

Introduction

The following texts are excerpts from some – mostly academic – writings investigating the influence of the Buddhist custom of „giving“ (*dana*) on Burmese economy. The texts serve the aim to do some more research on the hypothesis that the Buddhist concepts behind the practice of giving are hindering the country's economic growth and development as conceptualised by mainstream economists. This hypothesis was first formulated by the famous German sociologist in his studies on the „spirit“ behind modern western capitalism and the religious-cultural backgrounds of economic behavior in other parts of the world.

Weber's main thesis is that the „spirit“ behind modern (north-)European and American capitalism is a fruit of the Calvinist wing of the Reformation brought to America by religious dissidents during the 18th and 19th century. Max Weber called the maxim “Time is Money” coined by Benjamin Franklin in 1848 the surest, simplest expression of this spirit that he defined as stemming from an „inner-worldly asceticism“ as the foundation of a rational way of doing economy. In contrast, his assessment of Buddhism was that this religion was totally other worldly aiming at an end of all human activities through the attainment of *nibbana* (Nirvana). As a consequence, in Buddhist countries no „spiritual“ foundation for what can be called „sustainable economic activities“ exist.

The economic history of Burma/Myanmar does not contradict this hypothesis. The Buddhist Burmans always complained from the beginning of modern economics introduced by the British, that the great potential of their country was always only harvested by foreigners – British, Indian, Chinese. (Side note: The economic success of Thailand, another Buddhist country in South-east Asia can be attributed to the fact that the economy of the country is almost completely in the hand of Sino-Thai families after the founders of the Bangkok dynasty, being half-Chinese, invited their cousins from China to migrate to the country. This did not happen in Burma because of colonialism – the Indian and Chinese communities brought into the country by the British were and are still hated by the Burmese.)

The discussing on Weber's theses is still going on, but has not been lead on to research projects in Myanmar. The following texts aim at inviting Myanmar and western experts to discuss the many questions involved in concrete ways aiming at more insights into the motivational basis of economic activities in Myanmar and the extent of the “*dana* economy” producing the goods that are given away to Buddhist monks, monasteries, religious festivals etc. (ans their Christian and Muslim parallels.)

The texts are arranged in chronological order.

Text 1: David E. Pfanner and Jasper Ingersoll 1962 Theravada Buddhism and Village Economic Behaviour. A Burmese and Thai Comparison. *Journal of Asian Studies* 21: 341-361

The article is based on field studies in two villages in Burma and Thailand in 1959 and 1960. Both villages had the same size (150 and 330 houses respectively) and were located some 60 miles afar from the capitals of both countries close to smaller towns (Pegu and Nakhonpathom). The study addressed the following questions:

- “1) What are the significant religious roles in the community and, in particular, what is the role of the Buddhist monk or priest?
- (2) To what extent do Buddhist doctrine and moral norms based on this doctrine influence economic activity and economic roles?
- (3) What are the economic consequences of particular religious activities?
- (4) What is the implication of the relationship between the religious roles and economic activities for economic development?” (342)

The word *dana* is not mentioned in the article but the authors stress that the concept of merit is very important in both countries and influences the attitude towards economic activities. With regard to Burma, Pfanner writes after stating that the monks to not directly interfere in economic activities: “The point at which the role of the monk becomes most significant for the economy is his influence on the disposition of the family income. As a highly visible, living example of ‘meritful’ and exemplary conduct, as the embodiment of the highest cultural values, the sponsorship and continuous support of the monk is considered one of the highest forms of merit making. [...] The generalized support of this does not however constitute very much of a drain of the resources of the villagers, the major burden being taken by the wealthier households. The major economic importance of merit offerings in terms of financial outlay is to be found in the initiation and ordination ceremonies for youths entering the monkhood (*shinbyu*) and in the annual robe-giving ceremony (*kahtein*) at each monastic school.” (347)

“It was estimated by the writer that in the village [...] an average from four to six percent of net disposable cash income available after production costs was spent for religious purposes. On the surface this figure may not seem to represent a large proportion of income or expenditure, but it does become significant when compared with the proportion of income saved or invested in economic advanced countries, or with the allocation of surplus income beyond subsistence. [...] The extent to which income is devoted to these religious purposes is the extent to which alternative consumptions or investment choices are rejected, and it is here that the economic effects of religious expenditure can be seen. The social benefit and psychological satisfaction derived from these ceremonies is enormous, but a survey of farmers [...] indicates a tendency for increments to income to be absorbed by these religious expenditures. The absorption of increments to income through increases of productivity, increased prices paid for the product or through the growing of a second crop, is partly responsible for the maintenance of the standard of living at the present level, and a reduced amount of savings available apart from the consequences of such expenditures for rural indebtedness. [...] The effect of these expenditures is to inhibit the accumulation or concentration of wealth despite addition in income, and also to diminish or level differences in income since the wealthier villagers are expected to be, and are in fact, more generous in their contributions than the less wealthy. The small differences in income that do exist are generally not reflected in a significantly higher standard of living or consumption and are not devoted to a higher form of investment, but may provide increased leisure through the use of hired labour in place of family members.” (348).

The articles, concentrating on the role of the monks, concludes his article thus: “The monks of Burma insofar as they have an interest in maintaining the present status hierarchy, may resist changes which would result in the redistribution of social prestige in such a way that secular ones receive a greater share than at present. Monks have entered the political arena before when they believed that Buddhism was threatened, but thus far in the post war years they have not perceived economic changes as a threat and have remained aloof.” (349-50)

A difference between the two countries is noted with regard to the activities of monks in development projects. In Burma monks seem not to be interested very much in such activities while in Thailand the government tries to engage monks to support government schedules.

Text 2: Manning Nash 1965 *The Golden Road to Modernity. Village Life in Contemporary Burma*. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.

The book contains the result of anthropological field work in 1960 and 1961 in two Burmese villages – one depending on dry farming, the other on irrigation farming - in Upper Burma, located in Mandalay and Sagaing Division respectively.

Nash provides detailed accounts of the expenditures of three types of households - rich, moderate and poor. According to his calculation “religious” spending amounts to 14,3% of the annual budget

(900 Kyat of Kyat 6,292.84), 7,6% (120 of 2,580,76) and 2,1% (20 of 923,60) of the respective households (29).

A long section of the book (115-140) deal with “Buddhist Giving” as the acts of “building of kutho” (merit). Giving is defined “as the means, the positive volitional acts of building kutho, of refining the nature of the self. The act of freely giving is in a strict sense the Buddhist rite of sacrifice.” (115) Two hierarchies are discriminated, one regarding the “meritorious acts of self-sacrifice” - 1. build a pagoda; 2. give a *shinbyu* (sponsoring a novice monk); 3. build a monastery (and donate it to a monk); 4. donate a well or bell to a monastery; 5. feed a group of monks (*hsungywe*); 6. feed and gibe alms to monks; 7. feed and give hospitality to laymen – the second with regard to the receiving person – 1. presiding monk of a monastery; 2. monk (*pongyi*); 3. novice (*koyin*); 4. nun; 5. lay person. (116).

Different kinds of giving are described in detail. (116-132) It is stressed that the building of a pagoda that can be done only by powerful rich persons is connected to a sharing of merit as well as an opportunity of displaying secular wealth and reputation. (132-24) After that, the *kathein* is described as a common activity organised by the local Buddhist Association. (132-136) – The ritual of giving daily meals to the monks is done by the *koyins* and the food is not eaten by the monks. It is consumed by the novices, guests of the monastery and the animals around. The monks eat food specially prepared for them. “The daily giving to the sangha then is a ritual statement of the relation of the laity to the sangha (and reciprocally) and of the relation of human beings to the Buddha, all placed in the sacrificial idiom of giving to purify the self [...]. The daily acts of putting some rice out for “other living creatures,” the placing of cooked food on the Buddha altar, and other giving of cooked food all, to greater or lesser extent, say and mean the same thin.” (138)

Finally, some remarks are made about hospitality as a kind of giving starting with the lowest act of filling the jugs outside the village with water to be consumed by thirsty travelers. (139-140)

Nash summarises his analysis of the Buddhist impact on the economy this way: “The Buddhist emphasis on giving sacrificially [...] then is both a spur o economic activity (to get the wealth to give) and a brake because it freezes wealth in monumental rigidity of the pagodas and kyaungs, or dissipates it in the feasting of kutho groups for both secular and religious ends. Another double edged effect of Buddhism on the economy and the potentials for economic growth is an individualistic system of belief; it places at the center for moral concern the fate and destiny of a single individual bundle of *kan*; the kutho group and the territoriality are but minor elements compared to the overwhelming preoccupation with the plane of existence of a given consciousness. [...] This indifference [...] to organise for any end other than to build kutho [...] is certainly a liability when economic growth is so closely tied to effective hierarchical organizations based on functional, task-oriented authority. [...] Buddhism makes for an equalitarian society, and [...] it is the individual achievement of *pon*, *gon*, and *awza* that is relevant to social action.” (161)

Looking at future developments, Nash writes: “This system [of belief and practice oriented to the condition of the self in future states] bears ambiguously on the Burmese prospect of economic growth. One of the tasks of the Burmese intellectuals is the reduction of this ambiguity to make Buddhism come to grips with the prospect of a modern, industrial, and eve-growing society.” (164) “My prognostication [...] is that the [...] system [of a cultural-religious ways to look at the future] will attenuate under the onslaught of modern science, and the remote Nibbana will come to be replaced by more proximate religious states of salvation, and that a more austere and puritanical element will come to mark Burmese Buddhism. But [...] it does take more [...] incentive to get a Buddhist into economic activity in Burma, as against say a Muslim, or a Chinese Confucian, or even a Sikh or Hindu, all of whom are prominently engaged in the most modern of the occupations, while the Burmese, except for government, army, and politics, are over-represented in the most traditional of occupations.” (165)

Text 3: Melford E. Spiro 1966 Buddhism and Economic Action in Burma. *American Anthropologist* 68: 1163-1173.

Abstract:

The Buddhist world view, and especially its notions of rebirth and karma, provide a cognitive orientation within which religious spending is a much sounder and much more profitable investment than economic saving (in the usual sense of "saving"). This, at least, is the case in Burma, from which the materials for this paper are taken. Contrary, then, to the usual claims concerning Burmese improvidence, their consumption behaviour, given this world view, is both provident and rational. (1163)

a) Basis – a „simple behavioral assumption“:

„I assume that the behavior of any well-socialized adult is instigated by some need, that is, by the desire to attain some socially approved goal, which, if attained, can satisfy one of the drives by which the goal has been cathected. I further assume, however, that for almost any need this well-socialized adult has a fairly wide behavioral repertory, that is, a set of potential acts, all of which are instrumental for the satisfaction of the need.

Hence, any observed act represents a *choice* from among a set of alternative, often conflicting, potential acts. I further assume that this choice of the one from the many is based on the actor's *perception*, or *evaluation*, of the relative instrumental efficacy of the members of the set for satisfying the need. I assume, finally, that this perception is importantly determined by his *cognitive* system and, specifically, by that part of his cognitive system that constitutes his conceptions of nature, of society, and of culture. For it is from these conceptions, among others, that actors evaluate their projected actions as being possible, desirable, meaningful, and so on, or their reverse.

Within this framework, I should like to examine the relationship between Buddhism and economic behavior—more specifically, consumption behavior—in Burma.“ (1164)

b) Rejection of three generally held assumptions as wrong or misleading: 1) The „Burmese are essentially concerned with spiritual, as opposed to material, values.“ 2) The „Burmese have little, if any, concern for the future, preferring rather to believe that things somehow will take care of themselves.“ 3) The „funneling of earnings into religious channels is often taken to reflect the Buddhist doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, and more especially the Truth that “clinging” (*lanha*), particularly clinging to material things, is the root of suffering (*dukha*). In contrast: „the Burmese layman, whatever else he may desire, desires good and plentiful food, fine clothes, a “pukkha” house, and so on. And although most laymen agree that Buddhism takes a negative view toward material pleasures, few of them ... will agree that the desire for such pleasures, whether satisfied or unsatisfied, is the cause of suffering. Suffering, rather, is believed to be caused by illness, poverty, dacoits, evil spirits, sorcerers, rapacious government officials, drought, and so on.“ (1164-5)

c) Hypothesis: „Perhaps, given their [the average Burmese] behavioral environment, religious spending is more efficacious for the satisfaction of material desires than economic saving.“ Historical background: Continuous history of poverty, political insecurity, confiscating of private wealth etc. (1166)

d) Observations on the Burmese „behavioral environment“ and its consequences: „The centrally operative feature of the Burmese ... is the belief in rebirth. This belief, which is derived from Buddhism, is held with almost unanimous conviction in every stratum of Burmese society. ... how one is reborn is determined not by one's aspirations, but by one's karma, and rebirth as a wealthy man or in a heaven requires extraordinarily exceptional karma. Now karma is neither fate nor luck; it is, rather, the net balance of one's merits (Burmese, *kuzou*; Pali, *kusala*) and demerits (Burmese, *akuzou*; Pali, *akusala*) acquired in all of one's rebirths, including the present one. Merit, in turn, is acquired by three means: charity (*dana*), morality (Burmese, *&la*; Pali, *sila*), and meditation (Burmese, *bauwana*; Pali, *bhavana*).

As the Burmese view it, charity is especially efficacious for the acquisition of merit whose karmic consequence is birth as a wealthy human, morality for rebirth in heaven, and meditation for the attainment of nirvana, that is, for the cessation of rebirth. Since the attainment of nirvana is believed to be all but impossible for the typical human - and since, moreover, it is rarely desired, at least not in the immediate future - we can restrict our discussion to charity and morality. ... For although capital is increased by saving, merit is increased by religious spending, and surely, from what has already been said, religious spending is the Burman's soundest financial investment. ... From the returns on this investment—in the form of

accumulated merit-he can reasonably expect that his material desires will be wonderfully, even ecstatically, gratified in a future existence, if not as a blissful inhabitant of one of the Buddhist heavens, then as a wealthy man in the human world.

But this is not all. To support a monk, to provision a monastery, to build a pagoda-these are not only important for one's future existences, they are important in one's present existence as well. This type of spending not only adds to one's store of merit, it is a crucial means to the acquisition of religious prestige (*goun*), which is desired as much as physical pleasure." Furthermore, the *pwes* accompanying many festivals, satisfy the desire for pleasure. (1166-1168)

e) Thesis: „For the average Burman, then, the choice between economic saving and religious spending is a simple one. Religious spending is a highly profitable investment for the future, as well as a source of pleasure in the present. Economic saving, on the other hand, is not only a risky, if not an unprofitable, investment for the future; it also precludes the enjoyment of those few pleasures available in the present.“ (1168)

f) It follows a note on the shinbyu ceremony and a summary and conclusions regarding the „behavioral assumptions“ of Spiro's research.

g) Outlook: „These behavioral consequences of the karmic belief will continue to obtain, of course, only as long as the belief in rebirth is maintained. If the latter belief is corroded by the conflicting beliefs of scientific biology, the belief in karma, and its correlative belief in merit, will become meaningless. If, then, the duration of “life” is reduced to the confines of but one birth, the Burmese will be faced with radically different choices.“ (1172)

Text 4: Melford E. Spiro 1970 *Buddhism and Society. A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes*. New York and London, Harper & Row.

Spiro's work is based on field work in a Burmese village in Upper Burma in 1961 and 1962 after an earlier preparatory visit to the country and Ceylon in 1959. After the introductory “prologue” introducing the “anthropological problem” of Buddhism (3-28), the book identifies three different systems characterising Buddhism, “ideological” (31-187), “ritual” (191-275), and “monastic” (279-421), before finally outlining the relationship of “Buddhism and the World” (425-477). Within this differentiated account, the concept of *dana* is described in different contexts.

1 The basis: *Dana* as part of soteriological chain

Giving is part of the central concept of merit (*kuthou*) which again is the central element of “kammatic soteriology” guiding the belief system of the ordinary Buddhists instead of a “nibbanic soteriology” that aims at achieving the ultimate goal of salvation here and now. Within the latter – and according to enlightened interpretations, the original and “pure” form of Buddhism – concept, *kamma* is a hindrance to salvation because its accumulation – either in form of “good” or “bad” deeds - causes rebirth. In Burma – as in other Theravada Buddhist countries – this concept has shifted and *kamma* has become the “ultimate determinant” to salvation. The flexible concept helps to meet the demands of a layman's daily life without losing sight of the cessation of all *kamma* and the attainment of *nibbana* through a continuing cycle of rebirths. Acquiring a surplus of good merit within this life circle serves this purpose and giving is the first of a triad – *dana*, morality (*thi-la*), and meditation (*ba-wa-na*) - of means to pragmatically reconcile present necessities and the final goal of leaving the many worlds of suffering. (93-95)

2 The primacy of *dana*

“When asked to list the ways in which merit can be achieved, the Burmese, almost with no exception, mention *dana* to the exclusion of everything else.” (103) This is connected to a negative assessment of *thi-la* as laid down in the five precepts. Any violation of the precepts causes demerit. “Giving” is the best way to compensate for that. Furthermore, *dana* – different from *thi-la* – can be easily measured (how often, how much, to whom). Finally, the shift to kammatic soteriology implies a shift from “inwardness” to “externalism”. Giving can be done almost “mechanically and automatically without the prior requirement of psychological or spiritual change”. (104) But even though, giving is an act of self-sacrifice in the footsteps of the Buddha. The famous *Vessantara-Jataka*, the last of the stories of his previous births, is the most famous of all in Burma (107-108). Finally, the primacy of *dāna* “lies in the honor and prestige that is attached to giving in Burmese society.” (108)

3 The predominance of food and the calculation of the amount of giving

There is a hierarchy of goods that lead to the acquirement of good merit, but most Burmese cannot build a pagoda or a monastery or sponsoring a great festival for the monks. Therefore, the offering of food is the most prominent form of *dāna*. (109) It is particularly important in cases where monks are fed in connection with a funeral because the merit of this deed is transferred to the deceased. (253) - There are four types of giving according to the material means available to a person: *hinza dāna* (less than one can afford), *mizima dāna* (as much as one can afford), *pinita dāna* (more than one can afford), and *prissiga dāna* (sacrificial giving). The second type is regarded the most appropriate. "The Burmese say that one one-fourth of one's income should be contributed as *dāna*, one half should be spent on living expenses, and one-fourth should be saved." (110)

4 *Dāna* in crisis management

Giving is used not just to secure a good rebirth but to be safe in view of looming crises in this life. Therefore, every village needs a monk. "The monk may be viewed as the Burman's insurance policy, as it were: his daily feedings of monks represents his daily premium payments, and the special feasts offered in times of crises represent special assessments." A special and costly gift is the purchase of domestic animals to save them from slaughter as an enhanced measure of setting free birds and bringing turtles and fish to a safe pool in a monastery. (271)

5 Kammatic Salvation and economic motivation

"Unlike nibbanic Buddhism, in which worldly action is both an obstacle to and a disproof of one's chances of salvation – and unlike Calvinism, for which success in certain kinds of worldly action is proof that one has been elected for salvation – kammatic Buddhism views worldly action as soteriologically neutral." (453) Economic and political action is neither a means nor a hindrance to salvation. But: "The salience of the belief in *dāna*-acquired merits as a primary means to salvation provides a powerful motive for economic action." (454) Many Burmese keep merit-account books. "*Dāna* is not only the most important means for acquiring merit, but is equally important for prestige." (455)

6 *Dāna* and economic development

In Spiro's village, the average family income was 1,000 Kyat (US\$ 200). The costs for a shin-byu ceremony varied between 200 Kyat (very poor families) to 5,000 Kyat (rich families). In other cases, even more money was spent. "The funds required to cover these expenses are acquired through accumulated savings, the sale of property, and loans." (456) The normal expenditure in 1961 on Buddhism in the village of 119 households was 41,800 Kyat – that is 35% of the average income (119,000 Kyat). (458) The information obtained by village headmen are: "...the typical Upper Burmese village is reported to spend 30-40 per cent of its net disposable cash income on *dāna* and related activities. [...] If this is so, it is no exaggeration to say that the economy of rural Burma is geared to the overriding goal of the accumulation of wealth as a means to acquiring merit." (459)

Comparison of the "kammatic Buddhist" with the "Weberian puritan capitalist": "For the Buddhist [...] no less than for the Puritan, the pursuit of salvation provides a powerful motive for economic action. If, then, the Buddhism and Puritanism have had opposite consequences for economic development and growth, it is not because the soteriology of one (as Weber has argued) provides a motif for worldly action while that of the other provides no such motivation. It is rather [...] that their soteriologies lead to different motivations with respect to savings. For the Puritan [...] savings are to be reinvested to create further wealth – for the greater glory of God. For the Buddhist [...] successful economic action is a prerequisite to enhancing his chances of salvation, and savings are to be spent on *dāna* [...]. For the Buddhist, the proof of salvation is to be found, not in accumulating and creating new wealth, but in giving it away in the form of *dāna*. [...] That this merit-through-*dāna* pattern has had important consequences for the Burmese economy [...] should be obvious. It takes little imagination to realize that, if even part of the economic surplus that for so long has been devoted to *dāna* had been available instead for economic investment, Burmese economic history might have been significantly different." (460)

The pattern is therefore economically dysfunctional, but totally rational in the eyes of the individual Burma Buddhist (see for details Spiro 1967).

7 *Dāna* and social services

The merit gained by giving is proportional to the sanctity of the recipient. “Overwhelmingly it is believed that assistance, physical or financial, to secular objects or lay persons provides the donor with little merit. [...] “Let the government provide such things” is their attitude. Why build a school, which has but ephemeral value, they argue, when for the same funds one can build a monastery and appreciably augment one’s store of merit?” (464) That does not mean that the Burmese do not want roads, schools, hospitals etc., but from the villagers’ perspective, such measures have to be implemented by the government. “In the eyes of the average peasant, the government is viewed in some magical way as the possessor of huge amounts of largess which it acquires almost independently of its powers of taxation. [...] That they [roads etc.] are not built is not due to lack of funds, but to the greed, corruption and inefficiency of government officials.” (467)

8 Conclusion

“If the belief in rebirth were weak and the belief in karma only loosely held, if *dāna* were to lose its salience as a means for acquiring merit – if the belief in any of these doctrines were weakened, let alone rejected, the entire motivational structure described before would collapse, and with it the social and economic consequences I have pointed out.” (467)

Text 5: Naoko Kumada 2004 Rethinking *Danā* in Burma: The Art of Giving.

The paper is part of a Ph.D. Dissertation submitted in 2001 entitled „In the World of Rebirth: Politics, Economics and Society of Burmese Buddhists”.¹ It is based on anthropological field work in Myanmar conducted after 1990 in Myanmar villages. The author conducted interviews. Empirical data about the amount of what was given in different contexts is not provided.

The article modifies the notion of previous literature on ‘giving’ in Burma concentrating solely on the relationship between laypeople and monks neglecting the function of *danā* in social relations between laypeople. According to the author’s findings, the term is used in a broad variety of social contexts denoting religious as well as secular social relations. At the beginning, a description of a Burmese friend of the term is quoted:

Dana is to give away (*hlu-dan*) or to donate. It is to give (*pāykan*), to give away (*hlu-dan*), to give away in charity (*sunkye*) - whether to human beings, to nats, animals, to monks, or to female renunciators (*methilashin*), to whomever you give, it is *danā*. Giving to elders, to friends of your age, to younger people can all be *danā*. To build a pagoda, to build a monastery, is *danā*. To sink a well or to dig a reservoir is equivalent to donating water and is therefore *danā*.

It is argued that “giving (i.e. giving up of one’s possessions) can be seen as a lay form of renunciation, in other words, a form of renunciation and asceticism for those who cannot fully renounce the world.” It is thus not just a symmetric and reciprocal exchange of material goods given by the laypeople for merit provided by the member of the sangha. Instead, one main characteristic of *danā* is *seydana* (pali: *cetanā*), the intention attached to giving. “*Danā* [...] needs to be done with no expectation of return from the recipient, and with a sense of detachment.” (5) This quality reduces the importance of the amount of the gift. Furthermore, many terms are used for the act of giving – *hlu* (donate, sacrifice to the Buddha though the Sangha or laypeople), *sún* (giving from monks to layman, never the other way round), *gadāw* (giving as an act of reverence towards monks, teachers, elder people etc.) with overlapping meanings. Giving to the poor is also regarded to be meritorious, but not as much as giving to monks. Sometimes however, an *ahlu* (meritorious festival) might be held in a poor village because it can be held in a greater scale there and confers more prestige to the giver.

1 The paper was submitted at a conference entitled “Burmese Buddhism and the Spirit Cult Revisited” held at Stanford University on May 22 and 23, 2004. For the full text see http://www.dhammadownload.com/books/Politics_of_Gift-giving_in_Burmese.pdf.

In many cases it is not clear from the outside, if an act of giving is *daná* or not. One reason is that the central motif of *seydana* as an intrinsic act cannot be observed.

The author regards giving as a “form of renunciation of the this-worldly, a shunning of the material world, and an expression of the ideal of asceticism.”

Daná provides a way to balance the worldly desire to possess and the otherworldly ideal to renounce. “...*daná* does give [the layman] prestige (*gon*) and a certain power in society. An *ahlu* given ungrudgingly, feeding a great number of people, [...] is the object of public admiration and always becomes a topic of talk and will be impressed upon people’s memory. What food they offered during the feat is a question always asked [...] Failure to meet people’s expectations [...] can result in a lowering of the donor’s dignity and reputation.”

“It can be said that the Burmese acquire ‘symbolic capital’ by giving up material possessions in the name of merit.” This capital might be converted into “real” capital because of the prestige gained. Therefore, there is “not always a conflict between religious and other goals. [...] in the Burmese system things, money, reputation, power, merit etc. tend to go to those who achieve high religious goals.” In many cases however, *daná* serves the aim of “accumulating merit, the most valuable form of accumulation in the world of rebirth.”

In her conclusion to the chapter, the author states: “By focusing too much on the monk/lay relationship, previous literature presented a rather static view of *daná*. This chapter has shown the fluid nature of *daná*. People swiftly shift their emphases in their practice of gift-giving, and the practice of *daná* is more dynamic. Once we shift our attention to giving among the laity, we can see the complicated discourse of *dana* and how people skilfully practise it. *Daná* can easily permeate all kinds of giving and the border between *daná* and ordinary giving is not always clear. When practised, *daná* is often bound with worldly elements, and people often use its idiom to achieve religious as well as social ends.

I also showed how religious ideals such as renunciation and asceticism are important and practised by the laity. By gift-giving the donor gives away his worldly possessions for the sake of merit. This may thus be seen as a lay form of renunciation. The monks have no monopoly of religious ideals. Although the laity do not fully renounce this world, they practise religious ideals in their own way and religious ideals can be found here and there in the everyday life of the village society.

It is among these intricate relations between the this-worldly and the otherworldly that Burmese villagers play politics. Religious ideals greatly influence the way villagers give and exchange things and the way they consume wealth. As the Buddhist ideal is not to possess but to renounce, renunciation is a stronger way of asserting oneself and Burmese Buddhists often proclaim their identity, status and achievements by renouncing objects. The Burmese do respect wealth but according to the Buddhist ideal its renunciation is regarded as nobler than possession.

Daná, which provides an opportunity for one to show what one has renounced in the name of merit, also provides an opportunity to display one’s wealth and power. It is at the same time a form of renunciation and a form of manifestation of power. By giving the donor not only aims to acquire merit but also manipulates (wittingly or unwittingly) meanings such as piety, prestige, power and generosity, thus seeking to maintain or enhance his position in society.”

Text 6: Sayadaw U Eindathiri 2011, *Dāna and Hope in Myanmar Buddhism*

Dāna

Writing on the topic of *Dāna* and Hope I will begin with some explanations about *Dāna*.

Dāna can be classified into the following three categories:

dānasāmi (*dāna* given like a master),

dānasahāya (*dāna* given like a companion),

dānadāsa (*dāna* given like a servant).

If a person offers a valuable object with the best intention to a noble recipient considering it too good for of using it herself, this constitutes an act of *dānasāmi*.

If a person offers an object that she uses herself, or an object that is similar in value and function to one that she uses herself, this constitutes an act of *dānasahāya*.

If a person offers an object that she has no use for, or another object of minor quality that she wouldn't want herself, this constitutes an act of *dānadāsa*.

Of these three, *dānasāmi* will reap the best and noblest consequences. *Dānasahāya* will reap mediocre consequences. And *dānadāsa* will reap the least desirable consequences.

Related to *dāna* is also the following: Even if an animal is served food so that it can eat its fill once, the offering will bear the fruits of long life, physical beauty, comfortable live, physical strength and intelligence in for the next 100 lives, as the Buddha, explained about the 14 kinds of recipients for *dāna*.

Hope (*Hmyo lin. chin:*)

Hmyo lin. chin: (Sayadaw here uses a Myanmar word) usually translated as hope only means, that there is a wish that something may happen. It is not yet the actual experience of something happening. Hope is desire or will; not destination. He, who hopes to become a Buddha, must practice for a very long time until he has reached perfection. Only when he has reached perfection will he become a Buddha.

...

The Hope of Myanmar Buddhists: Giving and Hope

Buddhists make offerings or donations with various types of hope. These are:

- 1) The hope that the fruits of their offering may make this life more comfortable and peaceful
- 2) The hope that the fruits of the donation may lead to a favourable next existence in affluence and peace

Or, to put it another way, through donations they hope to achieve

- 1) that this life becomes more comfortable
- 2) that they may realize (or get to know) *nibbāna*, that is free from all thirst and needs (*ta_ha*)
- 3) that they, before attaining *nibbāna*, may experience, while still in *sa_sāra*, favourable future existences as a wealthy human, as a deva, or as a wealthy deva and gets a maximum of sensual pleasures.

Talking about giving and hope, I will now go on to explain about the four types of *saddhā* – usually translated as faith or confidence – in the context of giving.

2 Animals are the lowest of 14 categories of recipients for donations listed in the *Dakkhi_avibha_a Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya* : a Buddha being the highest, followed by arahats, sangha, Buddhist layman, moral non-Buddhist, immoral human, animal. Here the Buddha also points out that the fruits of a donation for the donor depend on the nobility of the recipient.

Four kinds of *Saddhā*

There are four kinds of *saddhā*: *Pasādasaddhā*, *Okappanasaddhā*, *Adhigamasaddhā* and *Āgamasaddhā*.

Pasādasaddhā means, that one is not able to distinguish between things that truly deserve faith and reverence and those that don't. One places confidence in whatever one comes across, but one also

easily loses that confidence again. This kind of *saddhā* is not stable and without reasoning. Just reverence without a proper foundation. A confidence coupled with desire: If I give to him, he will love me, if I offer things to him, he won't harm me. If I make offerings, people will praise my generosity. *Pasādasaddhā* is a kind of confidence, where one may give, in order to be praised. If one sees a poor, suffering person, one gives out of pity, but without being aware that this *kamma* will bear fruits in one's next life. *Pasādasaddhā* is confidence without wisdom.

Okappanasaddhā is faith coupled with a good understanding of the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha and the law of *kamma*. It is firm, lived faith in the truth of the Three Gems, the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. *Okappanasaddhā* is faith coupled with wisdom.

Pasādasaddhā and Okappanasaddhā

Pasādasaddhā is like the silvery moon that shines from the sky at night: Its light comforts people; it is enjoyable and makes them happy. However, it is not sufficient to work effectively in factories and offices, read, write, or work in the fields.

Okappanasaddhā on the other hand, is like the bright sun in the daytime sky. When it shines, all living beings can do their work, seek education and study without difficulties.

So *okappanasaddhā*, because of the light of wisdom and understanding, allows people to fully eliminate all *kilesā* (defilements). With noble understanding and wisdom it is capable of leading to freedom from all craving, that is, to *nibbāna*.

Pasādasaddhā is like a boat, that before taking you to down the river to the ocean – that is all rivers' final destination – takes you to a couple of islands in the middle of the river – islands that are very beautiful and full of food and luxuriant pleasures.

3 Based on the writings of Buddhaghosa, who distinguishes between *pasādasaddhā* (spontaneous faith which arises whenever the words 'Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha' are spoken), *okappanasaddhā* (faith which arises after some kind of assent to the Buddha's teaching), *adhigamasaddhā* (faith based on attainment, the faith which arises through the penetration); *gaman(īy)asaddhā* i.e. the faith of the *bodhisatta* which arises from the moment he is predicted to become a *sammāsambuddha*) (*Suma_galavilāsinī* II 529) as well as on analyses of faith with and without knowledge/desire contained in the *Abhiṣamma.cf.* Ashin Janakābhīraṃsa (1999): *Abhidhamma in Daily Life*. Mahagandayone Monastery, Amarapura.

Pasādasaddhā takes the doer of wholesome deeds not directly to the end of the *sa_sāra*, to *nibbāna* but leads him to intermediate, pleasurable stations on the way, such as to be born as a wealthy human or a deva.

If the intention of giving, or making *dāna* is not combined with wisdom and does therefore not aim at *nibbāna* the fruit of it will not take the giver to the ocean of *nibbāna* but let him stop on an 'island' on the way – such as in the existence of a wealthy man or a deva and is not capable of taking him further.

Okappanasaddhā on the other hand is like a boat that can take you directly to the final destination, the ocean, *nibbāna*.

Like in this image, *okappanasaddhā* means that the giver's intention '*nibbānassa paccayo hotu*' – may this *dāna kusala cetana* [that is, the wholesome intention to perform *dāna*] help to attain *nibbāna* – is combined with wisdom, aims at *nibbāna* and will therefore take the donor directly to 'the ocean' – the end of *sa_sāra*, *nibbāna*, where there is no craving – without stopping at other 'islands'.

These are the hopes, that Myanmar Buddhists nurture when they make *dāna*.

Adhigamasaddhā and Āgamasaddhā

Adhigamasaddhā is the confidence of noble persons (*ariya puggala*) well advanced in their insights and wisdom including the *sotāpanna*, 'one who has entered the stream' and reached the first of four

stages of enlightenment, the *Sakadagami* or ‘once-returner’ who is on the second stage of enlightenment, the *Anāgāmi* or non-returner who is on the third stage of enlightenment or the *Arhat* (*arahat*) who has attained full enlightenment.

Āgamasaddhā finally is the confidence of a future Buddha.

Okappanasaddhā and Adhigamasaddhā

Okappanasaddhā is like boat or ship that takes you to the opposite shore. *Adhigamasaddhā* is the confidence that the ariyās, the noble ones, have attained; it is like the other shore.

Confidence based on conviction

Conviction based on knowledge is of paramount importance. *Saddhā* denotes abiding conviction in the Three Gems, and the belief that beings are heirs to their own volitional actions, both in this existence and hereafter. A clear and incisive way of perception is the chief attribute of what is meant by the word conviction.

The idea of a soul or a self does not exist in Buddhism

*Kammasa kāraṇa natthi, vipākassaca vedako,
suddhadhammā pavattanti, evetaṃ sammadassanaṃ.*

There is no doer of a deed, or one who reaps the deed’s result.

Mind and matter, cause and effect and phenomena alone flow on – **no** other view than this is right.

There is no ‘he’ who does *kamma*; and there is no ‘he’ who enjoys its fruits; all there is is *nāma* and *rūpa* (mind and matter). Only this – without any deviations and additions is the right view.

So even when a donation is made by ‘Peter’, Peter won’t be Peter in a next life anymore. The next life is cause and effect, flux of mind and matter only. There is no Peter who reaps the fruit of the donation. Mind and matter, cause and effect alone flow on.

Text 7: Jacquet, Carine and Matthew J. Walton 2013 Buddhism and Relief in Myanmar: Reflections on Relief as a Practice of Dāna. In: Kawanami, Hiroko and Geoffrey Samuel, *Buddhism, International Relief Work, and Civil Society*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 51-73.
(https://www.academia.edu/8432669/Buddhism_and_Relief_in_Myanmar_Reflections_on_Relief_as_a_Practice_of_Dana_2013_)

The article starts with an overview on the Buddhist relief organisations after Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008 with the focus on the activities of the prominent Sitagu Sayadaw and his followers. The section highlights the positive effects on the interfaith relationship created by the cooperation of people and organisations with a different religious background. Based on interviews conducted in urban areas, changes in the donation practice within some segments of Myanmar society are described and the consequences of the involvement of Buddhist monks for the relationship between civil society and the government are discussed. The special context of the disaster inducing material assistance to the affected population changed some patterns of everyday giving. All informants of the researches “saw post-Nargis relief donations as *dāna*, no one mentioned that they took the moral standing of recipients into account when planning their donations, which suggests that the dynamics of *dāna* were different from situations of everyday giving.” (61) One monk from a university in Yangon discriminated between three levels of *dāna*: The lowest was giving with the expectation to receive future benefits like better conditions in the next life; the second is the intention to progress on the way to Enlightenment and the most noble is the pure motivation to relieve the suffering of others. The last level applied to most of the donors motivated by the Nargis catastrophe. However, giving through a respected monk like the Sitagu Sayadaw might increase the value of the gift. (62). Another change happened because the

involvement of international NGOs raised the aspect of the accountability of the donations, an aspect missing in everyday giving to monks, the building of pagodas etc. (63-64). In general, during the last decades, “monks have seem to have increasingly sought to fulfill social welfare needs that have not been addressed by the state.” (65) Such tendency touches the delicate relationship between civil society and the state. The article concludes: “Opportunities to provide relief following natural disasters [...] have also contributed to a gradual shift in people’s attitudes to giving in general, resulting in a more sustained focus on social donations, beyond the immediate situation of relief aid.” (68)

Text 8: Laura Hornig 2016 Buddhism and Economic Behavior in Myanmar
(http://www.eth.mpg.de/4044160/blog_2016_04_11_01)

The three pages text introduces a part of a EU sponsored project of the German Max-Planck Society dealing with „Civilisation and moral economy in the 21st century“.

According to a recent report, Myanmar is the „most generous country in the world“. This ranking, called the World Giving Index, is published annually by the London-based Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) and based not on the actual amount of money donated – here the USA are topping the list – but the willingness to give. The author’s own experiences are in line with this findings. She met some people claiming that they were donating half of their income to monasteries. She met a monk at a well known Buddhist University in Sagaing who criticises such extent of giving:

"Many people misunderstand the point about donations completely", the senior monk [...] told me. "They believe the act of giving helps them to gain merit – which would result in a better situation in their future existence. They think, the more the better. In the end, they donate too much. Any extra money that people have is directly given to monasteries. But the Buddhist teachings tell very clearly how you should handle your profit: divide it into four." (this refers to the *Pattakamma Sutta*) Slightly changed from the original teachings and adapted to the situation of a contemporary business, the monk suggested the use of each fourth as follows: "One fourth for future investment, one fourth for yourself and your family, one fourth for donations and social welfare and the last fourth, you save." Hence according to this monk, there is a mismatch between religious teachings and the actual behaviour of many people, as they often donate more than the teachings suggest.

Two other motifs besides that given by the monk are named: “Social redistribution” like the financing of monastic schools and pother social projects and gaining social prestige through financing festival related to religious events.

The main field work was done in Patheingyi, the capital of Ayeyawadi Division. A number of interviews touching different topics were conducted but there are no final results yet.