INTRODUCTION:
WHAT IS THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF BUDDHISM ABOUT?

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1. *First Definitions: The Theravada and the Mahayana*

FEW readers of this special issue of *JASO* will need to be told that Buddhism today can be broadly divided into the Theravada (found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia) and the Mahayana (found in Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam). For various reasons, most work in the anthropology of Buddhism has focused on Theravada Buddhism.[1] The present collection of essays is intended to restore the balance, with equal weight being given to Mahayana Buddhism. Some of the reasons why anthropologists have written extensively about Theravada, and not Mahayana Buddhism should emerge from a review of the differences between them.

'Theravada' means 'the doctrine of the elders'. Of all the schools of pre-Mahayana Buddhism - traditionally there were thought to be eighteen, a

1. For example: Ames 1964a, 1964b, 1966; Bunnag 1973; Carrithers 1979, 1983; Evers 1972; Gombrich 1971; Leach 1962; Mendelson 1975; Obeyesekere 1963, 1966; Southwold 1983; Spiro 1982; Strenski 1983; Tambiah 1970, 1976, 1984. See also the recent works by Gombrich (1988) and Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1989).

conventional number - it prided itself on being the most conservative and is the only one to survive into the modern world. Certain texts and doctrines associated with other pre-Mahayana schools have survived within the Mahayana tradition: thus the Tibetans preserve the Sarvastivadin monastic code, but for them this is merely an optional, supererogatory practice within Mahayana Buddhism and does not define an institutionally separate kind of Buddhism. There is no group of Buddhists today whose primary allegiance is to Sarvastivada Buddhism.[2]

Of these early schools Theravada Buddhism alone survived because it happened to be dominant in Sri Lanka and in Southeast Asia and therefore escaped most of the influences which led to the eventual disappearance of Buddhism within India itself. Scholars disagree on what exactly these were, but the rise of new forms of Hinduism, the loss of royal patronage, and Muslim invasions and conquests were all significant.[3]

Mahayana ('Great Vehicle' or 'Great Way') Buddhism appeared in India around the turn of the common era. The monks who adhered to it co-existed, often within the same monastery and sharing the same monastic discipline, with those who did not accept the new Mahayana scriptures, until north Indian Buddhism was destroyed by the Muslims between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. By that time the Mahayana had long since been taken up in China (and from there continued into the other countries of East Asia), and was already becoming firmly established in Tibet. Within South and Southeast Asia, Indian Mahayana Buddhism survived only in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, and, very minimally, in Bali. Elsewhere, all scriptures were translated from their original Sanskrit into Chinese or Tibetan.

2.   *Is the Theravada to the Mahayana as Protestantism is to Catholicism?*

A common comparison likens Theravada Buddhism to Protestantism and Mahayana Buddhism to Catholicism. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western scholars and observers, whether explicitly or implicitly, certainly viewed Buddhism in this light. Many of them were attracted to Theravada Buddhism but were keen to reform it. With one or two exceptions (such as Alexandra

2. An exception to this generalization about non-Mahayana groups may be the tiny Risshū sect in Japan (with about fifty members in two monasteries), who claim that their entire monastic practice is based on one of the old monastic codes. Since it has 250 rules the code is presumably that of the Dharmaguptakas (Professor R. F. Gombrich, personal communication).

3. Jaini (1980) argues that these all affected Jainism equally, but Jainism survived where Buddhism did not because its monks had closer links with the laity. This is perhaps another way of saying that Jainism was not dependent on large monastic centres, as Buddhism seems to have been (at least by the end of the first millennium).

David-Neel) who were drawn precisely by its 'magic and mystery', they tended to dismiss the Mahayana Buddhism of Nepal and Tibet as superstition, idolatry, wizardry, and depravity. In a much-quoted passage, Stcherbatsky (1977 [1923]: 42) drew a sharp contrast between the two types of Buddhism:

> When we see an atheistic, soul-denying philosophic teaching of a path to personal Final Deliverance, consisting in an absolute extinction of life, and a simple worship of the memory of its human founder,—when we see it superseded by a magnificent High Church with a Supreme God, surrounded by a numerous pantheon and a host of Saints, a religion highly devotional, highly ceremonious and clerical, with an ideal of Universal Salvation of all living creatures, a Salvation by the divine grace of Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, a Salvation not in annihilation, but in eternal life, —we are fully justified in maintaining that the history of religions has scarcely witnessed such a break between new and old within the pale of what nevertheless continues to claim common descent from the same religious founder.

Stcherbatsky drew attention to a real problem—what, if anything, do the different forms of Buddhism have in common?—but he made the solution sound more difficult than it is. Pre-Mahayana Buddhism was not just a philosophy (as modernists frequently present it), and it did not teach the extinction or annihilation of the self, but of desires.[4] Stcherbatsky's Protestant-Catholic model is very clear, since he continues in a footnote: 'The two churches co-existed peacefully in the same monasteries, because the Buddhists very wisely always made allowance for human nature which sometimes feels inclination towards a simple rationalistic Low Church and sometimes is attracted towards a devotional and magnificent High Church' (ibid.).

In fact, the parallel between Protestantism and traditional Theravada Buddhism quickly breaks down, for at least five reasons:

1. Chronology. Theravada Buddhism came first and is a representative of the earlier Buddhism against which Mahayana Buddhism reacted. It was Mahayana Buddhism which claimed to be returning to the true spirit of the Buddha's original message. Unlike Protestantism, Mahayana Buddhism did so not by returning to original texts, but by composing new ones. These were attributed to the Buddha, but were said to have been hidden by him under the sea until a sage capable of understanding them (Nagarjuna) would retrieve them.

2. The Role of Monasticism. Theravada Buddhism certainly entailed religious individualism (Gombrich 1988: 72f.) but it was never egalitarian. Nor did it

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4. Reliant on the secondary sources of his time as he was, Max Weber (1958: 204f.) also exaggerated the differences between the two forms of Buddhism, though in his case the *differences* between Theravada Buddhism and Protestantism were very much the focus of his discussion. As discussed below, Weber is frequently criticized by anthropological writers for his characterization of early Buddhism, but these critics only rarely attempt to put what he wrote in the context of his approach to South Asian religion in general or of his overall project. I have tried to do this elsewhere (Gellner 1982, 1988).

impose its individualism on 'life in the world', that is, on the social arrangements of the laity. Spiritual hierarchy was built into it from the beginning. At the very least this consists of two stages, monk and lay, but in practice other levels of attainment are recognized too. Thus, there is spiritual equality of opportunity, but not of result. It is not a question of sheep and goats, but of a large number of gradations, in short of hierarchy.

3. The Language of the Scriptures. Originally preserved orally, later written down, the Pali of the Theravada scriptures is incomprehensible both to the laity and to many of the monks who recite it. Unlike Protestantism, with its stress on literacy and reading the Bible for oneself, lay Theravada Buddhists have traditionally had no access to the scriptures, unless they have themselves spent time as monks.

4. The Worship of Relics. In spite of its individualist and rationalizing tendencies, Theravada Buddhism has always given a large place to the worship of relics, which within Christianity is characteristic of Catholicism, not Protestantism.

5. The Doctrine of Rebirth. Since life is presumed to continue through innumerable rebirths, and since, moreover, many Theravada Buddhists believe that at present, unlike in the time of the Buddha, no one can attain nirvana, the quest for salvation has rather less urgency than in Protestantism.

In the modern period, a new type of Theravada Buddhism has arisen which is indeed closer to Protestantism. It rejects spiritual hierarchy and has direct access to the scriptures (due to increased literacy and the existence of translations into English and the vernaculars). It has parallels in Japan in the new religious movements there; in Nepal, imported Theravada Buddhism, present there only since the 1930s, is the primary vehicle for this sort of Buddhist modernism. Heinz Bechert first coined the term 'Buddhism modernism'; Gombrich and Obeyesekere call this new form Protestant Buddhism (see Spencer's review article below). In his article below on Burmese definitions of Buddhism, Houtman suggests in a striking phrase that we see this new form of Buddhism not, as is conventionally done, as laicization, but rather as the 'monasticization' of the religion.

3. *Reasons for the Neglect of Mahayana Buddhism by Anthropologists*

One reason why Theravada Buddhism has received greater anthropological attention than Mahayana Buddhism is simply that it is easier to get to grips with. In particular, it has a more or less clearly defined canon, all of which has been translated into English. Not all Mahayana Buddhist scriptures have even been edited, let alone translated. Furthermore, if the relationship of precept and practice, or of text and context, is always problematic, it can be argued that the relationship of Mahayana scriptures to practice is even more problematic than usual. Thus, within Mahayana Buddhism there are many local variants, laying

very different stresses on different parts of the scriptural corpus. The single most important development is the emergence of the Vajrayana ('Diamond Vehicle/ Way') or Tantric Buddhism (see the comments on Snellgrove's *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* in my review article below). This is based on an even later set of esoteric scriptures known as Tantras, and represented a specialized path for priests, monks, and other virtuosi within the Mahayana. The process of scripture innovation begun by the Mahayana was much imitated. Not all Mahayana Buddhists accept the Tantras, and the Tantric Buddhists of Japan accept one class of Tantras, but reject those of a later historical period which have become the highest and most secret teachings for Buddhists in Nepal and Tibet.

In addition to the baroque complexity of the religion itself, two other factors help explain the lack of anthropological work on Mahayana Buddhism. First, Buddhism is not, in most of East Asia, the overwhelmingly dominant ideological force that it is in Tibet or Theravadin countries. Anthropologists working in East Asia have not been forced by their sheer salience in the culture to confront the issues outlined below. Secondly, the political situation in Mahayana countries such as Tibet and China has meant that overall they have been less intensively studied by anthropologists than, say, Thailand or Sri Lanka.

The only exception to these generalizations about research on Mahayana Buddhism is the large amount of work done on the Sherpas, Tibetan Buddhists who inhabit a part of Nepal accessible to anthropologists in recent years.[5] Of these anthropologists Fürer-Haimendorf's main frame of comparison is with the Sherpas' Hindu neighbours, and Paul is mostly interested in psychoanalytic applications. Only Ortner (1978: 157-9) attempts a comparison, albeit a brief one, with the work done on Theravadin countries. Citing Tambiah's (1970) account of Thailand, she is struck by the fact that Mahayana Buddhism reinforces the individualistic tendencies of Sherpa society whereas in the Thai case, Theravada Buddhism, 'supposedly the more individualistic form', has evolved into a communal religion. Ortner's recent book (1989), although it is about the founding of Sherpa monasteries, focuses more on the politics of personal competition within Sherpa society than it does on Buddhism itself; the Buddhism is taken for granted. Thus Clarke's article, below, is a welcome addition to this literature, notwithstanding the fact that the Lamas of Helambu, although calling themselves Sherpa, are usually considered a separate group.

Thus although Mahayana Buddhists have been studied by anthropologists, study of their Buddhism has generally been left to textual scholars. This is a pity, as there are many, often unnoticed continuities between the two forms of Buddhism. The same questions that have been so intensively discussed, and have resulted in a body of ethnographic literature of very high quality on Theravada

5. See Clarke 1983, Fürer-Haimendorf 1964, Kunwar 1989, Ortner 1978, 1989, Paul 1989 [1982], and Samuel 1978. Some further anthropological information on Tibetan Buddhism may be found in Aziz 1978. On the place of Tibetan Buddhism in the religion of the Tamangs of Nepal, see Holmberg 1989.

Buddhism, can, I believe, be posed in the Mahayana context also, even if that context does not force them on the observer as irresistibly as in Theravadin countries. Since the anthropological study of Mahayana Buddhism is in its infancy the following discussion must inevitably focus on Theravada Buddhism, but the problems are, in my opinion, far from being just Theravada problems, and I think this is also at least suggested by the articles of Ramble, Clarke, and Martinez below.[6]

4. *Theravada Buddhism: A Model of Anthropologists' Views*

Let us turn, then, to the anthropology of Theravada Buddhism. This has tended to focus on a series of questions which derive from the agenda set by the Theravada/Protestant and Buddhism/Christianity comparisons. These questions have been posed in their sharpest form by Spiro (1982: 7-9). How can a religion which is materialistic (the doctrine of no soul), atheistic (no creator God), nihilistic (all real things are impermanent), pessimistic (everything is suffering), and renunciatory (the only answer is to abandon one's self, family, and possessions) be the official religion of so many countries? Do Theravada Buddhists really believe in Theravada Buddhism? Indeed, *can* they? As Spiro goes on to note, some of these characterizations of Theravada Buddhism are exaggerated. For example, Buddhist schools have differed radically over which aspects of existence are to be considered real; and there are ways of being a good Buddhist which do not necessarily involve complete renunciation.

None the less, these kinds of presupposition and expectation informed the early European and scholarly encounter with Buddhism and ultimately influenced many Buddhists themselves. Reared on accounts of Buddhism which managed to derive from the scriptures a picture of the Buddha as a humanist reformer and a rationalist, many observers of actual Buddhist practice were alarmed and sometimes shocked by what they found. None of the laity and very few monks meditated; the Buddha was worshipped as if he were a God; Buddhists often worshipped Hindu gods and local spirits and demons; shrines to the gods were often found within monastery precincts; Buddhists also believed in systems such as astrology and therefore explained misfortune in those terms as well as by the

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6. I have tried to address these issues in my thesis (Gellner 1987a). In Gellner 1987b I show how the forest monk/village monk distinction appears in an unexpected Mahayana context. In Gellner 1989 I discuss how Mahayana Buddhism posits two further ideals which go beyond that of the enlightened being or *arhat* of early Buddhism: the *bodhisattva*, who has undertaken a vow to attain Buddhahood, and the *siddha*, or Tantric saint with manifold powers. The *bodhisattva* ideal legitimates the emergence of a Buddhist priesthood serving the laity, and the *siddha* ideal legitimates open 'cognitive' belief (see below) in the inherent magical power of Buddhist rituals.

doctrine of karma; some rituals seemed to imply the transference of merit to others and the magical efficacy of sacred objects, in contradiction of the strict individualism and moral and psychological rationalism of the scriptures; and most Buddhists seemed to be aiming not at nirvana but at achieving rebirth as a god or a rich human being.

These gaps between expectation and practice led many researchers to ask the question which Spencer (in his article below) characterizes as odd: are these people really Buddhist? Many answered with a resounding 'No'. A similar, though more downbeat concern to separate specifically Christian elements from pagan ones within the Christianity practised by Mediterranean peasants can be discerned in the relevant ethnographies such as W. A. Christian's excellent *Person and God in a Spanish Valley* (1989); a concern still more evident in many accounts of Latin American or African Christianity. As Ames (1964a: 37) remarks, 'This is the whitewash theory of syncretism; the high religion forms only a thin veneer covering a rich jungle of pagan cults.' The extraordinary persistence of the question, 'Are these people really X?', and the emphatic force of the response almost certainly derive, as Spencer implies, from Western rather than Asian conceptual priorities.

It is no doubt true that Westerners are more ready to resort to the whitewash theory the more 'other' or exotic a culture appears to them.[7] None the less it would be a mistake to think that before Western influence there were no movements for a return to more authentic practice, away from un-Buddhist corruption. In exactly the same way, as Spencer rightly points out, the concern to recover practice based on 'original' scriptures was not entirely a modern innovation. Carrithers, in his article, is concerned to describe just such reform movements, and to discuss what they imply both for Theravada Buddhism and for Jainism. It is true that the Western Orientalist (perhaps better: 'Otherist') is more concerned to label *all* Buddhists as inauthentic, whereas the traditional reforming Buddhist is likely to be more concerned with criticizing *monks*. None the less there is an overlap between the two views, the explanation for which lies, I believe, in the hierarchical nature of the religion.

Both Buddhism and Catholicism presuppose a spiritual hierarchy,[8] which Protestantism denies. Those at higher levels of the religion frequently regard ordinary lay practice as 'not really Buddhist/Christian' or 'only minimally Buddhist/Christian'. The laity themselves may often agree with these judgements, without intending to convey the same condemnation as the Protestant-influenced Western observer or the Buddhist modernist.

7. For attempts to get away from this in the study of Christianity see the various essays in James and Johnson (eds.) 1988.

8. I have argued this for Mahayana Buddhism (Gellner 1989).

Such modernists tend to describe actual Buddhism as 'mixed up' or, since this inevitably sounds pejorative in English, as syncretic.[9] Some anthropologists have also taken this line, for instance Terwiel, who spent six of his eleven months in a Thai village as a temporary monk (see Terwiel 1974). However, in one way or another, most anthropologists have taken issue with this judgement. These different positions can be represented, without too much artificiality, as if on a spectrum as in Figure 1.[10]

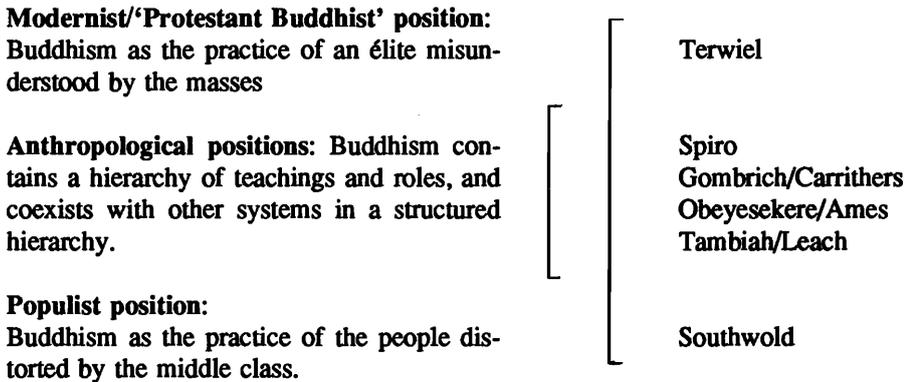|	
Modernist/'Protestant Buddhist' position: Buddhism as the practice of an élite misunderstood by the masses	Terwiel
Anthropological positions: Buddhism contains a hierarchy of teachings and roles, and coexists with other systems in a structured hierarchy.	Spiro Gombrich/Carrithers Obeyesekere/Ames Tambiah/Leach
Populist position: Buddhism as the practice of the people distorted by the middle class.	Southwold

FIG. 1: A Representation as a Spectrum of the views of Anthropological Observers of Theravada Buddhism.

Seen by others, such as Tambiah (1984: 315), as occupying the modernist end of the spectrum, Spiro has none the less moved away from it. He distinguishes three different forms or modes of Buddhism: nibbanic, kammatic, and apotropaic, oriented respectively towards attaining nirvana, improving one's chances of a good rebirth, and using Buddhist ritual for apotropaic purposes (Spiro 1982). Only the first, he claims, is fully canonical.[11] Gombrich (1971: 49) argued that Theravada Buddhism never aspired to be more than a religion of salvation, so that it was

9. This view is implied in the title of the collection edited by Bechert (1978): *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries.*

10. Wijeyawardene (1986: 69) calls the problem of Buddhism's coexistence with other religious systems 'the Theravada problem'. He implies the existence of some such spectrum when he remarks that 'in recent times the most extreme views on the problem have been on the one hand, the thesis that Theravada Buddhists subscribe to two quite contradictory systems of belief, and on the other, that no problem exists which has not been created by anthropologists, and before them by missionaries'. Historians of Buddhism as well as other Buddhologists could also in many cases be placed on this spectrum, but space precludes a detailed survey of them here.

11. But see the qualifications introduced by Gombrich 1972.

inevitably 'accretive', co-existing with other systems satisfying Buddhists' this-worldly needs. Thus the worship of gods derived from Hinduism or of other spirits could hardly be called syncretic, unless it were done for salvation. Furthermore, those features of contemporary Sinhala Buddhism which led modernist observers to deny that the Sinhalese were true Buddhists seem in fact to have been part of Buddhist practice as far back as the evidence goes.

Ames, Obeyesekere, and Tambiah emphasize how Buddhism as practised forms one part of a single religious system which includes opposed or counter-vailing strands. (Samuel (1978) takes a similar position on Tibetan Buddhism.) They treat as one Sinhalese or Thai religion what Buddhists themselves normally see as distinct systems. Thus Tambiah (1970: 42), giving substance to some remarks by Leach (1972: 309-12), describes his task as the delineation of 'distinctions, oppositions, complementarities, linkages and hierarchy' within the total system. There can be no doubt that these holistic approaches have been extremely fruitful in contrasting and relating the types of language, ritual, prestation, and behaviour appropriate in each sphere. Village Buddhists themselves may say, as Davis (1984: 181) reports from Thailand, that the opposed systems (in the Thai case, of Buddhism and Brahmanism) are inseparable. None the less, for the people themselves, this inseparability does not extend to systems of exorcism, and Tambiah's criticism (1984: 315) of Spiro for breaking Burmese religion down into Buddhism and animism could only have force for those entirely and unreservedly committed to the holistic approach.

Most extreme of all is the position taken by Southwold (1982, 1983, 1985).[12] For him, it is not enough to acknowledge that the Buddhism of ordinary Sinhalese villagers is 'surprisingly orthodox' (Gombrich 1971: 40). Nor is it enough to see Buddhism as one part—albeit the dominant part—of a pantheon and ritual heritag e containing other, opposed values, as Obeyesekere and Tambiah do. Southwold sets out to show that what village Buddhists do is and must be orthodox Buddhism, and that what he calls middle-class Buddhism—the kind of Buddhism which is identical with or has been strongly influenced by modernist or 'Protestant' Buddhism—is in error. He makes a considerable number of cogent points along the way, both about Buddhism and about religion in general, but his determination to find the villagers right in all things eventually leads to absurdity. As examples one can cite his suggestion that celibacy for monks has entered Theravada Buddhism only as a late and inappropriate clerical addition (1983: 40), or his argument that village Buddhists' everyday experience 'without knowing what it is they experience, is very plainly nirvanic.... The nirvanic is the fellowship of the world' (ibid.: 69). Southwold has to find villagers wrong when they assert the existence of a spiritual hierarchy which puts them at the bottom.

12. Wijeyewardene (1986) is probably to be placed somewhere towards the Southwold end of the spectrum. Both he and Southwold have been influenced by Ling's (1973) depiction of Buddhism as a this-worldly religion.

No doubt there could be debate on where in this spectrum different authors should be placed. Calling the central part of the spectrum anthropological is, of course, to take sides. For Southwold, his is the truly anthropological viewpoint, which other anthropologists have been unable to attain due to their modernist biases. However one chooses to label the spectrum, some general points about it can be hazarded. Those towards the populist end are more likely to see Buddhism as a this-worldly religion. Max Weber is frequently criticized from this point of view for describing early Buddhism as 'unpolitical and antipolitical'.[13] This is also one of the strands in Tambiah's work on the relationship of Theravada Buddhism to kingship, a field to which he has made a large but controversial contribution.[14] At the other end of the spectrum Buddhism is seen as essentially other-worldly, so that the actual practice of ordinary Buddhists is a falling away, or 'animism in all but name'. There is irony in the fact that the modernist end of the spectrum is also the élitist end—and therefore corresponds in some moods to what a traditionalist monk might say. The reason for this is that the modernists have taken the values of the old élitists and made them mandatory for the mass of monks and lay Buddhists, so that what ordinary Buddhists actually do is seen as not really Buddhism at all. It is the populist end of the spectrum (and not the modernist one) which is uniquely modern.

Anthropologists' views do not exist in a vacuum, sealed off from the societies they study (a point made by Spencer below). Thus I think it valid to suggest that two of the basic positions shown in Figure 1 correspond, very roughly, to indigenous views: the modernist position to that of learned and élitist monks, and the 'anthropological' position to that of all other Buddhists. None the less, the two-dimensional spectrum is meant primarily to capture some aspects of *anthropologists'* stances, and to show the two principal ways in which the hierarchies of traditional Buddhism can be ignored. It would be surprising if the model were adequate to the task of representing the full complexity of views taken up by Buddhists themselves within a given social context.

13. Weber 1958: 206. Both Southwold (1983: 173) and Ling (1968: 95) criticize Weber for this remark.

14. Tambiah 1976, 1984. This debate is too complex to summarize here. *Inter alia*, see Seneviratna 1987, Carrithers 1987, and Tambiah 1987, all in the special issue (Volume XXI, no. 1) of *Contributions to Indian Sociology* devoted to the work of Tambiah and Obeyesekere; and Spiro's (1977) review of Tambiah 1976 in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, and the subsequent exchange between them (Tambiah 1978, Spiro 1978). More recently, see Tambiah 1989.

5. *The Analysis of Buddhist Ritual*

The analysis of Buddhist ritual has been an important sphere of debate. Those at the modernist or rationalist end of the spectrum tend to see ritual as instrumental—and thus as not really Buddhist—whereas those towards the other end are more likely to emphasize its expressive nature. Thus the rationalist approach taken by Terwiel is criticized by Wijeyewardene (1986: 72) for whom there is 'a significant, non-instrumental component [the attainment of peace of mind] to even the most popular of Thai religious practice'. Spiro (1982: 411 n.), on the other hand, criticizes Ames's (1966) contrast of expressive Buddhist ritual with the instrumental, exchange-oriented rituals directed at the gods. He considers that exchange is fundamental to Buddhist ritual, pointing out that 'the layman provides the monks with all physical requirements—and more!—necessary to pursue his salvation-oriented goal, while the monk in turn provides the layman with the spiritual requirements (merit) necessary for *his* salvation-oriented goal' (Spiro 1982: 412, original emphasis).

Just as modernistically inclined scholars tend to see Buddhist ritual as an un-Buddhist departure from the original or true religion, Buddhist modernists themselves reject the use of thread and water which has been empowered by chanting monks. They deny that any particular power, other than psychological benefits and religious merit, accrues from the presence or chanting of monks. But as Wijeyewardene remarks (1986: 47), 'watching [Thai Buddhist] rituals, there are many occasions when the only interpretation one can give is that the participants are grabbing for power...quite literally'. He gives the example of young men ripping out the teeth from the body of a dead monk which lay on the funeral pyre. This obvious belief in ritual efficacy led Terwiel to describe Thai village Buddhism as basically animist. However, Gombrich (1971: 204) demonstrates that the use of thread and water is as old as the Pali commentaries, and he argues that belief in magic does not make one any less of a Buddhist, since Buddhism defines itself in terms of right action and good intentions: 'A monk who practises black magic is doctrinally on a par with a man who drinks; a bad Buddhist, if you like, but bad in the sense of wicked, not of inconsistent. A monk who says *pirit* [Pali verses] to cure sickness, whatever may be his theory to explain its efficacy, is a good Buddhist in every sense' (ibid.: 209). Similar conclusions, without the supporting scholarship, had already been reached by Ames (1964a). Spiro (1982: 153) also noted that although monks were much more likely than lay people to denigrate rituals, three-quarters of his sample of monks still believed that the recitation of Pali texts was efficacious in itself.

Related to this is the question of whether or not, or in what sense, merit can be transferred from one person to another (or to a god) in Theravada Buddhism. Theravada doctrine is clear that one cannot give merit to others, but Buddhists have usually wanted to be able to do this. Gombrich (1971: 266ff.) plots several historical stages in the justification of this need. When a Buddhist merit-making ritual is held either to benefit ancestors, or to benefit gods who will then provide

some specific worldly protection, what is strictly supposed to be happening is that the ancestors or gods (as the case may be) are being given the opportunity to rejoice in merit. Should they happen not to be present or not to be in a form in which they can be present, they cannot strictly speaking benefit, and only the performers of the ritual will benefit.

Gombrich's solution here, as in the question of whether or not the Buddha is considered to be alive or dead, is to invoke a distinction between cognitive and affective beliefs. The former are the avowed, canonical beliefs; the latter are beliefs which can be deduced from behaviour, but which conflict with the former and therefore remain unexpressed. Theravada Buddhists know cognitively, and usually say, that the Buddha is dead and that one cannot transfer merit to another. None the less one can infer that affectively they feel otherwise. The initial response of Spiro's (1982: 149) Burmese villagers was indeed that the Buddha is dead and gone, but when he then asked them who assisted them during protection ceremonies, they changed their mind and decided that he must be alive after all.

This distinction, between cognitive and affective beliefs, suggests one way around the instrumental/expressive dichotomy: Theravada Buddhists know cognitively that their attitude to Buddhist ritual should be expressive and that ideally they should not be motivated even by the desire to obtain merit; but in fact, on many occasions, their affective attitude is instrumental. However, the cognitive/affective distinction has had a mixed reception. Tambiah (1984: 375 n. 11) dismisses it out of hand. Obeyesekere, whose early article (1966: 5, 8) made a similar distinction, presumably accepts it, but all his subsequent work has dealt with very different psychological attitudes. Spiro (1982: 153-4) makes a similar distinction between belief and motivation. Collins (1982: 152) suggests that the distinction is presupposed by the Theravada tradition itself and is essential to its reproduction, the reason being that on the doctrinal level Theravada Buddhism firmly preaches the doctrine of non-self, while in the Rebirth stories of the Buddha's previous lives it encourages an affective acceptance of a continuing personal existence across many rebirths.

The most interesting response to the cognitive/affective suggestion is perhaps that of Southwold (1983: chs. 12 and 13). He considers it seriously but rejects it on the grounds that it implies that Buddhists only really believe what we deduce them to believe affectively; but, he objects, any course of observed action is compatible with more than one set of inferred affective beliefs. His proposed alternative interpretation of Buddhist ritual hinges on an approach he calls 'sapientalism', which he opposes to instrumentalism. He defines sapientalism (1983: 188) as 'a rational strategy for ameliorating experience by altering the mind and the self, rather than the environing world; it is parallel to, and alternative to, the instrumental strategy'. We do not have to follow him in associating sapiental-ism with the right sphere of the brain and instrumentalism with the left to see that this is a felicitous term for describing Buddhist attitudes; Wijeyewardene has already been quoted above saying something similar.

6. *The Contribution of the Present Collection*

Despite these various sophisticated anthropological critiques, the modernist view of Buddhism is unlikely to go away, growing as it does out of presuppositions of equality and context-free self-definition which are deeply embedded in modern culture. Thus, in different ways, the articles below by Ramble and Houtman exemplify the continuing anthropological assault on this view. Ramble is concerned to attack the common manner of writing about Tibetans which derives a priori generalizations about their behaviour, temperament, and culture from the fact of their being Buddhist. He proposes a novel solution to the question of whether particular communities are or are not Buddhist. He accepts the textual scholars' distinction between external observance and understanding of its proper Buddhist intent, and he allows that by external standards one village he describes is not Buddhist. But he then pulls the rug from under the textualists' feet: there is no such thing as Buddhism, no ghost in the machine of culture which animates all of Buddhists' other activities. As in the Buddhist theory of aggregates and of the twelvefold chain of dependent origination, there is no one determining and controlling cause (no base and superstructure), and whether or not these villagers are truly Buddhist, this cannot explain their behaviour.

Houtman attacks Westerners' concern with the questions 'What is Buddhism?' and 'Who are real Buddhists?' in a different way. Through a detailed and careful analysis of the different terms for 'Buddhist' used in Burmese he shows that the manner in which the question is posed in English is quite inadequate to capture the quantity and types of distinction made by Burmese Buddhists. The different distinctions which he outlines support, in my view, the point made above: that traditional Buddhism presupposes a hierarchy of Buddhist statuses. Houtman also shows how the very terms used are implicated in a debate about who fits where; for instance, on the question of the relative status of forest monks and village monks. The level of expertise in the vernacular demonstrated by Houtman is in itself a kind of critique of other anthropologists of Southeast Asian Buddhism.

Spencer's article surveys some of the anthropological literature on Sri Lankan Buddhism. This is sufficiently voluminous that some of these intra-Buddhist debates are reproduced even between anthropologists, as we have seen. He also points out that anthropologists of Buddhism often have a very personal engagement with their subject, a propensity they share with other students of Buddhism. Spencer's very pertinent observation of the oddness of the insistent focus on identity has already been discussed.

Carrithers' article puts the same problem, the nature of Buddhist identity, in historical and comparative perspective by contrasting Theravada history with that of the Jains. He casts in anthropological form some of the problems modern Christian theologians face with the variety of forms their religion has taken over time and in space. Is its unity to be found in a common ideal, a set of values (moral, behavioural, and/or aesthetic), or in the very terms of the debate, inherent in the beginning and played out through history? For Carrithers, the unities of

Buddhism and Jainism over time are given by certain reproduced cultural patterns which he dubs 'automatisms'. It seems to me that this notion is not far from that of Sherry Ortner's (1989) recent use of the idea of a 'cultural scheme' which orients but does not determine action. In any case, both Ortner and Carrithers are making admirable attempts to combine anthropology with history in order to explain both change and continuity.

Clarke pursues themes familiar from the anthropology of Theravada Buddhism in the sphere of Tibetan Buddhism. He shows that there are similar notions of religious merit, although the manner in which blessings are given concrete form is rather different. He also puts these Buddhist notions very firmly into a specific social context. The fact that practitioners here are non-celibate is likely to evoke the conventional charge of inauthenticity from Buddhologists, but Clarke's data suggest that they are no more so than Buddhist laity anywhere. Thus, his article is a contribution to the anthropology of married Buddhist clergy, an important social category which is usually treated as an anomaly.

Martinez's article on Japan tackles many of the same issues. One finds the familiar view that Buddhism and Shintoism are two equal and opposed religions, with the consequence that any practice of them together, as is done by most Japanese, is impure and syncretic. Martinez draws on Japanese scholarship to show that for much of Japan's history a perspective such as that of Obeyesekere for Sri Lanka or Tambiah for Thailand does much greater justice to the actual state of affairs in the country. She also demonstrates that it fits better the ethnographic facts of contemporary religious practice, even in a village whose core identity is Shintoist. Japan is, however, different from the countries so far considered in that attempts to bring Shintoism out from Buddhism's ideological hegemony go back a long way and were, as we know, very successful. Consequently the view of the two religions as entirely distinct for the whole of their history, and indeed the view that Shintoism today is the same as 'Shintoism' in the seventh century, is encouraged not only by modernist bias but also by the history of the last few hundred years. It is as if the Bonpo sect, instead of being a marginal, oppositional sect in Tibet, had succeeded in displacing Buddhism and becoming the official state religion.

7. *Conclusion*

Most of this introduction has focused on the question, 'What *has* the anthropology of Buddhism been about?' It has, we have seen, focused on the question of Buddhist identity. What kind of religion is Buddhism? How does it coexist with other systems? Given its radical individualism, how can Buddhists help others, and if the Buddha is dead, how is worship and ritual legitimated?

It would be remiss, however, not to raise explicitly the question, 'What *should* the anthropology of Buddhism be about?' Lurking behind the anthropological critique of modernist approaches which dismiss the practice of ordinary Buddhists as inauthentic is the suspicion that the very question of Buddhist identity is artificial: it has been raised entirely by outsiders, even if it has now become an essential part of Buddhists' own internal cultural debate. I cannot myself accept that, in different ways, Buddhists never thought about what Buddhism is and should be before they had contact with Europeans. None the less it is also true that the anthropology of Buddhism will only have attained maturity when it can focus equally on other questions, and when it can compare Buddhism in different contexts without immediately becoming embroiled in this debate. Anthropologists rightly stress the differences between cultures and the coherence of local world views. While retaining these sensitivities, the possibility of a comparative framework needs to be addressed. The present collection of articles is, I believe, a significant step along that road.

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