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# *Reviews*

## *Buddhism and Society*

*Burmese Supernaturalism*. By MELFORD E. SPIRO. Prentice-Hall, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967. Pp. x, 300, $3.95.

*Buddhism and Society: a Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*. By MELFORD E. SPIRO. Harper and Row: New York, and Evanston 1970; George Allen & Unwin: London, 1971. Pp. xiv, 510, $17.95, £6.50.

1970 could be claimed as the most important year for Theravada Buddhist studies since 1881, when Rhys Davids founded the Pali Text Society; for it saw the publication of two major monographs on Theravada Buddhism in practice, both of them rich in material and in ideas, and likely long to remain standard works: Dr Tambiah's *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*, and Professor Spiro's *Buddhism and Society: a Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, to which this review is primarily devoted. (It is the second volume of a proposed triology on Burma, of which the other volume under review is the first.) The authors, leading anthropologists in England and America respectively, adhere to contrasting intellectual traditions, a contrast mirrored in their treatment of closely comparable subject matter.[1] Dr Tambiah works in the basically French tradition which dominates social anthropology in England today, deriving largely from Durkheim and Mauss, and currently preoccupied with the approach of Lévi-Strauss. For Spiro, on the other hand, 'the approach of Lévi-Strauss cannot substitute for the more traditional approaches of functional anthropology and culture-and-personality'. (*BSup*, 7)[2] He is concerned not to discern patterns in cultural phenomena, but to solve clearly formulated cause-and-effect problems, a methodological orientation which I believe to be sound. It is because I agree so fervently with his method that I think it may be fruitful if I expatiate where I disagree with his conclusions.[3]

[1] Both Tambiah and Spiro are unfair to each other's method, the former with less excuse. Spiro has Tambiah 'deliberately ignore canonical Buddhism' (*BudS*, 4), a statement belied by the matter of T's book, which he could not have seen when he wrote; Tambiah (pp. 41–2) criticizes Spiro's earlier book for neglecting the relationship of Burmese supernaturalism to Burmese Buddhism, but its last chapter is devoted to that, and I cannot agree that the rest of the book suffers from this conscious omission. On the specific point about the alleged inconsistency between belief in gods and belief in karma, which I discuss below, Tambiah is, however, right; but he is right not because Spiro's approach is 'doctrinal', which it is not, but because he has misunderstood the doctrine. The two authors do not otherwise refer to each other.

[2] He goes on to say that it 'importantly augments them', but in fact his use of Lévi-Straussian structuralism in the earlier book is minimal, in the latter nil.

[3] Both books under review are so full of interesting hypotheses, on various levels of explanation, that I cannot here mention, let alone discuss, half of them. The ethno-

The majority of Spiro's problems and explanations are cast in terms of Freudian psychology: what function does a particular Burmese religious belief, rite, or institution perform for the individuals who believe or participate—what psychological need does it fulfil? Spiro is well aware that the particular form taken by the fulfilment of the needs is the product of historical circumstance, a system of belief, ritual, etc. passed on from parent to child. In presenting his proposed solution to why the Burmese believe in karma he writes, 'That Burmese believe in this parochial expression of the generic notion [of responsibility for one's own salvation] is a happenstance of their society's religious history; that they have acquired the generic notion is a function of their own family interaction'. (*BudS*, 139) (Here he is using the word 'function' to mean 'result'.) Besides this type of question, he also asks what effects the religious beliefs and institutions have on society. In contrast again to Tambiah, whose problem situation is purely sociological, Spiro does not draw his data exclusively from a single village, and intends his results to be valid for a whole culture—the Burmese.

Spiro rejects that brand of functionalism which assumes that religion necessarily has a social function, e.g. the function of prompting social solidarity postulated by Durkheim. Already in an earlier article[4] he pointed out that *a priori* religion might just as well be dysfunctional (or neutral) for society as functional; and in fact some of his conclusions here are that Buddhism is dysfunctional in specific ways for Burmese society, in particular for political stability and economic advance. His discussion of the effect of Burmese religion on society is altogether cautious and hard-headed (see especially *BudS* chap. 18); as he says, 'the ratio of assertion to demonstration in this field has been distressingly high'. (*BudS*, 425)

This caution is absent in his presentation of psychologistic theories: here he is delightfully bold. Nor does his scepticism about religion's function (usefulness) carry over from society to the individual: it is the cornerstone of his theoretical edifice that people will only accept and maintain the religious beliefs and practices with which their parents and teachers present them if they are functional, not dysfunctional, for the resolution of their intellectual and emotional problems. 'In asserting a causal relationship between childhood experience and religious belief, this theory asserts more precisely that, given the existence of a religious world view, the former is a necessary, though not a sufficient condition for the internalization of the latter.' (*BudS*, 139) Whatever my parents tell me, I will only believe in witches or in karma if to do so gives me some psychological satisfaction. That an individual's religion is thus functional for him may be so, but seems to me to be an untestable assumption;[5] this jeopardizes the scientific status of theories built upon it.

graphy I do not discuss because I have no independent knowledge of the facts. My qualifications for writing this review are an acquaintance with Pali Buddhist texts and detailed first-hand knowledge of Buddhism in central Ceylon.

[4] 'Religion: Problems in Definition and Explanation', in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London, 1966.

[5] As a hypothesis it goes much further than the 'instrumental conception of ideas' (*BudS*, 6), with which I fully agree.



Spiro's challenging theories about the functions that their religious beliefs erve for Burmese people are hard to evaluate, in that he gives us a clear picture of the beliefs, but not of the people. Alleged Burmese character traits are only produced in these two books when they conform to what Spiro's theories would lead us (or him) to expect: for example, the Buddhist doctrine that everything in the phenomenal world is impermanent is said to correspond to instability in the Burmese character. Spiro says that many responses to his questions were on the lines, 'That is the way I feel now, but I can't tell about the future', and he concludes, 'This lability in their own emotional and mental states forms, I believe, one of the bases for their generalization that nothing is permanent, a generalization which, deriving from their own experience, provides empirical underpinning for their acceptance of the doctrine of impermanence.' (*BudS*, 90) But isn't this putting the cart before the horse? Because of their intellectual tradition the Burmans are more aware that their views change; but where is the evidence that they *do* change more than other people's?

Now to this Professor Spiro might reply that I should wait for his promised third volume 'devoted to personality and social structure'. (*BudS*, xi) But such a reply would not satisfy me, for two reasons. Firstly, if he takes Burmese character as his independent variable I think he should give us his evidence about it first, and not ask us to take it on trust; nor are a few references to secondary sources, some of them unpublished, adequate for the reader. But secondly, I am sceptical about the empirical possibility of really hard data. In these two volumes Spiro seems to me to have built up a picture of what Burmese personality ought to be like, given their religious systems; he postulates personality needs which these religious systems would fulfil, and I cannot see how he is now going to test or falsify his own theories. For example, his theory to explain two major Burmese religious beliefs, their belief in witches and their lack of belief in a saviour, is that after infancy Burmese children are treated harshly and unpredictably by their parents. He seems to me to be committed now to showing that Burmese parents are harsher and more unpredictable than others, at least than parents in societies which disbelieve in witches, or believe in saviours, or both. Quite apart from the question of bias in viewing one's own data, in principle one might perhaps show that Burmese parents are harsher than e.g. Sinhalese parents, but empirically we certainly lack the data. Therefore Spiro's theory is hard to criticize (either positively or negatively). If Sinhalese Buddhists are more inclined than Burmese Buddhists to see the Buddha as a saviour, this could be because Sinhalese fathers are kinder, but we do not have the relevant facts, and I doubt whether we are ever going to get them. (A complication in this instance is that Spiro's own data do not entirely corroborate his statement that the Burmese do not see the Buddha (or any other being) as a saviour (*BudS*, 134); of this more below.)

Although it is thus difficult rigorously to criticize those of Spiro's theories in which religion is the dependent variable and a function of Burmese character, we may still examine some of them for plausibility. The twin theories just mentioned—that Burmans believe in witches and nats (godlings) because they perceive their parents as hostile (*BSup*, 73–80—for brevity I here

oversimplify his argument slightly) and do not believe in a saviour for the same reason (*BudS*, 134—no over-simplification)—strikes me as implausible. The vast majority of societies have believed in witches. Though the Burmese have both male and female witches, the latter are prevalent, because, Spiro suggests, 'from the child's point of view the rejecting parent is the mother'. (*BSup*, 78) Are we then to believe that rarely outside modern Europe and America have mothers been nice to their children? Similarly: 'In order to believe that one can be saved by the efforts of a compassionate saviour, it is necessary—so at least it seems from available evidence—to have had the experience of *persistent* love and emotional nurturance in childhood . . . In the beginning the Burmese infant is treated with the greatest nurturance . . . As he grows older, however, this nurturance is (from his point of view) unpredictably withdrawn.' (*BudS*, 133) During the first millennium A.D. most Indians were converted from belief in their own responsibility for their own salvation to devotion (*bhakti*) to a saviour god. Was this due to a change in their child-rearing practices?

The above arguments merely suggest that Spiro's theories are implausible, but in this case it is possible to do more. A theory that two effects result from the same cause can be falsified if one effect is found without the other. Both the Kandyan Sinhalese (from my own experience) and the villagers of north-east Thailand (Tambiah's data) disbelieve in a saviour just as much as Spiro's Burmans do; but most Kandyan Sinhalese do not believe in witches (despite *BSup*, 21, note 1—Sinhalese Low Country data), and Tambiah found witchcraft beliefs in his village 'peripheral' (p. 332) and apparently obsolescent. Finally, Spiro's no-saviour theory can be criticized on grounds of internal consistency: how does it square with his discovery (*BudS*, 198) that children under twelve pray to the Buddha and see him as a personal saviour? (In this context the distinction between 'saviour' and 'protector' would be invalid: not only is it in principle unlikely that the two have different psychological meanings for a child; the children in fact prayed for both spiritual and material goods.) Surely this proves that Burmans disbelieve (to the extent that they do disbelieve) in a saviour god because they are taught that disbelief during late childhood; their family interaction has no demonstrable relevance.

But in fact Spiro had an alternative theory about Burmese saviours: that 'the Order [of monks] may indeed be viewed as a collective saviour'. (*BudS*, 411) He calls this a 'theological proposition'. He cannot mean it psychologically, for then it would conflict either with his statement that the Burmese have no saviour or with his explanation for disbelief in saviours, since some monks are harsher than parents. (*BudS*, 329) Anyway, they are supposed (see below) psychologically to represent children! So what kind of statement is this 'theological proposition' which runs counter to Buddhist theology? It seems to fall on that barren middle-ground between what the Buddhists themselves think, using the concepts of their own culture, and what the outsider can validly formulate, using descriptions applicable to the real world.

Spiro also has a theory of family interaction to explain why Burmans accept the belief that man is responsible for his own salvation. 'The Burmese infant



experiences almost complete indulgence, which (according to Ferenczi) should give rise to the infantile belief that his wants are satisfied, by his own (magical) efforts . . . It is this cognitive structure . . . which is isomorphic with the Buddhist doctrine that man *can* save himself, just as his later childhood experience creates the cognitive structure consistent with the doctrine that he *must*, if he is to be saved, save himself!' (*BudS*, 134) What evidence is there that Burmese infants are exceptionally favoured? Ferenczi was writing of all babies, and most of them, even those later deprived of affection, do not grow up to believe in karma or in an isomorphic doctrine. Building on this, Spiro suggests that 'it is plausible to believe that infantile satiety would become the (unconscious) symbol of salvation (i.e. the fulfilment of all wants) and the feasting of monks its instrument. Based on the well-known (unconscious) fantasy of magical reciprocity, the adult might expect by the feeding of monks to reconstitute his own infantile bliss.' (*idem.*) Just before this, Spiro has referred us ahead for support for his assertion that monks are 'symbolically the structural equivalent of young children'. He does indeed show to my satisfaction in the later chapter that becoming a monk can satisfy regressive needs, especially the need for dependency; but there is an unjustified leap (*BudS*, 342) from psychologism to structuralism, with no proof, whatever the monk's unconscious fantasies may be, that the layman, even unconsciously, perceives the monk as equivalent to an infant. Spiro has an excellent section (*BudS*, 103–8) on reasons for the prime importance of alms-giving; this psycho-analytic explanation is a fifth wheel.

Though I have had to criticize adversely the theories so far presented, there are other hypotheses in these books, even psychologistic ones, which I like far better. Firstly, psychiatric thinking is of course most successfully applied to situations of abnormality and healing—hence the brilliant success of *BSup* part IV, 'Illness and Supernaturalism', which deals with possession and exorcism, largely through case histories. Secondly, I prefer those theories where the reader can to some extent follow the control of the variables. All Burmans believe in karma and witches—three respondents to a village census declared disbelief in witches, though we are not told whether they had the nicest mothers—but only a few Burmese women become shamans. In a most stimulating and enjoyable chapter (*BSup*, chapter 12), which fulfils both my favourable conditions, Spiro suggests, again with supporting case histories, that shamanism is an attempt to resolve neurotic conflicts about sex. The more sociological explanation that shamans come from poor families with low prestige is valid but inadequate, because only a few of the many women with such backgrounds take to shamanism; certain psychological determinants are also required. The following chapter, on the role of male exorcists, is no less successful (though here the explanation is cast in more sociological terms).

In *BudS* there is unfortunately only one section which deals in a similar way with the psychological peculiarities of a Burmese minority group: chapter 14 discusses the prerequisites for becoming a Burmese monk. Monks are recruited exclusively from the countryside and preponderantly from poor families (whether disproportionately so Spiro's sample (*BudS*, 325) is far too small to demonstrate). While giving some weight to conscious and rational

motives (e.g. the need to escape from an intolerable home) Spiro suggests that recruits are characterized by greater than usual dependency needs, narcissism, and emotional timidity. He goes so far as to see the monastic role as 'an institutionalized and symbolic resolution of the Oedipus complex'. (*BudS*, 342) This contrasts oddly—though the two are logically compatible—with his description (*BudS*, 405–8) of Burmese veneration for monastic asceticism.

Would Spiro's hypotheses about the unconscious basis for monastic recruitment be applicable to other Theravadin societies? In Ceylon recruitment of the permanent monkhood is carried out almost entirely during boyhood and adolescence, so that the role is as much ascribed as achieved, and the monkhood seems to me more closely to represent, in personal character, a cross-section of the male population; on the other hand one could argue that those who do not leave the Order probably find more satisfaction, unconscious as well as conscious, in their role. I must report that when I discussed with Sinhalese monks the *Vessantara Jātaka*, the charter for that narcissism which permits a man to abandon his family in order to seek his own salvation (*BudS*, 346–7), they equivocated, or even said that Vessantara should *not* be emulated. In Thailand the structure of the Order is again different, as so few enter it with a permanent commitment. So comparative evidence is inconclusive; but to interpret the psychological prerequisites for monkhood in psycho-analytic terms seems less adequate than to do so for shamans because the role content is so much more obviously rationally rewarding.

After this perceptive discussion of recruitment, Spiro's next chapter, on the monk's character structure, is puzzlingly poor: 'Here we are concerned with traits which, despite the fact that their extinction is the goal of Buddhist monasticism, Burmese monks share with other Burmans—indeed with human beings everywhere.' (*BudS*, 353) He then discusses monks' vanity, hostility, etc. But unless we are told how monks compare to other Burmans, what is the point? That they do not live up to their ideals is trivial—the more so as they constitute nearly ten per cent of the male population (*BudS*, 284)! What we want to know is which character traits have been institutionalized among the Burmese monkhood; for instance, I suspect that any profession with a regular captive audience, such as university professors, would score high for vanity. Nor does Spiro suggest why, when monks in general are hostile to each other (*BudS*, 355) (like prima donnas), only those in town come to blows. Is it just the higher density?

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A major problem which confronts writers on the anthropology of Buddhism is to explain to outsiders that in practice Theravada Buddhism is always accretive and coexists with other more or less formulated systems of belief and practice. Moreover, these other systems in every Buddhist society include at least one brand of supernaturalism. The Buddhists do not call the other systems 'religion', reserving the equivalent of that term for their Buddhism; in Ceylon I was told that 'belief in gods has nothing to do with religion', and



to Spiro the nat cult was characterized as 'business'; but of course there is no reason why an anthropologist should not label a system of belief and ritual 'religion' if he so chooses, and that is what Spiro has done with Burmese nat worship. Most anthropologists in this area have now reached a consensus with the Buddhists themselves in distinguishing two (or more, but for simplicity we can stick to two) such systems in Buddhist societies: this is exemplified in the title of Tambiah's book, and by the fact that Spiro, writing at greater length, has devoted two separate volumes to the two systems. This simple point is worth labouring, although Spiro calls it a 'truism' (*BSup*, 2), because it is remarkably difficult to bring home to people (or just to academics?) in the West: one review of *BSup* begins with the words, 'This study interprets Buddhism in Burma . . .',[6] which of course is precisely what it does not do. I myself have been mildly castigated for writing about Sinhalese Buddhism rather than 'Sinhalese religion', as if the author of a book on Christianity in England is failing in his duty if he does not discuss poltergeists.

On the symbiosis of two or more systems I take it then that we now have consensus; but what does one make of the relationship between the systems? Tambiah, the structuralist for whom the culture he studies is *a priori* a 'coherent whole' (p. 31), wishes to weave them together to construct a single pattern. To what extent this is merely a question of presentation and to what extent a hypothesis of causal relationships I am unclear: when he sees complementarity between a Buddhist festival and a guardian spirit festival I do not know whether he means that a change in one would entail a corresponding change in the other. Spiro's view is much clearer: the nat cult (why does he always call it 'cultus'?) is a historically independent system with its own function/use for individuals and effects on society; it can and does change independently of Buddhism, but its omnipresence in Burma affects most aspects of Burmese culture, including Buddhism. To its general relationship with Buddhism he devotes the last and longest chapter of *BSup*; with most of what he says I am in vehement agreement. Buddhism and the nat cult have not formed a syncretistic Burmese religion, nor is Buddhism a mere veneer. Spiro goes so far as to formulate a contrary thesis: 'adherence to Buddhism may be viewed as an institutionalized form of repression' (*BSup*, 141) (I suppose this would go for any ethical religion) and the emotional outlets afforded by the nat cult allow Buddhism to persist in Burma (*BSup*, 279). I wonder: in Thailand and Ceylon Buddhism has survived in coexistence with other systems, it is true, but they seem to be far less important to the villagers than the nat cult is to Burmans. While the nat cult has an orgiastic ethos which is a complete antithesis to Buddhist calm and self-control, so much could hardly be said of the spirit cults which Tambiah describes or of the theistic cults which I saw in central Ceylon. However, Spiro's theory may still have something to it: Buddhism in Burma is of far greater density than in Ceylon or Thailand by any measure—number of monks and monasteries, time (in thought, talk, and activity) and money devoted by the laity—and it could be, if the human being has only a given

[6] *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXVIII, 4, 1969, 903.

quantum of tolerance for the Buddhist values of kindliness and self-restraint, that the counterbalance of the nat cult allows of *more* Buddhism in Burma than elsewhere.

While I agree with Spiro that the nat cult conflicts with 'the ethics and spirit of Buddhism' (*BudS*, 187) and that the nats 'symbolize opposition to religious authority' (*BSup*, 139), I disagree with him when he sees a doctrinal conflict, and believe that his whole section on the alleged inconsistency (*BSup*, 253–7) is founded on a misapprehension. (This misapprehension may be due to Spiro's decision to label the nat cult a religion: one expects to find inconsistencies between the belief systems of two religions. The other systems of causation believed in by Theravadin societies in fact seem always to be logically compatible with Buddhism on the cognitive plane, as Obeyesekere showed[7] for Ceylon. This is just a psychological conjecture about Spiro.) Spiro presents the mistaken view that karma is complete determinism, so that if you believe in the law of karma and think that a nat has made you ill the only logically consistent response is fatalistic resignation. The same misapprehension recurs several times in *BudS* (e.g. p. 155). But oddly enough Spiro *knows* that karma is not a completely deterministic doctrine: near the end of the second book he writes: 'To be sure, the general character of one's station—as male or female, Burmese or Indian, rich or poor, intelligent or stupid, and so on—is determined by karma; but within the broad limits permitted by this general station, one's destiny is a function not only of karma but of free choice. For according to Buddhism there are, in addition to karma, two other determinants of one's life: wisdom . . . and initiative or effort . . . A man's destiny is the product of all three working together.' (*BudS*, 435). This perfectly correct formulation of what is both canonical doctrine and popular belief is, however, inconsistent with such statements as: 'If a person's karma is good, it follows that nats and other evil spirits cannot harm him—for their power is less potent than the power of karma—and to propitiate them is wasted energy.' (*BSup*, 253) Burmans think that nats exist, so that to ward off their attacks is just as rational and prudent as to defend oneself from humans or animals. Spiro writes that the Burmese are 'keenly aware of the inconsistency' (*BSup*, 254), and one hesitates to query another man's field data, but as the logical contradiction does not exist I suspect that this 'keen awareness' arises principally from the anthropologist's projection, expressed perhaps in leading questions. I do not deny that moral uneasiness about the nat cult may lead some Burmans to say that it is 'contrary to Buddhism' in other ways too, especially when they are confronted by a westerner, but I am sure that this is secondary.

Just as Spiro's analysis of the relationship between the nat cult and Buddhism is one of the major contributions of his earlier book, an analysis of Buddhism itself into three systems takes up the whole of the first third of *BudS*. The three systems, which he calls nibbanic, kammatic and apotropaic Buddhism, are those associated with three different goals, or types of salvation, which Buddhists desire: nirvana, a good rebirth, and protection from misfortune in this life. Spiro originally wanted to study a Buddhist

[7] 'The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism', *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXII, 2, 1963, 147–8.



society because he had read that Buddhism preaches nirvana as the goal, which is to be reached by renouncing the world, and he did not see how a society could operate with such a negative ideal; but he soon found out that this was a 'pseudo-problem' (*BudS*, 10), for in fact very few Buddhists desire nirvana or have internalized the associated ethic and metaphysics. Most of them desire not to renounce life, but rather to have a better life—both now and hereafter. The three kinds of Buddhism are not analytically distinguished by their adherents, but Spiro presents them—at length[8]—as independent cognitive structures. Most of his analysis is accurate and useful; despite my own reservations, set out below, I think that his typology deserves to attain recognition and to serve as a point of reference in future studies of Buddhism in practice.

There is some muddle about the historical sources of the three types. At the outset (*BudS*, 6) he explains that by 'normative *Theravāda* Buddhism' he means the doctrines of the Pali canon; then he equates his *nibbanic* Buddhism with normative Buddhism (*BudS*, 12). Later (*BudS*, 144–7) it turns out that he is well aware that apotropaic Buddhism is canonical too. However, he is apparently unaware that the same is true of kammatic Buddhism. This—and here we come to a more important muddle—is largely because of a crucial misunderstanding of karma theory. He starts going off the rails on p. 48: 'But from the perspective of nibbanic Buddhism a good emotion, such as love, is as dysfunctional as a bad emotion, such as hate; for by producing merit, and therefore retribution, love (no less than hate) leads to rebirth—and therefore to suffering.' This is not quite right. In canonical, normative Buddhism, an act (*karma*) leads to rebirth in so far as it is done from desire. The morality of the act depends on the intention (*karma=cetanā*). So if I do good with desire for reward, I am kept within *saṃsāra* by that desire. If, however, my good act is entirely disinterested it does not serve to keep me in *saṃsāra*. That even good karma must be abolished is the Jain view, heretical to Buddhism; so Spiro is wrong to say, 'Attainment of the otherworldly plane is achieved by the extinction of karma.' (*BudS*, 68—repeated p. 83) Nirvana is attained by the total extinction of craving, which extinction comes with the full realization of the Buddhist *dharma*, the truths of suffering, impermanence, and nonsoul. Moreover, since good karma is good intention, and good intention is spiritual progress, or mental purification—call it what you will, for these are all different ways of saying the same thing—good karma is tantamount to progress towards nirvana. The final step to nirvana can only be taken by a particular kind of good act, namely meditation, which by that stage is being performed without any desire for results. (The desire for nirvana is the last desire to go.) Thus, until the very last stage, merit *is* (normatively, canonically) 'the key to salvation', and this is not 'revolutionary (and

[8] For example: 'After tasting the pleasures of the world and finding them wanting, a world-rejecting ideology becomes one viable alternative to what I take to be the modal mammalian orientation to the maximization of worldly pleasure. When a life which is successfully devoted to worldly pleasure is ultimately experienced as frustrating and (perhaps even more important) as meaningless, the renunciation of the social-cultural world can then be entertained as a desirable alternative.' (*BudS*, 72) What would be lost by cutting from the first to the second 'alternative'?

heterodoxical)' (p. 97) at all. Spiro's informants on pp. 95–6 are doctrinally correct, and his criticism of them is wrong. Besides, an exposition of normative Buddhist doctrine by a Burmese monk,[9] to which Spiro twice refers in other contexts, makes the same point: meditation is good karma leading to nirvana.[10] In fact, had Spiro read more carefully the section on karma (pp. 88–90) in U. Thittila's article he could have shortened his long section on kammatic Buddhism and cut out many of its alleged inconsistencies with normative doctrine (e.g. most of pp. 114–23.).

Another muddle centres on the interpretation of nirvana (*BudS*, 56–9). This is not important for Spiro's main argument, but it compounds the widespread but really rather silly confusion about the term in Western literature. There are two kinds of nirvana, that with material substrate (*sa-upādi-sesa*) and that without (*an-upādi-sesa*). The first is the nirvana which a person attains, in life; the second is the state that such a person enters into at death. The differences between the answers given to Spiro when he asked people to describe nirvana can largely be attributed to the fact that some are talking about the first, others about the second. Suzuki, the 'Burmese Pali scholar' (p. 57) and 'a small group' (p. 58) are talking about the first, and the 'second' and 'third' groups (pp. 58–9) are speculating about the second, what happens to the enlightened man after death. Even among orientalists in the West much of the confusion about nirvana, to which a book[11] has recently been devoted, arose from failure to see this simple distinction. Nirvana in life is the cessation of craving,[12] *alias* greed-hatred-and-delusion, and is indescribable because it is the opposite of the process of life as we know it; to discuss it in isolation is futile because you have to understand what, according to Buddhist ontology, is being negated. It is futile also for a more important reason: nirvana is an experience, and all private experiences (e.g. falling in love) are ultimately beyond language (though they can to some extent be discussed with others who have had the experience). Experiences do have an objective facet. Objectively hunger is want of food, etc.; subjectively it is a kind of pain, imperfectly describable. My description of nirvana as the cessation of craving is objective. As one cannot even fully describe the experience of the cessation of a toothache, the indescribability of nirvana is unsurprising. For the convenience of discourse Buddhist saints did apply various kinds of epithets to its, and thus objectify and even reify what was for them the experience of a negation of a process. Had they foreseen the confusion that this would cause they might have kept silence. On nirvana after death the Buddha did keep silence: it is a mystery. To discuss its objective aspect he considered pointless; the subjective aspect no one has reported back on.

Spiro is an intellectualist: 'in the last analysis, even religious behavior is dependent on religious ideas' (*BudS*, 5). I entirely agree. It is for this reason that he tries to present his three types of Buddhism almost exclusively as

[9] U. Thittila in Kenneth W. Morgan, (ed.), *The Path of the Buddha*, New York, 1956.

[10] See also E. J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, London, 1933, pp. 114–15.

[11] Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and its Western Interpreters*, Chicago, 1967.

[12] The fire which is 'blown out' is not that of life (p. 56), but craving.



cognitive structures. But here I am perhaps more psychologistic than he is. For it turns out that his kammatic and apotropaic Buddhisms are really not fully-fledged independent *cognitive* structures at all. Apotropaic Buddhism consists mainly of the ritual use of Buddhist sacra for magical purposes, with a poorly developed rationale, and attitudes and values little or no different from those of kammatic Buddhism. As for kammatic Buddhism, part of it is good nibbanic Buddhism, part of it (like apotropaic Buddhism) is an extrapolation from people's behaviour. Spiro writes that his villagers do not believe that life is suffering, 'if their behaviour is an index of their condition'. (*BudS*, 74) I am all for extrapolating beliefs from behaviour, but not for mixing up ideas which are explicit with those that are implicit; that distorts the data. Moreover, I suspect a further distortion, in that some of the expressed beliefs reported under kammatic and apotropaic Buddhism are produced by the interview situation; this is demonstrably so when the informants' views change under further questioning (*BudS*, 148–9), apparently with leading questions (p. 152, top line). In what sense do people 'believe' the views which emerge as answers to questions they have never asked or been asked before?

So, for all its brilliance as an academic construct, I have not been converted to Spiro's formulation from my own simpler distinction between what people say they believe and what they act as if they believe. I attribute the discrepancies between the two to human (probably not just Burmese, or Sinhalese) nature; and think that the interaction between the two accounts for developments within Buddhism, so that the distinction is heuristically as well as analytically useful. I prefer to see syndromes where Spiro sees cognitive structures, because this accommodates more data. For instance, in Spiro's presentation of his three systems no one spontaneously expresses a belief that the Buddha answers prayers; but in the part of the book called 'Buddhism as a Ritual System' we learn that children explicitly believe that the Buddha answers prayers, even prayers for the next life (p 198); and indeed, still later in the book (p. 262) we find a village lady who has been bitten by a snake 'moaning over and over again, "O Buddha, help me, cure me, give me your assistance." ' (p. 262) This is not part of a cognitive structure in the sense of a consistent ideology; rather it is an expression, erupting under stress, of the syndrome/attitude which we can call 'life-affirming' as against 'life-denying'; the attitude which, rather than the negative expressed ideal of nirvana and its premature withdrawal from sensual existence, wants, rather than less life, more life and better, for self and loved ones. Ultimately there are two systems, not three: the distinction between the children who prayed to the Buddha for fountain pens and those who prayed for a wealthy rebirth or even nirvana (paradisically conceived, p. 84) is unimportant; they are all on the world-affirming side of the fence, for they have not yet been successfully taught to deny it in word. But later, in word at least, Theravada Buddhism has not reverted to 'the religious status quo ante'. (*BudS*, 5)

My dichotomy is of course nothing new for Professor Spiro; it corresponds quite well to his distinction between what is 'internalized' and what is not, a distinction which figures prominently in his 'Prologue' but far less in the rest of the book. That it is, however, the really important dichotomy is perhaps also his final conclusion. At the very end of the book (p. 474) he tells us that

'the ethos of *secular* Burmese culture is worldly to the core', and its paramount values are prestige, especially prestige derived from wealth, charismatic power, and authority. (In a neat piece of scholasticism he juxtaposes these to suffering, impermanence, and nonself respectively.) He does not explain the cognitive status of this 'secular' value system; and of its relation to the Buddhist value system he says briefly that the former values 'comprise the desires of their id and ego', the latter 'characterize their ego-ideal'. 'The former represent what the Burmese are; the latter what they think they ought and would like to be—but aren't.' (p. 475) I see nothing peculiarly Burmese about the former; but at the end of a marvellous book Professor Spiro and I are in harmony.

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*The Buddhist Revival in China.* By HOLMES WELCH. Harvard University Press Cambridge, Mass. 1968. pp. x, 385. £5·75.

This volume has evidently presented its author with a somewhat different challenge from that of its predecessor, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, since the investigation of over half a century of rapid change is perhaps less amenable to the painstaking combination of documentary evidence and interview material used so successfully by Mr Welch in recreating the more static system of monastic life. Nevertheless the present work, consistently well-written and penetrating in its observations, still bears the stamp of its author's singular talents. For Mr Welch is vigorous in his efforts to rectify misconceptions and reassess accepted judgements, and his focus on men, organizations and events rather than intellectual history, although a regrettable necessity, allows him to describe some very intriguing personalities.

His first three chapters take us from the beginnings of the revival under Yang Wen-hui in the late Ch'ing to the efforts of T'ai-hsü and his reformist supporters to seize national leadership of the movement. T'ai-hsü's role is subject to a thorough re-examination; Mr Welch's conclusion being that his talents as a self-publicist have won him an undeserved reputation amongst Western observers. The following chapters survey the new developments during this period, giving much valuable information on lay organizations, educational and welfare enterprises, and the relationship of Chinese Buddhists to their government, and the outside world, especially Buddhist nations like Tibet and Japan.

Mr Welch's final chapters then turn to interpretation, and these are perhaps the most interesting, yet least satisfactory. Though he naturally stresses that much more research is needed, he boldly challenges the whole concept of a Buddhist revival contained in his title, although on p. 199 Tantric Buddhism appears as an exception. His argument is that once the bias of our mainly missionary-influenced sources is removed, Ch'ing Buddhism is seen to be far from moribund, whilst the developments of the Republican era, with their increasingly secular reorientation, did not bode well for the future. Mr Welch has perhaps overstated his case here: examining the commonest charges against Ch'ing Buddhism he finds three entirely false, including the assertion that the clergy was dwindling. Their numbers multiplied almost



fivefold between 1667 and 1930, the evidence suggesting that this increase was taking place during the late Ch'ing. Yet viewed against the undoubted increase in the total population, this is perhaps not so impressive, and a decrease in the clergy as a percentage of the population cannot be ruled out. The other two charges likewise leave room for disagreement. Perhaps Mr Welch is more judicious in regarding most of them as half-truths, and examining the reasons for this. Bias aside, there were other distorting factors. Thus the most high-minded monks, isolated in monasteries, were also the least conspicuous. But surely the most significant factor pointed out, and one that must demand further attention, is the importance of regional differences.

The missionaries were originally concentrated in Southern China, where, it seems, Buddhism was in decay, yet the situation in the Yangtze valley turned out to be quite different. It is unfortunate that Mr Welch does not pursue the term 'Buddhist revival' back beyond 1913, since it was early used to describe the recovery from Taiping devastation in this area. In 1885 H. C. DuBose, in *The Dragon, Image, and Demon* talks of a 'revival of idolatry' in Soochow and elsewhere during the two preceding years, particularly a 'revival of Buddhism' at P'u-t'o shan, warning that 'before many years' reconstruction would be universal. In 1911 W. E. Geil, in his *Eighteen Capitals of China* similarly remarks on how the monks 'revived' after the Taiping Rebellion. But what was the connexion between this and the increasing involvement with Buddhism of intellectuals following K'ang Yu-wei's move towards eclecticism? Such questions are raised rather than answered by Mr Welch's pioneering work.

The text itself is not free from minor blemishes, mainly typographical errors and lack of cross-references. The index, however, can assure us that the Chang Ping-ling of p. 54 is, in fact, Chang Ping-lin, point the connexion between the Hossō sect of p. 56 and Dharmalaksana, and identify the term *fang yen-k'ou* of p. 173 with the English translation used elsewhere. The maps inside the covers, taken from the volume on practice, suppress a reference to Appendix IX of that work in the map of Chen-chiang, leaving unexplained the units of measurement used. Such trivial defects are far outweighed by the inclusion of Henri Cartier-Bresson's photographs of a festival, which give yet greater immediacy to Mr Welch's lively prose whilst constituting an attractive bonus to this stimulating book on an important aspect of China's modernization.

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*Religion in Japanese History.* By JOSEPH M. KITAGAWA. Columbia University Press: New York and London, 1966. Pp. x, 475. £3.60, $10.

This volume is the first major survey of Japanese religious history to appear in English since Masaharu Anesaki's *History of Japanese Religion* of 1930. While it loses in style and sensitivity compared to Anesaki's work, it has made great gains in methodology and detail. With some reservations it may be recommended as an able and well-documented summary of Japanese and Western scholarship in its field. The book is organized chronologically and is based on six lectures dealing with the following main topics: (i) early

Shinto; the charisma of the 'Tennō' clan and its dependence on shamans; the introduction of Buddhism; and the *ubasoku* or 'shamanistic Buddhists'; (ii) development of esoteric Buddhism; its fusion with Shinto; and the growth of Amidism and the worship of Jizō; (iii) the development of Shinto during the medieval period; the Shugendō; and the Pure Land, Nichiren and Zen sects; (iv) religious developments in the early modern period, including the 'Christian century'; Neo-Confucianism; the decline of Buddhism; and the Shinto revival; (v) post-Restoration religious policies; Sect Shinto; the revitalization of Buddhism; Christianity; and Confucianism up to the Pacific War; and (vi) post-war developments, including the New Religions. Each chapter starts with a summary of secular history. This possibly increases the utility of the work as a basic text book, but is superfluous for the more advanced student.

Professor Kitagawa's method is based on that of *Religionwissenschaft*, which he has elsewhere defined as a 'well-organized survey of the nature, characteristics and functions of religions'. The book may be said to live up to this description, though the reader should not be lead to expect very much in the way of doctrinal exposition. The author is in fact explicitly concerned less with the dogmatic content of Japanese religions than with their social and political aspects. His approach is mainly factual, and the theoretical background of the book need pose no difficulty even to those unsophisticated in the methodology of the modern study of religion. Though some debt is expressed to Weber, little attempt is made to relate religion to economic life. Two themes recur in the author's narrative: the relationship of religion to political power, and the persistence of 'shamanistic' forms of religion among the 'masses'. Professor Kitagawa sees first Shinto, then Buddhism and Confucianism, employed as ideologies to protect political power. Somewhat infelicitously, he employs the term 'immanental theocracy' to describe the use of Confucianism for this purpose from the Tokugawa period on. Whatever justification this may have in connexion with the religious policies of post-Restoration Japan, it seems an inappropriate characterization of Neo-Confucianism, to whose rationalistic outlook the notion of theocracy as ordinarily understood was basically foreign. Alongside religion in this dimension, there coexisted uneasily the shamanism of the masses. In the author's analysis, this is one of the basic religious modes of the Japanese people, and assimilates foreign imports such as Buddhism. In the modern period it erupts with the so-called New Religions, which the author sees as 'anti-intellectual and antimodern'.

As is probably inevitable in a work of this scope, there are a few errors and inconsistencies. *Mabiki* (p. 172) surely refers to infanticide rather than abortion; and the difficult kinship term *zoku* is translated inconsistently without explanation (pp. 15, 102). The author's romanization seems unnecessarily quirkish, despite his apologies. Such trivial matters aside, however, this is a valuable book which will undoubtedly be read with profit by students for a number of years to come. The conscientious documentation and extensive bibliography of secondary works will also be helpful to specialists anxious to pursue topics in greater depth.

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