

# Fate, Freedom and Prognostication. Strategies for Coping with the Future in East Asia and Europe

heir who could have led the Muslim community after his death. His immediate successors were called Caliphs, i.e. Successors of the Messenger of God. Under the Umayyads' rule, a shift happened, according to which the head of the Islamic state, the Caliph, was considered as the "Deputy of God." According to the predominant view in medieval Islamic political thought, the Caliph, as the legitimate successor of the prophet, ultimately controls all things and assures that right religion becomes the principle on which society runs.

However, in the context of the abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924 in modern Turkey, the issue of the Caliphate became the subject of a theologico-political debate. According to one view, the Caliphate, actually resembling the papacy, presented worldwide leadership of the Muslim

community without practical political power. According to a counterview, Islam did not lay down a precise order of government. Muhammad was a prophet with a special power; he did not set out to establish a state and Islam did not establish any particular political system. In Muhammad's unique case, politics was subject to a higher, wider power to rule over the affairs of the body and spirit, and the administration of this world and the afterlife. This view remained, however, marginalized in the majority of Muslim societies. With the establishment of influential political movements such as the Muslim Brethren, an all-embracing vision of Islam, covering all political, social, and economic aspects of life, was to be reaffirmed. Endeavours to separate religion and politics in Islam seemingly have not yet met with success.

## On a Travel Poet's Trail in Modern Japan: Celebrating Matsuo Bashō's Heritage

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In contemporary Japan we can clearly observe a pilgrimage boom. The phenomenon of Japanese pilgrimage has been introduced and a remarkable variation of the religious pilgrimage explored: the pilgrimage to the sites visited by the celebrated 17<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō, on his famous travels. A poetic-prose travel account of the 2,400 km-long journey he undertook in 1691 remains a popular work of classical literature in Japan. Bashō worked on it for three years, but it was published only posthumously, in 1702, as "The Narrow Road to the Deep North" (*Oku no hosomichi*). In it, we follow him through the north-eastern part of the island of Honshū. One of the disciples who accompanied him, as well as other sources, documented this trip especially well. Together with the descriptions in "The Narrow Road to the Deep North," Bashō's trail is therefore known in great detail. Because of his continuously growing fame – even reaching the rank of a deity in 1793 – this figure can be seen as a semi-divine national hero. Then and now, his heritage is celebrated fervently in Japan. The establishment of

the Matsuo Bashō commemoration trail, linking the sites where he stopped with his poetic activities, has to be seen in the context of looking at Bashō as a semi-divine figure because the establishment of the trail and the activities related to it are firmly linked to the general phenomenon of pilgrimage by circularly linked sites in Japanese Buddhism. The paradigm of the circulatory Buddhist pilgrimage is so dominant that non-Buddhist religions such as Shintō or those Buddhist traditions that decline the notion of pilgrimage as a means of obtaining merit have also invented circuits.

The invention of circulatory pilgrimage in Japan based on highly successful older models is a clear sign of the immense popularity of this practice. One of the new circuits is the Bashō commemoration trail. The presentation showed how the Bashō trail is connected to Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage and the idea of celebrating the nation. By connecting with a historical figure of divine talent, visitor-pilgrims literally follow in his or her footsteps to en-

sure a vision of the future for the nation, for peace and prosperity. Celebration of a nation's heroic deeds, holy places, and natural features is not only an identity-forming project. It is a way of connecting oneself to the spirit of a semi-divine genius and the spirit of the place he, in this case Bashō, visited.




## Karma, Chance, or Simulation? The Salvific Structure of the Tibetan Buddhist Game "Ascending the Spiritual Levels"

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Board games have been used in various religious traditions to visualize soteriological paths. The Tibetan Buddhist game "ascending the [spiritual] levels" (sa gnon nmam bzhags), supposedly designed by the famous Tibetan scholar-monk Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251), seems to be a perfect example of this. The game belongs to the group of "Chutes and Ladders" board games. Moves in the game, determined by casting a die, symbolize the karma of the player and will either promote the player's pawn closer to final liberation, i.e. nirvana, or demote it. In the most severe case, the pawn will be caught in the "Vajra-hell", a hell scheduled especially for Tantric practitioners who break Tantric vows. Most interestingly, the Tibetan Buddhist game not only simulates the spiritual paths of the three major Buddhist vehicles (hearers, bodhisattvas, and Tantric adepts), but also of other religious traditions, namely, Hindu, Bon, and Islam. As a social practice, playing this game will, on the one hand, help to imagine singular as well as collective workings of karma; on the other hand, it will be entertaining, too, since individuals seem to experience in the game spiritual success or failure – in contrast to their actual lifestyle as known to the other players.

as "narration" (of the general efficacy of soteriological paths). Given, however, that the game induces its Buddhist players to identify with their individual way through the game (accepting the chances determined by die throws as the workings of karma), the game may actually be seen as propagating certain conceptions of karma. A description of the game as "narration" stresses its quality as a pedagogical means; a description as a "simulation" would, however, be compliant with the Buddhist philosophical stance of conventional reality, for which Buddhist and non-Buddhist paths are but worldly imaginations.

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By applying ludological and narrative approaches taken from recent methodological discussions of digital games, the structure of the game can be described either as "simulation" (of the player's own karma), or