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Towards a Comparative Anthropology of the Buddhist Gift (and Other Transfers)

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is threefold. I would like first to propose a more refined choice of analytical vocabulary for the study of Buddhist giving and related practices, by taking into consideration recent contributions by Testart and F. Weber, who have forcefully argued that the Maussian category of 'the gift' is in need of conceptual clarification: we need a typology of forms of 'transfers', to use Testart's term. I will argue for the analytical importance of the distinction between 'gifts' strictly speaking and patterns of transfers that are more akin to an exchange or transaction, such as the provision of ritual services and their remuneration. Second, I address the question of the extent to which we can we speak of 'reciprocity' in the case of actual Buddhist gifts (e.g. alms or donations made outside of contexts in which monks are asked for religious services). The scholarly literature displays here a remarkable lack of consensus and, to some extent, of clarity; I will offer an attempt at clarification. The third aim is to reconsider critically the common assumption that the gift is a central if not an outright essential and defining component in Buddhist laity-*sangha* relations. I will draw here on data from a Tibetan society in which Buddhist gift-giving is only of minor importance and transactions centred on ritual services are much more central to laity-*sangha* relations, and contrast this with the data from mainstream Thai(-Lao) and Burmese Theravada contexts. This may serve as a useful corrective to scholarly accounts that echo perhaps too closely emic emphases on the gift, or might have been misled by ill-fitting theoretical models. The overall aim is to contribute, through the angle of the gift and its variants, to an emerging comparative anthropology of Buddhism.

Introduction[1]

Let us start with the (seemingly) obvious: the central importance of the gift in many, if not probably most, Buddhist contexts. From a textual doctrinal perspective, the practice of the gift (P./S. *dāna*)[2] appears as the first in the classical lists of 'perfections' (P. *pāramī*, S. *pāramitā*) that the adept needs to cultivate on the path towards liberation (Guruge & Bond 1998, p. 80).[3] The fact that the one who was to become Buddha Śākyamuni is said to have perfected the practice of giving (as the prince Vessantara, who ultimately gave away his kingdom and even his wife and children) during his last existence before being reborn as Siddhārtha Gautama has been argued to imply a 'definite causal relationship between *dāna* and liberation' (Heim 2004, p. 39). From a more sociologically informed perspective, the pre-eminence of giving and in particular of giving to the monkhood, as the paradigmatic way of accumulating merit, has been stressed in many anthropological accounts (see for instance Spiro 1970, chapter 4). We may also note that, at a more general, theoretical level, these forms of Buddhist religious giving are marked, at the very least in doctrinal formulations, by the somewhat striking absence of an obligation to reciprocate the gift—indeed, a widely shared feature of South Asian theories of the religious gift (*dāna*) is that the gift *should not* be reciprocated (Heim 2004, p. 34; Ohnuma 2005, p. 105).

This brings us to Marcel Mauss … or so one might expect. I would actually argue that the terms of the debate have somewhat shifted in recent years. This is not to suggest that the importance of Mauss's work on the gift is no longer indisputable. David Graeber remarks in his recent revisiting of Mauss's work that the French anthropologist's 'universally recognized masterpiece[,] (…) his "*Essai sur le don*" (1925), (…) has generated more debate, discussion, and ideas than any other work of anthropology' (Graeber 2001, p. 152). Within this ever-widening field, a particular strand of discussion has emerged in (both anthropological and more historical or text-centred) studies of the gift focusing on religious traditions with Indic roots (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism). This strand can be characterized as focusing on one area of (at least apparent) tension between the Indic materials and one of Mauss's core theses, that of the universality of the obligation to reciprocate a gift.[4] As we well know, Mauss himself was aware of this tension, as is to be seen in a footnote in the *Essai sur le don*, in which he acknowledges that the Hindu legal treatises actually contradict that (supposedly) general principle (Mauss 1925, p. 144)—a footnote repeatedly quoted in this strand of literature. Recent critical advances in the literature on the gift make it possible, however, to dispense with this seemingly inescapable reference to a certain footnote or to the tension with an assumedly general feature. As we will see, Alain Testart and more recently Florence Weber have forcefully argued that the Maussian category of 'the gift' is in need of conceptual clarification: a typology of forms of 'transfers' (to use Testart's term) would help, and the obligation to reciprocate is in no way as universal as Mauss's statements might seem to suggest—even within societies practising the potlatch and other institutions studied in the *Essai sur le don*. A slight shift in general perspective is thus possible and will inform the following discussion.

The aim of this introductory essay is threefold. First, I would like to propose a more refined choice of analytical vocabulary for the study of Buddhist giving and related practices, by taking into consideration recent contributions by Testart and F. Weber. In this field, the Pāli and Sanskrit term *dāna* has often been used as the main category, but it obviously cannot satisfy the requirements of a proper analytical term; its use also carries the risk of neglecting vernacular terms and regional or local variations in meaning.[5] Following Testart and F. Weber, I will argue for the analytical importance of the distinction between 'gifts' strictly speaking and patterns of transfers that are more akin to an exchange or transaction, such as the provision of ritual services and their remuneration—a distinction that many Buddhists actually do not make, for reasons that need to be examined.

The second aim is partly terminological too, but much closer to the analysis of the ethnographic data. To what extent can we speak of 'reciprocity' in the case of actual Buddhist gifts (e.g. alms or donations made outside of contexts in which monks are asked for religious services)? We will see that the term has been used abundantly by scholars in their analyses of gift interactions in Buddhist contexts, but with somewhat varying rationales. The empirical situations themselves can also be rather complex. Ultimately, however, I will argue that on the whole the existing ethnographic data does not justify the use of the term 'reciprocity' in this case. Donors expect 'returns' (in terms of merit, typically), but these are not provided by the monastic recipients of their gifts. Strictly speaking, the gifts are not reciprocated.

The third aim is to reconsider critically the common assumption that the gift is a central if not an outright essential and defining component in Buddhist lay–monastic relations. To this effect, I will be drawing into the discussion the rarely studied remuneration of ritual services. After a brief examination of the anthropological accounts of some Thai(-Lao) and Burmese cases, which on the whole tend to support the above-mentioned general assumption, I will offer data on a strikingly different case: a Tibetan society of the Nepalese Himalayas, in which Buddhist gift-giving is only of minor importance and transactions centred on ritual services are much more central to lay–monastic (or, for that matter, laity–*sangha*[6])

relations. This may serve as a useful corrective to scholarly accounts that echo perhaps too closely emic emphases on the gift, or might have been misled by ill-fitting theoretical models.

Agreeing on the Terms: Buddhist Gifts and Other Transfers

GIFTS AND OTHER TRANSFERS

Over the last two decades, the terminology in matters of gift and exchange in Mauss's *Essai sur le don* has been subjected to critical examination, in particular by the anthropologist Alain Testart and the sociologist (with a strong ethnographic bent) Florence Weber.[7] Although they do not see eye to eye on everything, they do agree on the need to distinguish between a 'gift' and what Testart calls an 'exchange' or what F. Weber calls (using a slightly broader term) a 'transaction': it is only in the case of the latter modalities that we find an obligation (Testart specifies: a legal obligation) to reciprocate (Testart 2013, p. 258; Weber 2007, pp. 20–21). For gifts, we often find a sense of moral obligation to reciprocate, but this is not the same thing as an actual legal obligation, Testart argues (2013, p. 257). Within the opposite polar category ('exchanges' or 'transactions'), Testart and F. Weber also agree on the necessity to distinguish between market and non-market modalities. In the former case, the transaction is centred on ('objectively' comparable) goods and services, independently of interpersonal relations.[8] In the latter case (often termed 'ceremonial exchange' in the ethnographic literature), the transaction is centred on and derives its meaning from interpersonal relations (Testart 2001; Weber 2000, p. 88, 2007, p. 20). Finally, the term 'transfer' is arguably appropriate for referring more generally to any movement of goods from one person to another (Testart 2007, pp. 23–24).[9]

The distinction between 'gift' and '(market) exchange' may seem at first glance to overlap somewhat with that between 'gift' and 'commodity', a duality combining Maussian and Marxian inspiration which has generated substantial scholarly discussion (see for instance Gregory 1982; Carrier 1991; Yan 2005, pp. 254–256). For Gregory, 'commodity exchange establishes objective quantitative relationships between the objects transacted, while gift exchange establishes personal qualitative relationships between the subjects transacting' (Gregory 1982, p. 41). My contention is however that the impression of terminological parallelism is mistaken and, most importantly, that the gift versus commodity duality is of little use in the analysis of Buddhist gifts and other transfers. Whereas the remuneration offered in return for religious services may correspond to more or less commoditized relations, it would be perhaps overly romantic, and in any case incorrect, to imagine that Buddhist gifts such as alms and donations denote the simple opposite of commodity relations. As we will see, Buddhist alms-giving is often marked by a prescriptive avoidance of personal relations and denial of exchange: we are far from the Maussian gift, in a domain left uncharted by the gift versus commodity duality.[10] My discussion will thus proceed on the basis of a (tempered) acknowledgement of the greater usefulness of Testart's distinctions.

With regard to the gift *per se*, Testart proposes a typology of forms, focusing on the place of reciprocation, over a spectrum ranging from an inherent absence to a central aim (Testart 2007, chap. 6). For our purposes, two important subcategories that need to be mentioned here are inherently non-reciprocal gifts, among which we find *donations* (pp. 165–169), and gifts marked on the contrary by the donor's self-interest, such as *offerings*, for instance to a deity, in a spirit of *do ut des* (pp. 161–162).

I contend that Testart and F. Weber's distinctions constitute a conceptually important (and, I will argue, a culturally appropriate) basis for a rigorous examination of Buddhist

gift-giving and other practices implying the movement of goods. Thus, according to these distinctions, alms given to Buddhist monastic recipients or donations of food and other necessities in contexts devoid of a transactional pattern, or donations of money given for the construction of religious buildings and the like, but also for instance the occasional redistribution of some of these by monastic recipients, would all be classified analytically as forms of 'gifts'. The term 'gift' has already been used (albeit sometimes for a wider range of transfers) by a number of scholars writing about Buddhist societies. In many scholarly discussions of alms and donations, however, one also finds a terminology of exchange and reciprocity—a terminology, I will argue, that is too vague and loose. Where we do find something of the nature of an exchange or a transaction is in certain other interactions: those involving the *provision of religious services*.

TRANSACTIONS: RELIGIOUS SERVICES AND THEIR REMUNERATION

Things become a little complicated when we consider religious services—both because the ethnographic data is not devoid of a certain characteristic ambiguity, as we will see, and because the typologies suggested by Testart and F. Weber, with their strong emphasis on goods, rather than goods and services (not to mention religious services, which are never mentioned), seem slightly less helpful here. Let us proceed step by step.

When monks or other specialists are asked to provide services (e.g. recite *paritta*[11] or other texts, carry out funerary or other rituals, perform divinations, provide protective objects or the like or even preach), they are, typically at the end, presented with food and other goods (including money in some cases). In these situations, it is very often denied that one is given in exchange for the other—in particular in Theravāda contexts, it would seem. In Mahāyāna contexts, as David Gellner remarks in the Newar case, people try much less to 'avoid the appearance of exchange' (Gellner 1992, p. 124). That the notion of exchange need not be addressed explicitly by the parties to the exchange actually happens in a number of circumstances (Testart 2007, p. 28). Here, in any case, when a patron solicits a religious specialist's services, there is arguably an implicit agreement on *mutual obligation* (a defining feature of exchange): the specialist will provide the service, and the patron will provide for the customary conditions (food, offerings, etc.) for a complete, felicitous event. Even if Theravāda Buddhists insist on keeping the terminology of the gift (*dāna* or other), the element of obligation means that *analytically*, we are no longer in the realm of the gift.

I thus suggest that we interpret these transactions as not being very different from what Testart and F. Weber identify as the market modality of exchanges or transactions or, more precisely, not very different from the provision of specialist services, in return for which remuneration (an appropriate amount of goods, whether in kind or in money) is expected. 'Remuneration'—from the Latin *remūneror/remūnerō* (to repay, recompense, reward), itself from *mūnus* (function, duty, but also gift) (see Glare 1968, pp. 1146, 1614)—is perhaps preferable to 'payment', with its strong monetary overtones, especially in Theravāda contexts, where prohibitions on monks handling money seem stricter. Interpersonal relations (crucial to non-market exchanges such as the *kula*) are not necessary for these transactions to take place and are not what these transactions are about: what counts first and foremost here is the provision of services (e.g. efficacious ritual) and an appropriate return of goods. We are therefore clearly closer to the market modalities defined by Testart and F. Weber.

Regarding the strong reluctance to talk of these transactions in terms of remuneration of services (not to mention the idea of equivalence of value between the two, which would be strongly rejected by many Buddhists), I suggest that Pierre Bourdieu and A. Testart provide us with important elements of interpretation. Bourdieu writes, in general terms, of the

'double truths' found in the 'economy of symbolic exchanges' (Bourdieu 1998, p. 95); more specifically, in the section on 'The Laughter of Bishops', he notes that religious enterprises have 'two truths: economic truth and religious truth, which denies the former' (p. 114). There are processes of 'euphemization of the economic relationship' (p. 114) at play in religious language and transactions: in the religious domain, 'objectively economic enterprises' thrive on the basis of 'the *misrecognition* of their economic dimension' (pp. 118–119, original emphasis).[12] In a somewhat similar vein—but in a discussion pertaining to non-market exchanges, such as those that take place between partners in various kinds of friendship relations—Testart observes that these exchanges are often phrased in terms of gift and counter-gift (Testart 2001, pp. 739–740). This gives rise to an 'illusion' (Testart 2001, pp. 739–740). '[The disappearance of] the reality of exchange behind the fiction of a gift' seems to give both donor and recipient 'a larger role than the one they have', the relations of value between the terms of the exchange as well as the obligation of a return receding out of sight (p. 742). Finally, is it not often the case that the religious service provided by the specialist (preaching, teaching, conferring tantric initiation or even performing a therapeutic, protective or exorcistic ritual…) is considered of greater value than any goods that the patron can offer? This too may well contribute to the transaction being rarely referred to in terms of exchange or even reciprocity. Let us not overstate, however, the difference in value between the religious service and the remuneration given in return; here, we also have a situation of (generally well-recognized, even if rarely articulated) *mutual dependence*: dependence on specialist services on the one hand and dependence on support for one's livelihood on the other.

It should however be recognized that some aspects of these transactions centred on the provision of religious services do not fit in well with the characteristics of 'market exchanges' as defined by Testart or F. Weber in their typologies. The importance, at least in some contexts, of the *moral state* of the specialist for the efficacy of the services suggests that these Buddhist transactions are slightly more complex than the simply services-and-goods-centred nature of the market transactions usually designated by the categories of 'provision of services' and their 'remuneration'. One can also note that the appropriate amount of goods to be given in return for a certain type of religious service is not always fixed according to a simple pattern of equivalence of value: the social identities of the participants in the transaction may influence the exchange (which is described actually as a feature of non-market exchanges). Thus, poor recipients of ritual services are often allowed to provide more modest returns in absolute terms. In some contexts, ritual services provided to one's close kin are not expected to be remunerated at all (apart from perhaps serving the ritual specialist some drink or food). Here, Marshall Sahlins's discussion of variations in reciprocity in 'primitive exchange' (much of which bears relevance for other societies also) may contain some useful insights. In exchanges ('balanced reciprocity', Sahlins 1972, pp. 194–195) with poor members of communities, wealthier partners in the exchange may feel 'constraints on acquisitiveness (…) if not a certain *richesse oblige*': in effect, 'differences in fortune between the exchange partners compel a more altruistic (…) transaction than is otherwise appropriate' (p. 211): something closer to Sahlins's category of 'generalized reciprocity' (pp. 193–194). A similar shift is observed in cases of kinship ties (p. 196).

For the purposes of this paper, the distinction between gifts (in their various forms) and what we will call 'remunerations' is the fundamental terminological and analytical shift that we need to operate. Just for the sake of completion, one should note that yet another type of interaction is to be found in certain religious obligations, such as the compulsory contributions of goods and labour by village households on the occasion of communal rituals or the 'monk tax' in certain

Tibetan areas. If a communal ritual is perceived to bring benefits to the village sponsors, then this constitutes a transaction similar to those found in the provision of other religious services; otherwise, these interactions correspond quite well to Testart's third and final main category (after the gift, devoid of any legal obligation to reciprocate, and the exchange), a category which he terms 'transfers of the third type', and which comprises taxes, corvée labour, fines and so forth. These share the absence of obligation to reciprocate that we find in the gift, but they are compulsory, which the gift is not (Testart 2013, p. 259).

PUTTING TO TEST OUR CATEGORIZATION OF RELIGIOUS TRANSFERS: NOTES ON THE TIBETAN CASE

Before going any further, we should investigate whether these distinctions make sense with regard to, and thus would effectively help in examining, Asian (or even other) Buddhists' own categories in such matters. The question is not whether indigenous terminologies perfectly mirror this scheme of analytical categories (which is rather unlikely, given that the former always tend to be messier than formal models), but whether these categorical distinctions would be recognized as meaningful. I will offer a very brief and partial examination of the case of Tibetan terminologies—the plural is necessary here, given the extent of language variation in the Tibetan cultural area, as well as the existence of both literary and vernacular forms. (The following will refer to colloquial central Tibetan unless otherwise specified.)

At a doctrinal, literary level, the practice of giving (in the sense of *dāna* in its Mahāyāna Buddhist uses: alms, charity, donations…) is most commonly called *jinpa* [sbyin-pa].[13] In colloquial Tibetan, however, a hierarchy of status also determines the vocabulary (not to mention, depending on the status of the persons involved or addressed, the polite use of honorific, ordinary and sometimes humilific registers, which may involve the switching to verbs and nouns based on different roots). In this context, if we focus on the most important terms in religious interactions, the noun *jinpa* refers more specifically to giving to an equal or inferior, such as a poor mendicant monk or a beggar, while *bülwa* ['bul-ba] is preferred as a general term (both as a noun and as a verb) for giving to superiors, such as respected monks or masters.[14] This last term is also one of the terms used when goods or money are presented to religious specialists after they have performed ritual services solicited by the patron; thus, the distinction between donation and remuneration is not always visible in the choice of terms.

More specific and commonly used terms, however, do exist. On the one hand, with regard to the 'gift' in Testart's sense, no single term covers exactly all forms of religious 'gift'; instead, we find a number of subcategories or forms of gift. Thus, donations (for instance for the upkeep or the construction of a temple) may be referred to as *shendep* [zhal-'debs] or *büldü* ['bul-sdud] when collected by religious specialists,[15] alms are referred to as *sö-nyom* [bsod-snyoms], offerings (for instance to deities) are called *chöpa* [mchod-pa], and so forth. On the other hand, remunerations for ritual services are actually often called *yön* [yon] or its honorific variant *kuyön* [sku-yon], terms that would not be used outside such a transactional context: here, the distinction with the donation clearly emerges.[16] On the whole, the distinction between 'gifts' (donations, alms…) presented to religious specialists and remunerations for their services appears much more clearly in Tibetan categories than in Theravāda contexts in which terms like *dāna* may be used indiscriminately. One may note that both the donor of gifts and the donor of remunerations are commonly called *jindak* [sbyin-bdag], 'master of the gift', in central Tibetan, but they can be distinguished in Amdo Tibetan: the former is called *jindak*, and the latter often *yöndak*, or colloquially *yomdak* [yon-bdag], 'master of the remuneration'.[17] Finally, the root *chö*, in the sense of an 'offering'

presented by a lay patron to a religious specialist, whether or not explicitly as a return for the latter's religious services, also appears prominently in certain other terms designating priests or priest–patron relationships.[18]

In Tibetan understandings, what kind of transactions are remunerations for religious services? Tendencies towards the euphemization or misrecognition of remunerations are no doubt present. Beyond such tendencies, in effect, it appears that remunerations are perceived as neither being the same as gifts nor (at least in principle) belonging simply to the domain of common market relations—such a situation would be strongly condemned.[19] The scholarly literature here hesitates: some formulations reproduce the euphemistic tendencies in their choice of terms, but, in striking contrast to the literature on Theravāda societies, many authors do not shy away from a terminology strongly connoting market relations of paid provision of services. Aziz's description of the relations between the Dingri [Ding-ri] laity and the officiants of their household rituals is maybe the most explicit in this regard (but, for that matter, maybe slightly lacking in nuance?): religious specialists 'secure work' and are 'hired', and 'the best are rewarded by prestige and full employment' (Aziz 1978, pp. 256–257). In exchange for their services, these specialists are 'paid'—a seeming particularity of the Dingri setting being that (according to Aziz at least) 'every religious service has a fixed fee' (p. 257).[20] There may be possibly a slight lack of nuance in Aziz's consistent choice of a plain labour market vocabulary, but similar terms are to be found here and there in a number of other accounts.[21]

Outside observers are not the only ones to go beyond euphemizations of relations involving ritual services and their remuneration. One of my more articulate Tibetan interlocutors (an elderly layman from Western Tibet, with some modest ritual training and experience, a man both pious and endowed with a healthy dose of critical distance) even glossed the word *yön* ('remuneration') as follows: it's like the price, *rinpa* [rin-pa], of an object, he said; it's like trade, *tsong* [tshong], or like a salary, *yok-la* [g.yog-gla]. He was smiling broadly all the while: not only was he eschewing pious euphemizations, but, with *yok-la* in particular (which refers more precisely to a *servant*'s salary), he was being openly irreverent and challenging common codes of etiquette. His choice of terms, in any case, unmistakably suggests a proximity with the domain of remuneration of services and market exchange.

Finally, a domain that corresponds to (unilateral) religious obligations in terms of goods, services (labour) or even bodies is also recognized and distinguished from the previous ones. Communal duties with regard to providing goods or labour for collective ritual activities, as well as compulsory forms of monastic recruitment, are all glossed as *trel* [khral]: 'taxes' or obligations. Bearing in mind the qualifications voiced in the discussion of religious services and their 'remuneration', on the whole, the Tibetan data does suggest that the analytical categories discussed above may well constitute a serviceable set of tools.

Is There Reciprocity in the Buddhist Gift?

With regard to the notion of reciprocity, the literature on Buddhist gift-giving, as practised in particular in Theravāda Buddhist societies, displays a remarkable lack of consensus and, to some extent, of clarity. Thus, Stanley Tambiah's claim that 'in philosophical Buddhism, (…) the meditating monk becomes the model of non-reciprocity' (Tambiah 1970, p. 68) has often been recycled as a general truth regarding actual Theravāda monks, irrespective of their religious profile.[22] However, the opposite claim, namely that the laity's gifts to the Buddhist clergy are based on a scheme of reciprocity, has been made with equal insistence by a number of other authors, while a few have attempted to reconcile both positions, at

the risk sometimes of appearing to say both one thing and its opposite in the very same piece. I will therefore start with an attempt at clarification.

THE DIVERSE MODALITIES OF THE BUDDHIST GIFT

For lack of sufficient empirical data on a variety of Buddhist contexts, I have been obliged, for the following discussion, to draw on data from a variety of Buddhist contexts without any systematic comparative structure. In order to maintain as rigorous a discussion as possible, I will systematically make explicit reference to the sources. For certain points, it seems that we can observe a certain convergence of the data, whereas for others, I will point to distinctions that seem to emerge. I have also focused on certain enduring, mainstream religious forms and have left aside for instance modernist, reformist elements within Buddhism, which are often ideologically opposed to the performance of ritual services with worldly ends (e.g. Jordt 2007 on Burma; Cook 2010 on Thailand), or, at the other end of the spectrum, 'prosperity cults/religion' and the like (e.g., on Thailand, Jackson 1999; Scott 2009; Pattana Kitiarsa 2012). All these are major components of contemporary Buddhism in urban and even wider contexts. Taking them into consideration would maybe not substantially alter the main arguments made in this paper but would surely complicate them. What follows should be seen as a tentative discussion, which may hopefully lead to future, more satisfactory examinations of these issues, based on more comprehensive sets of empirical data.

In actual practice, lay–monk interactions involving gifts to monks or monasteries present a wide range of modalities, from daily alms of food to gifts offered during temple visits, to the sponsoring of a son's ordination or gifts presented during important Buddhist calendrical festivals, donations made at a religious fund-raising campaign or perhaps even (in a domain marked more by immediate reciprocity) the presentation of goods or money to monks who have been invited to perform rituals inside the layman's house.[23] The latter case will be examined separately, but, to put things simply, it is not always easy to distinguish 'gift' and 'exchange' practices. Thus, how are we to understand a pious layperson's choice of purchasing items in a monastery-run shop?[24] There is both a strongly and immediately reciprocal character to the transaction, an obvious partaking in something of the nature of commodity exchange, *and* something else: the choice of having the profit from the sale go to monastic actors or entities, as a way of supporting these—in effect, a motivation very similar to those often underlying paradigmatic forms of the Buddhist gift, such as the giving of alms. Another quite distinct form of transfer is the offering of money, food or other goods by laypeople to the dead, hungry ghosts or denizens of the hells, offerings that in many cases are taken and/or consumed by the monks who officiate for the ritual procedure or simply who look after the temple where the offerings were brought. With this duality of recipients, we have here clearly something more complex than a simple gift. Patrice Ladwig notes that a variety of rationales (involving or not the principle of transfer of merit) are to be found in both doctrinal and ethnographic sources; one suggestion is that the monks' action may be seen as a transformation of *material* offerings into something that ghosts and other immaterial beings can enjoy (Ladwig 2011, 2012). Such examples also point in a useful way to the limits of Testart's typology.

In the following discussion, the scope of the modes of religious gift-giving examined will, for lack of space, have to be limited. And for the sake of the following section, in which I aim to highlight certain contrasts between (Southeast Asian) Theravāda and Tibetan cases, I will focus to some extent on what in most Southeast Asian Theravāda contexts is a key (as well as rather well-documented) modality of Buddhist gift-giving, but one that is virtually absent in Tibet: the daily alms rounds.[25] (Ideally, a fuller, more satisfactory comparative analysis would examine the various modalities of daily or other provisions of food for the monastic

clergy.) I will, however, also aim at providing in quick brushstrokes a somewhat larger view of the issue. As for the rationale behind this choice of elements of comparison, it corresponds simply to a contrast between a domain that is arguably the best documented one so far (Southeast Asian Theravāda) and another, rather well-documented one (Tibetan Buddhism), of which I have first-hand knowledge—a contrast that I have found good to think with. Other comparative angles would have been possible, as the introduction to and the other papers in this special issue clearly demonstrate.

As Jane Bunnag remarks, on the basis of fieldwork conducted in the city of Ayutthaya, in central Thailand: 'The ideal of impersonal giving is probably most perfectly realized in the act of presenting rice to the monk on his daily alms-round' (Bunnag 1973, p. 60). Alms rounds in such Theravāda contexts are also a particularly striking and important form of gift practices due to their *daily* and *public* character. Through this particular modality of giving, Buddhist monastic and lay actors cultivate culturally stipulated modes of Buddhist roles (see for instance Kawanami 2013, p. 152). The numerous rules pertaining to alms rounds that feature in the Vinaya texts might well be indicative of the importance this practice had in ancient Indic Buddhism (Guruge & Bond 1998, p. 83). The symbolic pre-eminence of alms rounds can also be found in non-Theravāda contexts, as we see in Jørn Borup's study of a Rinzai Zen sect in the Kyoto area in Japan, where it is perceived as a symbol of the 'true Buddhist spirit' (Borup 2008, p. 169).[26]

It should be acknowledged, however, that not all Southeast Asian Theravāda monks—and, for that matter, hardly any Tibetan monks—engage in daily alms rounds. All food was brought directly by laywomen to the monastery every morning in the Thai-Lao village studied by Tambiah (1968, p. 66). As for Bunnag's Ayutthaya sample, only two-thirds of the monks regularly went on alms rounds; others lived in well-endowed monasteries in which food was provided to all or for instance were holders of ecclesiastical offices or high honorific titles, which meant that they received a small royal monthly allowance which covered their food expenses (Bunnag 1973, p. 61). Nevertheless, although many Bangkok monks (more 'sophisticated' than their Ayutthaya counterparts, according to Bunnag) had no need to beg for food or were not based in a residential part of the city, they chose to maintain the alms-begging practices 'as a symbolic act': 'as a reminder of the Buddha's total renunciation of the world, and of their own mendicant status' (p. 62 n. 22). Alms rounds may also be maintained, even if there is no need to do so for the monk, in order to provide the laity with occasions for acquiring merit (Spiro 1970, p. 309).

Another pre-eminent and highly valued modality of Buddhist gift-giving, in these same Theravāda contexts, is the gift of robes and other goods at the celebrations (Thai Kathin, Burm. Kahtein) that take place at the end of the rainy season retreat. (Here again, these celebrations are conspicuously absent from Tibetan societies. Ceremonial or ritual collective events at which the laity can offer donations to the assembled clergy do exist, but this component does not seem as symbolically central to the event as the practice of giving at Theravāda Kathin or Kahtein celebrations.[27])

The modalities of gift-giving, strictly speaking, are diverse, as mentioned above, but they do not necessarily occupy as large a section of the lay–monastic interactions as one might assume from common formulations on the 'centrality of the gift' in Theravāda contexts—at least, provided we understand (following Testart) the gift as devoid of obligation and recognize, in contrast to this, the element of obligation present in a number of interactions in which Buddhist specialists provide religious services and the laity respond by presenting goods to them. The latter domain of activity typically takes up a very substantial amount of monks' time (apart from a minority of scholar-monks or meditation virtuosi), be it in Theravāda, Tibetan or other contexts.[28] But let us now come to the issue of (non-) reciprocity in the gift properly speaking.

A large number of descriptions of Buddhist gift practices (in the strict sense outlined above) have emphasized the absence of reciprocity: on these occasions, transfers of goods are not only unilateral but also marked by an absence of acknowledgement or gratitude in the monks' demeanour.[29] However, many scholarly interpretations of the system are phrased in terms of exchange and reciprocity—with quite differing rationales, which shall now be examined.

ARGUMENTS FOR RECIPROCITY IN THE GIFT

A first set of considerations consists in (repeated, but perhaps not fully convincing) arguments that identify reciprocity in the very structure of the standard Buddhist gift (alms, donations of food, robes, money and so forth).

In a number of these approaches, 'reciprocity' is understood for instance as deriving from the (supposedly) *active role* of the monastic recipient of the gift. Thus, according to Melford Spiro, the layman offers material support to the monk, 'while the monk in turn *provides* the layman with (…) merit'; thus, here we find 'a perfectly symmetrical system, exemplifying the general pattern of reciprocity and exchange which, as Mauss (1967) has shown, characterizes all gifts' (Spiro 1970, p. 412, emphasis added). Similarly, for Borup, in the 'ritual gift exchange', 'monk and lay agent (…) are both givers and receivers' (Borup 2008, p. 171). Or, in Donald Swearer's terms: 'In return [for the lay donor's gifts], *the virtuous power* of the sangha [the monastic community] *engenders* a spiritual reward of merit (*puñña*), thereby enhancing the donors' balance of kamma/karma'; the author mentions different forms of merit-making rituals, such as gifts of food during the morning alms rounds, as well as gifts during Kathin celebrations, and adds: 'the structure of reciprocal exchange remains constant' (Swearer 2010 [1995], p. 19, emphasis added; also quoted by Scott 2009, pp. 95–96). Along the same lines, and more explicitly still, Guillaume Rozenberg argues that, in the process leading to the production of merit, 'the monk *places* his full moral authority and *spiritual strength* in the service of the lay person in return for his/her support' (Rozenberg 2004, p. 499, emphasis added). Yet neither the monks themselves nor their 'virtuous power' or 'spiritual strength' appears to be understood as giving or producing merit, be it in doctrinal formulations or in ethnographic materials.[30] It is thus difficult to justify arguing for the presence of reciprocity on these grounds.

In other scholarly formulations, 'reciprocity' is seen to stem from the fact that donors expect to receive some form of return for their gifts. Thus, in her essay on the Buddhist gift, after having commented at length on its non-reciprocal nature, Reiko Ohnuma states: 'what I have been referring to as an unreciprocated gift is not wholly unreciprocated'; shifting her stance, she continues: 'reciprocity is involved (…). The layperson who gives alms to a monk (…) *desires and expects a return* in the form of karmic merit. (…) [E]veryone knows that giving has its rewards' (Ohnuma 2005, p. 110, original emphasis). Other sources that put forward this kind of argument could be quoted. Several of them mention the 'merit account books' kept by Burmese villagers (Spiro 1970, pp. 111–112). But self-interest and even the calculability of karmic rewards do not amount to *reciprocity*. There seems to be some confusion here between the notion of reciprocity, which strictly speaking characterizes a relationship between two agents, and the fact that the Buddhist gift is generally not a 'pure' or disinterested gift—in contexts marked by theories of karmic retribution, this concept would make relatively little sense.[31]

A mixed approach to the issue of (non-)reciprocity, combining a more social structuralist strand, has been attempted by Tambiah in the context of gift-giving to monks in a Thai-Lao village. We first encounter arguments very similar to those already critiqued above. At the level of religious theory, Tambiah identifies a 'double negation of reciprocity': donors make gifts in an 'idiom of (…) [the] "free gift"', and monks accept the gifts without any 'recognition of

reciprocal obligation' (Tambiah 1970, p. 213). In practice, however, one finds an 'affirmation of reciprocity': the donor 'expects to accumulate merit (…); the monk in turn (…) confers merit on the donor' (Tambiah 1970, p. 213). But Tambiah also points to a larger web of socio-religious reciprocities, beyond purely 'Buddhist' logics: monks are supported by lay donors but perform ritual roles of benefit to the laity; additionally, we find a scheme of intergenerational reciprocity here, as monks are typically the pre-adult or young adult sons of the older lay supporters (pp. 143, 212). Yet a further dimension of reciprocity can be identified, Tambiah claims, in the fact that a number of male elders are specialists of rites of passage and other rituals that are crucial for the younger generation as a whole, but also specifically for monks (p. 259). The extent of the relevance of the generational factor in this account of socio-religious reciprocity has been questioned however (Burr 1978). Tambiah's structuralist arguments also go well beyond our initial focus on individual lay–monastic gift interactions and unfold at a more aggregate level at which, as I will argue hereafter, we can speak of 'reciprocity' only in a much broader and somewhat vaguer sense. So we still have no convincing arguments to corroborate the notion that individual acts of Buddhist gift-giving are characterized, strictly speaking, by reciprocity.

Finally, a notable recent attempt at inscribing the Buddhist gift and its returns within a logic of reciprocity is to be found in an article by Rozenberg (2004). The gist of his argument is that we need to define 'reciprocity' in a way that is congruent with Buddhist realities: 'as the very act of accepting the gift' or, in other terms, as 'the obligation to work as a field of merit' (p. 513 n. 6). Here, the question of the active or passive character of the monk's position is recognized as important, but the argument is slightly unclear in this respect. The monk's passivity is argued to constitute a form of activity: in particular in modalities like that of the alms round, the monk actively offers himself as a recipient of gifts (p. 499). But this activity *precedes* the offering of the gift: it cannot therefore be seen as a reciprocation of it. The (supposed) need for a more specific, culturally appropriate definition of the term 'reciprocity' is also justified in a somewhat circular fashion: if we were to accept the idea that the Buddhist donation is an unreciprocated, 'free' gift, 'the monk would be indebted to the lay donor as the implacable rule of gift-giving has it' (pp. 513–514, no. 6). But the question of the creation of debt in the context of Buddhist gift interactions cannot be solved deductively by reference to an assumedly general sociological law: it has to be examined as a question of careful empirical enquiry. (For fairness's sake, it should be noted that Rozenberg is by far not the only scholar, in the wake of Mauss's writings, to write about the principle of reciprocity as if it were absolutely universal, as we can see for instance in Spiro's words, quoted above.) In the end, Rozenberg's terminological suggestion is original but ultimately strikes one as moving away from the aim of constructing a generally applicable analytical vocabulary, since the suggestion is to substantially modify a major category of the social sciences *for the particular case* of Buddhist gift-giving.

On the other hand, and maybe more importantly, Rozenberg raises a key question: how then are we to conceive, in a rigorous way, of reciprocity in the case of the Buddhist gift? Here, most authors have simply overlooked the problem of calling 'reciprocity' (or 'exchange', which, strictly speaking, presupposes reciprocity) what is in fact an impersonal, mechanical process of merit generation, devoid of an actual agent giving the merit. Thus, Juliane Schober (1989, p. 118) states:

> While a monk does not produce merit in the way an industrial worker produces a commodity, monastic acceptance of *dana*, nevertheless, sets into motion a cosmic causality which results, no matter how circuitously, in the generation of merit for the donor in return for his gift and generosity. (…) *Dana* for merit constitutes a quid-pro-quo and completes a reciprocal exchange between two parties.

I would suggest that what is 'circuitous' here is primarily the way in which this formulation attempts to maintain its position on 'reciprocal exchange', even if the situation obviously refuses to fit into the common understanding of these terms. The solution, I argue, is that in our descriptions of Buddhist gift-giving, we distance ourselves from the uncritically accepted idea of a necessary 'reciprocity'.

'Reciprocity' suggests a voluntary interaction between two agents (or larger entities capable of action), with transfers of goods or services in both directions. In the words of Sahlins, 'Reciprocity is a *between* relation, the action and reaction of two parties' (Sahlins 1972, p. 188). In the present case, a worthy recipient of the gift is needed, but no agent can be said to reciprocate the gift. Instead, we find the expectation that the act of gift-giving in itself will generate positive *returns*, typically in the form of merit, the increase of which will contribute to a favourable rebirth or future worldly benefits for the donor.[32] These returns are not seen as deriving from a recipient's reciprocation (to the best of my knowledge, the available ethnography fails to document this), but from the impersonal, mechanical effects of the act of giving itself. Thus, for instance, in the Newar case, '*dān* is viewed more as an asymmetrical exchange—of blessing for gift—or as an investment with delayed returns, than as a pure gift' (Gellner 1992, p. 122): the recipient can make a small gesture of reciprocation with blessings (the *anumodanā* verses, see below), but the process of *merit* generation (or karmic retribution) is impersonal and produces delayed as well as (at least temporally) uncertain returns.

Thus, we essentially have a two-sided, (pace Spiro) highly *asymmetrical* process: first an interpersonal gift, an act which then automatically triggers returns in the form of merit and karmic retribution. This latter process is influenced by the religious qualities of the recipient (in most Buddhist understandings, the holier the recipient, the more merit is generated), but this process of retribution is not carried out by an agent, and thus, there is no reciprocity in any strict sense of the word.[33] This does not mean that acts of Buddhist giving cannot contribute to creating or maintaining interpersonal *relationships*. Indeed, this is probably an important component of, for instance, Tibetan understandings of the religious gift.[34] This is however a somewhat different question, to which we shall return presently, but a thorough examination of which is beyond the scope of this paper. It has also often been pointed out that donations and sponsorship of rituals are publicly and visibly acknowledged in many Buddhist contexts and serve to heighten the donor's social status, prestige or even power[35]; however, this of course does not amount either to reciprocity *per se*.

Two other points, however, still need to be examined: minor instances of reciprocity in the form of blessings in some contexts and the approach consisting in taking a larger, more aggregate view of laity–*sangha* interactions.

MINOR ELEMENTS OF RECIPROCITY: ALMS-RECEIVING VERSES AND OTHER BLESSINGS

In striking contrast to the oft-mentioned, seemingly normative non-acknowledgement of the gift of alms by a monastic recipient, we also find instances in which alms or donations are acknowledged by the recitation of verses, the choice of which may depend on circumstances such as the nature of the goods donated. These verses, often described as 'blessings' in the literature, aim at encouraging liberality and often consist in wishes of happiness, well-being, protection from misfortune and the fulfilment of the donor's desires (see for instance Tambiah 1970, p. 208; Guruge & Bond 1998, p. 85; Gellner 1992, pp. 120–121, 185–188). The term most commonly used to describe them is *anumodanā* (P./S.), which literally refers to an expression of thanks or rejoicing.[36] In Newar contexts, one also finds the term *dānavākya* (S.), or 'gift-verses' (Gellner 1992, pp. 121, 185).[37]

The ethnographic literature I have reviewed does not always clearly indicate in which contexts the recitation of such alms-receiving verses is deemed appropriate, compulsory or not. In some contexts, Newar Buddhist tantric priests are expected to recite these verses, but younger priests in particular do not always know them (Gellner 1992, pp. 120–121, 187). Hiroko Kawanami observes that Burmese *thilashin* (female renunciants without proper monastic status) chant such verses in unison during their alms rounds, whereas monks remain silent in such circumstances (Kawanami 2013, p. 102; confirmed in personal communication with B. Brac de la Perrière). Among the Burmese monkhood, avoidance of interaction (be it through eye contact or through the recitation of blessings) with the alms givers seems to be particularly emphasized in the monastic-discipline-centred Shweigyin order (Schober 1989, p. 229). Thus, ethnographic evidence is rather scant and points as much to the absence as to the presence of this secondary feature.

In Tibetan Buddhist contexts, another form of reciprocation appears in some gift interactions with very particular representatives of the *sangha*, namely members of the religious elite, or lamas. One may visit a lama in order to make a donation for the lama's projects, or more simply with some money or food, in order to pay one's respects and renew one's relationship with the master, and derive some blessing from the encounter—something that is done commonly on the first days of the Tibetan New Year for instance. The lay donor often offers first a ceremonial scarf, *khata* [kha-btags], placing it in front of the lama or simply holding it out on his or her outstretched hands, as a sign of respect. Providing the interaction is at close range, a very common response is for the lama to give the scarf back, over the donor's head, placing it around his or her neck, an act that, coming from a lama, represents for the lay donor a blessing. The lama may also give (whether in person or through an assistant) blessing cords to the lay visitors and/or bless them with a touch of the hand on their heads. Paraphrasing Gellner, we have here an asymmetrical reciprocity, 'of blessing for gift', that seems particularly prevalent in interactions with the higher levels of the clergy—the Tibetan case would need here to be compared with examples from other parts of the Buddhist world.

On the whole though, the dominant thrust, as it emerges from the literature, remains that of a primarily non-reciprocal interaction in the standard Buddhist gift (alms or donations to common monks, etc.).

ANALYSIS AT AGGREGATE LEVELS: 'WEAK' VERSUS 'STRONG' RECIPROCITY

Finally, it may also be useful to leave aside momentarily the level of a single two-person interaction (or layperson–monastery interaction) and look at larger, more aggregate or systemic levels, as a complementary perspective on these acts and relations.

Let us consider for instance the series of interactions between one layperson and one monk; this series may include a number of instances of alms-giving by the lay donor, as well as occasional sermons (typically in more collective settings) given by the monk. In such a context, a number of authors are tempted to speak of 'reciprocity' or even 'exchange'. Taking our cue from Testart's discussion of different levels of use of the term 'exchange', ranging from the purely 'kinetic' (flows moving in both directions between two entities or areas) to the fullest (economic) sense of the term, implying intentionality, mutual obligation, mutual causality, etc. (Testart 2013, pp. 254–255), we may want to distinguish between a weaker sense and a stronger sense of 'reciprocity'. If a first gift is followed by a second gift that is offered intentionally as a return by the initial recipient to the initial donor, we may speak of reciprocity in the strong sense. In the case mentioned above of a monk giving a sermon to an audience that may include a former donor of alms, the gift of a sermon is generally not considered to be addressed specifically to that donor, nor to be addressed to

him *as the donor* of a certain previous instance of alms-giving: here, 'reciprocity' applies in a much weaker sense. As Michael Ames (writing in the Sri Lankan context) points out for instance, each individual moment in such a sequence is a 'complete, separate, and independent (…) act' (Ames 1966, p. 31). The presence or absence of the initial donor would probably not even make much difference to the sermon event; and, conversely, a lay alms donor may hear sermons pronounced by monks to whom he has never had the opportunity of offering alms. Collectively, however, the laity provides for the monks' needs, and the monks provide the laity with a number of religious services, whether remunerated or freely dispensed. In terms of the intentionality of the individual acts, however, the ethnographic record includes mentions of both occasional acknowledgement and recurrent dismissal of the notion of reciprocity. We may thus describe this overall pattern as *collective, diffuse, weak reciprocity*—but in no way as 'reciprocity' in the full, strong sense.

This interrelatedness at an aggregate level has already received scholarly attention. Ames has spoken of 'an integrated network', 'a network of prestations' that bind all actors in one 'Buddhist moral community' (p. 32). Most prominently, Ivan Strenski has suggested that this be called 'generalized exchange' (Strenski 1983), with reference to Lévi-Strauss's work on marriage exchange relations. Leaving aside Schober's critique that such a designation does not do justice to the fundamental hierarchy between monks and laity in Theravādin contexts (Schober 1989, p. 119),[38] we should note that such a formulation relies implicitly again on a (in Testart's sense) weaker, vaguer sense of 'exchange'—but then the very principle of Lévi-Straussian generalized exchange (with the relative uncertainty and unconnectedness of a return) fails to pass the test of Testart's legalistic definition of exchange in the strongest sense of the term (see for instance Testart 2007, pp. 221–222).

Whatever terms one chooses, the analytical benefit of looking beyond individual acts of donation is readily apparent from other angles as well. Even in contexts in which alms rounds are regularly practised, series of layperson–monk gift (and other) interactions are not always marked by a code of silence, anonymity and avoidance of communication: long-term, established relationships between an individual lay benefactor and an individual monastic recipient also emerge (see in particular Kawanami 2013, pp. 132 ff. for Burma). These relationships may also be instigated by a monk offering 'solicitary gifts to potential patrons', in order to trigger their interest and support (Bunnag 1973, p. 179).[39] Within such relationships, reciprocity in the strong sense of the term (albeit delayed, accidental and initially unintended) may also appear in cases where the lay patron falls upon hard times and receives help from his or her former monastic beneficiaries (Kawanami 2013, p. 151). Finally, it is of course essential to look beyond individual acts of gift-giving in order to understand processes of redistribution within the clergy (typically by Buddhist masters or virtuosi, but also by more ordinary members of the clergy), as well as the circulation of goods between individuals and institutions in monasticism—complex patterns that lie beyond the scope of this article (see for instance, for Thai data, Bunnag 1973, p. 68; for Burma, Kawanami 2013, p. 131; Rozenberg 2004, pp. 498 ff. for Burma; or, for Tibetan cases, Stein 1972, p. 148; Caple 2011, pp. 112 ff.; and Sihlé 2011).

Understanding more fully an act of donation to monks or monasteries may also require looking beyond laity–monk relations: consider for instance occasional large gifts made by successful businessmen, sometimes as a way of compensating for trade practices understood to be ethically problematic, such as trade in livestock in Tibetan contexts. Here is an important reminder that these interactions are often simultaneously part of several layers or different cycles of social logics.[40] The non-reciprocity of the gift and the absence of any obligation on the part of the monastic recipient are recurring themes in the textual and ethnographic sources, but, sociologically speaking, they are just one (important) component or layer of meaning within an inescapably more complex act. The different logics involved may also

draw on other, non-Buddhist ideological sources. Thus, as Borup observes for Japan, Buddhist principles are not the only ones underlying gift practices between Buddhist actors: in this context, they can also be combined with values of Confucian origin, such as gratitude, and receiving/repaying favours (*on/hō-on*) (Borup 2008, pp. 120–122).

Ultimately, the appropriateness of focusing either on discrete acts of giving or on aggregate or systemic levels is also a question of theoretical orientation. Mauss's particular interest in the juridical dimension and thus in contracts led him to emphasize dyadic situations characterized by reciprocity between a giver and a receiver. Postulating the primacy of the whole over the parts, Lévi-Strauss critiqued Mauss for failing to recognize the fundamental character of systemic, structural exchange (Lévi-Strauss 1950, p. xxxviii). Bourdieu's attention to actors' practices led him to point to important dimensions, such as the temporality within which such acts unfold, that are missing in totalizing, mechanistic accounts such as Lévi-Strauss's; from this perspective, reciprocity appears as much less certain (Bourdieu 1980, p. 167; see also Ohnuma 2005, p. 118, as well as Testart's own critique of Bourdieu's position: Testart 2007, pp. 223–226). What the present section achieves, I hope, is to show the important complementarity of various aggregate or systemic perspectives, even if the point of departure of the present discussion is rooted—perhaps rather too strongly for the anthropologist—in juridical norms (Testart's approach), combined with a comparative interest in the particular social universes of meanings, practices and institutions that inform these acts.

A brief review of the gendered dimension of Buddhist gifts (yet another way to expand beyond discrete acts of giving) may serve as a useful reminder that practices are not exclusively determined by norms but may also be strategically employed to contest and redefine norms—a perspective that has somewhat been missing in our account so far. As we can see from Kawanami's ethnography of Burmese *thilashin* female renunciants, the subaltern, not-quite-monastic status of the *thilashin* can be seen to induce a wider range of possible relational modes in interactions with the laity, including positions of obligation towards the lay donor. As opposed to family members' disinterested and non-obligating gifts, similar transfers of goods by total strangers may often create a sense of obligation to reciprocate through services among *thilashin* recipients (Kawanami 2013, pp. 134–136). Whether these transfers are ultimately 'gifts' (in Testart's sense) appears to be not only a question of juridical norm but also a matter of context and negotiated practices.

If this *thilashin* example shows that the religious status of the actors partly determines the nature of the relations of Buddhist giving, the converse is true as well: the ways in which individual *thilashin* or sometimes their convents manage to strategically shape the practices of collecting alms can be seen to influence the degree to which these *thilashin* are perceived as monastic agents (Carbonnel 2009, pp. 272–274). For the similar Thai *mae chii*, Monica Falk also argues that through the ritualized giving of alms to the *mae chii* (of certain convents), these '*mae chii*s have actualised the potential of their ordained position' (Falk 2007, p. 146). Alms-giving interactions *constitute* the recipients as 'fields of merit' and are experienced as implying heightened requirements in terms of proper religious practice (p. 152).

BEYOND THE GIFT: BRINGING RITUAL SERVICES AND THEIR REMUNERATION INTO THE ANALYSIS

Our examination of the question of reciprocity in Buddhist gift-giving has thus led us to a series of observations. Reciprocity in the 'strong', full sense, in which B presents A with a gift, intended as a return for another gift previously received from A, is on the whole largely lacking from the ethnographic record of Buddhist religious giving. The closest one comes to such

reciprocity is in a barely mentioned practice, in which reciprocity is only a minor component of the interaction, namely the reciting of alms-receiving verses by the monastic recipient. The recurring mentions, in the literature, of 'reciprocity' or 'exchange' with regard to the merit earned by the donor are arguably incorrect, because merit, as we have seen, is neither given nor produced by the recipient of the gift. What these formulations do perhaps point to, however, is the sense that, at a more aggregate level, the laity and the *sangha* find themselves in a complementary situation in which each party derives benefit: a pattern of collective, diffuse, 'weak' reciprocity. Larger, aggregate or systemic perspectives also carry with them the intellectual gain of reminding us of the multiple layers of meaning and practice that can be associated with discrete acts of Buddhist giving.

Where we do find a central component of ('strong') reciprocity is in a very rarely studied dimension of Buddhist lay–specialist interactions: the provision of religious services and their remuneration. We will focus much more on this dimension in the following section, but for the time being, let us note that bringing these interactions into the analysis makes considerable good sense when analysing what Strenski has called 'generalized exchange' or what we have termed collective patterns of 'weak' reciprocity: after all, donations by the laity and freely dispensed 'gifts of the *dharma*' by monks are but one part of the movements of goods and services between the laity and the *sangha*, and restricting the analysis to these gifts would be ultimately rather artificial. Thus, reformulating Strenski's comments, Joanna Cook observes that 'the ritual services provided by monastics and the *dāna* given by laity constitute a system of generalised exchange' (Cook 2008, p. 13). The notion of *remuneration* of services is conspicuously absent from this formulation—we will come back to this very shortly. However, one thing rings true here and possibly may reflect somewhat indigenous discourses. The monks' provision of ritual services is not simply part of an exchange against gifts or remuneration; they are also explicitly understood to be part of a larger system of (collective) mutual obligation: for monks, to respond to the laity's religious needs, and for the laity, to take charge of the *sangha*'s material (and recruitment) needs.

Thus, in Baragaon (also known as lower Mustang), a Tibetan society in the Nepalese Himalayas about which I will have more to say shortly, one hears that the performance of funerary rituals in the villages associated with a given monastery is a collective obligation, shared on a rotational basis by the monks of that monastery as a way of reciprocating the (partly compulsory) contribution of sons by these village families, or *houses*, to preserve the more salient, fundamental social unit of local society.[41] However, let us not fall prey (as anthropologists have all too often[42]) to a romantic overemphasis on reciprocity: what these Baragaon monastic actors also brush aside, in insisting on a pattern of reciprocation, is a pattern of domination. In this Tibetan society, although many non-monastic Buddhist ritual specialists (tantrists, or *ngakpa*) are present as well, the monastic clergy is entitled by customary law to a monopoly over the core funerary rituals, a situation which has afforded the monasteries considerable political clout in their dealings with the associated village communities.[43]

In a somewhat similar vein as these monastic discourses, but on a less collective level, we also find in parts of Baragaon long-term patronage links established through an early gift (provisions for at least one month) made by a given house to a young trainee tantric priest (*ngakpa*), as he undergoes his initial three-year-and-three-month retreat. '[I]t is this anticipatory tribute, it is said, that obliges [a priest] to rise from his bed on a freezing night and travel to the house of a patron where someone has fallen gravely ill, or has died' (Ramble 2008, p. 171). Again, we note that interactions taking place in small temporal units, such as a gift, or a ritual service and its remuneration, are not the only relevant units of analysis: multiple cycles of transfers and mutual obligation can inform the same act, and thus, larger systemic contexts of gifts and other transfers constitute essential dimensions too.

CONCLUDING ON (NON-)RECIPROCITY

The present discussion of (non-)reciprocity in the Buddhist gift has attempted to provide some clarity in an area marked by substantial terminological and conceptual vagueness. The resulting picture is more complex than what a number of previous formulations suggested. Beyond necessary nuances—such as the occasional presence of minor acts of reciprocity (alms-receiving verses) or the necessity to also take into account larger aggregates of interactions (a level at which one can argue for the presence of 'weak' reciprocity)—the dominant feature of acts of Buddhist religious giving remains their *non-reciprocal* character (in the 'strong' sense of the term).

This feature, found in various religious modalities of the gift, has given rise to some more general propositions. A number of scholars have suggested that we see the non-reciprocity of religious giving as indicative of the salvational dimension of these practices. Thus, Ames has argued that non-reciprocal religious transactions (giving alms for instance) are associated with the sacred, the salvational, with mental self-purification or merit or rebirth, while reciprocal religious transactions (as in ritual dealings with worldly deities and spirits) are associated with the profane, with consolation, with protection from external defilements or even with amoral actions (Ames 1966, pp. 37–38). In his influential work on the gift (examined in the context of ethicized salvational religions), Jonathan Parry has made reference to the main thrust of Ames's suggestions (associations with the salvational versus the profane) and has further elaborated on this theme (Parry 1986, pp. 462, 467–468). Ohnuma, referring to this line of argument, comments on the 'basic truism about the gift' that we (assumedly) have here: the idea that 'while the ordinary, reciprocated gift stands as a marker of the purely social, the unreciprocated gift often serves to signify the sacred, the salvational, or the soteriological' (Ohnuma 2005, pp. 106–107). I would just like to suggest that the empirical data complicates this neatly drawn picture. Thus, tantric initiations (cases of the 'gift of *dharma*', with often a strongly soteriological orientation), for instance in Tibetan contexts, are rarely performed without some form of offering for the master who confers the initiation. Indeed, the history of the spread of Buddhism to Tibet is replete with examples of masters agreeing to grant tantric initiations only when offered considerable amounts of gold and other goods. These prestations have a specific name, *wang-yön* [dbang-yon], or 'initiation honorarium'. This suggests that reciprocation can also appear in contexts strongly marked by a soteriological dimension.

Interesting reflections on non-reciprocity are also to be found in the literature on Hindu forms of ritual gifts called *dāna* (or Hindi *dān*). Thus, Parry suggests that the 'moral perils' of the Hindu *dāna* (in particular in terms of the donor's sins that may be transferred through it) might be related to the non-reciprocity of the *dāna* gift. Other forms of gifts that do not entail a similar risk are typically 'governed by an explicit ethic of reciprocity' (Parry 1989, p. 73). However, Parry also acknowledges that this principle is not an absolute general rule:

> The *bhiksha* (or *bhikh*) given in alms to an ascetic (or beggar), and the *chanda* donated towards the upkeep of a monastery, represent exceptions to this rule of reciprocity; but neither of them is said to contain the sins of the donor or place him in jeopardy if the recipient of his charity misuses his gift for sinful purposes (Parry 1989, p. 73).

Significantly for our discussion, these 'exceptions' of alms given to a mendicant or donations presented to a monastery are central modalities of the Buddhist gift. It may therefore come as no surprise that, in Maria Heim's observation, '[t]here is no inkling of the poison in the gift, however conceived, in either contemporary anthropological or premodern textual accounts of (…)

Buddhist practices of gift giving' (Heim 2004, p. 61). In this respect, we thus find significant differences between central Buddhist and (at least certain contemporary, north Indian[44]) Hindu modalities of religious giving. Despite the fact that both are known as *dāna* (and that Heim's study of medieval Hindu, Buddhist and Jain treatises on *dāna* seems to point to substantial commonalities, at least *in that literature*), we should exert caution in the extent to which we assume continuity or semantic overlap between these categories.

By way of a last comment, we have seen that the literature on Buddhist forms of giving is marked by substantial terminological vagueness with, for instance, recurring confusion between *reciprocity per se* and the expectation of *returns* (typically in terms of merit) for acts of giving. I would suggest that this vagueness is in part the result of an uncritical acceptance of the idea of the pervasiveness, if not universality, of a 'norm of reciprocity'—a 'norm' which has found powerful echoes in major works of the social sciences, from Mauss's *Essai sur le don* to Lévi-Strauss's *Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, to name just two. Annette Weiner's critique (see above and endnote 42), among others (e.g. MacCormack 1976, p. 101, cited in Yan 2005, p. 251), has probably not been sufficiently heard among scholars of Buddhist societies, but one may hope that this may be changing. In her study of medieval South Asian theories of the gift, Heim argues that we find there an 'emphasis on esteem as the ideal social bond', a disposition 'predicated on human difference and asymmetry' (Heim 2004, p. 54). Esteem or reverence is 'a virtue that resists a logic of exchange', and these Indic cultural constructions regarding the gift 'should temper some of the stronger claims voiced by anthropologists about the logic of the gift, the universality of reciprocity, and the axiomatic superiority of the donor' (p. 144). Finally, Testart's *Critique du don* and its analysis of the very diverse (reciprocal or non-reciprocal) modalities of the gift provides us with a highly serviceable basis (or at least a major contribution towards such a basis) for an examination of the gift that is free of the shackles of an assumedly general 'norm of reciprocity'. Instituted reciprocity is found in Buddhism, but simply not in any major way in the gift; for this, we need to turn to transactions based on mutual obligation: religious services and their remuneration.

Is the Gift Always Central to Buddhist Laity–Sangha Relations?

It is time now to critically re-examine a long-held common assumption about the 'centrality' of the gift in laity–*sangha* (or lay–monastic) relations in Buddhist contexts.[45] This will be done by focusing on a category of interaction that has been only rarely recognized—and sometimes even explicitly denied—in Western scholarly literature: the remuneration offered to members of the Buddhist clergy for the religious services they provide. After some preliminary observations on some conceptual and theoretical obstacles that have probably hindered the recognition and a proper engagement with this category, I will move on to a comparison of selected Theravāda and Tibetan contexts. In order to engage in a valid comparative discussion, however, a brief remark on terminology is in order. The formulations 'lay–monastic relations' and 'laity–*sangha* relations' are probably equivalent in most Buddhist contexts; however, they are not in Tibetan areas, where we find a 'twofold *sangha*', *gendün de nyi* [dge-'dun sde gnyis], consisting of a monastic clergy and a non-monastic clergy of tantrists—householder religious specialists of tantric rituals, most commonly called *ngakpa*.[46] Both categories may receive merit-generating donations (although these practices involve more commonly monastics), and both may provide religious services for which the laity in return offers a remuneration.

AN ELUSIVE, PROBLEMATIC CATEGORY: REMUNERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Here, the scholarly literature is much more limited than with regard to the paradigmatic Buddhist gift. The elusiveness of the object is probably related to its problematic, 'misrecognized'

character in Buddhist societies—a misrecognition probably shared in some scholarly works that echo too closely emic perspectives and emphases. The empirical situation in Theravāda contexts seems to be characterized by a dominant emphasis on the Buddhist gift (in the form of alms or other donations), even if actual practices do not always correspond, analytically, to gifts properly speaking, as summarized by Falk:

> *Dana* must be given without obligation or duty, in order to differentiate it from exchange. (…) In practice, (…) this model appears to be readily displaced by a simple pattern of reciprocity whereby offerings are given to monks *in reward for* their participation in various merit-making ritual occasions and other services (Falk 2007, p. 142, emphasis added).

We find a description of the presentation of such 'offerings' to monks in return for their services in Bunnag's ethnography of lay–monastic relations in Ayutthaya:

> At the close of all [merit-making] ceremonies the lay host (…) presents each monk who has taken part with a traditional offering which typically consists of three incense sticks, two candles and a lotus bud, items placed before images of the Buddha during the act of worship; packets of tea and sugar, of washing powder and cigarettes, and other personal articles of everyday use as well as a small sum of money (…). These presentations (…) become the personal property (…) of the recipient (Bunnag 1973, p. 63).

Note here the cautious use of the term 'presentations': the question of whether this is closer to a payment or to a gift is left aside. In the same study, Bunnag also uses a formulation such as 'sums of money received *in return for* their performance of merit-making rituals' (p. 109, emphasis added).

This description may be contrasted with a case taken from my fieldwork in Baragaon, in the Nepalese Himalayan borderlands of the Tibetan world. Here, the presentation of the remuneration is endowed with a certain formality: at the end of the ritual, money is brought to the officiant (whether a monk or a tantrist) on a small plate containing grain. The officiant takes a handful of grain and throws some across the room as he recites a final prayer; at the end, only a few grains remain in his hand, and he counts them carefully: an odd number is a good omen (for instance in terms of the ritual's efficacy). The officiant may occasionally refuse to take the money at first when taking his leave; the lay patrons urge him to accept it, for instance arguing that there will be less merit if he does not (note here how one falls back on the more highly valued register of merit, for a ritual concerned primarily with this-worldly efficacy). Invariably, the officiant finally complies and takes at least part of the amount.

We see in both the Ayutthaya and the Baragaon cases that the presentation of goods to the ritual officiants is more than just a purely economic return for a (religious) service: in the Thai case, items with religious connotations are first 'placed before images of the Buddha'; in the Baragaon case, the procedure takes on a divinatory dimension; and in both cases, the goods presented seem to be somehow associated with concerns related to the ritual's general efficacy. However, on the whole, the seemingly shared elementary pattern does indeed seem to be that of remuneration.

As already mentioned above, the notion of remuneration or exchange appears to be strongly avoided in Theravāda contexts, and terms like *dāna* or its vernacular equivalents are preferred to designate the presentation of goods in return for religious services. Thus, according to Tambiah, in a Thai-Lao village context, the 'reward [for ritual services] is very definitely conceived as a gift' (Tambiah 1970, p. 348). As noted above, Bourdieu in particular provides important suggestions as to how we are to understand this denial of exchange.

In the case of Japanese Zen, what Borup describes analytically as 'payments' for religious services is conveyed in indigenous discourse through the notion of 'donations' (Borup 2008, pp. 41, 270). The terminological issue has partly economic determinations: 'despite their lexical and cultural meanings as "donations" (布施 *fuse*, Skt. *dana*)' (p. 42), presentations of money made on the occasion of ritual services typically follow a fixed price. One reason for calling such monetary transactions 'donations is really a matter of (legitimate) financial speculation' (p. 42): 'donations (as opposed to payments) are tax-exempted' (p. 173). But Borup also calls upon Bourdieu to fully understand what is at play here: the 'set prices' (for instance when monks are invited to recite sutras in front of the domestic altar) 'are termed and regarded as donations in order to hide [*Bourdieu's "misrecognition*"] and "wrap" [in euphemization] the ritual and social game going on beneath the formal and superficial practice' (pp. 172–173).

In South Asian Buddhist contexts, however, remuneration for religious services has not been an unthought category: in particular, one finds the term *dakṣiṇā* (S.) or *dakkhiṇā* (P.), which can be glossed as 'fee' or 'honorarium'.[47] It would seem, however, that this category has received much less Buddhist doctrinal elaboration than the religious gift. Heim observes that the notion of *dakṣiṇā* 'was not particularly important for medieval *dāna* theory' (Heim 2004, p. 119) and mentions it only in relation to Dharmaśāstra literature: not one word is said in her study about its possible uses in Buddhist or Jain contexts.

Regarding the Buddhist *dāna* versus *dakṣiṇā* pair, we find more in the Newar ethnography. The family priest of Newar Buddhists receives 'mainly *dakṣiṇā*, on occasion *dān*' (Gellner 1992, p. 140). The '*dakṣiṇā* (stipend) to one's family priest, (…) like all prestations to other ritual specialists which are not specifically *dān*', is 'considered to be a payment in return for ritual services' (p. 123). Thus, here, the 'reward' for ritual services is clearly *not* 'conceived as a gift'.

A similar perspective is also very explicitly present in some institutionalized forms of payment for ritual services in Tibetan contexts, such as in the payment for the protection of the crops from hail by a tantrist—typically, a fixed annual quantity of grain collected after the harvest by the village houses, called 'hail tax', *sertrel* [ser-khral], or sometimes 'hail salary/fee', *serla* [ser-gla] (Bell 1928, pp. 43–44; Carrasco 1959, p. 49; Jest 1975, p. 350; Gombo 1983, p. 50).

But the contrast observed between explicit recognition and denial or misrecognition of the exchange nature of the transaction is not simply a matter of different 'vehicles' of Buddhism or national traditions: distinctions similar to that also probably operate within given national traditions. In the Tibetan context, Buddhist ritual specialists of very modest religious and social status, such as the *serkyim trawa* [ser-khyim grwa-pa] of Dingri described by Aziz, are paid and fed like simple artisans, as their patrons view their services 'largely as a technical skill' (Aziz 1978, p. 91). However, the modalities of the presentation of goods and money change significantly with the status of the provider of religious services: when it is a master (lama), extreme deference is shown, and the notion of remuneration (*yön*, or even the honorific *kuyön*) is much less likely to be heard.

ILL-FITTING MODELS

Besides the analytical challenge of going beyond the rather widespread emic misrecognition of remuneration for religious services, another reason for the relative failure of anthropologists (or other scholars, for that matter) to account properly for these interactions is probably the influence of ill-adapted theoretical models. Thus, in Ames's consciously Durkheimian analysis (Ames 1966, p. 37) of Sri Lankan religious acts, non-reciprocal modes of religious transactions (giving alms, preaching sermons, etc.) combine to form 'an integrated network' that binds all actors into one 'Buddhist moral community'; these transactions are meritorious, whereas non-reciprocal ones (bribing supernaturals through offerings) fall within the domain of 'magic'

(pp. 32–33). For reasons possibly linked to the theoretical framework employed, Ames's analysis omits to take into account the more reciprocal modes of laity–monk interactions, where monks (the core representatives of the 'religious' domain) are involved in more 'magical' activities: the ritual services provided by monks, such as chanting *paritta*, are not mentioned once.

Ritual services provided by the monastic clergy are not entirely overlooked but are given relatively short shrift in Strenski's influential examination of patterns of lay–monastic relations. '[T]he *sangha* provides preachers, teachers, scholars and, in certain cases, healers' (Strenski 1983, p. 465): note the diminutive place accorded to the (even in Theravāda Buddhism) wide spectrum of ritual services—funerary, prophylactic, protective and, yes, sometimes therapeutic, or divinatory, etc.—performed by monks. Strenski's account goes on: 'however, (…) none of these services is, strictly speaking, reciprocated cleanly to the laity for gifts given, but is an obligation, to some extent, freely assumed' by the members of the monastic order (p. 465). This vision of sequences consisting of gifts from lay donors *followed by* 'free' services provided by the *sangha* as well as Strenski's denial of reciprocity in these contexts are echoed by Ohnuma (2005, p. 107). These comments, however, completely bypass and leave unthought the presentation of goods (remuneration) *following* ritual services performed by monks, in a spirit that may well include some sense of reciprocity. Taking his cue from Lévi-Strauss's models of 'restricted' and especially 'generalized exchange', Strenski then examines the lay–monastic relations from the latter angle in particular (Strenski 1983, pp. 473 ff.). This might have been a promising comprehensive approach; however, Strenski's choice of focus is strongly inspired by the emically and scholarly more salient category of merit. Furthermore, his attention is drawn to the larger civilizational ideals rather than to the actual, seemingly 'crasser' dealings on the ground (p. 474). As a result, rituals aimed at more worldly ends and the transactions they occasion are never really examined.

Schober's model of primary versus secondary exchange will only be mentioned briefly here. It highlights important differences between lay–monastic transfers of goods, on the one hand, and (in its main modality) the distribution of food by a lay donor to his or her close social environment on the occasion of a merit-making ritual, on the other hand: the former do not create obligation, while the latter does (Schober 1989, pp. 102–107). It does not, however, enable one to distinguish between the different kinds of transfers between the laity and the *sangha*, all of which are understood (as commented on already above) as 'exchanges'.

Perhaps one of the more productive (albeit unrecognized) points of departure is to be found in Tambiah's classic monograph of the Thai-Lao religious field, in which he offers an analysis of ritual syntax across genres of ritual ('the grammar of ritual transactions', Tambiah 1970, p. 346). Of particular interest to our discussion are the elements he provides regarding the temporal/syntactic order of two core sequences: *gift* → *blessings* and *ritual service* → *remuneration*.

> The [Kathin] festival demonstrates well the ideology of voluntary gift giving for purposes of merit-making. Gifts are made first and monks reciprocate later. The ideal Buddhist transaction occurs: the presentation of gifts as a voluntary act and in proper spiritual state precedes the transfer of grace by monks [*i.e. they chant* paritta*, give blessings and a sermon*]. In the mortuary and house-blessing rites, however, we see that the monks first chant and perform their ritual service and are rewarded afterwards with food and gifts. Yet this reward is very definitely conceived as a gift, though the sequences are suggestive of payment for specialist service (pp. 347–348).

For Tambiah, this is 'the Buddhist transactional idiom' (p. 348). Tambiah's concern is to contrast the different 'complexes' (Buddhism, the spirit cult, etc.) of the religious field, viewed as a

structural system; although his analysis of distinctions within the domain of Buddhist religious activity starts in an insightful way, he ultimately falls back on the singular ('the […] idiom'), as Buddhism is designed as one position within the system. Tambiah thus fails to comment more precisely on the key difference between the *two idioms*: the presentations made at the Kathin festival and at domestic rituals. The festival is centred on *gift-giving* (monastic robes, money and much more are donated lavishly to the monks), whereas mortuary or house-blessing rites are ritual services solicited by householders, a situation in which (often misrecognized, or at least euphemized) *normative reciprocation* prevails: something of the order of remuneration. Even if, in this latter case, the 'reward is very definitely conceived as a gift', the ritual syntax does suggest very strongly that this is not the same kind of transfer.[48]

It is striking that in other, for instance Tibetan, contexts we find very similar temporal/syntactic orderings of both kinds. Occasionally, in Baragaon, and more commonly in contexts with large monastic institutions, we also find yet a third variant: a patron requests that a certain ritual service be performed during a religious assembly (rather than at his or her home) and leaves money in the hands of a ritual functionary; the service takes place later, and the money is for instance distributed, or a monastic tea paid by the money is served, on that occasion. This is however not very different from non-religious specialist services that are paid in advance. I would hypothesize that the seeming recurrence (to be confirmed) of these temporal/syntactic sequences points to meaningful and enduring relational structures of the Buddhist world.

CENTRALITY OF THE GIFT IN MAINSTREAM THERAVĀDA CONTEXTS

Here, 'Theravāda' is shorthand for traditional, primarily lowland Thai and Burmese Buddhist forms, as these are the ones for which data is most abundant and on which the comparison shall be based.

The scholarship on these forms of Buddhism has repeatedly emphasized the centrality of the Buddhist gift in lay religiosity and in lay–monastic relations. In Spiro's estimation, in the 1960s, villagers in Upper Burma spent between 25 per cent and 40 per cent of their income on *dāna* (Spiro 1970, pp. 456–459).[49] As for 'the regular expense entailed by the daily feeding of monks (…) and their normal upkeep[, this] alone consumes about 10 per cent of the income of the average family in Yeigyi', the village which constituted Spiro's main fieldwork site (Spiro 1970, p. 458). The centrality of the religious gift is not to be seen only in quantitative, economic terms: as we have already mentioned, Buddhist modes of donation constitute an extremely valued type of lay religious activity and rank (with actual entry into the monkhood) as the highest means of acquiring merit (Tambiah 1970, pp. 68–70; Spiro 1970, p. 103).[50] The power of this instituted mode of relationship is such that, in Burma, monks have turned the refusal of alms ('turning around the alms-bowl') into a mode of socio-political protest (Jordt 2008; Kovan 2012).

Without aiming to question the overall thrust of this assessment, I would insist that we do add some nuance to the picture. In interpreting the figures above, we need to distinguish between donations aimed at acquiring merit and presentations following ritual services, wrapped in ritual forms and terminology that evoke the realm of the Buddhist gift, yet analytically comparable to remunerations. What is the relative weight of these somewhat different transfers in Spiro's and other scholars' figures on '*dāna*'? Unfortunately, more precise figures are elusive, probably partly due to the lack of distinction in vernacular categories: presentations that are made to monks at rituals aimed at worldly benefits are referred to using the same terms as for donations (e.g. *dāna*, or *ahlu* in colloquial Burmese); furthermore, these rituals themselves are commonly designated, in Thai for instance, by the general expression for *merit*-making ceremonies, *ngan tham bun*

(Bunnag 1973, p. 49), even if their primary aim is much more worldly and immediately pragmatic.[51]

This large category of ceremonies (some of which are centrally about acquiring merit, but many others not) constitutes, in Bunnag's terms, 'the chief basis for [lay–monastic] interaction' (Bunnag 1973, p. 49; see also Schober 1989, p. 139).[52] Compared to the daily alms rounds, which are not practised by all monks, Bunnag remarks:

> most *bhikkhus* [monks] in Ayutthaya felt that the performance of these rituals on the layman's behalf was central to their role, whilst for the householder the act of financing a *ngan tham bun* (merit-making ceremony) has important implications for both his spiritual and his social status. The most crucial, and hence the most meritorious of all the *ngan tham bun*, are generally felt to be the ordination ceremony (…) and the ceremony of cremation (…). Buddhist monks are however usually invited to recite *parittas* or merit-making chants on other occasions, such as prior to the actual wedding ceremony (…), or to celebrate the entry into a new house and the opening of a shop or school; a rare form of *ngan tham bun* is performed at a time of grievous illness, within the family or of epidemic proportions (Bunnag 1973, p. 62, citing Wells 1960, p. 207).[53]

Of course, beyond the *ngan tham bun* category, we find yet further, very worldly (and often contested) ritual services provided by certain monks, such as divination, healing, creating protective objects, selling lucky lottery tickets and so forth (see here, for instance, McDaniel 2011 or Pattana Kitiarsa 2012). In Burma, the diverse range of esoteric *weikza* cults, with their focus on exorcism, healing, protection, alchemy, etc., would need to be added to the picture as well (see, for instance, the recent special issue on this topic in the *Journal for Burma Studies* 2012). And any in-depth discussion would of course have to distinguish more carefully between rural and urban contexts, social classes, time periods and so forth and to acknowledge the great diversity of configurations in contemporary Theravāda Buddhism. The preceding remarks may serve simply to remind us that a simple, unqualified emphasis on the 'centrality of the gift' in mainstream Theravāda contexts may fail to account for another important dimension in local religious lives, one more akin perhaps to what Hayashi has termed the 'Buddhism of power' in contrast to the 'Buddhism of rebirth' (Hayashi 2003, pp. 206–212): an orientation more focused on ritual power and its efficacy in the here and now. But let us now turn to a context in which this orientation becomes strikingly dominant.

THE BUDDHIST GIFT IN A MINOR MODE:A TIBETAN CASE

Baragaon, or Lower Mustang, is a small, predominantly Tibetan-speaking society in the Nepalese Himalayas. It lies on the Tibetan periphery, but it has been shaped by 900 years of at least intermittent religious contact with Tibetan religious centres and lineages and has experienced centuries of (at times perhaps weak) Tibetan Buddhist institutional presence. Its religious demographics are rather typical of Tibetan areas. The Muktināth valley (almost 1500 inhabitants), the core of Baragaon's more densely populated southern part, has five monastic communities and one village-and-temple community of tantrists for only six villages, amounting to a total religious population of roughly 10 per cent of the valley's population.[54] Much of what will be described here, in terms of dominant religious orientations, would apply to other culturally Tibetan Himalayan societies, especially to those—in effect, the majority of them—that lack the demographic concentrations and sizeable economic surplus enabling them to support large monastic centres.[55] It may also apply to a large extent to economically comparable regions within Tibet (or even within the larger Central Asian area in which Tibetan Buddhism has spread), regions that lie at some distance

from large monastic institutions and lack the presence of outstanding or highly revered master figures, but the great paucity of data available for such regions precludes any larger discussion.

In a nutshell, economic relations between the laity and Buddhist religious specialists *qua* religious specialists are marked here by the predominance of ritual services and their remuneration, and the relatively minor importance of forms of Buddhist gift-giving.[56] In Baragaon, as in many other Tibetan contexts, monks, and even more so nuns, are only minimally (if at all) supported by their institutions.[57] Their families provide only modest annual (unreciprocated) support to their monastic kin, and even less to other monastics. Alms are collected only once a year in the villages associated with a given monastery (daily alms rounds are virtually unknown in Tibet[58]). The grain donated on that occasion, along with what is harvested in the few fields that have been offered by individual houses to the monastery, covers only a small fraction of the needs. Large collective ceremonies focusing on the laity's donations to the clergy, like the Thai Kathin, or the Newar Pañca Dāna (see Toffin in this issue), are absent from Tibetan Buddhism. Whereas Spiro observed that the average Burmese monk's 'standard of living (…) [was] surpassed only by that of the wealthiest laymen' (Spiro 1970, p. 310), in many traditional Tibetan societies, an average monk enjoyed a life free of the constant toil of manual labour yet rather modest in economic terms; and a number of them lived in impoverished conditions. This was particularly the case among the scholar-monks at monastic centres of learning, who avoided engaging in what most of their brethren did to make ends meet, namely provide ritual services to the laity (Dreyfus 2003, pp. 65–66, 351 n. 28; Goldstein 1998, p. 32).

For the Baragaon laity, alms-giving and donations (such as forms of direct support to monks and nuns as mentioned above) or other modalities of religious gifts are, on the whole, rather rare occurrences and very rarely substantial in economic terms. The most notable exception to this is gift-giving in funerary contexts. On such an occasion, the family of the deceased typically makes rather substantial offerings of cash or valuables, called *ngoten* [bsngo-rten] or 'support for the dedication [of merit]', to a master (or even several masters) of the highest possible religious status in order to produce merit on behalf of the deceased. The *gewa* [dge-ba, lit. 'merit'] or large-scale ritual activity on the final day of the 7-week-long funerary sequence is also an occasion—for the family, but also for their kin and co-villagers—for extensive donations among all categories of religious specialists officiating on that day (monks, nuns and tantrists) and even among certain status categories among villagers, such as male or female householders. The other main occasions for meritorious giving are occasional collections of donations (and sometimes contributions of labour) for religious projects such as the construction or repair of religious buildings or structures (e.g. prayer-wheels). Some houses also provide food now and then for the occasional hermit living in the vicinity of the village. Pious women make monthly visits to shrines and monasteries, but the main offerings they bring with them are butter or oil for the 'offering lamps', *chöme* [mchod-me]: meritorious acts that do not contribute to the material support of the clergy.

Globally, the forms of Buddhist giving described above are far from sufficient to cover the monastics' basic needs. For that, an additional, indirect means is essential: the sponsoring of communal and household ritual services. In Tibetan contexts, these are expansive categories indeed, which cover producing merit and blessings at key points in the agricultural cycle, driving out evil influences on both an annual basis and an *ad hoc* basis, propitiating a variety of protective and tutelary deities, rituals for prosperity, success, health and long-life and so forth. The vital importance of ritual services for a monk's livelihood clearly emerges from figures such as those provided by Tsarong Paljor for a monastery in Ladakh, a former kingdom at the far western end of the Tibetan-speaking world: in his study, most monks devoted roughly 55 to 75 per cent of their days, over a period of 1 year, to the performance of

household rituals (Tsarong 1987, pp. 60, 80). These figures are probably not exceptional; but they cannot be generalized to the entire range of monastic institutions across Tibetan societies. For instance, large centres of learning may comprise sizeable cohorts of ritually much less active scholar-monks, whereas smaller local monasteries are more geared towards the provision of ritual services (Dreyfus 2003, p. 44). Monasteries of the post-Mao era in Chinese-controlled areas of Tibet have also seen their economies undergo significant changes (Dagyab 2009; Caple 2011).

In bringing this brief examination of a Tibetan case to a close, it should again be emphasized that the minor importance of forms of the Buddhist gift, as compared to interactions centring on ritual services and their remuneration, is particularly striking in a society like Baragaon but that the patterns are probably more complex in situations of higher demographic and economic concentrations, where larger, important monastic institutions are likely to be found. Thus, high-ranking social elites often devote considerable amounts of wealth to donations to the monastic clergy and institutions (see for instance Yuthok 1990, p. 166). These donations may largely be absorbed by religious elites, but the latter often play an important role in the redistribution of that wealth. However, these particular socio-economic contexts bear the mark, just like all other Tibetan communities, of one crucial feature of Tibetan tantric Buddhism: the centrality of ritual, the availability of strong ritual power and the existence of an extremely wide spectrum of applications of this tantric ritual power, ranging from lofty soteriological goals to the enhancement of worldly life and to the control and even destruction of all kinds of forces and (non-human and human) beings. Thus, the provision of ritual services and their remuneration remain a key feature of Tibetan lay–specialist relations, far beyond simply societies similar to Baragaon. Demographic and economic determinisms are partial at best.

Beyond purely religious characteristics, such as the tantric versus non-tantric nature of the different schools of Buddhism, the socio-religious types of the Buddhist specialists involved also constitute an important factor. While monastic specialists and institutions need to be supported economically, non-monastic householder specialists are able, to a large extent, to support themselves through non-religious activities, such as agriculture and trade. This is, however, only partly a question of economics: moral and religious qualities are central here too. The moral purity of celibate, vow-abiding monastics makes them pre-eminently qualified recipients of gifts that are understood to generate merit, whereas tantric training (and to some extent any form of advanced religious virtuosity) make tantrists (and virtuosi) pre-eminently qualified providers of powerful ritual services and life-enhancing blessings (Sihlé 2013).[59]

An examination of the more complex Tibetan patterns alluded to above is beyond the scope of this paper; but we have achieved a first goal in identifying an important pattern of lay–monastic relations that diverges to a substantial extent from the assumedly general centrality of the Buddhist gift. In the previous subsection, we were careful to note that even in mainstream Theravāda contexts, we should not neglect a component of 'Buddhism of power' with worldly efficacy in lay–monastic relations; in Tibetan, tantrically empowered contexts, this component often occupies centre stage.

Concluding Words: The Merits of Comparison

This essay has made several key arguments. With regard to core analytical categories, I have argued that Testart's (and others') critical examination and refining of the Maussian terminology of 'gift' and 'gift exchange' should be taken very seriously. Although some caveats have been offered (critical work which no doubt needs to be further pursued), the distinctions proposed by Testart between 'gift' and 'exchange', between market and non-market modalities of the latter and between a variety of forms of gifts on a spectrum ranging from

inherent absence of expectation of reciprocity ('donations') to pronounced self-interest ('offerings' made in a spirit of *do ut des*) provide us with a highly serviceable set of tools to examine forms of Buddhist giving and transacting. What has become known as the 'Maussian gift' as well as the distinction between 'gift' and 'commodity' (as developed for instance in Gregory's work) need not be abandoned but leave us strikingly ill-equipped to understand major forms of Buddhist giving.

A second set of arguments concerns the category of reciprocity (in the context of Buddhist giving), concerning which I have made the case that here also there is a need of conceptual clarification. A number of positions of, or formulations by, previous scholars in the field have been critically reviewed. The recurring vagueness of the uses of terms like 'reciprocity' or 'exchange' when discussing Buddhist forms of gifts, such as alms or other donations, may well be due in part to an (among others, Maussian) intellectual heritage in which reciprocity has been uncritically accepted as universal. This tendency has already been strongly critiqued in other quarters within anthropology (with Weiner's work for instance), and quite convincingly too in Heim's historical, textual study of medieval Indic Buddhist gift theories. However, these insights are still to fully make their way into the study of Buddhist economics. It is not that reciprocity is absent in Buddhist gift-giving, but its occasional (and, on the whole, minor) presence in actual lay–clergy gift interactions needs to be more rigorously and precisely identified in the data at hand. At more aggregate levels of interactions and/or actors, I have argued that distinguishing between 'strong' and 'weak' forms of reciprocity may also introduce more clarity.

A final set of arguments bears on the assumed centrality of the gift in Buddhist lay–clergy relations and (at least lay) Buddhist religiosity. A first key critical observation, I submit, has consisted in pointing to a virtual blind spot in academic writings on Buddhist lay–clergy interactions: the category of *remuneration* for religious services has barely been touched upon in this literature, in particular in studies of Theravāda contexts—and has certainly until now not been drawn into any larger analytical discussion. One reason may well be that in many (in particular Theravāda) Buddhist contexts, the provision of a commensurate reward for religious services received tends to be presented, euphemistically or by misrecognition, as a gift (e.g. *dāna*). Yet, it is important to analyse precisely these emic emphases or conflations. As this essay has argued, the lack of scholarly attention to the remuneration of religious services—which, as a category, has remained largely invisible, in the shadow of the gift, as it were—has also stemmed, in a number of cases, from the application of a variety of ill-fitting (Durkheimian, structuralist or other) models. Drawing this category into the analysis, however, enables us to question and refine received understandings of Buddhist religiosity. Finally, a comparative examination of, on the one hand, mainstream Theravāda patterns and, on the other, Tibetan patterns that are most visible in contexts devoid of high Buddhist clergy or major religious centres, but important throughout Tibetan Buddhist areas, provides us with a significantly qualified, sharper perception of the place of the gift in Buddhist lay–clergy relations. The doctrinally (and, to some extent, academically—a convergence which perhaps should not come completely as a surprise) devalued component of a 'Buddhism of power' attuned to worldly needs, and to quite some extent based on relations of service and remuneration, is an important, and in Tibetan contexts often quite central, part of actual Buddhists' lives.

Reflecting on the trajectory that has led from a 'Comparative anthropology of Buddhism' workshop on the gift and its variants[60] to the fruits presented in this and the other contributions to this special issue, I would like to offer a brief concluding methodological comment.[61] If our initial *comparative* ambition has borne fruits of any substance, this is probably in some measure due to the intellectual back-and-forth between a comparative approach heedful of ethnographic specificities and logics on the one hand and

conceptualization and more theoretical reflection on the other. Finally, if the present essay has achieved, however modestly, anything of more general value, I hope that, beyond its contribution to the development and critique of certain anthropological categories and claims, it has also reminded us of some of the merits of comparison—something which may have been, more often than not, forgotten.

Short Biography

Nicolas Sihlé a social anthropologist by training (PhD Paris-Nanterre University 2001), Nicolas Sihlé first taught at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Virginia (USA) from 2002 to 2010, before joining the Centre for Himalayan Studies, a research unit of the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. He is a specialist of Tibetan society and religion, and of Buddhist societies more generally. His work focuses in particular on religious specialists called tantrists (*ngakpa*), key figures of the non-monastic side of Tibetan Buddhism, generally characterized by their practice of tantric rituals involving occasionally strong ritual power and even ritual violence, as in violent exorcisms. His first book, based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in culturally Tibetan areas in the north of Nepal, appeared in 2013, under the title *Rituels bouddhiques de pouvoir et de violence : La figure du tantriste tibétain* [Buddhist rituals of power and violence: The figure of the Tibetan tantrist]. His current research projects focus on the large communities of Buddhist and Bönpo tantrists of the Repkong district in northeast Tibet (Chinese Qinghai province), where he has been conducting fieldwork since 2003, and on the coordination of a network of scholars engaging in the comparative anthropology of Buddhism. He is also the editor of the collective research blog *The Himalayas and Beyond* (http://himalayas.hypotheses.org/).

Notes

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[1] I have a debt of gratitude to the many Tibetan and Mustang friends and acquaintances, too numerous and, for some of them, too exposed to be mentioned here, who made this work possible. My thanks go also to Patrice Ladwig, Jane Caple, Bernadette Sellers and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on drafts of this paper, as well as to Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière and Fernand Meyer for stimulating discussions.

[2] The following abbreviations are used: P. = Pāli, S. = Sanskrit.

[3] For my purposes here, a fully coherent examination of doctrinal perspectives would necessarily imply an assessment of their actual presence (in local discourses and symbolism, in actual text-reading practices…) in the ethnographic contexts studied here, which is far beyond the scope of this paper. Without this component, one must of course remain extremely cautious with regard to the importance one attributes to theological statements, from which actual local practices, ideas or emphases may diverge significantly, as for instance Gregory Schopen's work has shown in an exemplary way (I am thinking in particular of Schopen 1991)—including for the very topic of the gift (e.g. Schopen 1997 [1985], Schopen 1992).

[4] See in particular, following earlier comments by Thomas Trautmann (1981, p. 279), the important work of Parry (1986) and Heim (2004) (based on an earlier doctoral dissertation, Hibbets 1999), but also Michaels (1997), Laidlaw (2000), Rozenberg (2004), Ohnuma (2005), and Cook (2008).

[5] Thus, the term *dāna*, which is extensively used in the ethnographic writings on Burma, is not commonly used by lay Buddhists, although they do know it (B. Brac de la Perrière, personal communication).

[6] The *sangha* (P. *saṅgha*, S. *saṃgha*) is literally the Buddhist 'community'. Understandings of whom this term referred to have varied, but it has primarily designated the Buddhist monastic order or its subgroupings (Sparham 2004). We will see that in Tibetan contexts, characterized by the existence of both a monastic and a non-monastic clergy, the equivalent Tibetan term, *gendün* [dge-'dun], can extend beyond the monastic order.

[7] See Testart (1997), Testart (1998), Weber (2000) and most recently Testart (2007) and Weber (2007).

[8] To be more precise, services constitute a dimension that appears somewhat inconsistently in Testart and F. Weber's writings (although they do appear in Mauss's work: see Carrier 1991, p. 122). They are generally omitted in these authors' definitions, which focus only on goods (in a broad sense, including money); they are present, however, in some of the relevant discussions, as if they should be understood as being covered by the definitions. One difficulty here lies, of course, in the complex definitional issues surrounding the term 'services' itself.

[9] For the purpose of the present discussion, in the absence (to my knowledge) of any more satisfactory approach, I will adopt Testart's paradigm, with its primary emphasis on juridical distinctions between the key terms. See however Steiner (2009) for some useful critical remarks, including the suggestion that one element lacking here may be the perspective of the social or cultural 'biography of things' (for instance, Kopytoff 1986)—a relevant perspective if one thinks for example that donations of ill-gotten wealth are invalid in orthodox Buddhist thought (Schober 1989, p. 102).

[10] One might also note that some donation-giving practices (see for instance the relations between Chinese donors and Tibetan masters or monks mentioned by Caple and Campergue in this issue) appear to have a distinctly instrumental thrust, if not an outright market-exchange character, the donor expecting commensurate return in terms of financial success, resolution of problems, access to the master and so forth. Thus, *both* remunerations for religious services and donations may lean towards the pole of 'commoditized' transactions: the duality between gift and commodity appears of limited help to operate meaningful distinctions.

[11] *Paritta* (P.) are verses or sections of scriptures that are commonly recited in Theravāda contexts for protection, blessings and the like.

[12] A more radical (but reductionist) Marxist perspective might see this process in terms of *mystification* (e.g. Bloch 1977, pp. 320 ff.). Alternatively, one might want to draw some inspiration from Bloch and Parry's ideas on a duality of 'transactional orders', one more long term and 'associated with the central precepts of morality', the other more short term and concerned with less-valued individual purposes (Bloch and Parry 1989, pp. 23 ff.). However, the argument has a strong social functionalist thrust, as in a number of Bloch's writings: the 'higher good' pursued by the more highly valued transactional order is identified as the reproduction of society—something that can hardly be said of the Buddhist meritorious gift, unless we recast it as ensuring the reproduction of a very partial and specific society: the *sangha*.

[13] In order to make the reading of Tibetan terms easier for non-Tibetanists, I provide phonetic transcriptions; although there are some minor shortcomings, I follow the relatively standard 'THL Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan', proposed by Germano and Tournadre (2003). (For terms specific to the language of Amdo [A-mdo], or northeast Tibet, I adapt the transcription slightly to the Amdo pronunciation.) I add the transliteration in square brackets at the first occurrence of a term, following the version of the so-called 'Wylie' system (with capitalization of root letters) used mainly in European academia (see Cantwell *et al.* 2002).

[14] This formulation glosses over the fact that these acts can be given a different value, and a somewhat different religious meaning, depending on the identity and status of the recipient—just as in other Buddhist contexts, and with variations according to Buddhist traditions and periods (Heim 2004, pp. 57–82; Ohnuma 2007, pp. 152–159; Bowie 1998, p. 471; Lai 1992; Jones 2009, pp. 305–309).

[15] See for instance Riaboff (1997, pp. 255–256) for Zanskar, in the far western Himalayas.

[16] See Riaboff (1997, p. 254) for Zanskar. In some areas, however, such as in Amdo (northeast Tibet), *bülwa* remains much more common. The pair *jinpa* versus *yön* corresponds roughly to *dāna* versus *dakṣiṇā* (S.) or *dakkhiṇā* (P.), at least as regards the uses of the latter terms in Buddhist contexts (see Ruegg 1991, pp. 446–447).

[17] The latter linguistic usage may be more common among tantrists (non-monastic tantric religious specialists, called *ngakpa* [sngags-pa]) than among monks of the dominant Geluk [dGe-lugs] order: in the latter context, *jindak* is preferred (Jane Caple, personal communication). One may note that the value associations of the two terms (in colloquial Amdo at least, and *contra* Seyfort Ruegg's remarks on the use of these terms in certain literary sources: pp. 445–446) are not always the same. Whereas *jindak* often refers to the highly valued practice of the Buddhist gift, *yomdak* is more commonly suggestive of (less-valued) market exchange relations: services against remuneration. (Thanks to Jane Caple for useful discussions on these terms, and cf. Caple in this issue.)

[18] We find terms for monks or tantrists with priestly functions such as *chöne* [mchod-gnas], 'destination of offerings' (Riaboff 1997, pp. 65–66, 181–182), and *lamchö* [bla-mchod], a contraction of *lama* and *chöne* (Sihlé 2013, p. 79), or also the well-known compound *chöyön* [mchod-yon], a contraction of *chöne* ('destination of offerings') and *yöndak* (perhaps best glossed as 'master of the offering' in this context), which refers to a certain kind of 'relationship (…) of donor and officiant/chaplain/preceptor' (Ruegg 1991, p. 452), which was instituted most prominently between Mongol sovereigns and Tibetan hierarchs starting in the 13th century (Ruegg 1991, 2014).

[19] J. Caple's observations (personal communication) from Amdo monastic contexts confirm my own first-hand data, which is drawn from various regions, with an emphasis on tantrist milieus and their social environments.

[20] This goes slightly beyond what I understand to be the more common pattern in Tibetan societies: a large number of ritual services are associated with (locally) fairly standardised levels of remuneration; however, in the case of rarer services, such as (for instance funerary or exorcistic) rituals requiring higher qualifications or power, remuneration levels may vary significantly, according to the circumstances and means.

[21] See for instance Fürer-Haimendorf (1964, p. 263), Ramble (1984, pp. 263, 265, 2008, p. 171), Gutschow (2004, p. 86).

[22] In particular, an uncontextualized reformulation of Tambiah's statement in Strenski's influential essay on the 'domestication' of the *sangha* (Strenski 1983, p. 472) has been quoted repeatedly in the subsequent literature.

[23] See Brac de la Perrière in this issue for a discussion of the spectrum of donation activities in the Burmese context.

[24] For a Tibetan ethnographic case, see Caple (2011, pp. 133–134).

[25] In the Sri Lankan Theravāda context, due to the caste structure of society, alms rounds generally do not take place (except in cases of non-ordained female renunciants); instead, lay donors take food to the monasteries and prepare the meals there (LeVine & Gellner 2005, p. 57; Bartholomeusz 1994, pp. 138–142). Due to the caste structure of Newar society, alms rounds have been highly problematic there too, in the recent, early history of the development of a Theravāda movement, and on the whole were quickly abandoned (LeVine & Gellner 2005, pp. 63, 116). See also Toffin in this issue.

[26] It should be noted that most of Borup's survey respondents (participants in Buddhist institutional activities, like classes in a Zen Buddhist university) did not rank the Buddhist gift (Jap. *fuse*) among the most meritorious forms of activity. This may be related to the fact that most of them have never encountered alms-begging Zen monks (p. 169 n. 87). This in itself has historical roots: following the Meiji restoration, mendicancy was outlawed in certain prefectures, 'in the name of anti-Buddhist modernity' (p. 171).

[27] On the latter celebrations, see for instance Tambiah (1968, pp. 75–77), or Toffin in this issue, or, in a Siamese-Chinese ethnic interface context in Malaysia, Ismail (1987, chap. 7).

[28] See for instance Bunnag (1973, p. 59) on the Ayutthaya case, or Tsarong (1987, p. 80) for Ladakh, a culturally Tibetan region in northern India.

[29] See for instance Ames (1966, p. 32) for Sri Lanka, Bunnag (1973, p. 60), or Brac de la Perrière in this issue. For a rare mention of instances of monks expressing gratitude, or even reciprocating lay donors' gifts, see Kawanami (2013, p. 138 n. 12).

[30] Strenski makes a brief contrary claim (albeit one devoid of any reference to sources or empirical data) with regard to lay Theravāda Buddhist understandings (Strenski 1983, pp. 472–473).

[31] Buddhist (and, even more so, Jain) theories of the gift do sometimes recommend, as a superior modality, the practice of the gift in a disinterested manner (Heim 2004, pp. 35–37), and one finds echoes or variants of such ideas in the ethnography. However, the same theological literature also abundantly elaborates, as a way of encouraging gift practices or simply as facts within a karmic worldview, on the (worldly and other-worldly) benefits to be expected from giving (p. 40).

[32] Other possible expectations may include desirable mental states, the cultivation of virtuous qualities, or the positive effects of blessings (on this, see below).

[33] James Laidlaw makes a very similar argument for the Jain case (Laidlaw 2000, p. 624).

[34] In a Tibetan society like Baragaon, the act of making one's child enter a monastery (outside of the customary, compulsory recruitment of the middle sons and daughters) is sometimes described as 'offering' one's child to the monastery's master. Maintaining spiritual/karmic links with a master through acts understood (or portrayed) as gifts appears thus as a highly valued mode of religious activity, beyond the principle of ordination in itself (which in Theravāda contexts receives perhaps stronger emphasis, as a preeminent procedure for generating merit).

[35] For a Tibetan ethnographic study, see Schrempf (2000); for Burma, see the substantial discussion by Schober (1989, pp. 103 ff., quoting Lehman 1984, p. 241).

[36] Richard Gombrich has argued that orthodox Theravāda thinkers, in their reinterpretation of what was commonly understood as 'transference of merit', transformed the meaning of *anumodanā* and its cognates from 'thanking' to 'rejoicing' [in the virtuous deeds, or merit] (Gombrich 1971, pp. 214–216; Brekke 2002, p. 105). This interpretation is contested however by some authors (see for instance Langer 2007, p. 179).

[37] A similar possibility is a gesture (or a thought, for instance) of blessing (cf. Toffin in this issue).

[38] In this regard, see also Brac de la Perrière in this issue.

[39] On solicitations for long-term commitments by lay donors in Burmese urban contexts, see also Spiro (1970, pp. 308–309 n. 4).

[40] Another way of seeing this could be in terms of morally connoted 'conversion' between different 'spheres of exchange', following Bohannan (1955).

[41] On the notion of the 'house', see the seminal work of Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) and, for a brief discussion of this concept in the context of a Tibetan agricultural society like Lower Mustang, Sihlé (2013, pp. 85–89).

[42] Annette Weiner, for instance, has critiqued the naïve overemphasis on the (historically constituted, Western) 'norm of reciprocity' within anthropology, and the 'ahistorical essentialism' in this norm 'which has masked the political dynamics and gender-based power constituted through' the multiple forms of circulation and non-circulation of goods and persons (Weiner 1992, pp. 2, 17). For an influential sociological statement on the 'norm of reciprocity', see Gouldner (1960).

[43] See Sihlé (2001, p. 252) and Sihlé (2013, pp. 104, 107).

[44] For some critical remarks on the extent to which we should follow theses, such as Gloria Raheja's (1988), on the 'poison in the gift' in Hindu *dāna* contexts, see Toffin (1990, pp. 136–139).

[45] This is not to deny the central importance of the *material support* of the *sangha* by the laity—from a political economy perspective, a crucial feature (probably throughout the history of Buddhism), which requires of course, as my colleague Patrice Ladwig reminds me, to be analysed in terms of power.

[46] See the online Rangjung Yeshe Dharma dictionary: http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/dge_%27dun_sde_gnyis (accessed Oct. 23, 2014).

[47] Cf. Ruegg (1991, p. 453). See the discussion of the Tibetan term *yön* above.

[48] Strenski's faulty reformulation of this data leads him to the incorrect conclusion that, together, all these interactions manifest a denial of reciprocity (Strenski 1983, p. 472).

[49] Borup remarks here: 'This is definitely very different from Japanese conditions' (Borup 2008, p. 171 n. 88). Recent, similar figures for Burma can be found in Kawanami (2013, p. 150).

[50] The strong emphasis in the literature on giving *to monastic actors and institutions* may need to be slightly nuanced however, as we can see from Katherine Bowie's study on giving to the poor in northern Thailand (Bowie 1998, p. 471).

[51] Schober provides, in an Upper Burmese context, a detailed description of the sequence of actions that constitute such a ritual event, in its material, social and religious dimensions (Schober 1989, pp. 137–157). The latter is approached primarily from the angle of merit (as well as doctrinal sermons, the taking of refuge…); that the ritual may actually be intended (and contain specific sequences) for other, more worldly aims is only briefly acknowledged.

[52] Bunnag (1973, p. 49) notes that this is particularly true of urban contexts, where the range of modes of interaction is more restricted.

[53] This large range of monastic ritual services is also associated with a substantial investment in training (Bunnag 1973, p. 63). In the Thai-Lao village studied by Tambiah, to the extent that the monks and novices engage in religious training, 'it is not so much (…) practising salvation techniques as (…) learning Pali chants which are necessary on various ritual occasions' (Tambiah 1970, p. 118).

[54] The data presented here is based primarily on 18 months of fieldwork conducted in Baragaon between 1995 and 1999. Important socio-economic and religious changes have occurred since then, in particular substantial migration to the US, which has triggered a flow of remittances that have changed local economics—including religious economics: thus the volume of donations for projects of religious construction (e.g. Craig 2004) seems to have increased.

[55] Samuel's comments on demographic/economic types of Tibetan societies (or 'communities') are useful here (Samuel 1993, pp. 115–116).

[56] Tantrists, as key members of their houses, but also often monastics, who remain peripheral members of their houses, and in particular nuns, also participate in the secular give-and-take of kin solidarity in matters of domestic labour and shared meals.

[57] The 'ethnographic present' is used here only for the sake of simplicity.

[58] According to the scholar Yonten Gyatso, who in the 1950s was a monk in the huge Drepung ['Bras-spungs] monastic complex in the Lhasa [lHa-sa] area, some alms rounds were performed at that time by poor Drepung monks originating from the far northeast Amdo region (personal communication by Matthew Kapstein; on the poverty of these monks, see Dreyfus 2003, p. 65). However, our colleague Samten Karmay, who was a monk in Drepung too at that time, did not remember hearing about any alms rounds then, when I asked him recently: they were obviously neither very significant nor regular features of Drepung monastic life. On occasional alms rounds carried out by nuns of an eastern Tibetan nunnery, see Schneider (2013, p. 134), and on the stark disparity between the incomes (including through alms) of male versus female monastic institutions in a far western Tibetan setting, see Gutschow (2004, pp. 107–116).

[59] Of course, these contrasts provide us only with general trends. Actual situations might diverge according to local social configurations and particular histories, as we have seen with the changes in monastic economies in post-Mao Tibet. In the Japanese context, we find a complex, very contrasted historical trajectory. Buddhism in the Kamakara era (12th–14th centuries), for instance, was marked by the importance of public donation campaigns (Goodwin 1994). More recently, starting with the Meiji reformation's attacks against institutional Buddhism, powerful transformations have set in, such as the legalisation and spread of clerical marriage (Jaffe 2001), and the decline of the centuries-old parishioner (*danka*) system, in which households were affiliated to, and supported economically, a given temple (Marcure 1985). These, along

with major 20th-century events and social changes, have led to the development of a 'temple Buddhism' heavily reliant on the income of funerary and commemorative services (Covell 2005). The example of Japanese Buddhism is a reminder that lay–clerical relations, including patterns of transfers of goods and services, are shaped by complex histories of interlocking factors: religious features of course, but also relations with the state, social organisation, modes of economy and so forth.

[60] See the introduction by Sihlé in this special issue.

[61] I gratefully acknowledge here the input of my workshop co-organiser, Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière.

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