

Emotions and Ethics in Buddhist History: The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* and the Work of Virtue¹

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While literature is often thought to be a product of culture, the writing of history in medieval Sri Lanka was based on the assumption that texts themselves can produce changes in culture by making people into virtuous devotees. A study of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, a Theravāda Buddhist chronicle written in Sinhala around the thirteenth century, provides new material with which to examine the ways historical narratives can be crafted to manipulate and transform the readers and listeners of a text. In this instance, the text gives rise to emotions that are productive of a moral subjectivity in those who encounter its narrative. By making persons feel that the Buddha and other virtuous agents in the past have performed deeds to benefit those in the present, the text causes devotees to view themselves as having been aided by others. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* works to constitute its readers and listeners as the moral subjects of another's acts and thus obligates them to respond accordingly. More generally, religious histories can be complex literary works that offer the scholar much more than simply descriptions of past events. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* claims for itself the aesthetic capacity to effect certain emotional and ethical responses in an audience. These efforts to compose historical narratives appear designed to instill a heightened sense of oneself as a beneficiary of history who in turn is obliged to engage in the virtuous work of ritualised devotional practices. © 2001 Academic Press

Introduction

The production of Buddhist literature in Sri Lanka has been generously supplemented by the writing of historical texts commonly known as *vaṃsas*, or 'chronicles' or 'histories'. While the *vaṃsas* are not included in the Theravāda Buddhist canon, the narratives of these Pāli and Sinhala works have had a considerable influence in Sri Lankan society. They typically concern topics such as the lineage and deeds of ancient kings, the events related to the arrival of the Buddha's relics in Laṅkā, and the career of the Buddha. While much scholarly attention has focused on the oldest surviving histories of Sri Lankan Buddhism—the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa*, dating from around the fourth and fifth centuries AD, respectively—a significant corpus of histories written in Sri Lanka between the tenth and the fourteenth centuries challenges the common assumption that the Theravāda *vaṃsas* are uniform in terms of style, content and motive. Indeed, while scholars tend to presume only similarities among the *vaṃsas*, close readings of individual texts can reveal distinctive characteristics that render Theravāda history writing a complex and variable form of Buddhist literary expression.

This article examines some of the assumptions and implications of Buddhist history found in the thirteenth-century *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, which was written by Parākrama Paṇḍita, a lay author about whom little is known.² Adapting and elaborating upon the same narrative found in the Pāli *Thūpavaṃsa* of Vācissara Thera, modern printed editions of the Sinhala version range somewhere between 200 and 220 pages in length. The text narrates more or less chronologically the Bodhisattva's initial vow to become a Buddha, his efforts at moral cultivation and subsequent Buddhahood, the dispersion of the Buddha's relics after his cremation, and the acts of pious kings to spread and establish the Buddha's 'Dispensation'—the historical instantiation of his 'Teaching', or Dharma (or, in Pāli, Dhamma)³—to the island of Laṅkā. While recalling the career of the Buddha and the subsequent establishment of a sizable portion of the Buddha's relics in a large

stūpa (*thūpa*), or relic shrine, in Northern Sri Lanka, the text refines our understanding of the writing of history in Theravāda Buddhism by offering an alternative interpretation of why some *vaṃsas* were valued ethical tools in pre-modern Buddhist communities.

Since the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* and many other *vaṃsa* texts incorporate seemingly fantastic or mythical accounts into their narratives, many people prefer to call them ‘chronicles’ rather than ‘histories’. Yet if we consider the distinctions in historical writing made by Hayden White (1973, pp. 5–7), the fact that the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* constructs a causal sequence of events within a narrative form exhibiting a discernible beginning, middle and end would disqualify this text from the more open-ended ‘chronicle’ form. My use of the terms ‘history’, ‘historical’ and ‘historiography’ with reference to the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* is justified, I believe, by the presence of a central, organising narrative that creates a coherent sense of the past—a past that reflects and affects the present. Not all ‘pasts’ are created equally, of course, but all accounts of the past are created. While the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*’s description of the building of the Mahāthūpa relic shrine in Sri Lanka enables a higher degree of empirical verification than the text’s account of the predictions made by Buddhas who lived aeons ago, the narration of events leading up to the construction of a Buddhist landmark that can be visited today still exhibits the kind of selective inclusion and causal ordering of so-called ‘facts’ characteristic of all narrative forms. Although the *vaṃsas* typically narrate the past with a deliberate literary sensibility that differs from attempts in modern historiography to present ‘facts’ in an ‘objective’ way, their manner of reading meaning back into the past in an attempt to fashion individual sentiments and social identities is often replicated by modern works—Marxist, nationalist or something else—in the field of history. For the purposes of my argument, I find it useful to stress the similarities rather than the differences that Buddhist ‘histories’ have with other, more modern, narrative representations of the past.

Important differences remain, of course, especially with regard to how Buddhist histories were envisioned to affect people’s lives. This study of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* will demonstrate that Buddhist history writing was at times directed towards changing the present world by means of narrating the world of the past. I will argue that the narrative recollection of the past in this text is presented as a method for transforming readers and listeners into moral agents who respond emotionally and ritually to the ethical obligations that the text lays upon them. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* supplies us with several hints as to how persons are expected to react when they read or listen to a recital of its narrative. Its language works to make readers and listeners conclude that the events of the past have had a direct and significant impact upon their present lives and their future destiny. As such, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* functions as a case study for inquiring into how a text can be used to give rise to habits of thought, structures of feeling and modes of action that effect changes in the world outside of the text. Indeed, by seeking to transform the way people think, feel and act towards the past, this text serves to broaden our conceptions of how history and ethics were part of a related project to fashion individuals into a community of ‘virtuous persons’ obliged to venerate particular relics of the Buddha.

Since the nineteenth century, historians and scholars of religion have typically studied Sri Lanka’s *vaṃsas* along a few, fairly distinct lines. Many have argued that these texts can be used judiciously to reconstruct ancient South Asian history. Earlier generations of scholars such as George Turnour (1837), Wilhelm Geiger (1908, 1930) and G. C. Mendis (1996) have tended to evaluate texts like the *Mahāvaṃsa* in terms of their historical accuracy, striving to distinguish history from myth. This historiographical

strategy has had a lasting effect upon how many modern scholars read Sri Lanka's pre-modern histories. Geiger, for instance, articulated a largely positivist approach to the Buddhist *vaṃsas*, whereby one seeks to 'uncover' the truth of the texts and recreate an historically accurate past:

There is a good number of fables, legends and tales of marvels in the Mahāvamsa, and we must in each particular case attempt to find out whether there is in the narrative an historical kernel or not. It is for instance, evident that the story of the three visits of the Buddha to Laṅkā in ch. 1 is purely legendary, invented at a later time in the island itself in order to legitimate its sanctity. But we stand on firmer ground in regard to the report of the three Buddhist Councils (chs. 3–5). It is not necessary to assume that the report is correct in all its details. But the fact itself can hardly be called into question. (Geiger 1930, p. 208)

Geiger's reading of the Pāli *Mahāvamsa* as an imperfect, but still useful, historical document to represent the past requires little explanation. Numerous scholars in Asia and the West have followed his lead, carefully weeding out fact from fiction in the *vaṃsa* literature to rediscover the past 'as it really was'. The value of a particular *vaṃsa* is thus established by the degree to which its narrative corresponds to other empirical evidence used to verify its accounts. Yet any effort to reconstruct the ancient South Asian past invites the skepticism of critical historians such as Hayden White (1973, 1987), Dominick LaCapra (1983) and Keith Jenkins (1991), all of whom maintain that 'history' is not a transparent record of the 'past' but rather represents the author's creation of a story out of select events that come to be identified with the historical past. While the *vaṃsas* may yield significant insights that contribute to our knowledge of pre-modern Sri Lankan history, they can never be expected to reconstruct the past exactly as it occurred.

More recently, scholars have tended to argue that the *vaṃsas* exhibit political motives to legitimate kings and monastic lineages and that they have also contributed to the contemporary ethnic tensions between Sinhala and Tamils in Sri Lanka.⁴ While specific arguments vary over the influence of Buddhist histories in Sri Lanka, many interpreters are convinced that because all historical writing reflects political interests, the *vaṃsas* must therefore display the strategies of monks and kings to shore up their positions and privileges in society. Heinz Bechert depicts Buddhist histories as tools for legitimating the participation of monks in political affairs. He locates the impulse for writing history in monastic attempts to make the king and Saṅgha interdependent entities in the governance of the state. Yet Bechert also exhibits the problematic tendency of extrapolating past motives from present effects, citing the 'long-term political results' from the *vaṃsas*, wherein 'the inseparable connection of national identity and Buddhist religion resulted in a feeling of responsibility towards nation and state and thus in the preservation of . . . the state of the Sinhalese . . . throughout the centuries' (Bechert, p. 9). While there are a growing number of critics, such as R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, who question whether we can discern the early seeds of nationalism and ethnic identity in the ancient and medieval *vaṃsas* of Sri Lanka, the tendency remains to blame pre-modern Buddhist histories for their alleged role in fomenting political opportunism and ethnic chauvinism in contemporary Sri Lanka.⁵

Although a few scholars have attempted to interpret the *vaṃsas* in other ways, most scholars have focused on what they take to be objective 'facts' and attempts to justify the political status quo.⁶ Historical positivism and theories of political legitimation typically emphasise either that which is true about the past or that which is mythic, yet both efforts tend to use Sri Lanka's *vaṃsas* to convey information about their historical

contexts. The texts are thus rendered useful inasmuch as they contribute to theories concerning the veracity or political uses of history ‘as such’. In short, these studies rely on modern conceptions of history wherein objectivity—either as a goal or as a ruse—determines how one reads historical narratives. Yet interpretations that either privilege what is evidently true or stress that historical truth claims are useful for political legitimization both affirm that a text is understandable only through the presumed *context* in which it was produced. While this approach may seem intuitively sound, it is worth recalling that a ‘context’ is at root an impression that is the product of other texts brought together by scholars to form a realistic picture of the past. LaCapra has neatly encapsulated the problem of depending solely on material from outside a text in the attempt to understand it:

The attempt to return a thinker to his own times or to place his texts squarely in the past has often served as a mode of abstract categorization that drastically oversimplifies the problem of historical understanding. Indeed, the rhetoric of contextualization has often encouraged narrowly documentary readings in which the text becomes little more than a sign of the times or a straightforward expression of one larger phenomenon or another. At the limit, this indiscriminate approach to reading and interpretation becomes a detour around texts and an excuse for not really reading them at all. It simultaneously avoids the claims texts make on us as readers—claims that impress themselves upon us both at naive and at theoretically sophisticated levels of understanding. (LaCapra 1983, p. 14)

Too much focus on the presumed context behind literary works often results in overlooking the possibility that a text can work to affect and transform its readers and listeners directly. Buddhist *vaṃsas* do not simply supply us with historical data or, alternatively, prescribe a course of action or an idealised polity. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* instead works to create a community of devotees who relate to themselves and others in terms of beneficiaries and benefactors who are morally obliged to give aid and acknowledge aid received. When we consider this view, we allow that texts like the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* might have functioned as producers of medieval Sri Lankan culture rather than existing simply as the lifeless artifacts of a particular time and place. By reversing the direction of influence, we are able to see how some Buddhist histories show signs that they were composed and transmitted as literary works for transforming individuals and the world in which they lived.

Encountering Buddhist History

My reading of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* focuses on various expectations—explicitly stated and implicitly understood within the text—that historical narratives serve to transform their readers and listeners ethically. In short, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* attempts to forge a connection between remembering the past and performing ritualised *pūjā*, or devotional offerings, in the present. These devotional acts can be considered ‘ethical’ in that they display a cognitive understanding of being a beneficiary of the past who is morally obliged to acknowledge one’s dependence on the Buddha for the ability to imagine and attain various Buddhist felicities. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* thus shows how some Buddhist texts were envisioned to work in medieval Sri Lanka. It suggests that historical writing in at least some religious communities might have been connected with literary efforts to relate the lives of contemporary devotees to specific events in the past. Put differently, these ‘religious’ histories may be discernible, albeit not exclusively so, by their attempts to link the self-understanding of a reader or listener with a written

depiction of the past. The significance of history writing in the study of religion thus shifts from the pursuit of truth for ‘its own sake’ and from an overwhelming emphasis on textual content to the particular uses of history as reflected in the form (in conjunction with the content) of historical narratives. Accordingly, the relevant question for this study thus becomes: at what point does history become identifiable as ‘Buddhist history’ per se? The answer, as we will see, does not revolve around the issues of truth or narrative themes so much as depend upon conceptions of how texts can function as agents for fashioning a moral subjectivity in its audience.

The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* suggests that pre-modern Buddhist histories were once conceived to accomplish more than simply preserving or reconstructing knowledge about the past. Rather, narrative in the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* was apparently seen as a means for affecting how people felt and acted in the world—transformations that carry both social and soteriological implications. Sri Lankan Buddhist history, as evidenced by the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, appears to have been valued primarily for cultivating virtue and ritualised devotion in an audience. Specifically, as I will show, the text depicts the recollection of history as conducive to acts of *pūjā* directed towards relics of the Buddha by those who read it or hear it read aloud. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* links the emotional effects generated by its narrative with the constitution of moral subjects who come to see themselves as the beneficiaries of past events. Stressing one’s dependence upon what was done in the past, the text in turn obligates its readers and listeners to reciprocate, so to speak, by making offerings to the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* opens by asking ‘virtuous persons’, or *satpuruṣas* (*sappurisa*), to listen attentively to its description of the ‘Great Stūpa’ (also called the ‘Ruvanvāli Sāya’ in Sinhala), which is located in the ancient city of Anurādhapura in Sri Lanka.⁷ Yet I contend that the text comes to represent itself as having the power to transform an audience into *satpuruṣas* who, by implication, are endowed with a moral subjectivity that compels them to engage in acts of devotion to the relics of the Buddha.

Encounters with the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, through reading or hearing it read aloud,⁸ are depicted within the text as transforming an ordinary Buddhist devotee into a *satpuruṣa*, a person who feels grateful for the past and feels obliged to acknowledge dependence on others through doing *pūjā*. The text itself suggests that the transformative power of Buddhist history is located in its ability to give rise to generalised emotional states in an audience when they encounter historical accounts of the past. Emotions such as serene joy (*prasāda/pasāda*), profound disquiet (*saṃvega*) and pious confidence (*śraddhā/saddhā*) are not restricted to the sensuous experiences of an individual but rather tend to be valued in Theravāda Buddhist thought for enabling pious acts of veneration, renunciation and alms-giving. The cultural value attributed to certain emotions in Theravāda literature suggests that instead of viewing emotions as originating in the passive and subjective experience of individuals, we ought to consider them as the results of appraisals given to certain situations based on culturally transmitted beliefs and values (see Lynch 1990).⁹ Catherine Lutz argues likewise in favour of seeing emotions as preeminently cultural rather than ‘natural’ products:

Although we may experience emotion as something that rises and falls within the boundaries of our bodies, the decidedly social origins of our understandings of the self, the other, the world, and experience draw our attention to the interpersonal processes by which something called emotion or some things like joy, anger, or fear come to be ascribed to and experienced by us. (Lutz 1988, p. 5)

In this way, an emotional reaction of happiness or sadness does not simply arise ‘naturally’ but rather is predicated upon the way one has learned to evaluate a given event. The argument here is that texts like the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* work to prefigure certain religiously valued emotions by supplying information and interpretations about the past that are designed to affect an audience of devotees. Furthermore, the written accounts in several *vaṃsas* in which miracles associated with the Buddha’s relics are said to have aroused ‘serene joy’ among those witnessing the events would seem to indicate that certain emotions are taken to be prefigured by external sources and uniformly felt.¹⁰ These frequent descriptions of emotional experiences felt by large groups of devotees would, then, seem to suggest that rather than being intensely personal, natural events, emotions are frequently crafted and conditioned by cultural appraisals of what persons experience. Put differently, emotions can be inculcated by supplying people with information used to understand themselves and their place in the world.

Inasmuch as Buddhist histories work to prefigure certain emotional responses to narratable events and condition some kind of evaluation or reaction in an audience based upon traditional norms and literary conventions, we can begin to see how certain emotions were at times understood to be the products of encounters with Buddhist histories. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* tutors an audience on how one should feel in the context of one’s relationship to the Buddha and to other virtuous agents in the past. As the narrative describes how devotees in history responded emotionally and ethically to accounts of past events, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* displays the expectation that it, too, can transform how an audience feels and acts by recalling history. When characters in the text remember how the Buddha’s Dispensation was established in the past and rejoice at that fact, the text works to reproduce the same emotional response within its audience. Readers and listeners of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* are thus expected to recall and rejoice in noteworthy events from the past along with the pious characters described in the text. By being ‘mimetic of itself’, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* displays attempts to fashion the emotions and moral subjectivity of the audience in ways that mirror the characters depicted in its narrative.¹¹ In short, Parākrama Paṇḍita’s text seems to employ a narrative representation of a past ‘reality’ in order to remake or reconfigure reality as experienced in the present.

The ability of history to evoke generalised emotions is attested to throughout the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*’s narrative as it relates the life story of the Buddha and the careers of pious Buddhist kings. As the king who builds the Great Stūpa at Anurādhapura, Duṭṭugāmuṇu (or ‘Duṭṭagāmaṇī,’ as he is known in Pāli) assumes the protagonist’s role in the second half of the text. While other Buddhist kings such as Ajātaśatru, Aśoka and Devānampātissa (Devānampiyatissa) are also depicted as feeling emotions in response to remembering what the Buddha did, Duṭṭugāmuṇu comes to embody the *satpuruṣa* who is ethically transformed by recalling the past. Duṭṭugāmuṇu is specifically praised as someone ‘who knows the virtue of gratitude’ and ‘who has a pure mind that is serenely joyful with respect to the Triple Gem’ (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, p. 143). This brief remark describing the impulse behind Duṭṭugāmuṇu’s great gifts to the Buddha’s Dispensation speaks to the imagined effects of recalling the past for a Buddhist devotee who encounters the text. Emotions of gratitude and serene joy are at once displayed by characters in the narrative and signify the ideal response for the audience of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*. The implicit connection forged between characters appearing within the text and those readers or listeners who exist outside of it depends upon relationships that Buddhist historical narratives establish in order to link a contemporary audience with past events.

In other words, history does not simply provide the context for interpreting the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*. It is also thought to give rise to particular emotions held to be useful in ethically transforming readers and listeners as they are led to recall what happened in the past. Generalised emotions of serene joy and gratitude arise from being made to feel simultaneously dependent upon and enabled by others, and are likewise seen to be conducive towards the fashioning of a subjective disposition deemed appropriate for performing acts of merit.¹² In this case, feeling dependence would be construed as a positive sentiment since it affirms that Buddhist devotees have benefited from the deeds of the Buddha and other virtuous agents in the past. A person's ability to recognise and pursue soteriological fruits such as good rebirths and liberation is understood as having been constituted by what others have done on the person's behalf earlier. Thus we may conclude that the manner in which Theravāda Buddhist history gives rise to piety is more complicated than what many previous scholars have assumed. The dispositions towards devotional acts and their concretisation in ritualised *pūjā* are brought about by making readers and listeners feel dependent on, and obligated by, what others have done. More than simply 'inspiring' devotion with their fabulous accounts (see Perera 1961, p. 38), Buddhist history can condition and compel it, stirring an audience to engage in ritualised activities that promote an ethical awareness of oneself as a beneficiary of the past actions of others.

To illustrate, we might inquire as to why the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* would stress that King Duṭṭugāmuṇu felt serene joy and gratitude towards the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha. One possible explanation suggested by the text is that the acts of the Buddha and other virtuous monks, nuns and kings in the past have contributed directly to the King's welfare in the present. The Buddha, for one, is praised in the text for anticipating the needs of future beings when he resolved to have his relics spread to various lands after his death:

Because our Buddha did not remain for much time, desiring the welfare of the world and thinking, 'My Dispensation has not been spread into every place. Taking the relics that measure even a mustard seed from me when I have passed away in complete Nirvana, making relic shrines in the places where people dwell, and enshrining the relics in caskets, the many beings who make offerings will enjoy the happiness of the divine world, the *brahmā* world and the human world', he thus made a resolution for the dispersal of the relics. (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, pp. 72–3)

The narrative claims that even while the Buddha was alive in the world, he foresaw the needs of later devotees and arranged for his relics to be available for people to venerate. Furthermore, relic veneration is said to lead to greater happiness for devotees in subsequent lifetimes. From the perspective supplied by the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, the spread of the Buddha's relics to lands outside of India was not simply an attempt to expand empires and legitimate kingships, however compelling these conclusions may seem to modern interpreters. Rather, the narrative asserts that the dispersal of relics coincided with a resolution (*adhiṣṭhāna/adhiṭṭhāna*) that the Buddha made for the sake of all beings. The spread of relics is represented as more proof that the Buddha is compassionately concerned with the welfare of all since, in this way, he is said to have arranged the means through which devotees can attain various felicities in fortunate realms of rebirth.¹³

The excerpt from the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* also illustrates how Buddhist histories could be employed to draw contemporary readers and listeners into the scope of the narrative itself. Stated differently, the text uses language to make the audience feel implicated in

the events that it narrates, demonstrating that contemporary readers and listeners have been directly and personally affected by what occurred previously. In speaking of the Buddha in the first-person possessive—as ‘our Buddha’—the narrator underscores the relationship that the text attempts to cultivate between the audience and the Buddha himself. The audience is at once brought into a relationship of intimacy and dependence with the Buddha. Readers and listeners are led to conclude that the deeds he performed were also done for their sake. By extension, narrating what the Buddha, renowned monastics and pious kings did in the past constitutes a technique for creating an audience that feels grateful for being the beneficiaries of deeds done by those who penetrated the Dharma and spread the Dispensation previously. Indeed, the connection between historical writing and gratitude in Theravāda can be illustrated etymologically by noting that the Pāli word for grateful—*kataññū*—literally means ‘knowing what was done’. In the above instance, a contemporary audience is included among those for whom the Buddha resolved to spread his own relics after death since, from the rhetorical point of view, *our* Buddha did it for *us*.

We are now in a better position to understand why feelings of serene joy and gratitude could be considered praiseworthy qualities for a king. King Duṭṭhagāmuṇu is repeatedly characterised in terms of the joy he feels from recalling past events that have contributed to the welfare of him and others. While this includes the serene joy that the King experiences on his deathbed when recalling his own meritorious deeds, the text also refers to the joy he feels in response to what others have done.¹⁴ In one particular case Duṭṭhagāmuṇu learns that the *arahant* Mihiṇḍu (or, in Pāli—‘Mahinda’) made a prediction over a century earlier that Duṭṭhagāmuṇu himself would become king and build the Great Stūpa and the Brazen Palace (*Lōvāmahāpāya*) to house the members of the monastic community. Upon finding a gold plaque that reads, ‘In the future, when one hundred and forty years have passed, a king named Duṭṭhagāmaṇī Abhaya, who is the son of a king named Kāvantissa, will build these two monuments’, the king responds in the following manner:

King Duṭṭhagāmuṇu, who was happy, folding his left hand and clapping with his right hand, saying, ‘I have been seen by the Mahāthera Mihiṇḍu, who is my Dear Lord [*svāmīdaru*], and thus having become happy, on the morning of the next day, going to the Mahamevunā Park accompanied by the great assembly, having assembled the Saṅgha, venerating the Saṅgha, standing on one side while putting his hands on his head [in reverence], he announced, ‘Reverends! I will build a *poṃa* hall resembling a divine mansion for the monastic community’. (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, p. 144)

At this point in the text, the narrative moves fairly quickly. History is recalled, the King feels happy, and he begins to build a monastery for the Saṅgha. We ought to discuss the context for the King’s reaction, however, before returning to this episode later in order to point out the ethical significance of emotions in Buddhist history. Duṭṭhagāmuṇu’s happiness is explicitly linked to the fact that he was foreseen long ago by the venerable monk Mihiṇḍu. His own existence was foreseen, as was the fact that he would perform significant acts of merit. The gold plaque that carries this prediction effectively represents an historical ‘text’ that functions to memorialise a past event. The King has the plaque read aloud and is said to feel joy as a consequence of having been foreseen by an *arahant* in the past. In other words, a written account of a prediction made in the past is shown to produce emotions by confirming that its audience was anticipated and stands to benefit from what others have done earlier. In conveying this episode, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* tries to persuade an audience to feel that they have been

cared for and that they, too, are beneficiaries of efforts made by others in the past for their own sake in the present. The episode illustrates a conception of history writing that played a decisive role in the copying and preservation of handwritten manuscripts of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* from medieval times. It exemplifies how historical accounts were at times attributed with the capacity to produce emotional responses by suggesting that later audiences were foreseen and cared for by Buddhist agents long ago.

In addition to depicting how various characters feel joy and gratitude for having been anticipated and provided with the Triple Gem as a means of obtaining worldly happiness and higher soteriological fruits, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* also contains moving accounts of what the Buddha undertook for the welfare of the world.¹⁵ Many of these occasions are related in the context of his career as the Bodhisattva (*bodhisatta*), a being who endured unimaginable suffering and made incredible sacrifices to attain Buddhahood and rescue all beings from the cycle of birth and death called *saṃsāra*. Not coincidentally, the figure of the Bodhisattva receives considerable attention in the text, less as a model for people to emulate than as an extraordinary being to whom people should feel grateful.¹⁶ For instance, when the time comes for him to renounce his family and royal life, the text describes Prince Siddhārtha as he decides to take one last look at his newborn son and considers whether his affection for him will inhibit his ultimate goal:

Should I stroke the child? Were the small palm of this child, tender and delicate, to touch my neck, it would be like a noose placed around my neck to prevent me from going to become a Buddha. How can I rescue twenty-four incalculable numbers of children with the affection directed towards a single son? (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, p. 26)

Therein, the narrative of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* vividly illustrates one of the many personal sacrifices that the Buddha is said to have made—abandoning the son he loves—for the sake of all beings. The future Buddha is portrayed as having been devoted first and foremost to the welfare of others. Significantly, the word used here is ‘children’, implying that the incalculable numbers of beings to be rescued by the Buddha are likewise related to him in an intimate and dependent manner. Since the Buddha in Theravāda came to be attributed with the virtues of unlimited compassion and omniscient knowledge, readers and listeners living over a thousand years after this event are thus led to conclude that the Buddha strove to attain his Awakening because he cared for them, too.

That account illustrates one way in which the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* shows that Buddhist history is founded upon what the Buddha endured and accomplished for the sake of all beings. Its vivid and lengthy narration of selected *Jātaka* tales to depict each of the Perfections (*pāramitā/pāramī*) he achieved while striving to attain Buddhahood highlights the efforts he is said to have made for everyone—including, by extension, contemporary readers and listeners of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*. While celebrating the Buddha’s achievements, such narrative accounts also serve to make people feel grateful. In a related manner, Steven Collins (1999, pp. 550–54) has noted that the Pāli Vessantara Jātaka possesses emotive force, evoking fear and pity in its audience while giving expression to a wide range of moral values, both positively and negatively. In this sense, the account of the Bodhisattva Vessantara functions to craft emotions deemed useful for stimulating ethical reflection, including feeling sympathy for the suffering of others and a reflexive awareness of one’s position in a network of family relations. From our perspective, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* is similarly designed to make emotional and ethical demands upon an audience. The text conspicuously attempts to generate specific

dispositions of feeling and thought in order to make individuals feel grateful and dependent upon the Buddha as well as other notable figures in history.

Ethics and Devotion

The recurring descriptions that illustrate how Buddhist agents in the past took actions that have made it possible for Buddhists in the present to attain worldly benefits (*bhōga/bhoga*), divine happiness (*svarga/sagga*) and liberation (*mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*) suggest that the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* attempts to impart a particular kind of moral subjectivity upon its audience. To recall Buddhist history is thus to become fashioned as a dependent beneficiary of what others have done. Accounts of the past bestow an ethical awareness that one has been enabled to increase one's virtue and happiness as a direct result of what other, more virtuous and capable beings have done in the past. After all, according to the text, it was the Buddha who strove to attain his Awakening, disseminated the Dharma and arranged to have his relics dispersed for all beings to venerate. Likewise it was members of the Saṅgha who brought relics to the island of Laṅkā so that they could be enshrined and venerated. Great kings are said to have marshaled resources to construct *stūpas* and support the Saṅgha, permitting the Buddha's Dispensation to survive up to the present for contemporary readers and listeners of the text. People encountering the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* are prefigured to envision themselves as the recipients of others' acts—'patients', to use Ronald Inden's term—whose ability to seek future happiness and liberation is made possible by what the Buddha and other agents have done.¹⁷

Returning to the episode where King Duṭṭhamaṇu learns that he was foreseen by the *arahant* Mihiṇḍu, we find evidence of the moral subjectivity that the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* attempts to cultivate and transmit to its audience. As a consequence of discovering how he has been foretold to build the Great Stūpa, Duṭṭhamaṇu is depicted as feeling that he must act in accordance with the obligation that history has laid upon him. After initially reacting with joy, the King immediately convenes the Saṅgha and announces his intention to build the Brazen Palace to house the monks.¹⁸ Later, upon completion of that monastery, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* relates that one day when the King was entering the city, 'having seen the stone inscription that had been set up by King Devanapātissa at the place where the Ruvanmāli Dāgaba would [later] be established, and recalling the words that were spoken by the Mahāthera Mihiṇḍu, he thought "I will build the Great Dāgaba"' (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, p. 146). The narrative of the text illustrates how King Duṭṭhamaṇu displays a sense of himself as the subject of another's act: he was quite literally 'seen' by Mihiṇḍu. Who he is and what is required of him have already been decided by others. His ethical sense of moral obligation therefore comes from hearing history, and as a result, he undertakes the construction of a 300-foot high relic shrine.

The point is that feelings of gratitude and dependence create obligations for a person to act and, as a result, contribute to the construction of moral agents who engage in devotional acts that are prefigured by Buddhist histories. In this sense, I believe that the presumed effects of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* confirm one of the fundamental insights found in Michel Foucault's writings on ethics and subjectivity (see Foucault 1997). Ethics, for Foucault, appears to comprise various systems, or 'technologies', of knowledge and practice that are used to give a person a sense of who one is and how one should care for oneself. There is no natural or inherent way, in other words, for understanding ourselves and what is required of us. This information is supplied to us from other sources and is developed through practices of self-examination such as study,

writing, penance and contemplation. Ethics, in short, consists largely of how one relates to oneself and how a moral self relates to others. The utility of Foucault's discussion is that it allows us to expand the sphere of ethics beyond second-order reflections on moral experience—for example, reflecting upon why it is wrong to steal and why is it good to be generous. No longer are we restricted to viewing ethics in terms of individual free agents who adhere to religious precepts guided by their own moral reasoning. On the contrary, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* illustrates how moral agency can be in part the product of historical literature, inasmuch as its narratives condition how persons feel and act in response to learning how their lives were profoundly shaped by others who allegedly acted on their behalf in the past.

Therefore the narrative of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* appears designed to constitute readers and listeners as moral subjects who are made aware of how the past impinges upon their lives in the present. One's sense of oneself and of how one is related to others is transformed by the feelings and knowledge prefigured in encounters with Buddhist historical narratives. The reader or listener of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* is clearly fashioned to be a 'child' and a 'devotee' of the Buddha, and to feel both grateful and obligated in response to learning how the Buddha cared for one's needs and facilitated the means to achieve greater happiness in this life and the next. In this way, one's dependence and reciprocal obligations to the Buddha serve to refract attention and analysis back upon oneself. As a beneficiary of history, one is conditioned to relate to oneself as a subject dependent to some degree upon what others have previously done. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* repeatedly emphasises that the sacrifices made by the Bodhisattva, the dispersal of the Buddha's relics and the construction of various relic shrines in Lankā were all done for the benefit of all beings—including, once again, the readers and listeners of the text itself. The feelings of serene joy and gratitude that come from learning that one's needs were already anticipated and taken care of leads directly to the realisation that one is now obligated to try to reciprocate.

What then is a beneficiary of Buddhist history supposed to do? How does one express gratitude to exceedingly generous and sometimes omniscient beings who lived and died centuries earlier? The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* answers this question by depicting practices of veneration and making offerings as the instinctive result of learning how one has benefited from the past. Its narrative predisposes grateful readers and listeners to engage in ritualised offerings of *pūjā*. In other words, the text generates an impulse for doing *pūjā* by making its audience feel compelled to reciprocate for what the Buddha and other virtuous agents have done for them. Even though the Buddha in Theravāda is thought to have attained a final state of *nirvāṇa* and therefore does not benefit from *pūjā*, the beneficiaries of his deeds are morally obliged to show their gratitude and respect. The idea that the obligations bestowed by history give rise to *pūjā* is nicely illustrated in an episode in which King Aśoka questions the Saṅgha about the Buddha's teachings:

'Reverends! I will ask a question of you, Sirs. What is the extent of the Dharma that was preached by the Meritorious Buddha?', he asked. The monks, having heard that, said, 'Lord! According to its branches, it is nine. According to its sections, there are 84,000 sections of the Dharma'. That king, having become serenely joyful in the Dharma of the Buddha, [said], 'I will make offerings to each section of the Dharma with a monastery'. (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, p. 93)

Upon hearing of the extent of the Dharma discovered by the Buddha and taught for the benefit of himself and others, Aśoka instinctively wishes to make a great offering of 84,000 monasteries in an attempt to reciprocate for what the Buddha has done. By

narrating this episode, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* suggests that it too can effect acts of *pūjā* among those who encounter historical narratives. Inasmuch as the text recalls what the Buddha accomplished and gave to the world, those persons who encounter this narrative are expected to follow suit by acknowledging their status as beneficiaries and by doing or giving something in return. King Aśoka embodies the gratitude felt for the gift of the Dharma given by the Buddha and, in turn, shows his appreciation by offering a gift that is symbolically equivalent to what he has received. Similarly, the reader or listener of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* can easily be expected to make some kind of offering—even though, as tradition holds, it would pale in comparison with the invaluable gifts of the Triple Gem—since that would at least acknowledge gratitude for having benefited from the deeds of others.¹⁹

The moral subjectivity crafted by Buddhist history writing thus encourages ritualised acts of devotion by making readers and listeners feel obligated to those who have already brought the means to worldly (*laukika/lokiya*) and world-transcending (*lokottara/lokuttara*) felicities within their reach. Throughout the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, acts of *pūjā* are often represented as the spontaneous and instinctive responses of beings who have learned that the Buddha has cared for them. Kings, deities and even monks appear as if they were compelled to make offerings to the Triple Gem.²⁰ The practice of *pūjā* even appears to be contagious, as the narrative mentions several occasions when large numbers of human and divine beings participate in making offerings *en masse*. At the enshrining of the relics in the Great Stūpa, for instance, King Dutugāmuṇu's joy at seeing the miracles of the relics leads him to offer sovereignty over his kingdom to the relics for seven days along with all the royal ornaments that adorn him. The text then relates that, at that moment, the King's sixteen thousand consorts, various royal officials, the army, 'many women and men', gods, *brahmās*, *nāgas*, *suparṇas* (*suparṇas*), *yakṣas* (*yakkhas*), *rakṣasas* (*rakkhasas*), *siddhas*, and *vidyādharas* (*vijjādharas*) unfastened their own ornaments and made offerings to the relics also (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, p. 188). The text goes on to make a direct appeal to the members of the audience, admonishing them to do *pūjā* themselves and asserting that someone who makes an offering to the Buddha's relics in the proper emotional state receives as much merit as someone who made an offering to the living Buddha long ago:

Therefore, if there is someone who has made an offering with reverence to the living Omniscient One—who received offerings from the inhabitants of the Three Worlds, and if there is someone who has made an offering to a relic of that Omniscient One measuring [even] a mustard seed, recognizing that the wholesome fruit in the serene joy of that mind is equal to the offering that was made to the living Omniscient One, flowers and lamps ought to be offered to those relics by all beings. (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, p. 188)

Significantly, the special attention given to characters who make offerings to the Buddha's relics illustrates that the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* attempts to do more than simply provide a model for devotional practice to be read and imitated at will. This image of the text as a handbook fails to consider how the language and the images of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* transform people into ritualised agents who come to embody and act upon their ascribed status as dependent beneficiaries.²¹ The narration of history also supplies the impetus for venerating relics by showing readers and listeners how their well being depends to a considerable extent upon what the Buddha and other notable kings and monastics have done previously. Once instilled with this form of subjectivity, readers and listeners are transformed into *satpuruṣas* as a direct result of their encounters with the

historical narrative. The representation of *pūjā* as a contagious act, together with the expectation that the audience will follow suit, suggests that the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* was composed and copied, as well as read and recited, in pre-modern Sri Lanka to evoke generalised emotions such as serene joy and gratitude thought to be conducive to relic veneration. As a form of action that is traditionally held to be meritorious for the actor, *pūjā* also displays the dependent and obligated relationship one has with the Buddha who, as Buddhist histories routinely claim, acted for the welfare of the world. By depicting how emotion and devotion spread from one character to another, even extending outwards into an audience, the narrative of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* makes a strong claim for its ability to generate real effects in the world beyond its pages or folios.

Conclusions

The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* shows how historical narratives could be designed to make affective and ethical demands upon an audience of readers and listeners. As illustrated by several characters in the text, the act of remembering the past is equated with learning how others have facilitated one's welfare previously. The narrative prefigures a response of gratitude and obligation, stimulating acts of *pūjā* as a result of the moral subjectivity instilled by the text. While it is of course highly improbable that every reader and listener will respond in this ideal manner, the conspicuous attempts at fashioning grateful devotees in the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* outlines a vision of writing Buddhist history in which texts are ascribed the power to transform an audience into *satpuruṣas* who make offerings to the Triple Gem. The frequent claims in Sri Lankan Buddhist *vaṃsas* that they were written for arousing serene joy and other emotions conducive to moral conduct begin to look more significant when we consider how historical narratives were accorded a transformative capacity to make people realise how their own welfare depends significantly upon actions undertaken by others in the past.²²

The view that one's own present existence and future destiny is not exclusively a consequence of one's own acts also forces us to expand upon the typical scholarly theories of karma in South Asian religions. While it is commonplace in the study of Buddhism to emphasise individual responsibility in the moral valorisation of specific acts, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* complicates this picture by suggesting that the attainment of higher soteriological fruits may be attributed as much to what the Buddha has done for people as to what people have done for themselves. This conclusion also supports the view found among a growing number of scholars that one can find evidence of a strong 'social ethics' in various Buddhist traditions.²³ By recognising that the actions of past agents have contributed towards the welfare of latter-day readers and listeners of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, the text advances a broader ethical position whereby individuals are seen to have the capacity to improve other people's lives along with their own. The suggestion that one's acts can affect the welfare and destiny of others easily extends the realm of moral responsibility outwards, so that people are encouraged to care for others and facilitate for them the means for doing merit and improving their fortunes in life.²⁴

Inasmuch as the narrative of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* was envisioned to condition structures of feeling, habits of thought and modes of practice, theories that take Buddhist histories to be strictly either the repositories of historical facts or mythic charters to legitimate religious and political institutions require some modification. By using the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* as a starting point, we learn that at times the writing of traditional histories in Theravāda Buddhism included the task of fashioning ideal devotees who are made to feel obligated to venerate the Triple Gem and make offerings to relics. The

narration of history in the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* thus holds out the possibility that life might imitate literature through being directly shaped by it. It would, of course, be a mistake simply to dismiss the political and polemical traces in the Theravāda *vaṃsa* literature highlighted by other scholars. After all, it is not difficult to imagine that the capacity of texts to inscribe identities and create communities could have been useful for a variety of political ends. This study, however, has focused attention on the ethical implications of Buddhist historical narratives that are typically overlooked by scholars today. As such, it may be more profitable to argue that what makes Buddhist histories ‘Buddhist’ is not so much their subject matter as the efforts they make to generate emotional states and moral acts that were valued in Buddhist communities for making people more ‘virtuous’, concerned with the welfare of others and subject to future karmic benefits.

The more general point to be emphasised is that a close reading of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* helps illustrate how religious texts have occasionally been thought to condition manners of feeling, thought and action. Historical narratives might thus be seen to prefigure certain types of action in people as effectively as the moral exhortations found in doctrinal expositions. The common desire that many contemporary humanistic scholars have for seeing individuals as rational agents who make their own choices and determine their own level of participation and belief may inhibit us from seeing how some historical texts were once ascribed with the agency to structure people’s dispositions. I suggest that an examination of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* helps to remind us that, in contrast to many modernist views of Theravāda Buddhism that deem it a religion of self-purification and individual achievement, some texts underscore the significance of being acted upon and the devotional relationships formed with the Buddha through the medium of historical narrative.²⁵ Clearly, the focus of this article is less the work that went into composing or preserving the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* than the work involved in responding to the ethical demands that history makes upon a reader or listener. We recognise that the writing of religious histories at certain times and places were strategic acts designed to transform people and the worlds in which they lived.

Notes

- 1 This article draws upon research in Sri Lanka that was funded by the Fulbright Junior Fellowship program. An earlier version of this article was presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in 1999. I would like to thank Charles Hallisey, Kevin Trainor, Robert Scharf, Jack Llewellyn, Russell McCutcheon, Susanne Mroziak and the anonymous reviewer for *Religion* for their insightful comments at different stages in this research.
- 2 Generally speaking, there has been little research on the author and date of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*. Important discussions on the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* written in Sinhala can be found in Kulasuriya (1961, pp. 198–214) and Sannasgala (1998, pp. 192–6). Significant English discussions of this text include Geiger (1908, pp. 82–7), Godakumbura (1955, pp. 107–10), Jayawickrama (1971, pp. xv–xviii) and Kulasuriya (1978, pp. 9–10).
- 3 Most readers of scholarship on Theravāda Buddhism will expect to see the use of Pāli technical terms to refer to concepts or figures in the Theravāda tradition. Since this article is primarily concerned with a non-canonical text written in a medieval form of literary Sinhala, I have chosen in most cases to foreground the Sinhala terms from the text and to offer the Pāli equivalents subsequently or parenthetically. Pāli versions of proper names have been given for Pāli texts and for cases in which the reader may not be able to identify a given name. I have retained the use of the Pāli words ‘*vaṃsa*’, ‘*arahant*’ and ‘*saṃsāra*’ since they are occasionally used as such in the text. While these decisions may result in variants that seem unfamiliar to many, they will serve as a useful reminder that many Theravāda traditions have historically had a

bilingual approach to writing texts, employing both local and cosmopolitan languages in composing Buddhist literature.

- 4 See, for example, Gunawardana (1976), Bechert (1978), Kiribamune (1978) and Obeyesekere (1995).
- 5 Gunawardana (1990, 1995) has raised doubts about the antiquity of ethnic categories and nationalism in Sri Lanka. Instead, he locates the introduction of concepts of ethnicity and nationhood much later, during the Sri Lankan colonial experience.
- 6 In a departure from the two most common interpretations of the Buddhist *vaṃsas*, Walters argues that some of the early *vaṃsas* were later used dialogically as models for imperial expansion by medieval Sri Lankan kings (see Walters 2000).
- 7 *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsaya*, ed. W. S. Karunatillake (1994, p. 1). For the sake of convenience and familiarity, I will hereafter drop the Sinhala-*ya* suffix from the title of the text in all references to it. Additionally, it should be noted that the direct mention of ‘*satpuruṣas*’ in the opening paragraph is found with greater consistency in modern critical editions of the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* than in the palm leaf manuscript editions of this text. Even then, the term appears periodically throughout these manuscripts, and particularly at points where the narrator addresses the audience directly. Generally speaking, the terms *satpuruṣa*, *sappurisa* and *sādhujana* are synonymous and commonly used with reference to the readers and listeners of nearly all pre-modern Theravāda histories written in Sinhala and Pāli.
- 8 Senarat Paranavitana (1939, pp. 253–60) has edited and translated an inscription found in a stone slab near the Ruvanvāli Sāya that suggests that a text called the ‘Thūpavaṃsa’ was read aloud at a ceremonial alms-offering held near the shrine at approximately 1203. Note, however, that there is some doubt as to whether the *Thūpavaṃsa* referred to in the inscription is the same text that Parākrama Paṇḍita composed.
- 9 The translation of Sanskrit works on poetics into Sinhala in medieval Sri Lanka suggests that Buddhist works composed with attention to Sanskrit poetic conventions might also reflect an assumption that literature is capable of arousing particular responses in an audience much like the various *rasa* theorists argued in India. Further research must be done to determine the exact nature of the literary influence that Sanskrit poetics had on Sri Lankan Buddhist writing between the tenth and the fifteenth centuries.
- 10 For a discussion on the feelings of serene joy elicited by witnessing the miracles of Buddha relics, see Trainor (1997, pp. 167–71). Steven Collins (1998, p. 593 n. 2) also recognises the external sources for some emotions when he describes *pasāda* in terms of ‘a clarity of mind, calmness, and conviction in the religious value of what, or who evokes the feeling’ (italics mine). Note here the priority given to religious value, which is a concept that depends upon a cognitive understanding of someone or something that has been learned or taught, and not simply felt from within.
- 11 I am borrowing the idea of a cultural expression being ‘mimetic of itself’ from Clifford Geertz (1980, pp. 103–4, 123–4, 136), whose study of the rituals associated with Balinese kingship explains how the pageantry of state ceremonies in pre-modern Bali both represented and became the vision of reality presented.
- 12 Karunatillake (1991) offers an illuminating discussion on the requisite mental states that make actions productive of good karmic fruits and therefore ‘meritorious’ by definition.
- 13 There are only two fortunate realms of rebirth (*sugati*), according to Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (XIII. 94). Rebirth as either a human or a divine being is considered fortunate largely because these states are thought to give proportionately more occasions for feeling pleasure and happiness than are found in rebirth as an animal, a hungry ghost (*peta*), a titan (*asura*) or a hell-dweller.
- 14 At the end of the text, an *arahant* reminds the dying King Duṭṭhagāmuṇu to recall his various meritorious deeds in an attempt to make the King arouse ‘serene joy in the very place that one ought to arouse serene joy in mind’. The *arahant* goes on to explain how two gifts in particular entail ‘great results’ for the King since they were obtained and given righteously, without any consideration to himself and with great joy and pious conviction to a recipient who enjoyed them fully (see *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, pp. 193–4).
- 15 In this sense the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* offers a slightly different view of what Frank Reynolds has termed the ‘biographical chronicles’ in Theravāda Buddhism. Reynolds (1976, 1997) points out that the inclusion of the Buddha-biography in the Pāli *vaṃsas* represents, among other things, an attempt to trace the presence of relics in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia back to the Buddha in India in order to authenticate them. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* appears to deviate from the kind

- of *vaṃsa* Reynolds has in mind since it devotes relatively scarce attention to the Buddha's legendary visits to Sri Lanka and instead concentrates more upon his *bodhisattva* career.
- 16 The important distinction between the Buddha as a model to be emulated and the Buddha as an extraordinary figure upon whom beings rely for assistance in achieving higher religious goals is discussed in Gómez (1996, pp. 27, 32).
 - 17 Inden (1990, p. 23) notes how Indian subjects of the British Raj were constructed as 'patients' for and upon whom the British acted. While the colonisers could variously pacify, punish, save, reform or develop such 'patients', Inden maintains that a patient can be more or less willing, acting in ways that are both complicit and resistant to the colonial hegemony. Despite the pejorative tone of the term 'patient', I believe it remains a useful concept to emphasise how latter-day Buddhists were conceived as the subjects upon (and for) whom the Buddha and other virtuous figures from history acted.
 - 18 *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, p. 144.
 - 19 There is ample evidence in the Pali Canon supporting the traditional view that the gift of the Dharma excels all other gifts. See, for example, *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, I. 91; *Dhammapada*, v. 354; and *Itivuttaka*, p. 98.
 - 20 Two episodes concerning monks who make offerings to venerate the Buddha's relics appear in the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*. These particular accounts (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, pp. 158–61) elaborate upon the descriptions of the same events in *Mahāvaṃsa* XXX. 21–41.
 - 21 The process in which people internalise the values and structures informing a particular ritual to become 'ritualized agents' is discussed by Bell (1992, pp. 98–108).
 - 22 See, for example, *Dīpavaṃsa* I. 1–3; *Mahāvaṃsa* I. 4; and *Dāthavaṃsa*, p. 151, v. 6 for various statements that effectively claim how the work in question was compiled to generate serene joy and other generalised emotions in the audience.
 - 23 Hallisey (1995, p. 414) has pointed out how Buddhist social ethics, while often overlooked by scholars, may involve a view of society in which 'care for others is part and parcel of everyday life'. Other scholars such as Keown (1996) and Swearer (1998) have argued in support of the social relevance of virtue in the ethical development of Buddhists.
 - 24 An example of social ethics in practice can be readily witnessed in large-scale *piṭṭās* made at Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka today. Persons who have simply shown up at the same time that an offering is being held are routinely permitted and encouraged to 'share' in the merit being earned by the primary donors through touching or otherwise handling the objects being offered.
 - 25 While there is no shortage of contemporary depictions of Buddhism that emphasise individual efforts towards self-improvement or personal fulfilment, it should suffice to quote one example of this characteristically modern interpretation of Buddhism. Daisaku Ikeda, an influential Japanese lay Buddhist, has written: 'The important thing for each individual is to establish his own solid and indestructible strength of character that will enable him to understand the true nature of change and to survive it. Herein lies the essence of Buddhism' (Ikeda 1996, p. 129). Even though the idea that every person controls his or her destiny may be compatible with many streams of contemporary thought, the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* shows us that in at least some pre-modern Buddhist texts the personal welfare of individual Buddhists can be directly tied to others acting on their behalf.

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