fate, and without belief in fate, one cannot be a cultured man. . . . Common man, without fate or fearsome of fate, pursues happiness and goods; or he faces the change of fate with resignation. . . . Confucian “superior man,” however, learned to live in the knowledge of fate and to face up to it inwardly with proud equanimity. (1968: 207).

The reference to an utopian social ideal in one passage in the Book of Rites and its contemporary elaboration by K’ang Yu-wai are also mentioned (1968: 211ff.). These observations indicate that a degree of tension, as highlighted in Weber’s analysis of religious rationalization, was present in Confucianism. However, Weber played down the significance of these points in his interpretation of Confucianism as “adjustment to the world” and absence of tension.

Again, the basic structure of this theoretical scheme appears to be at least partly responsible for this bias. As we saw above (section 2), Weber’s analysis of tension begins with the discussion of the tension between the religiously articulated meaning of the world and the “empirical reality” and focuses on the tension between the rationalism of salvation religiosity and other this-worldly types of rationalism. In this analysis, these two types of tension are not clearly distinguished. This confusion may not pose a serious difficulty in analyzing a tradition that highlights the tension between religion and the world in its account of the path toward salvation. In a tradition that emphasizes harmony as its ideal, however, the confusion may result in an important distortion: the emphasis on the absence of tension in the ideal (“adjustment to the world”) may lead one to underestimate the level of tension experienced between
this ideal and the "empirical reality." Yet, one may live in great tension with the world while upholding the ideal of "adjustment to the world." The structure of Weber's theoretical framework rules out this possibility.

My observations suggest that Confucianism was in fact a great deal less "magical" than Weber's interpretation suggested. Its this-worldly ideal of "adjustment to the world" co-existed with a significant degree of "tension" and religious rationalization. Certain biases in Weber's theoretical framework stand behind the distortions in his analysis. The ideal of "adjustment to the world" led him to minimize the tensions between the ideal and the "empirical reality" that indicate a significant level of religious rationalization. Underestimating the level of religious rationalization in turn led him to emphasize the magical character of Confucianism.

It is interesting to observe that these biases arise as a consequence of Weber's attempt to develop his analysis in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism into a general theoretical framework for a comparative sociology of religion. As we saw above, the contrast between magic and salvation religiosity as well as the focus on the concept of tension first emerge as clear emphases in his presentation of the theoretical framework and comparative studies.

Weber's analysis of "heterodoxy," i.e., Taoism and Buddhism, also emphasizes their magical character. Again, the nature of his theoretical scheme may be partly responsible for his emphasis. The issue is of considerable importance for a consideration of the nature of Confucianism which was deeply influenced by the Taoist and Buddhist ideals of spiritual cultivation. It is in the context of their examination of Neo-Confucianism that de Bary and Metzger have cause to question Weber's analysis. To this we will now turn.

5. De Bary and Metzger on Neo-Confucianism

In his introduction to The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism (1975: 1-38), de Bary presents an account of Neo-Confucianism that highlights its tension. Basing himself on a dynamic conception of tradition, de Bary describes Neo-Confucianism as "a movement which grew precisely through successive efforts to redefine and reformulate orthodoxy" (1975: 11). The redefinition and reformulation reflect changing historical conditions and produce new syntheses among its basic polarities such as "scholarship and public service, intellectual inquiry and moral cultivation, activity and contemplation, the practical and the aesthetic" (1975:...
These polarities describe basic dimensions of tension in Neo-Confucianism. De Bary notes further in analyzing the paradigmatic case of Wu Yü-pi that "at the heart of this 'orthodoxy' lay a sharp juxtaposition of the ideals and actualities and a constant creative tension between the two" (1975: 21).

The crucial motive in seeking these new syntheses was the authenticity of reappropriation: "they felt that this Way could not be real or genuine for them unless somehow they could find it within themselves, as something not external or foreign to their own essential nature" (1975: 32). From this point of view de Bary describes Neo-Confucianism not so much as "a set of moral code or a philosophical system" but rather as "a life-style, an attitude of mind, a type of character formation, and a spiritual ideal that eluded precise definition" (1975: 24). Pointing to the centrality of the sage ideal, the importance of the practice of quiet sitting, and the seriousness of inner struggle in Neo-Confucianism, de Bary sees "the predominant influence of Buddhism to lie precisely in the deepening of Neo-Confucian spirituality" (1975: 161). This analysis suggests that a significant level of religious rationalization was present in Neo-Confucianism.

To summarize, de Bary sees Neo-Confucianism as a dynamic tradition that "contained within itself the vitality to generate new forms, the strength to engage in self-criticism, and the resilience to contain stresses and strains" (1975: 18). The Neo-Confucian "traditionalism" dramatized the tension between the ideal and actuality:

instead of simply "adjusting to the world," Neo-Confucianism could generate a radical critique of prevailing mores as falling short of traditional ideals, and Confucian purist could take his stand also as a non-conformist, unwilling to accommodate himself to the decadent ways of his own time (1975: 21).

Hence the rational adjustment of the Neo-Confucian was conjointed rather than juxtaposed, to the task of rational transformation in which Weber and others saw the Confucian as failing (1975: 7).

Weber's discussion of Confucianism was formulated in the light of a larger universal-historical question: why did modern bourgeois capitalism fail to emerge indigenously in China? The thesis that Confucianism ended up with extreme traditionalism is offered as a central part of Weber's answer to this question (1968: 249). De Bary's discussion of the tension in Neo-Confucianism seriously undermines Weber's provisional answer. It also raises further questions.

In his broader theoretical discussion Weber argued that only one type of tension arising as a result of religious rationalization produced the
attitude that characterizes the spirit of modern capitalism. Other more common types, associated with the mystical ideal, result in the orientation of "the flight from the world." Once the tension is identified in Neo-Confucianism and its dynamic is shown to parallel some central themes in Weber's analysis of religious rationalization, it would be natural to raise further questions regarding the relationship between the tension and the type of orientation it produces. One could ask, for example, whether the tension in Neo-Confucianism was similar to that of Buddhism. If so, it would not have produced the orientation of "the mastery of the world" that Weber thought was at the heart of the modern attitude.

De Bary identifies and analyses the tension in Neo-Confucianism in a manner similar to Weber's discussion in the sociology of religion, but he does not address Weber's larger universal-historical question directly. Nor does he focus on the difference between the tension in Neo-Confucianism and the tension in ascetic Protestantism. But the question remains, and the answer would necessarily involve clarifying the nature and limitations of the Neo-Confucian tension.

In his *Escape from Predicament* Thomas Metzger presents an analysis that conceives the limitations of Neo-Confucianism as "predicament." The issue of modern rationalism is shifted from the question of indigenous origin to that of modernization. Within this context, Metzger characterizes the impact of modern West on China as the "escape from predicament." I want to focus on his analysis of the Neo-Confucian predicament.

In a manner that parallels Weber's emphasis on the rationalism of patrimonial bureaucracy, Metzger focused on the ethos of Ch'ing bureaucracy in an earlier study (1973). Labelling the ethos as "probatory ethic," Metzger observes that these officials, conscious of their weighty responsibility and the pervasiveness of evil, were particularly susceptible to the feeling of shame and willing to submit themselves to punishment (1973: 250, 255-265, 400-404). Here Metzger discovers a high level of tension and criticizes the Weberian view that emphasizes the absence of tension (1973: 404,411).

This analysis is further expanded in Metzger's discussion of Neo-Confucianism. Metzger defines the goal of Neo-Confucianism as "linkage":

The goal of Neo-Confucians, therefore, was to obtain a living, immediate, emotionally soothing, and elitist sense of cosmic oneness and power by achieving moral purification together with a comprehensive cognitive grasp of the cosmos.
as a coherently linked whole. With this state of mind, one would realize social oneness and put the whole world in order. Thus one avoided existing in a "dead," "bad," self-centered way, cognitively disoriented by the helter-skelter of happening, feeling out of contact with ultimate reality, subject to anxious feelings of powerlessness and aimlessness in the face of powerful forces threatening to "overcome" one, and so unable to realize social oneness and to save the world. (1977:81).

Metzger suggests that whereas Chou and Han Confucians had taken the unity of all things for granted, Neo-Confucians regarded "this oneness as an unsolved problem" (1977: 72). The impact of Buddhism explains this shift. The Buddhist view that "birth is suffering" postulated a chasm between the ideal and the actual experience, thus making "the problem of linkage central and acute" (1977: 73): if we experience life as suffering, how can it also be "a glorious process" bringing "'things' into unity with ultimate being'? (1977:73); if this linkage is not found in our everyday life, how can it be achieved? The Buddhist emphasis on "mind" led Neo-Confucians to seek the linkage in the mind. Whereas Chou and Han Confucians ascribed the power of social transformation to the "king," Neo-Confucians regard the mind (wu-hsin) as its prime vehicle (1973: 76). In this manner Buddhism shaped the Neo-Confucian "agenda of issues and criteria of validity" (1977:74).

Metzger highlights the Neo-Confucian preoccupation with cosmic forces:

What I call the metaphysical bias of Neo-Confucians comes down to the key point that for them, the individual was not a self-sufficient moral agent, and ethical purity was not enough. They needed to feel supported by an immense power transcending the immediate ego, and they wanted this power in order to transform the world. Even when they suspected it was unavailable, they still sought the pathos of this power. In other words, along with their humanism, they believed that the mind had a transnatural power to control the cosmos (1977: 154).

Their problem was "how to devise some combination of spiritual nurture, cognitive understanding, and practice through which they could tap a beneficent but elusively transcendent cosmic force and realize their immense goal of world harmony, while contending with their own weaknesses, the evils of society, and a cosmic will often undercutting their own endeavours" (1977:134f.).

Metzger notes that this amounts to defining life "as an agonizing predicament with virtually no route of escape." It was a predicament because "the goal, the need to pursue it, and the forces blocking this pursuit were real: the efficacy of the solutions they proposed to each other was open to grave doubt" (1977:135). Giving up the goal
would have meant discarding his own actually irrepressible participation in the cosmic flow of morality, embracing a life of "fears and anxieties," giving up any claims to the ti-wei (status) of sagehood . . . , forfeiting the rationale for his sense of identity as a charismatically superior person, and abandoning the hope of finding some way to realize the eight steps of the Great Learning. Moreover, any commitment but a complete one appeared as "dead" and futile. (1977: 195f.).

A comparison between this analysis of Neo-Confucian predicament and Weber's analysis of Puritanism may be helpful. Neo-Confucians assumed ("perception," 1977:50) that their goal of linkage was both possible and necessary. Their predicament is due to its extreme difficulty. Puritans in contrast believed that it was impossible to affect the future of one's soul. Since it was beyond their power to promote their ultimate goal of salvation, they pursued success in the vocation, ultimately a meaningless but psychologically necessary goal. This comparison indicates that the tension in Neo-Confucianism was a good deal less radical than in Puritanism.

In the light of the distinction between the two types of tension in Weber's discussion, the tension in Neo-Confucianism as analyzed by Metzger is predominantly that of the tension between the ideal ("goal") and the "empirical reality." The tension within the ideal, i.e., the tension between religious salvation and other value spheres, is absent. In fact, the goal of linkage with its emphasis on the unity of all things does not recognize any principled tension between value spheres. In this sense, this goal may still be described as an ideal of "adjustment." Metzger's comment, for example, that the Neo-Confucians conceived the problem of linkage as a cognitive problem, revealing their "rational bias" (1977: 63) contrasts with Weber's preoccupation with the ultimate inevitability of "intellectual sacrifice" (1958: 154), i.e., ultimate irreconcilability of the values of religion and intellectualism.

The discussion of tension in Neo-Confucianism by de Bary and Metzger indicates that a significant level of tension co-existed with an ideal of adjustment. This view confirms earlier observations concerning the ambiguities in Weber's theoretical framework.

Certain directions in which the theoretical framework must be revised emerge:

(1) The dichotomy of magic and salvation religiosity must be questioned and the relationships between the ideal of adjustment, tension, traditionalism, and magic need to be reexamined.

(2) The types and consequences of tension arising in differing contexts of religious rationalization need to be described more carefully with greater attention to their differences.
(3) Both de Bary (1975: 7) and Metzger (1977: 76, 154, passim.) speak of "transformation" as a paradigm for describing the practical consequences of the orientation that follows the ideal of "adjustment" while holding it in great tension with the "world." But the concept needs to be more closely examined and developed.

In spite of its major difficulties, Weber's theoretical framework proves to be a helpful guide in clarifying the significance of de Bary's and Metzger's own contributions. The issue of differences in the types and consequences of tension turns out to be of crucial importance in this clarification. This issue is central to Weber's discussion, though not always properly analyzed. While he identifies tension, de Bary does not deal with the question of its limits. The distinction between two types of tension throws light on an important dimension of the tension identified by Metzger.

Even though Weber's specific conclusions about Confucianism stand as a "foil" or as points of departure for de Bary and Metzger in developing a more appropriate analysis of religion in China, the development still unfolds within the overall context of Weber's theoretical framework. In this way Weber's theoretical suggestions continue to illumine the path and "give meaning and direction" to our labours (1949: 112).

McMaster University

REFERENCES