Independent Study Project

Politics of the Body

An Analysis of the Vedic Ritualization Dichotomy and its Contribution to the Study of Power Relations in Theravada Buddhist Polities

Department	Arts and Humanities
Course Code	157400023
Student Number	257395
Author	Adam Gottesmann
Supervisor	Gustaaf Houtman

9858 Words

Authored April 2013

Typeset July 2023

Introduction

My interest in South and South East Asian Religious Traditions, particularly Buddhism and Hinduism began with J.C. Heesterman's *Inner Conflict of Tradition* which I encountered while attending an introductory course on Hinduism[1]. J.C. Heesterman's approach to social dynamics in Pre-modern India seemed to offer me the analytical tools required to address the overwhelmingly multifarious data. The following year, while studying Theravada Buddhism, I reconsidered Heesterman's approach to South Asia and chose to address South East Asian Buddhism in a similar way. The feedback I received was positive yet I felt that further analysis was required in order to address my increasing skepticism of Heesterman's theories. I took advantage of this year's *Religious Philosophies of Ancient and Medieval India Course* in order to question further Heesterman's intellectual influences and the revisionist interpretation of his analysis. At a certain point in my research I realized that the symbolism of the body played a crucial role in conceptualizing social dynamics in Pre-modern Indian traditions and I chose to deal with this topic in a separate paper. Thus, this paper serves, in many ways, as a synthesis of my learning process throughout my studies. The courses I have taken and the papers I have written have collectively served to strengthen my understanding of South and South East Asian Religious Traditions and have enabled me to write this thesis. I would like to thank in particular my essay advisor Gustaaf Houtman for guiding me through the dark alleys of uncertainty by providing me with significant tools of insight and encouraging feedback. I would also like to thank *OWD* for his continuous and exceedingly generous dispensation of typographical wisdom.

This paper starts off by focusing on the theme of freedom and individuality in metaphysical societies. After discussing some cross-cultural parallels in the construction of the individual, a more critical analysis of theoretical constructs concerning the individual will be provided in the context of Ancient Indian power relations. In order to illustrate to what extent Indology is relevant to our analysis of power relations, an assessment of the evidence concerning the birth of renunciation and asceticism will also be offered. Subsequently, the correlation between the individual and the ascetic will be explored in order to investigate to what extent symbolisms of the body may be chimed with notions of power and liberation. Having identified a revisionist model of a power/knowledge matrix that is heavily connected to symbols of the body in Pre-modern India, such theoretical constructs will be applied in the Southeast Asian Buddhist context. In order to justify such theoretical applications I will illustrate some parallels observed by scholars such as Ian Harris and Stanley Tambiah between the two evidently distinct geographical regions. Particular methodological incongruities such as the differentiation between Buddhist meditator and ascetic; Buddhism and *śāsana*; the laity and the monastics; and myth and factuality will be

[1] See (Heesterman 1985).

analyzed and hopefully resolved by applying the new social model of power relations in South East Asia that I have tried to develop. Since this is more of a theoretical paper than a case study, both examples of Burmese and Thai *Buddhisms* will be utilized without strict stratifications since my aim is to shed light on the social model I have attempted to understand and develop in my studies of the religious traditions of South and Southeast Asia.

Body

There are numerous understandings and definitions of freedom and individuality that may be found in distant times and in various cultural contexts. In *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy* (Nightingale 2004: 233), for instance, Andrea Wilson Nightingale discusses how Aristotle defined a new type of free individual in Ancient Greece. According to Nightingale:

> 'the perfectly free individual is an analogue for the perfectly free activity: since a man is called free if he "exists for himself and not for another", an activity must be called free if it "exists for its own sake." The fact that an individual or an activity does not aim at utility, then, is one of the principal markers of his/its freedom. As Aristotle says in the Politics, "to seek utility everywhere is completely inappropriate for great-souled and free men" [...] The free man will choose "useless" activities precisely because this evinces his freedom' (ibid.: 233)

Aristotle's theory of the free individual cannot be conceptualized without understanding his ingenious interpretation of *theoria*, which constructed a new type of contemplator[2]. This type of contemplator is not supposed to be involved in the world but rather contemplates *ad hoc* with a sense of detachment from socio-political activity. Aristotle's free individual is thus far from being one in a modern, egalitarian democratic system but rather a new type of individual who is distinct from other types of socially knit beings. The dichotomy that is proposed between a socially bound and a socially free individual has also been portrayed by early social theorists of Ancient and Classical India.

In many of his works[3], Louis Dumont, as in the case of Aristotle, invents a new type of individual in Ancient India who transcends the social matrix through renunciation from the world. According to Dumont:

> 'For more than two millennia Indian society has been characterised by two complementary features: society imposes upon every person a tight interdependence which substitutes constraining relationship for the individual as we know him, but, on the other hand, there is the institution of world-renunciation which allows for the full

[2] For more details, see (Nightingale 2004: Chapter 4).

> independence of the man who chooses it. Incidentally, this man, the renouncer, is responsible for all the innovations in religion that India has seen' (Dumont 1982: 94–95).

Similarly to Nightingale's analysis, Dumont suggests that at a critical moment in Indian history, a profound shift was created between men who participated in the world and men that renounced it for the sake of freedom, or spiritual liberation. It is indeed interesting to observe that the notion of freedom and individuality are often portrayed as the protagonists of change at critical points in the history for both civilizations. There seem to be two main differences, however, between Aristotle's understanding of a free individual and Dumont's analysis of Indian socio-ontological development: Firstly, the former is explicitly defined and is indeed a primary source while the latter is a secondary source and is more or less based on speculation. Secondly, the former may be understood in relation to *theoria*, while the latter only in relation to the concept of ritualization. Both differences are noteworthy because Dumont's analysis of Indian civilization is partially influenced by theoretical works that deal with the practice of ritualization in archaic societies[4].

In order to understand why Dumont's analysis is a melange of speculation and theoretical borrowings, we must refer to his academic entourage. It is important to note that Dumont was a pupil of Marcel Mauss (Madan 1999: 475), a nephew of Emile Durkheim, who wrote influential sociological/anthropological works which offered a clarifying analysis of the social implications of gift exchanges in archaic societies (Marcel 1954: 72). One of Mauss' fundamental understandings of sacrificial gift-giving in archaic societies is that:

> 'to give is to show one's superiority, to show that one is something more and higher, that one is *magister*. To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient' (ibid.: 72)

Mauss hence imagines a sacrificial realm where the material exchange between a sponsor and sacrificer creates a shift in the balance of power between the two and hence ties them together. Having been inspired by Mauss' theory of gift exchange, Dumont and scholars of his legacy applied their learnings onto Ancient and Classical Indian Civilizations. The scholar who has applied Mauss' findings to the extreme is J.C. Heesterman, who is quite well-known among Indologists for his captivating refinement of the theory that the gift Mauss refers to is fairly reminiscent of the *daksinas*, offered to ritualist by the sponsor of Vedic rituals (Heesterman

[3] See (Dumont 1982, 1988).

[4] It might be reductive to completely differentiate *theoria* from ritualization. Nightingale identifies a historical shift in the conceptualization of *theoria* which heavily relates to the topic of this paper. She explains that *theoria* had connotations of participating in religious spectacles (ritual?) and that such connotation had been replaced by another type of *theoria* which implies a form of internalized ritual. She claims that the term 'philosopher' as we know it today derives from the latter connotation. See (Nightingale 2001: 36).

1985: 27). In other words, 'the gift is held to embody the sins of the donor, whom it rids of evil by transferring the dangerous and demeaning burden of death and impurity to the recipient' (Parry 1986: 459). Thus, according to Heesterman, the problematic nature of the social ties that Dumont refers to are the result of the short and long-term processes of pollution of gifts offered by the patrons (prototypically ksatriyas) onto the sacrificers (prescriptively Brahmins). It is, therefore, from the avoidance of a sacrificial exchange between giver and receiver, that the Brahmin developed the individualistic practice of asceticism (Heesterman 1985: 39). There is thus a clear delineation between a free, pure, ascetic and a social, impure, bound ritualist.

Brain K. Smith insightfully remarks that Heesterman's theory is not merely an extrapolation of Dumont's, but is also heavily influenced by the anthropological writings of the former's contemporaries (Smith 1989: 41)[5]. Firstly, the transition from the Pre-Classical interdependent householder and the classical independent renunciant, in Heesterman's eyes, is concomitant with the transition from the pre-classical sacrifice to the classical ritual (ibid.: 41). Heesterman portrays the pre-classical sacrifice as a violent *mise-en-scène*, symbolising 'death and destruction (Heesterman 1985: 38), and contrasts it with the pure, 'fail-safe certainty of ritualism' (ibid.: 38). Furthermore, such dramatic socio-ontological shift is not due to an implicit 'gradual and cumulative process of erosion' but an explicit 'conscious reform' (ibid.: 38). Moreover, Smith rightly points out that Heesterman associates the violent nature of sacrifice with striking similarity to the way René Girard does in his *Violence and the Sacred* (Smith 1989: 42).

Similarly to Girard's view, '[i]t is purely the actual and actualized logical conundrum and social problem of the necessity of death for the continuation of life that Heesterman posits as the mysterious sacrificial darkness' (ibid.: 42). Furthermore, Heesterman's depiction of the Classical ritual as an escape from the meaningfully destructive reality of sacrifice (Heesterman 1981: 54) is stunningly reminiscent of J.F. Staal's suggestion that '[t]o say that ritual is done for its own sake is to say that it is meaningless, without function, aim or goal, or also that it constitutes its own aim or goal' (Staal 1979: 9). Heesterman, therefore, in the light of Girard, Staal, and Mauss' theories, depicts the role of the Hindu ascetic as a *rebellious* figure who avoids the dangerous and polluting mechanisms of socially engaged ritualism. The dichotomy between the Brahmin householder and the Hindu ascetic is thus construed as an internally forged opposition between freedom and entrapment. Although, as Smith remarks, Heesterman's analysis derives from a mansion of theoretical borrowings, the most controversial aspect of Heesterman's study is that the discussed socio-ontological development in 'traditional' India is depicted as orthogenetic, or in other words, as internal developments within the same cultural framework. Gonda remarks that:

[5]The following three paragraphs are taken from a paper I already submitted this year. The title of the paper: 'Is "The Inner Conflict of Tradition" a Valid Construct for the Analysis of Change and Continuity in Indian Religions?'.

> 'There is of course room for the observation that this consciousness of continuity on the part of the Hindus themselves is not based on scientific research and insight, that the *Upanishads* which were incorrectly considered to be the Veda proper were anachronistically interpreted in the light of later beliefs and convictions, that in studying the ancient traditions teachers and religious leaders as a rule had not the faintest notion of historical causality, that commentaries and explanations were written and handed down without any historical or philological basis. This consciousness of continuity is on the contrary based on mere tradition-ridden community which has unshakable belief in pre-historic "revealed" origin of its views, institutions and way of life would think of anything like an interruption of the tradition by which they feel themselves to be connected with that "revelation" ' (Gonda 1965: 14).

Gonda avers a valid point which is to not only doubt the limitations of contemporaneous methodologies but also the veracity of particular past claims asserted by the actual players who, to a full extent, played part in the dynamic process of change and continuity in pre-modern India. In the case of Heesterman, it is possible to conclude that it is the actual collation of contemporaneous methodologies with the methodological stance of orthogenesis that was influenced by the primary sources themselves (Olivelle 1993: 69), which enabled the author to produce his *inner conflict of methodologies*. Truth is relative, but more fundamentally, distinct systems of truths are prone to incompatibility when they are purposefully used to construct a diachronic analysis of an imagined civilization.

The binary opposition between social attachment and detachment via ritualization, constructed in "the inner conflict of tradition", does not exclusively fit an orthogenetic model. The conceptual opposition between the categories *Brāhmaṇas and Śramaṇas*, householders and renunciants, in the context of ritual, had also been transposed into other dichotomies such as "Vedic" and "non-Vedic" (ibid.: 69), and Aryan and non-Aryan (Bronkhorst 1999: 39–40) This argument is primarily supported by Johannes Bronkhorst, who focuses on forms of interaction between "Vedic" and "non-Vedic" ideas via textual evidence. Bronkhorst's methodological conclusion that in order to validate the "inner conflict of tradition" one must take into account the earlier borrowing of knowledge from others (ibid.: 43–44) demonstrates that the attempt to resolve the inner dynamics within one tradition has indirectly resulted in the study of the exchange of ideas between different traditions. In his work on *Greater Magadha*, for instance, Bronkhorst argues that the contents of the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* is a testimony of crucial epistemological interaction:

> '... during the late-Vedic and early post-Vedic period there was a form of asceticism which can safely be called Vedic asceticism because it remained close to the Vedic

> sacrifice in its aims and practices. Moreover, this Vedic asceticism was clearly distinct from the asceticism which we have come to know in connection with Greater Magadha' (Bronkhorst 2007: 85).

It is clear from Bronkhorst's statement that Vedic asceticism is explicitly contrasted with the asceticism of Greater Magadha, the latter being the area which fostered Buddhist soteriological paradigms (Erdosy 1993: 46). Since the type of asceticism that had originated in Magadha is not closely related to the Vedic sacrifice, it implies that the idea of renunciation as an antithesis to the external exchange of sacrificial offerings had originated from there. This, in turn, would suggest that the borrowing of the ascetic practices from Magadha has resulted through a crystallization of ideas, which had become the phenomenological object of Heesterman's "inner conflict of tradition".

The sudden shift from an orthogenetic to a polygenetic lens in Vedic studies especially through textual sources is risky business. By strictly following a geographical division and over-crediting external influences, one may follow the path of H. S. Converse's notorious proposal that 'everything new, creative and interesting was attributed to the non-Aryans, proto-Dravidians and proto-Jains' (Bodewitz 1997: 586). This hypothesis, as well as Bronkhorst's, assumes a clear-cut division between "Vedic" and "non-Vedic" categories while there is not enough proof to confirm such explicit geographical and ethnic distinctions (Olivelle 1995: 163). Patrick Olivelle summarizes quite well the faulty adherence to the categories "Vedic" and "non-Vedic" especially when they are used interchangeably with Aryan and non-Aryan:

> 'It is obvious that vedic society contained large numbers of people whose roots were non-Aryan and that their customs and beliefs must have influenced the dominant Aryan classes. It is a quite different matter, however, to attempt to isolate non-Aryan customs, beliefs, or traits at a period a millennium or more removed from the initial Aryan migration. The vedic literature, as (Gonda 1965: 200) observes, does not give us a complete account of the religious life of the Aryans. That some aspects we observe at a later period are absent in earlier texts is no proof of their absence at that time or of their non-Aryan provenance' (Olivelle 1993: 68).

Olivelle is clearly against relying on the two-source hypothesis without giving credit to some internal continuity within the Vedic ideology. According to him, one-sidedness concerning the exchanges or developments of ideas is nonsensical, for historical reality is not the product of 'neat categorizations of both ancient Indian theologians and modern scholars' (Olivelle 1995: 163). Olivelle therefore suggests that it is the interaction between the external influences and the internal elements of the brahmanical tradition, which should enable one to come up with more constructive conclusions regarding the development of traditional Indian socio-ontological

thought (Olivelle 1993: 68). This, in turn, would fuse the Manichaean stance of the one-source and two-source methodological stances into a more complex and truthful account. One can therefore postulate that by finding a balance between Heesterman's and Bronkhorst's theories, one ends up contextualizing the former's diachronic model, and de-contextualizing the latter's synchronic model. In other words, since Heesterman's theory is simplistic due to its risky adherence to the purely orthogenetic model and Bronkhorst's polygenetic model reduces the structural ritualization dichotomy into a mere temporal crystallization of ideas between two (or more) distinct traditions, the collation of the two stances may provide us with some kind of pan-chronic model, which endorses a profound dialectic between myth and factuality. After all, even Heesterman's greatest critics, such as Ronald Inden, admits that despite of the former's untenable orthogenetic model, there is indeed some truth in constructing a continuous social dichotomy between pure and impure modes of life in Brahminical soteriology (Inden 1986: 766).

Space does not allow us to systematically construct a pan-chronic account of the Brahmanical ritualization dichotomy yet it would be invaluable to understand why such a dichotomy is crucially linked to pre-modern Indian notions of the individual[6]. Anthony T. Carter, in the following manner, presupposes a clear distinction between the modernist western and pre-modern Indian notions of the person:

> 'In the Euro-American case the person is conceived as an individual, ontologically prior to any collectivity and containing within himself all of the attributes of humanity. Conversely, in this "individualistic universe" society as a whole is regarded as "*in principle* two things at once: a *collection of individuals* and a *collective individual*" (Dumont 1970: 33) In the contrasting Indian case the social whole, informed by the hierarchical opposition of pure and impure, is ontologically prior to any empirical actor. In this holistic universe particular human beings are regarded as possessing different and unequal attributes of humanity and are not associated with any normative principle'.

According to Carter, there is no room for individuality in the sense of agency in 'traditional' Indian thought because the purity of the psychologically molded being is already predetermined by the cosmological body (e.g. *varna*, *jāti*). This of course correlates well with Dumont's view that 'hierarchy is inseparable from holism, the valorisation of the social whole rather than the human individual' (Parry 1998: 156–157). Although Carter does have a point in regarding the Premodern Indian as one which is predetermined by the cosmological body, he nevertheless does not include those individuals who managed to transcend such predeterminations. Isn't it after all the renouncers who had eventually liberated themselves from the predeterminations of the cosmos? This question is, in my opinion, a crucial key for understanding Dumont's

characterization of the renouncer as an ideally free individual because the main difference between the householder and the ascetic in terms of individuality seems to be that the former conceives one's conscious human body as being attuned to the governing laws of the macrocosm while the latter transcends the pre-deterministic cosmic laws via the embodiment of the absolute. In other words, the individual body, clearly distinguished from the servant of the cosmological body, aims to embody the macrocosm through the practice of asceticism. As we shall see, this does not entirely solve our understanding of individuality in Pre-modern India.

For some prominent scholars of Indian religious traditions, the practice of Brahmanical or Buddhist asceticism does not result in a liberated individual, but quite the contrary. In *The Ascetic Self*, Gavin Flood attempts to universalize the social role of ascetics within culturally rich textual traditions (Flood 2004: 16). His main point, which he applies onto mediaeval Christian, Classical Indian, and Theravada Buddhist traditions is the following:

> 'The ascetic internalises the tradition, subjectively appropriating it and conforming his body, speech and mind to the forms prescribed. He eliminates his individuality, as it were, through a subjective intensification. The ascetic body is inscribed by tradition and becomes the text, in the sense that the ascetic inscribes his body as a text' (ibid.: 82).

Flood's claim is reminiscent of what has previously been proposed regarding the role of the ascetic in terms of the process of embodiment. Indeed, according to Flood, the ascetic embodies tradition (in this sense tradition means some form of cosmic truth that is shared by a group of social beings) but this form of internalization ends up transforming the body into an emblem of tradition. This emblematic body in turn strengthens the tradition in which the ascetic is affiliated with because it (the body) is alive and endowed with subjectivity. This evidently clashes with our earlier supposition that it is the sacrificing householder who is bound to cosmic hence social determinations while it is in fact the renouncer who transcends the confines of determination through the internalization of sacrifice. I suspect this friction between Flood's and our revised interpretation of Dumont's individual occurs because the former's criticism of Dumont's conception of the individual is based on certain misconceptions. Flood evidently applies the modernist psycho-sociological view of the individual onto the Indian context. Otherwise, one would not have to ask why the individuality of the ascetic is destroyed through the practice of asceticism if the individual is already socially predetermined by a holistic paradigm. Moreover, the fact that the author uses the term *habitus* (and attaches supportive bibliographical references to it) in order to conceptualize the ascetic body (ibid.: 6), it can be maintained that Flood's conception of the

[6]It should be understood by now that the notion of the individual in Pre-modern India is based on Western conceptions which cannot be fully applied onto the Brahminical context, but I choose to use this term for the sake of pedagogic illustration.

person and its relationship to the body is chimed with the ideas of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who clearly views the individual body as one which is subconsciously regulated by social norms (ibid.: 6). It is therefore apparent that the ascetic for the author is merely an instrument (although a powerful one), which propagates the memory of the textual tradition through the concomitant destruction of individuality and the rise of subjectivity within the ascetic's body[7]. Flood's analysis is indeed at odds with some individualistic notions in Premodern India yet the author has repeated a more significant methodological error which also Anthropologists carrying fieldwork involved themselves in. Richard Burghart, in his analysis of renunciation in South Asian traditions, pinpoints the flaw of adhering to a univocal interpretation of asceticism. He states:

> 'Most anthropologists who have carried out fieldwork in south Asia have focused their attention either on the village as a locality or on caste as an institution. In consequence, anthropological theories of Hindu asceticism have been based, for the most part, on perceptions of ascetics from the point of view of the world which they have renounced. Moreover, anthropological recourse to indological texts has merely confirmed the bias of fieldworking anthropologists, for most comments on the social aspects of renunciation have been derived from the prescriptive texts which were compiled by Brahman householders or, possibly eremitic householders, but not by renouncing ascetics' (Burghart 1983: 635).

Burghart makes a fine point in criticizing the way in which Indologists conceptualize the Hindu ascetic from the point of view of the Brahmin householder. Why would the non-ascetic depict the ascetic as one who transcends the confines of tradition if one's purpose is to preserve the tradition? By characterizing the ascetic as an instrument for the preservation of tradition, the non-ascetic from the same tradition purposely ends up characterizing the ascetic as a secondary component, or an extended aspect of the tradition. From his fieldwork experience, Burghart explains that not only is a univocal definition of the ascetic fundamentally incomplete, but that:

> '[t]here is now material at hand to examine the adequacy of Dumont's general formulation. This material suggests that no simple dichotomy can describe the relation between Brahman householder and renouncer,for these two persons situate themselves in different conceptual universes-the Brahman householder in an organic universe and the ascetic in a temporal one. Since each person sees the other through the terms of reference of his own world, their interrelations can be described only by considering their different perceptions of the events in which they interact' (ibid.: 636).

[7]Since Bourdieu's theories apply to all modern individuals who unconsciously embody their symbolic reality, it would be interesting to investigate why Flood chose to present the ascetic as one who consciously attunes his body for the sake of the tradition (Flood 2004: 6).

Burghart's insightful remark allows us to observe different figures who embody different conceptual paradigms, one which is more concerned with individual embodiment (the ascetic) and one which is more focused on being in tune with the cosmic world (brahmin householder). At this point, the individual ceases to be our focal point of interest, because what apparently constructs the disparity between these different types of social beings is not determined by notions of individuality (which have been proven to be the products of western presuppositions), but the way in which knowledge and power is produced by protagonists (in Burghart's case two) who locate their minds and bodies within distinct socio-ontological paradigms.

We have seen so far that the paradigmatic model of purity and impurity is distinct from the microcosm-macrocosm paradigm for the former is founded on the dependency of ritualization while the latter is to a large extent preoccupied with the notion of internalization[8]. These two paradigmatic forces, one based on determinism while the other on processuality, are, at least, within an ethnocentric perspective, characterized to have been originally conflictual ones. We must be, however, skeptical about the axiomatic claim that these two paradigmatic forces were working with, or even originated from socio-ontological tensions. Contrary to what is usually presupposed, it might be postulated that the processual paradigms may have indeed originated out of inspiration, or out of sheer ingenuity. Ted Proferes suggests that according to the Vedic texts, the notion of equating the individual body with the cosmos, ātman with Brahman, microcosm with the macrocosm, originated during an act of ritualization, by the brahmins, for the Vedic king (Proferes 2007: 152). Proferes states a highly stimulating point which is worth quoting in full:

> 'From the time of the Vedic hymns, royal power was represented as universal and absolute; every ruler claimed his place at the center of the cosmos, however peripheral his position may have been in reality. Increasingly, we find the assertion of the ruler's physical identification with his domain, as well as with the cosmos as a whole. As the embodiment of the universe, he was the ideal not merely of political power, but of spiritual power as well. When others contrasted their own political, economic, and social position to that of the sovereign, it highlighted their own limited freedom and status and made the king's own position appear ever more grand, even absolute. The king was looked upon by all as the embodiment of political autonomy, while others saw themselves as dependent entirely upon forces outside their control. As the figure of the king was projected upon the cosmos and identified with it, the political freedom and power of the king came to symbolize spiritual freedom and spiritual power. In this way, concepts of sovereignty inspired a whole new set of religious values and ideas, many of which contributed to the speculative explorations of spiritual liberation recorded in the early Upanishads. The idea of the identity of

> microcosm and macrocosm was enhanced by the identification of the king with his dominion, idealized as the universe in its entirety. The paradigm of sovereignty was thus formative for a language of symbolism of spiritual aspiration that went on to dominate religious discourse in India for centuries. The ideal attributes of a great king became the model for the spiritual aspirations even of those with no claim to political power. Gradually, the political aspect of the ideal faded, and was preserved only in certain key metaphors employed in what was now a new discourse of spiritual freedom. Thus it might even be said that late Vedic and Early Hindu spirituality reflects the popularization of the ideals of an ambitious king' (ibid.: 152).

Proferes claims that the paradigmatic model of microcosm and macrocosm as a means to liberation, out of all the individuals, could have been firstly applied onto the king. This in turn inspired others without such authority to internalise the cosmos and hence achieve liberation. Individual freedom is thus attained through internalisation, because without it, one is merely a reductive substance of the cosmos within a relatively deterministic framework. Proferes' insightful interpretation, in some ways, reveals to us a new player in the discourse (the king) of body/mind paradigms, and thus opens a gateway to an analysis of power relations between householder, ascetic and king.

Having acknowledged that different types of symbolic protagonists in Pre-modern India share a particular worldview yet situate their minds and bodies in different conceptual paradigms, it is possible to postulate that we are dealing here with a multi-vocal environment. Burghart and Dumont detect a tension between the Hindu ascetic and the Brahmin householder, Heesterman views a conflict between the Brahmin and their endangering patrons, and Proferes envisions a symbolic dialectic between Kings and self-empowered ascetics. All of these relationships, in my view, are inherently linked through symbolic paradigms of the body because each type of agent has his unique soteriological and epistemological position in the social-ontological matrix. Richard Valantasis concludes in his analysis of ascetics, a definition which could be applied more broadly in the Pre-modern Indian context:

> 'With regard to asceticism this simple definition addresses many of the issues raised above: the construction of reality and truth, which embraces a wide spectrum of intellectual, theological, literary, and political knowledge, as well as specific ideological and logonomic frames; the social situation of asceticism in which the practice and teaching of the ascetic distinguishes itself from the practice and lives of the non-ascetic; the importance and centrality of practices and technologies to the ascetic

[8]Part of this paragraph is taken from a paper I already submitted this year. The title of the paper is: 'Analyzing the dynamics of symbolic paradigms of the body in the development of Premodern Brahminical and Buddhist traditions: A Critique of Univocality'.

> program in which the practices at once construct power and modulate social concerns; the critical linking of solidarity/sociality with power as inverse descriptions of one another; and, finally, the production of systems that support the ascetic's subjectivity, social relations, and symbolic universe. The capacity to change and the capacity to affect the productive environment of another subject (even when that "other subject" is simply a redefinition of one's own self) implicate a wide assortment of human activity. Ascetical power, then, produces the capacity for change and a capacity to affect the environment in which change is produced' (Valantasis 1995: 793).

I think Valantasis' conclusion encompasses not only the ascetic but also other important protagonists such as the kings and the Brahmin householders since each group embodies its respective conceptual socio-ontological paradigm. The ascetic can therefore be seen as one who embodies his own soteriological goal, the Householder as one who embodies the Vedic tradition, and the King as one who embodies the political cosmology. Of course, these portrayals are invariably simplistic because they assume continuities which may not exist but they are indeed useful for us in order to start conceptualizing how these symbolic agents eventually end up generating multiple layers of truths. Thus, ascetics, householders, and kings, each create systems on their own even though these differing views may be portrayed at times as a conglomeration of knowledge in flux.

A critical question in this paper is whether these social dynamics may be also applied to Premodern Buddhist or contemporary Theravada Buddhist polities[9]. We need to acknowledge that Theravada Buddhism encompasses many elements which are foreign to the western conception of what Southeast Asian Buddhists had pejoratively labelled as 'Protestant Buddhism' (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1990: 7). Since Brahminical as well as indigenous cultural traits constantly form what we call today Theravada Buddhism, it would be reductive to apply a static definition and to disassociate it from pre-modern Indian conceptions of sovereignty and empowerment (Swearer 2010: x). The links can be already observed from a relatively simplistic analysis of the relationship between kings and *sangha* in Buddhist polities. Buddhist rule, since the time of *Aśoka*, could not be propagated without a particular relationship between the king and the *sangha*. Such a relationship arose only when the king sponsored the *sangha*. If the *sangha* accepted such sponsorship, the king gained legitimacy through maintaining the Buddhist *śāsana* (Ferguson 1978: 67). The process of sponsorship and legitimation occurred via a particular merit-making ritual, which symbolically affirmed the king's authority. Following the completion of the ritual, kings officially become a *dhammaraja*, or *cakkavatin* (Tambiah 1976: 52). Such king/*sangha* relationships in South-East Asia were described by Tambiah as "galactic polity", which acknowledged the particular power relations between the kings and the *sangha* (Tambiah

1985: 252). Although the kings had legitimacy to rule, they could not in theory act against the *dhamma*, which is in essence the highest source of authority (Jordt 2007: 194). The *sangha*, which represent the authority behind the *dhamma* may determine whether or not the kings are neglecting 'the conditions of their own power' (Tambiah 1985: 252). Another important force in resisting claims of kingship is 'the charisma gained [...] by ascetic practice[s] [...] recognized as signs of merit and power and capable of upstaging hereditary claims to kingship' (ibid.: 265–269). The explicit parallelisms between Pre-modern Indian and Theravada Buddhist polities is equally observable in Ian Harris' synopsis of power dynamics of the latter:

> 'Theravada Buddhist conceptions of sovereignty did not really differentiate between "political leadership" and "charismatic authority" [...], for the king's status was also determined by his possession of merit stored up over previous lives. But monarchical claims are only one side of the coin in understanding the relations between power and political authority. The monastic order (*sangha*) was itself perfectly capable of challenging the state when it seemed significantly out of line with Theravada virtues. Quite apart from any other consideration, the impact of large numbers of able-bodied monastics in a state of withdrawal from economic activity has done much to shape the societies and cultures of Theravada lands for centuries, and monastic law (*vinaya*) has provided the basis on which many "larger political structures rest" (ibid.: 265–269). In addition, the renunciation represented by the *sangha*, and in particular by those members of the order who undertake ascetic practices (*dhutanga*) at the periphery of society, in the wilderness for example, is traditionally held to generate prodigious quantities of power which may then be transmitted to amulets and relics deemed to be especially convenient physical receptacles for concentrating and storing this supernatural energy (Thai: *saksit*). Possession of such special objects confers great power on their custodians, be they rulers or those who seek their overthrow. In this context, then, it is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to suggest that a healthily functioning Buddhist polity is one in which the respective powers of king and *sangha* are held in a state of antagonistic symbiosis' (Harris 2007: 3).

Harris clearly observes an 'antagonistic symbiosis' between the monarchy, the Buddhist *sangha*, and self-empowered ascetics in Thai Buddhist history. This portrayal is indeed akin to the already examined Pre-modern Indian context. In a similar way to the Pre-modern Brahminical context, the king embodies the polity, under the supervision of the *sangha*, who embody the supramundane *dhamma*, yet the peripheral ascetic gains self-empowerment through a process of embodiment, which is not necessarily dependent on both the authority of the king and the *sangha*. Since there is an explicitly similar interplay of embodiments by different agents in both

Theravada Buddhist and Brahminical contexts, it is possible to claim that such structures of social dynamics are not necessarily Buddhist or non-Buddhist, Brahminical or non-Brahminical, or either Buddhist or Brahminical. It is perhaps an amorphous form of acultural intelligence (that seems to have originated in India) which acknowledges the role of the body and embodiment without strict correlations to particular religious identifications and stratifications.

Part of the confusion in applying this triadic category in Pre-modern India onto Theravada Buddhist contexts has to do with identifying the Buddhist *sangha* as ascetics, as opposed to householders (Cook 2010: 15–16). Cook explains why this distinction is superficial:

> 'Buddhist monasteries in Thailand vary widely in focus and institutional organization and we must be careful not to assume a necessary correlation between monasticism and asceticism, or indeed between meditation and asceticism, in any given context. [. . .] I do not use the term "ascetic" to describe all people who "renounce the world" or become monastics: to be a monastic one does not have to engage in ascetic practices and vice versa. It is not necessarily the case at all that monastics, though they have renounced home, sexual activity and marriage, are necessarily then to be understood as engaging in ascetic practices' (ibid.: 15–16).

There is therefore a clear delineation between those who practice asceticism and those who are merely part of the monastic order. The reason why Theravada Buddhist monks are regarded as ascetics is mainly because they renounce their home, sacrifice worldly pleasures and engage in meditation. Part of this confusion also has to do with Dumont's static image of the Hindu renouncer as a responsible agent for innovative ideologies such as what we call Buddhism. The truth of the matter is that the borders between Brahmanic and Buddhist traditions are much more blurred than they seem since the constant intermingling between these two (textual?) traditions are even highly visible today (Skilling 2007: 202). Peter Skilling, by investigating the relationship between the Buddhist *sangha* and the Brahmins in Thailand, arrived at a similar conclusion:

> 'In this chapter, I have examined the ideals of kingship and of two powerful social institutions, the monastic order (*sangha*) and the brahmans. The ideals are hybrid, distinctively Thai, set in a complex cosmology. The texts that support this hybridism include *jātakas*, *nīiti*, law books, and ritual manuals. Ritual languages have included Thai, Khmer, Sanskrit, and Pali, and in some cases Tamil and Mon. South-East Asian law books (*dharmaśastra*) and chants for Brahmanical ceremonies cite verses or passages in Pali: that is, Pali becomes the classical legal and ceremonial language

[9] Part of this paragraph is taken from a paper I submitted a year ago. The title of the paper is: 'Between External and Internal Ritualisation: An Assessment of Colonial Influence On Traditional Burmese Power Relations'.

> of the region. Traditions overlap, and replenish each other. Other sources are multi-vocal. I have not expected to find, let alone construct, a single definition of kingship, or of the relations between ruler, *sangha*, and brahmans' (ibid.: 202).

This intense form of syncretism between the various textual traditions impedes Skilling to coherently trace the dynamics between ruler, *sangha* and brahmans. Since Brahmins and Buddhist are inherently linked to the service of legitimating sovereignty, it could be misleading to regard the Brahmins and Buddhists as two separate forces in the overall dynamics of power relations. If Skilling were to regard the Brahmins and Buddhists as separate agents who more or less position themselves in the same position in the power matrix (legitimating the king's rule and embodying the authority of their respective textual corpus) depending on historical context, perhaps harmony will override cacophony in his conclusive analysis. Jacques Leider proposes that the relationship between Brahmin and Buddhist monk in ritualistic context has to do with practical cooperation as opposed to ideological tension:

> 'for life in this world, Buddhism holds an ethical message for monks and for laypeople alike. But the rituals it produced proved insufficient for such earthly needs as the consecration of a king and the engineering of political questions by supernatural means. For such needs, the Buddhist courts of Southeast asia heavily borrowed from the indian tradition. [...] as generally acknowledged, Brahmins played an essential role in the ritual of king making (ablution ceremonies [abhiseka]) at the courts of the Buddhist kings, where Brahmins were also employed as astrologers. Their functions were related to the transmission and the practice of special knowledge imported from india. In Burma (myanmar) and arakan (rakhaing), these 'Brahmins' were generally called *punna*. Though their presence at court is a well-known fact, they have as yet attracted no particular scholarly interest' (Leider 2005: 159–160).

The lack of scholarly interest, I suspect, derives from the fact that the coupling of Brahminical and Buddhist services appear as cacophanous and hence unintelligible for a coherent analysis of Burmese Buddhist social dynamics. Since it is possible to postulate that the Buddhists employed the Brahmins because the former did not specialize in earthly *rites de passage*, what seems at first ambiguous and unclear in terms of religious organization suddenly appears completely sensical and practical from a Buddhist perspective. Yet, such clarifications only form a minute part in deconstructing some rigid classifications which impede us from observing the rich and multi-vocal dimensions of social dynamics in Theravada Buddhist polities.

One of the fundamental problems in understanding the social dynamics in these religious traditions has to do with the way in which the western definer, during and after the period of colonization in South-East Asia, invented a scientific category called Buddhism[10]. In fact,

it is generally claimed that the transmission of foreign knowledge onto Southeast Asian soil generated significant changes, which 'involved the fate of the *sangha* and of Buddhism itself' (Tarn, Ferguson, and Mendelson 1975: 67). Various forms of knowledge, ranging from scientific to Christian teachings, were diffused along Burmese terrain resulting in an incongruous clash with indigenous Buddhist teachings. Even the term Buddhism, unlike *thathanadaw*, did not exist prior to colonial contact with the Burmese. Alexey Kirichenko explains that:

> 'In precolonial Burmese the term *thathanadaw* was literally translated as "instruction" (*ahson-ama*) and understood as a space established by the Buddha which one could enter to achieve complete liberation from existence or a better birth. Thus, *thathana* by itself obviously was not a "community," "church" or "a form of nationhood" as Obeyesekere claims for Sinhalese *śāsana*, but a medium of improvement of one's status in the *saṃsāra*' (Kirichenko 2009: 30).

The notion of Buddhism, as an institutional religion, is a product of western epistemology, which 'implied a self-identical, objective system based on doctrine as well as common horizontal identity for the faithful', in contrast to *thathana*, which connotes 'a much more complex reality where religious and social identities were inseparable and so religious participation was mediated by one's social status' (ibid.: 25). Since it is the term Buddhism and not *thathana*, which is hitherto investigated, particular conclusions regarding historical transitions in Buddhist reign may have been mismanaged. Michael Charney, in a relatively recent publication (2006), for instance, interprets king Mindon's reign as one which marks:

> 'an important transition from the "traditional" relationship between the throne and the monastic order to a new and in view of the continuity of the relationship between a throne/state that patronises the Religion while not opposing monastic sectarianism as we see today in Burma-modern relationship' (Charney 2006: 219).

The notion that it is the state and not the *cakkavatin*, who is sponsoring the Religion and not the *sangha*, is evidence for a transition from a relatively pure *śāsana*, into a politically contrived Buddhism. This claim may be true in terms of *etic* analysis, yet as an *emic* approach, considering it a transition may be misleading. Michael E. Mendelson, in contrast to Charney's and earlier scholars' "before and after" claims regarding Mindon's reign, argues that:

> '... relations between *sangha* and king were determined by the strength of the king at any given time. It is easy to imagine that in centrifugal periods the loyalty of monks

[10] Parts of the following two paragraphs are taken from a paper I submitted a year ago. The title of the paper is: 'Between External and Internal Ritualisation: An Assessment of Colonial Influence On Traditional Burmese Power Relations'.

> could easily evaporate, just as, in centripetal periods, under such strong kings as Bayinnaung or an Alaungpaya, monks, being Burmans, after all, followed the fortunes of their leaders and were as loyal to them as any other citizen' (Tarn, Ferguson, and Mendelson 1975: 83).

Mendelson remains fairly critical of views which endorse a profound paradigmatic shift in power relations during Mindon's reign. This is mainly due to his awareness that prior to western epistemological influences, it is mainly the level of support the king bestows upon the *sangha* which primarily determines the latter's loyalty to the former (ibid.: 85). By offering support, which is evidently a form of generating ritual dependency, is therefore the predominant factor that 'enable[d] the king to control the *sangha* he pretended to set free' (ibid.: 85). Paradigmatic changes in Burmese Buddhism claimed by Charney are therefore questionable, for he does not take into account the quintessential dimension of gift-giving in his political analysis of social cohesion.

Considering the argument that despite of evident external influences, it is primarily the forces from within which determine the balance between unity and resistance (Jordt 2007: 98), it may be of equal relevance to explore the way in which such western external influences affected monastic activity in the Burmese context. As mentioned earlier, the westerners' transmission of knowledge inevitably endangered the *śāsana* by defining the latter as a rival religion. Such epistemological implementations caused distress among the *sangha*. Some monks became aware of such dangers and believed that it was not the monks but the 'lay people [that] had the responsibility to protect and promote Buddhism' via the study of the *Abhidhamma*, which emphasises *vipassanā* meditation (Braun n.d.: 39). It is important to note that before colonial rule, the laity were not supposed to meditate, it was strictly reserved for the monastic elite (ibid.: 39). Ledi Sayadaw, a relatively unknown monk at the time, was among the prominent figures who formed a mass meditation movement by channeling *Abhidhamma* from a strictly monastic practice to a 'lay practice of self cultivation' (Braun 2008: 300). Such actions may be interpreted as politically motivated ones since 'Ledi's groups shared with the YMBA and others the purpose of providing Buddhist education to the laity and promoting morality' (ibid.: 204). Unfortunately such a view is inaccurate because it seems that Ledi's groups never took part in any political or nationalistic movement (ibid.: 204). If the transmission of religious knowledge to the laity had no evident implications for promoting nationalism or external political resistance, the motives must have been internal, or at most, social. Ingrid Jordt argues that the transmission of knowledge to the laity by the monks led to 'a natural affiliation and bond that ultimately may be threatening to a ruler seeking to subject his population' (Jordt 2007: 196) Such implications infer a deeper assertion that such transmissions led to a transition from a relatively binary relationship in power between king/state and *sangha* into 'a ternary order in which each has some power in keeping

the others in check by invoking purification as the outside condition of ultimate moral force' (Jordt 2007: 196). Such assertions of transitions from pre-colonial to post-colonial times, as in the case of Charney, may be subject to flawed etic analysis. Gustaaf Houtman disagrees with the common assertion that during the colonial era, there was a laicization process, which was responsible for changing the power relations from a binary to a ternary one (Houtman 1990: 125). He argues instead that:

> 'Considering the way some unordained meditators have a tendency to mark in a language their status as "core" Buddhists by using monastic language and by classifying themselves as monks as described above, one would be better off suggesting the reverse, namely that there has been a "monasticization" of the unordained. The emphasis contemporary meditators put on being part of the *the-tha-na* does not suggest the radical displacement of old roles by new roles and old institutions by new ones [...]. The centrality of the monkshood (and the monastery) has not been challenged in the ideal and, by aspiring to a Buddhism of the monastery, the meditator in fact perpetuates an old order of Buddhism' (ibid.: 125).

Acknowledging how easily one may misconstrue modern political changes for traditional continuities as a result of western epistemology onto these regions, Houtman, avoids unnecessary assertions. Perhaps there is truth in the fact that it is indeed the people and not the monks, who by gradually expressing their remorse through the practice of *vipassanā*, are affecting the balance of power of between the *sangha* and state but it is also important to understand that in terms of symbolic exchanges, the laity do not form an independent voice of resistance for they do not have a real voice within the contrived cosmological paradigm. If the laity were to express political resistance in a Buddhist context, they would have to engage themselves with *samatha* practices, the meditative practices of the ascetic, which seeks self-empowerment (Houtman 1999: 331). Yet, as long as the laity are practicing insight (*vipassanā*), as opposed to concentration (*samatha*), they are embodying symbols that belong to the authority of the *sangha*.

In cultural analysis, attempting to approach a particular worldview through natural facts may at times be futile because in many cases, views of reality derive from contrived expressions and hence understandings. By analyzing social developments through factual analysis, one is more prone to be misled by the rubrics of rationality, which at times, generate the crux of dissonance between distinct worldviews[11]. A good example of this schism is expressed in defensive claims by Southeast Asian Buddhists that *vipassanā* meditation can be stripped of all non-scientific influences. Cook explains that:

[11] Interestingly enough, by studying an ahistorical symbolic wordlview, one does not actually enter into an eternal domain of interpretation as opposed to historical realism. The methodology of the former is prone to change just as much as the latter due to the fundamental differences between different presents. Thus the claim

> 'Buddhadasa emphasized *vipassanā* as the most important aspect of Buddhist spiritual practice and denounced samādhi as central to a supernaturalist view of Buddhism [...]. [...] Buddhadasa proposes a vision of Thai Buddhism removed from all non-scientific influences (such as the transferral of merit, rebirth, heavenly beings, and so on), which may act as a model for progressive social development and individual spiritual attainment. [...] It is interesting to note, however, that many of Buddhadasa's supporters believed that he had attained high levels of spiritual power and insight and as such it was especially meritoriously accumulative to donate alms to him' (Cook 2010: 42–43).

It is not surprising that the constant attempt to protect Buddhism by presenting it as a comprehensive rational system usually generates incongruities. These incongruities do not result because Buddhism is fundamentally irrational, but precisely because the Buddhist tradition amasses both rational and imaginative discourses which were not meant to be separated. It is the reaction to Western Imperialist threats that has resulted, from a western rationalist perspective, into a contradictory representation of Buddhism. These rhetorical incongruities actually derive from the conscious and explicit separation of myth from factuality by Post-Enlightenment secular observers. Nightingale observes the exact same situation when a secular westerner attempts to gain insight from the worldview of Ancient Greece. She explains that:

> 'Th[e] combination of mysticism and rationality has created enormous scholarly problems. Most interpreters have "solved" this problem by separating the disparate fragments of Empedocles into two very different works: *On Nature*, a "natural-ist" poem, and *Purifications*, a supernatural story of reincarnation. Recently, however, several scholars have shown that some of the material ascribed to the latter poem belong in the former; as they suggest, the separation of the naturalist from the mythical material is based on the anachronistic assumption that true philosophy has no room for the supernatural. [...] The fact that Empedocles wrote poems (or perhaps a single poem) which included "philosophical" and "nonphilosophical" (i.e. religious) material challenges the standard modern approach to the early thinkers. Among other things, it exposes our tendency to retroject contemporary conceptions of philosophy onto the ancients. If we resist this move, we can see that many of the early thinkers were engaged in complex and broad-ranging projects that do not fall neatly within the boundaries of philosophy as we now conceive it' (Nightingale 2004: 31).

that the mythological past is eternally actualized is a myth precisely because the meanings contained in the symbolism always undergo change due to the passage of time. Thus, the idea of centralizing and controlling the order of the *sangha* for the sake of restoring a nostalgic eternal order is fundamentally anachronistic because the present notion of eternal order itself constantly undergoes transformation.

Rationality is indeed a victim of epistemology. The essential necessity to separate myth from factuality could be indeed a unique feature of secular western epistemology. The 'death of God' in Nietzschean terms was enacted by the West, and the abolition of metaphysical realities from rhetorical discourse makes it difficult for the rational observer to understand metaphysical world views (Latré 2001: 302). A hermeneutical approach which takes into account emblematic and mythical portrayals of metaphysical polities is therefore crucial for gaining some insight from currently existing cosmological paradigms in South East Asia. It needs to be fully acknowledged that a methodology that explores the dimensions of interactive symbols of the body merely reflect one layer of reality, but is nevertheless, a shared one which is continually regenerated in the non-linear dimensions of social thought and action. Endorsing a historical linear approach would end up dislocating the mythical and factual, and such analysis will be bound by endless cycles of incongruities. Since the line between social reality and the way it is conceived is arguably a thin one indeed, it would be much more sensical to focus on the local history and hence interpreting Southeast Asian or Theravada Buddhist history as mythical paradigms, which to a certain extent, produce particular epistemological constructs. This would in turn strengthen Houtman's sensical argument that sacred biographies generate not stories but histories, which inevitably become ingrained in the collective minds of a locality (Houtman 1997: 335). Understanding what in fact generates these epistemologies will end up refining ones understanding of the dynamics between state and *sangha* in Theravada Buddhist Polities and could strengthen our analysis of the cultural significance of meditative practice and embodiment in contemporary Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

The interconnections between themes, texts, bodies, and realities are indeed outstanding when one acknowledges that they are purely bound by interpretation. It is also surprising that it is the accumulation of distinct points of views, at times incompatible, that serve as the backbone for one's claims of conclusive analysis. This may imply that the myriad voices that bound one's mind may at some point in time harmonize yet it is difficult to know for how long such harmony may be kept intact. In order to kick start our analytical endeavors, we have shown that different people with different bodies do not have the same conception of the individual. For Dumont and Heesterman, the individual escapes the confinements of holistic paradigms and chooses to escape intersubjectivity while for Flood individuality should not be applied beyond post-Enlightenment epistemological frameworks. Yet once individuality is associated with liberation and empowerment through symbolic embodiment, the semantic scope of the term becomes more coherent. We have also observed that an agent who is able to embody particular truths (either through external or internal ritualization) has a particular position in the social matrix whether

it is a king/state, a Buddhist monk/Brahmin Householder, or a wandering ascetic. Each type of embodiment generates symbols that may be translated into individual participation in a multivocal environment. Equally important for our analysis, is the discussion of how the categories invented by Indologists and social anthropologists bore the fruits of methodological incongruity. When one attempts to invent concrete distinctions between Theravada Buddhism and Hinduism, for instance, one ends up being blind to the socio-political relevance of the highly sophisticated techniques of embodiment (either through ritualization, meditation or asceticism) shared in both contexts. What is more, by positioning the Brahman householder and Buddhist meditator in a completely different position in the metaphysical social matrix, one becomes perplexed by their shared functions in the royal courts. Furthermore, the application of the *etic* term 'Buddhism' instead of the *emic śāsana* may result in assuming historical discontinuities in Burmese politics while it might not be the case in reality at all. More significantly, by neglecting the importance of symbolic embodiments which are unique to the studied localities, one may wrongly invent a symbolic voice of the laity (which is inexistent in the overall social matrix) and incorporate it into the overall analysis of socio-political theory. We have seen that although the laity is able to embody either the paradigm of the monastics through *vipassanā* or the ascetics through *samatha*, they do not have an independent voice in the metaphysical paradigm of the Burmese state. Finally we have stressed that in order to attain insight into a distinct worldview, we might have to abandon a clearcut separation between pure rationality and mythical paradigms. A more inclusive approach to Southeast Asian history from a phenomenological perspective is required, for without a richer and more profound understanding of the dynamics of body symbolism in Southeast Asia the epistemological constructs of such localities seem rather incomplete.

Bibliography

Bodewitz, Hendrick W. (1997). "The Hindu Doctrine of Transmigration: Its Origin and Background". In: *Indologica Taurinensia* 23–24, pp. 583–605.

Braun, Erik (2008). *Ledi Sayadaw, Abhidhamma, and the Development of the Modern Insight Meditation Movement in Burma*. Massachusetts, United States: Harvard University Press.

— (n.d.). *The Birth of Insight: Ledi Sayadaw, Meditation, and Modern Buddhism in Burma*. Under review for publication. University of Oklahoma.

Bronkhorst, Johannes (1999). *Is There an Inner Conflict or Tradition?* Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, pp. 33–57.

— (2007). *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India*. Brill.

Burghart, Richard (1983). "Renunciation in the Religious Traditions of South Asia". In: *Man* 18.4, pp. 635–653.

Charney, Michael W. (2006). *Powerful Learning: Buddhist Literati and the Throne in Burma's Last Dynasty, 1752–1885*. Ann Arbor, Michigan, United States: University of Michigan Press.

Cook, Joanna (2010). *Meditation in Modern Buddhism: Renunciation and Change in Thai Monastic Life*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Dumont, Louis (1970). "Religion, Politics, and Society in the Individualistic Universe". In: *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, pp. 31–41.

— (1982). "A Modified View of our Origins: The Christian Beginnings of Modern Individualism". In: *Religion* 12.1, pp. 1–27.

— (1988). *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Erdosy, George (1993). "The Archaeology of Early Buddhism". In: *Studies on Buddhism in Honour of Professor A.K. Warder*. Ed. by Narendra K. Wagle and Fumimaro Watanabe. Toronto, Canada: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, pp. 40–56.

Ferguson, John P. (1978). "The Quest for Legitimation by Burmese Monksand Kings: The Case of the Swegyin Sect (19th–20th Centuries)". In: *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*. Ed. by Bardwell L. Smith. Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, United States: Anima Books, pp. 66–86.

Flood, Gavin (2004). *The Aesthetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Gombrich, Richard and Gananath Obeyesekere (1990). *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton, New Jersey, United States: Princeton University Press.

Gonda, Jan (1965). *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*. The Hague: Mouton.

Harris, Ian (2007). "Introduction: Buddhism, Power and Politics in Theravada Buddhist Lands". In: *Buddhism, Power, and Political Order*. Ed. by Ian Harris. London, United Kingdom: Routledge, pp. 1–9.

Heesterman, Jan C. (1981). ""Veda and Society"". In: *Studia Orientalia* 50, pp. 56–59.

— (1985). *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kinship, and Society*. Chicago, Illinois, United States: University of Chicago Press.

Houtman, Gustaaf (1990). "How a Foreigner Invented "Buddhendom" in Burmese: From *Tha-Tha-Na* to *Bok-Da'Ba-Tha*". In: *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 21.2, pp. 113–128.

— (1997). "The Biography of Modern Burmese Buddhist Meditation Master U Ba Khin: Life Before the Cradle and Past the Grave". In: *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*. Ed. by Juliane Schober. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 310–344.

— (1999). *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*. Tokyo, Japan: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Press.

Inden, Ronald (1986). "Review of *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society* [Heesterman, J. C.]" In: *American Ethnologist* 13.4, pp. 762–775.

Jordt, Ingrid (2007). *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power*. Athens, Ohio, United States: Ohio University Press.

Kirichenko, Alexey (2009). "From *Thathanadaw* to *Theravāda* Buddhism: Constructions of Religion and Religious Identity in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Myanmar". In: *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia*. Ed. by Thomas D. DuBois. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 23–45.

Latré, Stijn (2001). "Nietzsche, Heidegger, Girard on "The Death of God"". In: *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 57.2, pp. 299–305.

Leider, Jacques (2005). "Specialists for Ritual, Magic, and Devotion: The Court Brahmins (*Punna*) of the Konbaung Kings (1752–1885)". In: *Journal of Burma Studies* 10, pp. 159–202.

Madan, Triloki Nath (1999). "Louis Dumont 1911–1998: A Memoir". In: *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33.3, pp. 473–501.

Marcel, Mauss (1954). *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. 1st ed. Martino Publishing.

Nightingale, Andrea Wilson (2001). "On Wandering and Wondering: "Theôria" in Greek Philosophy and Culture". In: *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 9.2, pp. 23–58.

— (2004). *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: "Theôria" in its Cultural Context*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Olivelle, Patrick (1993). *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

— (1995). "Review of *The Two Sources of Indian Asceticism* [Bronkhorst, J.]" In: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115.1, pp. 162–164.

Parry, Jonathan (1986). "The Gift, the Indian Gift and the 'Indian Gift'". In: *Man, New Series* 21.3, pp. 453–473.

— (1998). "Mauss, Dumont, and the Distinction between Status and Power". In: *Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute*. Ed. by Wendy James and Nicholas J. Allen. London, United Kingdom: Berghahn Books, pp. 151–172.

Proferes, Theodore N. (2007). *Vedic Ideals of Sovereignty and the Poetics of Power*. New Haven, Connecticut, United States: American Oriental Society.

Skilling, Peter (2007). "King, *sangha* and Brahmans: Ideology, Ritual and Power in Pre-modern Siam". In: *Buddhism, Power, and Political Order*. Ed. by Ian Harris. London, United Kingdom: Routledge, pp. 182–215.

Smith, Brian K. (1989). "Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion." In: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 121.2, pp. 346–348.

Staal, Frits (1979). "The Meaninglessness of Ritual". In: *Numen* 26.1, pp. 2–22.

Swearer, Donald K. (2010). *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*. 2nd ed. New York, United States: State University of New York, Albany.

Tambiah, Stanley J. (1976). *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

— (1985). *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*. Massachusetts, United States: Harvard University Press.

Tarn, Nathaniel, John P. Ferguson, and E. Michael Mendelson (1975). *Sangha and State in Burma: A Study of Monastic Sectarianism and Leadership*. Ithaca, New York, United States: Cornell University Press.

Valantasis, Richard (1995). "Constructions of Power in Asceticism". In: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63.4, pp. 775–821.