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Author(s): Ivan Strenski

Source: *Man*, New Series, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Sep., 1983), pp. 463-477

Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2801592>

Accessed: 17/08/2010 12:48

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ON GENERALIZED EXCHANGE AND THE DOMESTICATION OF THE *SANGHA*

IVAN STRENSKI
Connecticut College

The 'domestication' of the Theravāda Buddhist *sangha* has typically been looked on as the simple consequence of the *sangha's* assumption of permanent physical residence in a given location. Alternatively, in the romantic vein it has been considered an inevitable result of spiritual decline into routinised settled life. Against both these materialist and romantic views, it is argued that domestication is primarily a social process. In the case of Theravāda Buddhism, domestication needs to be understood as a consequence of ritual gift giving to the *sangha*—the institutional condition of the *sangha* within a system of generalised exchange. Rather than a deviation from ancient norms, domestication of the *sangha* is a normal social development of an ancient deviant sect.

By many reckonings, the Theravāda Buddhist *sangha*, or community of monks, enjoys the greatest longevity of any existing voluntary human society. Yet, the sociological understanding of the *sangha*, including its relations with the Buddhist laity, has remained relatively undeveloped compared to other fields of religious sociology. Part of this may be the result of an undue respect for the formative thoughts of scholarly 'ancestors' in the field. Max Weber was among the first to apply systematic sociological perspectives to the study of the *sangha*. In doing so, however, he set the terms of the debate in ways which may have limited rather than expanded inquiry. Even scholars who have written their own chapters in the sociology of Theravāda still perpetuate some of the same unexamined perspectives first introduced by Weber and others. It is time to examine some of these classical assumptions which have guided our scholarship about the Buddhist *sangha*.

One area particularly dominated by classical approaches to the study of Theravāda is the problem of the transition from the *sangha* of the early renouncer community to the national, political and social Buddhism of the south Asian Buddhist middle ages. Indeed, Carrithers has called this the 'fundamental' problem of Theravāda sociology and has termed the process 'domestication' (1980: 195 sq.). Others, such as Tambiah, speak more narrowly of an apparently similar process called 'feudalisation' (1976: 6f), while Malalgoda (1976: 11 sq.; cf. Weber 1958: 233) speaks of 'transformation'.

Although such scholars tend to agree about the nature of the phenomenon to be isolated, they differ sharply on the origin and value of 'domestication'. This need not, however, detain us here. Whether early Buddhism spoke more or less exclusively in the voice of Dumont's man-outside-the-world (1970: ch. 3), as

Carrithers believes, or whether, as Tambiah holds, ‘social’ Buddhism was chartered from the very beginning, thus coming to flower in the Buddhist medieval period, seems to me beside the point. ‘Domestication’ is still a fundamental issue, even if scholars may quarrel about whether it represents a fulfilment or repudiation of some ‘early’ tradition. In the tradition of this problematic itself, I argue that the dynamic of religious giving ought to be considered a fundamental internal factor in propelling Theravāda along the path to a fully social religious status. In so arguing, I think it is possible to maintain neutrality between Carrithers and Tambiah, for example, about the degree and nature of the social component of early Buddhism.

Likewise, in raising the matter of the transition, it might be useful to reserve judgment on the value of the ‘domestication’ of the *sangha*. Or at least we might balance our prejudices on the issue of the value of domestication. In some sense, Weber’s protestant-romantic abhorrence for bureaucratisation skews his vision of monastic landlordism as a kind of fall from grace, anticipating the degeneration of romanised Christianity. Allowing for Weber’s ethical-religious biases, we can begin entertaining other candidate explanations—themselves perhaps skewed in different directions. A ‘cultural Catholic’ (‘cultural Jewish’ or simply Durkheimian) reading of domestication might place more emphasis on the wholesomeness of social Buddhism as a natural development like that of the church itself. To be sure I counsel here no bloodless neutrality, but a lively—sometimes bloody—entertaining of opposed interpretations. One way to lift the moral clouds Weber has settled on the domesticated *sangha* is to offer a counter-evaluation, producing, at worst, an ethical balance on the issue. With a balance thus achieved, we can then open up the question of the reasons for domestication in ways that might provide new perspectives.

A new perspective is needed, because Weber’s approach to the mature *sangha* leaves little room for seeing domestication as a natural development of Buddhist processes. Rather, his view makes the development of Buddhist civilisation a kind of aberration, in his words, ‘the unavoidable accommodation to the actual conditions of the world’ and ‘the interest of the laity’ (1958: 243). Instead we might look on the domestication of the *sangha* less as a deviation from an ancient norm and more as the normal development of an ancient deviant sect—early Buddhism itself. After all, that seems to be what the great bulk of Buddhists throughout history seemed to have believed by their pious support of the *sangha* and their faithfulness to Buddhist civilisation.

Defining domestication

Weber’s views aside, what precisely has the concept of domestication meant? What ought to be meant by it in future?

Two things should be noted from the beginning: the *sense* one gives to the concept of ‘domestication’ and the *degree* to which a *sangha* can be said to be ‘domesticated’ vary between different Buddhist countries, even if inquiry is limited to the Buddhist countries of south and southeast Asia.

At a minimum, I urge that domestication of the *sangha* occurs whenever certain relations are established between the *sangha* and laity, whenever the

sangha participates with the laity in institutions. Therefore, we should consider at least five salient areas of domesticating relationship: residential, ritual, social, political and economic. Thus when it is said that the *sangha* is 'domesticated' we should mean that it has established relationships with lay society in one or more of these five (or more) senses. For example, when Weber says that the *sangha* has been 'domesticated' (his word is 'transformed'), he means that it has taken up residence in common, near the precincts of an established lay settlement (hence *gāma**vāsīn*), enclosed within its own boundaries (*sīmā*) and housed within human structures, ranging from caves prepared for habitation to the elaborate monastic dwellings well-known in south and southeast Asia. This, of course, makes good conceptual sense, because at least part of what is generally meant by the undomesticated primitive Buddhist *sangha* is a community of homeless wanderers, who keep to themselves, generally sleeping in the open air or in sheltered places in the north Indian forests.

Beyond these residential relations, a domesticated *sangha* will, second, maintain a range of ritual relations with the lay communities outside it. Above all, the *sangha* is a ritual receiver of gifts. Weber even argued that the only real rule laid upon the Buddhist laity was the obligation to maintain the *sangha* by giving it gifts (1958: 230). This in turn leads to the first of the *sangha*'s two chief symbolic relations with the lay world: the *sangha* is the chief occasion for merit-making (only superficially 'given' by the *sangha* for gifts received), thus making the *sangha* the chief exemplar of non-reciprocity (Tambiah 1970: 68). It is a passive symbol of independence even as it depends upon active lay donors (*dāyakas*). In this passive symbolic role, the *sangha* also exemplifies (and, of course, actively pursues) the *dhamma* and beyond this, *Nibbāna* itself. In an active role, the *sangha* provides preachers, teachers, scholars and, in certain cases, healers. Note well, however, that none of these services is, strictly speaking, reciprocated cleanly to the laity for gifts given, but is an obligation, to some extent, freely assumed as appropriate to the new domesticated role of the *sangha* and its members. I shall argue that these relations constitute the basis of what is properly called a Buddhist culture or civilisation, and that they are in some sense the critical features of a domesticated *sangha*. Without the ritual relations described and alluded to here it is impossible to conceive of a Buddhist culture; similarly without these ritual relations, it is unlikely that any other aspect of domestication would be legitimate or indeed have been embarked on in the first place.

A third set of relations defining the domestication of the *sangha* is its social relations with the outside world—kinship, status, caste and so on. Recent studies of the contemporary *sangha* (Bunnag 1973) have shown the astounding degree to which normal social ascriptions (previous lay status, family privileges) still adhere to the supposedly withdrawn renouncer, man-outside-the-world. In Sri Lanka, there are even notorious cases of 'married' monks living with their family in the monastery itself (Carrithers 1979: 298; Malalgoda 1976: 26).

Fourth comes the recently well-researched area of political relations traditionally established between royalty and the *sangha*. The *sangha* renounces political power and grants legitimacy to the ruler, while the king supports the *sangha* and establishes it in a privileged position within the realm, agreeing to rule according to the *dhamma*. The king also reserves the right to act to purify the

sangha and unify it if fragmented by internal strife; in return the king assumes the role of disciplinarian of monks found guilty of transgressing monastic laws (*Vinaya*). In the view of Tambiah (1973: 19) these political relations deserve special attention because they overshadow and encompass most other such relations typical of domestication. Any economic relations between *sangha* and laity would be conditioned by the political relations instituted in a particular Buddhist realm. It was in the context of royal grants (or sanction of grants) to the *sangha* that many of the economic relations between *sangha* and laity are situated.

This brings us to the fifth and perhaps most 'salient' (Gunawardana 1979: 340–50) element of a domesticated *sangha*—economic relations between *sangha* and society. Domesticated *sanghas* not only take up residence, they may often possess property, the most problematic of which is land. It was Weber again who first called attention to this and made it the most visible feature of a domesticated *sangha*: monastic landlordism likewise became a defining characteristic of the feudalised *sangha*. As in many other aspects of the *sangha*'s domestication, Weber's views here remain paramount, so much so that anyone explaining the transition from *bhikkhusangha* to feudal *sangha* must come to terms with the various relations in different Buddhist countries of the *sangha* to land ownership.

In this connexion it is important to note that the relation to land ownership varies from country to country, yet it remains true that in each case we can refer to a domesticated *sangha*. One can speak of a range of relationships to land, from simple 'trusteeship'—no tenure, but perhaps the limited right to taxes levied on certain lands as in Burma and Thailand and for some *Nikāyas* in Sri Lanka—to the classic Weberian case of tenure or 'monastic landlordism' in Sri Lanka, to the fullest expression of dominion over land in the Tibetan Buddhist lamaistic theocracy. This gradually increasing degree of land appropriation follows the gradually decreasing ability (or will) of particular political powers to intervene in the economic life of the *sangha* through the traditional right of *sāsanavisodhana*, purification of the *sangha*. Thus, in Burma and Thailand, a strong and regular pattern of royal *sāsana* reform is correlated with the absence of land tenure on the part of the *sangha* and/or presence of, at most, an undeveloped system of monastic trusteeship. In Sri Lanka a weaker system of traditional royal interventions is correlated with the tendency to move from trusteeship through alienable to inalienable land held by the *sangha*. In Tibet, the *sangha* becomes royalty, so to speak, and assumes the traditional political role assigned to the lay kingship in other Buddhist countries.

In summary, then, domestication is a process by and in which the *sangha* and laity enter into a complex variety of relationships: residential, ritual, social, political and economic. The significant fact is that those purporting to explain domestication generally confine their efforts to *one* of these, and then proceed as if all other relationships were either included within this one, were simple consequences of it or could be safely ignored.

By far the most popular characterisation places the residential relation first in both describing and explaining the phenomenon of domestication; by far the most popular style of explanation here has been materialist. At a minimum, two

classes of materialist explanation of domestication can be distinguished, each focusing on the explanation of the *sangha's* assumption of permanent residence: these comprise two kinds of environmental account and one demographic-ecological explanation.

Explaining domestication

Materialism. I call the two environmental explanations the Water and Fire Theories. The Water Theory, long associated with Dutt¹, states simply that the northeast Indian monsoon forced the early *sangha* to cease its wanderings for several months and seek permanent shelter from the rains, both for the purpose of self-preservation and to spare the lives of small animals straying about in the forests. In time, this forced the *sangha* to establish an annual retreat, leading inevitably to regular settlement. This then required property assigned for the use of the *sangha* alone. Everything else follows from this establishment of residence: with a residence fixed, the laity could easily locate and then gradually influence and become influenced by the *sangha*. Other relations characterising domestication, such as the social and political, can be seen to follow automatically from a closer physical and geographical relationship between laity and *sangha*. For instance, the social status system of a lay community is more likely to influence the *sangha's* own schemes as recruits from the lay community enter the *sangha* from well-known families in the immediate area. Residence defeats anonymity by increasing everyday familiarity.

The Fire Theory holds that the threat or aftermath of war (or famine) caused domestication. Most writers holding this view use the case of first century B. C. Sri Lanka, usually citing the *Mahāvamsa's* (35: 37–42, 98–101) account of the so-called *sangha* stabilisation (Malalgoda 1976: 18–20; Rahula 1956: 158). 'Stabilisation' simply indicates a regularisation of material support for the *sangha* in the form of revenues from lands, for example. During the famine and wars to which the island had been subjected around the end of the first millennium B. C., the *sangha* suffered a great hardship because of the disruption of the *dāna*. Some monks migrated, many died of starvation and in some cases were victims of cannibalism (Rahula 1956: 81 sq.). With the loss of the *sangha* the survival of the *dhamma* in Sri Lanka was itself threatened. Shortly thereafter, conferences were called in Sri Lanka, not only to endow the *sangha* with sources of support, but also to sponsor the writing down of the *Tipiṭaka* and its commentaries. At the same time a division of monastic labour in the *sangha* between the literati and the contemplatives was legitimated, and the somewhat parallel distinction between forest ascetics (*araññavāsīn*) and village monks (*gāmaavāsīn*) also became explicit. The balance of social prestige fell to the village monks and to the scholars who, as can easily be seen, were the agents and vanguard of the development of Buddhist civilisation.

Another class of materialist explanation is implicit in Gunawardana's work and can be termed 'demographic' or 'ecological' (1979: 53, 56). Here the sheer density of the wandering monastic population causes settlement in order to avoid the ecological disaster of a kind of 'overgrazing' of the *dāna* 'commons'

similar to that described by Hardin (1968). A relatively large number of *bhikkhus* (monks) competing for a limited quantity of available food (in the 'commons' of *dāna*) creates a potential shortage, which in cases could be critical. In response local groups of monks would then 'enclose' their share of the 'commons' of *dāna* (gift) within what have been called traditional monastic 'parish' boundaries or *sīmās*. Thereby they increase their chances of guaranteeing a sufficient and regular flow of *dāna* for their own needs by securing what in some way is their private reserve of resources (Gunawardana 1979: 53; Weber 1958: 230).

Romanticism. The only alternatives to these materialist explanations come from Weber himself (1958: ch. vii) and from both Carrithers (1979: 295–7, 307) and Tambiah (1976: 175). I identify this thesis as the romantic-fatalist view, because of its special marriage of affection for the pristine origin of things with the pathos of the inevitable decline and corruption that ensues once we move from the origins. This thesis conforms at least to what Buddhists of the Pāli Canon seem to believe about themselves (Tambiah 1976: 122, ch. 7). For Weber, early Buddhism was an 'unstructured' movement of religious virtuosi, whose charismatic authority provided a measure of unity for the early community (1958: 223). Soon after the death of the Buddha, Weber believes, the primitive community revolted against the 'aristocracy of charisma', (1958: 224), forced a 'fixing of forms' through an 'unavoidable discipline' of a system of 'rules' (1958: 216). For Weber there is something inevitable in this movement from charismatic to legal and bureaucratic authority characteristic of all social systems. Carrithers seems to share Weber's tragic sense but casts his views about early Buddhism's degeneration in the moral mode. He speaks of a 'gradual, unconscious, apparently inevitable, and in these senses, natural tendency for the *sangha* to become domesticated' (1979: 296). It is 'drawn to the values of everyday life' (1979: 307). Tambiah laments the 'all-too-human' tendencies towards corruption inherent in Buddhist monasticism. The *sangha*, he says, manifests the 'ever present threat' or 'propensities' to 'decline' (1976: 175). (See also Rahula: 199–203.)

Yet such views in the end do not explain anything. They are laments about the way things have turned out, appeals to the inevitability of certain 'trends' which themselves are plainly mysterious. Carrithers, Tambiah and Weber may thus be as unseeing as the Buddhists themselves about the reason things seem aimed in a downward ('domestic') direction. Simply saying things are getting bad does little to explain why they are getting bad; it just restates the problem as part of a larger general movement of decline. Moreover, even if such a general pattern of so-called decline could be demonstrated, we might want to keep an open mind about accepting the value perspective of the renouncer monk, with his concerns for maintaining personal spiritual purity, so well echoed in Weber's protestant sense of inevitable sinfulness and human depravity. Other perhaps equally early traditions (certain sects of the *Mahāyāna*) taught the higher moral impurity of the ascetic renouncers. For these traditions, it was the *bodhisattva*, not the *arhat*, who expressed the essence of Buddhist spirituality. That essence was social. In this light, looking on the domestication of the *sangha* as unavoidable decline is a little too much like looking at marriage as a concession to the weakness of the flesh:

in both cases, we can see the sour face of the renouncer-ascetic frowning through.

A non-romantic critique of materialist explanations. The leading assumption of materialist explanations of domestication is the general causal priority assigned to settled human residence. Once settled residence is explained, everything else falls into place. Thus, as long as the *sangha* travelled, domestication was automatically averted. But how much of this is true?

In such discussions, one must keep alert to conceptual issues. As long as domestication *means* from the start something more than residential settlement, domestication may be compatible with peripatetic monasticism. Would a monk who maintained elaborate ritual relations with lay communities, who meddled in politics, who conformed to the status system of lay society and who perhaps trafficked in the exchange of goods and services be considered undomesticated simply because he maintained no fixed residence? To be sure, he might be considered *less* domesticated than one who did. But would he be any less so than the travelling salesman is considered less a full-blooded *bourgeois* than his settled counterpart? The answer is obvious.

Similarly, the more one understands domestication in broadly social, rather than locative or physical senses, the more one tends to play down the residential conceptions and explanations of domestication. This goes hand in hand with the suspicion that even when one thinks of settled residence one is often thinking about such a notion as a kind of shorthand for a far more complex state of affairs, typically including social factors such as contract, exchange and so on. Reference to physical things often masks social relations. Let us, then, take a second look at statements of the residential thesis to see just how well they stand up. Here we may concentrate on the Water Theory, since, aside from Weber's attempts, it has been the most persistent candidate for explanations of domestication in the literature (Prebish 1975).

That domestication does not necessarily follow from the *sangha's* need to seek shelter during the rainy season seems clear. Such temporary residences need not have become permanent and even if they had become permanent, a *sangha* thus domiciled would not need to become domesticated in the full sense of the term. Other domesticated groups of renouncers, such as the *Digambara* Jains, have maintained their wandering, non-residential ways—even though they were thought to have originated the *vassa* retreat in the first place! Moreover, even when monks have settled in permanent domiciles, these may be very remote from settled human habitations and so constructed as to resist contact with ordinary lay people. I am thinking here of the modern-day (undomesticated) *araññavāsis* of Sri Lanka as well as certain east Asian Buddhist *sanghas* (Korea) who keep pretty much to themselves on their own monastic compounds. In these cases, permanent settlement may actually be a way to avoid domestication; they become special reserved precincts to which monks may retreat from the world of social relations.

At its strongest, the Water Theory might imply that these short (three-month) periods of settled residence tended to encourage contact with a single, regular community of lay devotees, and thus laid the necessary physical foundations for

domestication.² The Buddha always warned against too close ties between monks and laity. Perhaps he warned against these things to forestall the rapid domestication which would follow such contacts. On the other hand, it still remains odd that many scholars hold that the *vassa* retreat would have contributed to domestication, since it was on the face of it at least (and still remains so) a way monks could very literally *retreat* from the social contacts that they had in the normal course of their peripatetic lives. Food, of course, still had to be found to sustain the monks gathered for retreat and regular arrangements be established between agents of the *sangha* and local *dāyakas*.

But in considering these wider aspects of the condition of the *sangha* during its *vassa* retreat we perhaps can perceive the seed upon which the crystal of domestication could grow: regular patterns of social relationships grow along with regular patterns of giving. Rather than focusing on the residences of the early *sangha* as permanent settled material dwellings, let us consider their being gifts. On this view, it is not so much that the material nature of monastic residences made them the agents of domestication as it was their status as gifts which in turn called forth certain social obligations. Among other things, the gift-nature of monastic residences would in some way account for the fact that settled residence was considered legitimate. From the days of Mauss's analysis of gift we are at least sensitive to the social dimension of giving.

To introduce this alternative account of domestication based on the dynamic of gift exchange, an initial reconceptualisation of the idea of domestication will be required. Thus domestication is no fall, no decline in the fortunes of Buddhism; it is a legitimate and natural development of ancient strands of the Buddhist tradition. It ought then to be seen as part of the process of expressing and achieving certain Buddhist goals—in particular that of Buddhist culture, society or civilization (Ames 1966: 32), or what Tambiah calls Buddhism as a 'world religion' (1976: 16). Domestication is first of all part of the formation process of Buddhist *society*, growing slowly into the early *sangha* itself, then expanding to embrace ever larger spheres (Gunawardana 1979: 346 sq.). The problem of how domestication came about is, then, the problem of how Buddhist society was formed in the process of ritual giving.

It is undeniable, I take it, that ritual giving sits squarely in the centre of the relation between the *sangha* and lay society. Giving defines the very relationship between the *sangha* and lay society: the monks are always receivers, the laity always givers. Yet why should giving occupy such a special place in the formation of the social solidarity we call Buddhist society, culture, civilisation and the like? Why, as Sahlins has suggested, *is* the gift the social contract (1972: ch. 4)? Ekeh (1974) has made the case that a persuasive answer to this question is to be found in Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary structures of kinship*. Lévi-Strauss there offers nothing less than a theory of social solidarity, couched in terms of gift exchange and kinship parlance. I argue that Lévi-Strauss's theory may be applied to the formation of Buddhist society—to the domestication of the *sangha*.

Exchange and social solidarity

Lévi-Strauss's (1969) problem is to explain the transition from a pre-social condition to one that is fully social. He begins by observing the universality of the incest taboo and law-like power of the rule of exogamy, two apparently different facts that are aspects of the same thing. The rule of exogamy—take a wife from outside one's own reference group—is really just the other side of the incest taboo—do not take a wife from within. It is only when people form relations which cross the reference group boundary that we can speak of 'society'. All social groups must be wife-givers and wife-receivers, bound alliances established by the practice of exchange. This is why Lévi-Strauss says not only that the incest taboo is common to every society, but that in some sense it is society: it reflects an obligation laid upon all human groups to give. Yet different forms of exchange have different consequences for durable social solidarity. 'Restricted exchange' operates on a simple *quid pro quo* basis; 'generalised exchange' establishes moral 'credit' (1969: 265), involving social risk and even speculation that the initial gift might never be returned.

In a scheme of restricted exchange (hereafter RX) a transaction can be completed (this is what we often call reciprocity, cf. MacCormack 1975). It operates between two parties, and essentially aims to achieve an equilibrium. The assumptions under which generalised exchange (hereafter GX) operates differ. GX seeks an unbalanced condition between exchange partners, which requires repayment at some unspecified time, typically by another group or person than the original receiver of the first gift: A gives to B who gives to C. . . . until A finally receives his due. Such a system circulates gifts in a scheme theoretically open to an indefinite number of members (cf. Damon 1980). Pushed to its limit, GX approaches sacrifice, which I take to be outright giving in which no return is expected—partly because the gift is permanently alienated in some way, as by killing a victim, consuming it and so on.

GX thus links its members in a theoretically open system of indebtedness, the momentum of which tends to build up systems of social solidarity. Parents give their children something of the same their parents gave them, and the children in turn will do likewise to theirs. Although children are expected to make returns (RX) to their parents, this reciprocity is not what makes society possible, even if it makes it civil; what makes society possible is the forward momentum of giving to children in the next generation. Society would quickly come to a civil though certain end if this were not so, and if one generation decided to forgo child-rearing or child-care in order to square its social debts with the previous generation (Ames 1966: 33).

I want to argue, at this juncture, that giving to the *sangha* ought to be interpreted much more as an instance of GX than RX (and also to some degree as sacrifice—SX): what has been labelled 'domestication' of the *sangha* is no more than the condition of the *sangha* within a system of GX. 'Domestication' simply names a process of the *sangha*'s participation in a certain social solidarity. Thus, if gift-giving to the *sangha* in the spirit of GX is normal and natural to Buddhism, then so also is its consequent domestication.

Let us take a brief look at the nature of the logic of *dāna* given to the *sangha* in order to establish my claims about its identity as a species of GX.

Buddhist exchange. Perhaps the first thing one comes to appreciate is how treacherous exchange can be for a social formation of renouncer ascetics such as the *sangha*. If no qualification were placed upon the exchange between *sangha* and laity, the *sangha* would soon become laicised. A *sangha* which exchanged food given it for food it preferred would *ipso facto* have taken the first plunge into merchandising; in the south Asian context, it would simply be another *jāti* (caste) among others. (This happens in Sri Lanka at certain times: Gunawardana 1979: 78). On the other hand, without exchange between *sangha* and laity, the *sangha* would either have to become economically (and in all other ways) self-sufficient, or would simply cease to exist. In the first case, the *sangha* would become close to a 'tribe'—the *gana* which Chattopadhyaya (1973), for example, thinks may have been a prototype of the *sangha*. Such a 'tribe' would then either need to reproduce its own membership (and become laicised thereby) or, if it maintained the rule of *brahmacārya*, would as now need to rely on a steady supply of recruits willing to accept a regimen in most respects like that of lay society but without sex and marriage. Here, *mutatis mutandis*, the Shakers come to mind, as do the more self-contained, self-sufficient Buddhist monastic communities of east Asia. In this case, the durability of such communities as the Shakers is doubtful and the degree to which Buddhist communities of the self-contained type can be said to contribute to the type of Buddhist culture found in south Asia is equally dubious.

If the alternatives of unqualified exchange and no exchange lead to dead-ends, then perhaps we can understand why and how the laity and *sangha* entered into relations of qualified exchange. If exchange relations are left unqualified, the *sangha* tends toward laicisation; if exchange is denied, the *sangha* becomes laicised by another route or ceases to exist. Let us then examine aspects of the *qualified* exchange relations obtaining between the *sangha* and lay society with an eye for the special role of generalised exchange, hoping in this way to see how domestication of the *sangha* occurs according to natural Buddhist processes of giving to the *sangha*.

Restricted exchange and Buddhism. RX between the *sangha* and laity is problematic, primarily because the *bhikkhu* is supposed to be a paradigm of *non-reciprocity*.³ For this reason, RXs proceed in a Buddhist setting under what may seem unusual circumstances—almost as if reciprocity itself were at the same time being denied. For instance, RXs begin with a gift from a *dāyaka* to a monk or to the *sangha*. In return the *sangha* (or monk) seems to perform certain rituals for lay benefit, preach the *dhamma*, maintain a conspicuous exemplary standard of public moral purity, and make itself accessible as an occasion of merit-making. But at the same time as the *sangha* seems to bind itself to make a contract, at the same time as it seems to cooperate in its own domestication by entering into relationships with the laity, it asserts its independence from reciprocity (Ames 1966: 30 sq.). *Bhikkhus* often delay performances of rituals until some days after the relevant gifts have been given (Tambiah 1970: 348); at other times, the rituals are performed before the giving of gifts (Tambiah 1970: 347). Moreover, the *sangha* teaches that merit (*puñña*), which many pious Buddhists believe is chiefly what they get from the *sangha* in exchange for their gifts, is not actually given

them in return for the *dāna* given the *sangha*. The *sangha* is an occasion of merit, as the scriptures put it a 'field of merit' (Spiro 1970: 280, 410), it is not its origin; much less is it a private reserve to distribute to the worthy (Ames 1966: 31 sq.).⁴

But despite these attempts to escape reciprocity, it can be seen how these gift RXs constitute at least one relation making up domestication. The *sangha* now maintains ritual relations with the laity (Tambiah 1970: 143). Ritual relations, in turn, then can be seen to ground either permanent residence or regular peripateticism and not the other way round: the monks must be accessible if they are to fulfil their ritual obligations created by their reception of gifts. In fact, Dutt (1962: 26, n. 1) notes that in the *Milindapañho*, Nāgasena defends the monks' living in monasteries on the grounds that it would make it easier for the laity to visit them. Even though solitude is good, Nāgasena suggests that access to the *bhikkhus* weighs in the balance for laity. The same pattern of RX would also seem to exist in the relationship between the *sangha* and the polity: the king protects the *sangha*, agrees to rule according to *dharmma* and assumes the responsibility of purifying it; while the *sangha* agrees to remain directly uninvolved in politics and conform to the laws of the realm.

Yet although we can see domestication and Buddhist civilisation to some degree built up on these patterns of reciprocity (RX), other patterns of exchange (GX) can be discerned in the *sangha's* relationship with society at large. These constitute some of the more troubling instances of exchange as well as some of the more splendid. The point here, however, is to analyse a style of exchange which both avoids the appearance and substance of reciprocity and expresses more durable and inclusive patterns of relationship. Let us see to what extent this perspective helps us here in understanding the nature of the domestication of the *sangha*.

Generalised exchange and Buddhism. There are any number of patterns of GX discernible in the relations between the *sangha* and lay society. For brevity's sake, let us consider three cases: (1) the *sangha* engages in economic GX when it receives productive lands or other durable items, and then proceeds to manage them as estates or profitable enterprises which 'trickle down' to enrich the whole society at large; (2) the *sangha* engages in social GX when it receives durable or perishable goods and services, which it then converts into moral or cultural 'currency' (art, philosophy, literature, ideology) for circulation within society at large and to posterity in general; (3) the *sangha* finally participates in a scheme of spiritual GX when it receives gifts within the context of merit-making, and offers for others the occasion to make merit by rejoicing in merit earned by pious *dāyakas*.

In each case, we have a circle of giving beginning with the lay *dāyaka*, passing to the *sangha*, then from the *sangha* to other recipients, and ultimately, it can be argued, either in this or the next life to the initial giver. Thus the *sangha* does not necessarily reciprocate to the *dāyaka* for gifts given (least of all merit!) but instead acts to benefit a third party, which in turn eventually brings benefit back to the original donor. In some cases, where a 'trickle down' effect might occur, people would enjoy the same economic benefits any profitable estate would provide to

the community at large. Perhaps Buddhist monasteries in south and southeast Asia acted as agents of economic development in much the same way as the monastic foundations of medieval Europe (Twitchett 1956; 1957; Wright 1957). The *sangha* also acted as an agent of cultural and ideological development in so far as it functioned as an educational institution, as a patron of the arts, as a focal point for the articulate self-consciousness of national identity and so on. In the strictly spiritual vein, the *sangha* also played a special role in structuring the ideology of merit-making in a Buddhist manner. Rather than considering merit-making and the so-called transfer of merit a matter of spiritual accounting, we have something quite different: a *dāyaka* gives *dāna* to the *sangha* and thereby (automatically) earns merit (remembering all the while that this is not given the *dāyaka* by the *sangha*, only 'occasioned' by it); in turn the *sangha* then invites the *dāyaka* to invite others (the dead, the gods) to rejoice in the merit earned. The *sangha* gives an occasion for others to rejoice in the merit made by the first gift, and thus gain merit thereby (Gombrich 1971: 226 sq.).

I emphasise the spirit of the orthodox theory of merit-making because it tells us so much about what the leading values of a Buddhist society ought to be. Yet when most students of Theravāda think about the phenomenon of merit-making, they tend to see in it only a crass calculus of spiritual merits and demerits. Theravāda folk theory and practice do little to discourage this judgement. No wonder some scholars even see in this rationalised system of spiritual balances a wonderful pre-capitalist anticipation of elements of economic ideology. They may even be right, though they will have missed understanding what morally makes a Buddhist civilisation. It is important, then, to penetrate behind the behaviour of merit-making Buddhists to what orthodox parties within Buddhist society have tried to insist would be an aspect of their vision of a Buddhist culture.

When we do, it is stunning how the tenor of merit-making changes, from one in which RX seems to dominate to one in which GX does. Meritorious deeds still produce merit, it is true, but they do so within a different moral environment. Instead of seeing merit-making as a simple RX between *dāyaka* and *sangha*, with the added feature of a 'credit transfer' to another person, the orthodox theory sees the meritorious giving of *dāna* to the *sangha* as a normal part of pious Buddhist life which, it may or may not be understood, circulates wealth through the *sangha* for the benefit of all. Strictly speaking there is also no merit-transfer, for reasons discussed earlier. Rather, in so far as merit may be said to be 'shared' it is actually an *occasion* for merit-making that is made available to persons invited for the purpose of rejoicing in the merit initially earned. Buddhist culture, in so far as its tenor is affected by the orthodox spirit of merit-making and sympathetic rejoicing, presents a rather edifying picture of persons seeking virtue and offering their fellows the occasion to rejoice in that virtue. Here is no Buddhist ethic ready-made to do service for the budding spirit of a native capitalism—even if it may be an ethical prerequisite of the formation of a great civilisation. Generations of Buddhists dead and alive are in this way linked in a cycle of sympathy for the spiritual progress of one another; one gives to the other the occasion for greater virtue in a pattern identified earlier as GX.

Sacrifice?

Let me close with a note on sacrifice. How may we integrate the fact that all gifts to the *sangha* are said to be absolutely alienated, and thus according to some scholars ‘doctrinally a sacrifice’ (Tambiah 1970: 213; Spiro 1970: 107)?⁵ The issue is critical for this discussion: to the extent that gifts to the *sangha* are ‘sacrifices’, they are *ipso facto* removed from systems of exchange. Perishable gifts cannot even be returned to the laity as *prasad* or ‘communion’; the same goes for offerings made to the image of the Buddha. What remains, after the *sangha* has consumed its share of gift food, becomes refuse (Gombrich 1971: 119 sq.). Durable gifts cannot be reciprocated; nor can they become refuse and ‘go away’. Thus they accumulate and become the material stuff of monastic estates and monastic domestication. On this point, a Marxist might say that because durable goods are alienated by the *sangha*, it becomes domesticated: it shares the same relation to the mode of production as does any other property-holder in an agrarian society. In this sense, it is not so much moral obligation arising out of participation in a scheme of generalised gift-exchange that domesticates the *sangha*, as it is the *sangha*’s ownership of productive land—its participation in agrarian production. Not Mauss then but Marx may have the last word.

It is not clear, however, that Buddhist *dāna* is a sacrifice in the sense required to qualify for Marx’s analysis of alienation. Although gifts to the *sangha* are given in the spirit of the free gift (Tambiah 1970: 213), although they may be seen to disappear into the ‘mouth’ of the *sangha*, so to speak, they can equally well be seen to enter a cycle of exchange through the *sangha* to others and back again eventually to the original *dāyaka*. But since these cycles may be quite long—long in the way kinship or systems of generalised ceremonial exchange are long—it may seem to the original *dāyaka* that his gift is freely given, without reciprocal return, and hence a ‘sacrifice’. That the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth and karma theoretically guarantees some ‘return’ on a *dāyaka*’s moral ‘investment’ is indubitably orthodox; that orthodoxy tries to discourage spiritual greed explains why Buddhist *dāna* has the spirit of sacrifice rather than RX. But then that spirit is just what Lévi-Strauss claims GX uniquely possesses. Without doing away with the idea of the promise of return, GX liberates gift-giving from petty calculation. It does this by *appearing* to be sacrifice.

This becomes a real problem for the *sangha* when the gifts are durable (as with land and recruits). For the *sangha* cannot simply dispose of durable properties the way it can surplus rice: land will not just ‘go away’. In periods of Burmese history, the alienation of manpower to the *sangha* in the form of recruits created such serious shortages that the Burmese kings are thought often to have exercised their prerogatives to purify the *sangha* in order to mask their simple economic and political desire to increase the pool of available manpower in the realm (Aung Thwin 1979). Thus in so far as the *sangha* did not place its durable wealth sufficiently at the disposal of society at large, and in so far as the *sangha* refused to enter systems of exchange, it risked these inevitable royal, so-called, ‘purifications’. Wherever wealth accumulates, human economic interest will eventually focus. We know of only one case where the *sangha* has with success exclusively represented these influences—Tibet. In this sense we may even look at the monastic landlordism of Sri Lanka as a way of escaping the horrors of

simple accumulation which would befall the *sangha* if it simply accepted gifts of land and did nothing with them. Perhaps monastic landlordism represents a middle way between the extremes of letting accumulated land go unused and selling it as fast as it comes to the *sangha*. It is a middle path in so far as it places land into socially productive schemes as a source of wealth. At any rate, a sacrificial element can be found in Buddhist giving, even if it may be there more in appearance than in reality.

What matters is that extent to which *dāna* appears to be sacrifice would make a difference to the tenor and symbolic nature of Buddhist giving. I suggest that giving in the Buddhist context may be seen from several perspectives, some competing, but some complementary. Sacrificial giving (SX) might then be seen to contribute something to the nature of ritual exchange in Theravāda which RX and GX are not able to contribute. For instance, if we take RX and GX (in particular the latter) to describe synchronic systems of relationship on a given plane of Buddhist society, then perhaps SX might be seen to provide a vector directing the desired trajectory of any given Buddhist society. GX patterns describe the network making up society; SX tells us the direction of the whole. Indeed, civilisation or society has never for Buddhists been an end in itself; it is itself to be transcended, and that transcendence is nowhere better symbolised than in the primary *Nibbāna*-questing activity of the *sangha*. It is to hold out a model of a society moving in spiralling circles of generosity and sympathetic joy, circles themselves aimed in a definite direction beyond, along the route to *Nibbāna*.

NOTES

¹ One should, however, note that Dutt's view cannot simply be reduced to Water Theory—even if that is what most writers have tended to take from him. For Dutt, social reciprocity and interdependence between monks and laity are also significant factors in the domestication of the *sangha*. One aim in the present article is to rehabilitate that part of Dutt's view.

² In an unpublished paper, 'Reflections of the Rainy Season,' H. L. Seneviratne has outlined an argument for the social importance of the rainy season retreat consistent with that here.

³ Tambiah 1970: 68. But compare 1970: 213 where Tambiah affirms reciprocity behind the 'double negation' of it!

⁴ The main reason for this theoretical inability of the *sangha* to 'give' merit is because merit is not, strictly speaking, a thing at all. Merit is a relationship of being in a higher karmic state. Karma is also similarly not a thing, but is itself merely a principle of moral causality. To have gained merit then is simply to have acted in karmically good ways—to have done those acts which produce good karmic effects. Moreover, since Buddhist morality is governed by intention, the karmic quality of acts is always bound up with the good or ill will of moral agents. The chain of causality linking intention, act and karmic quality is perfectly objective, and in a way mechanical. Only the equally objective spiritual status of the *sangha* affects the quality of karmic benefit to a *dāyaka*. Strictly speaking, the *sangha* can only give occasions for others to do meritorious acts, to perform deeds deemed karmically beneficial. The *sangha* does not and cannot give merit to its *dāyakas* for *dāna* given any more than it can give someone virtue for having been virtuous. The matter is independent from what the *sangha* may want.

⁵ However, Spiro reduces sacrifice to the psychological act of a donor's 'genuine deprivation' (1970: 107); while Tambiah takes sacrifice merely to be non-reciprocal giving (1970: 213). Thus, Spiro's remarks avoid the sociological and cultural dimension of sacrifice, while Tambiah's fail to locate sacrificial giving within the wider context of exchange in general.

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