SPIRO’S FREUDIAN INTERPRETATION OF BURMESE BUDDHIST MONASTICISM*

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I. Introduction

Melford E. Spiro was a famous anthropologist and a scholar who had a wide interest in Burmese culture, especially in Burmese religious behavior. Spiro first went to Burma in 1962 and completed his field work in 1962. In order to discuss on his thought and methodology, I have selected some of Spiro’s major works on Burma, especially *Buddhism and Society* (1971), and evaluated them by means of Freudian psychology and the Pali Canon. There are several issues concerning Buddhist monasticism discussed by Spiro. Only some major issues, however, that reflect his Freudian interpretation of Burmese Buddhist monasticism, such as the concept of father, Oedipus complex, sexual drive and narcissism, will be closely considered in this paper which aims to demonstrate the attempt and the result of Freudian application in Eastern context.

II. General Characteristics of Burmese Buddhist Monasticism

Burmese Buddhist monasticism is the Buddhist monasticism in Burma which follows the rules and precepts of the Pali Canon in Theravada Buddhism. The composition of the monastery are *sayadaw*\(^1\) or “venerable teacher” (which Spiro calls *hsaya-do* or “royal teacher” in his *Buddhism and Society*, and Manning Nash calls *hsayadaw* or “abbot” in *The Golden Road to Modernity* (1965) and ordain monks with less seniority. Monk is the ideal type of Buddhists in his role and characteristics. All Burmese monks hold monastic vows of poverty and chastity. They have only three pieces of cloth making

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*The words “Burma” and “Burmese” were used in Spiro’s books instead of “Myanmar” as officially used today.

\(^1\) This word is used by David E. Pfanner, “The Buddhist Monk in Rural Burmese Society” in Adrienne Suddard (ed.), *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism* (New haven: Yale University, 1966.)
up a robe and can possess only the necessities of monastic life. Bodily
adornment or luxurious items are strictly forbidden. They live in
brotherhood within the monastic compound which is usually in or near
the village. Monks do not earn their living by working as lay-people.
They are not allowed to produce food themselves. They have to live by
whatever is offered to them in their alms bowl or that is sent separately
to the monastery each day by a donor. The conduct for ordained monks
is prescribed in the 227 precepts contained in the Pāṭimokkha or Book
of Enfranchisement which is a section of the Vinaya-piṭaka. Monks
who commit either of the four cardinal sins, which are breaking the
vow of chastity, taking human life, theft, and making false claims of
supernatural power, are unpardonable and must be expelled from the
Order.\footnote{Ibid., p. 80-2.}

By living in poverty, chastity, and difficult life within strict
rules of monastery, monks are highly respected by lay-people who
believe that the karma of the monks is so vastly superior to theirs. The
primary duty of monks is their own salvation. Teaching dhamma to
laity is their secondary role.\footnote{Ibid., p. 84.} The commonest form of formal religious
activity that brings monks and laity together is attending the sermon as
well as feeding them in the monastery. Nevertheless, monks are
expected to communicate with lay-people with self-control and
somewhat detachment in their expression but not without mercy in
their heart. Lester has described the manner of monks in
communicating with laity as follows:

In particular, he is to follow the Buddha’s example, if not his express command, to counsel the laity
on worldly affairs, heal the sick, and command malevolent spirits. In all of these matters the Bhikkhu is
to proceed without “ego-involvement”, without selfish interest, and only when the layman seeks him out. He
passively influences, preaches, teaches, counsels, and heals as the layman comes out to offer food, invites the
Bhikkhu into his home, attends observances at the monastery and asks the Bhikkhu’s advice.\footnote{Robert C. Lester, Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia (Ann Arbor: The University of
Being indifferent and detached while communicating with laity, monk can avoid selfish interest and sentimental involvement with the outside world. He can thus remain stable while being in pleasant or unpleasant situation. This mental discipline will prepare him to easily follow the passage of salvation.

Monks in Burmese Buddhist monasticism are differentiated in grades of brotherhood. The highest ranked status is sayadaw or the head of the Order. The second ranked status from sayadaw is pongyi. Pongyi means a monk or a member of the sangha (monastic community). This word is generally used to means a monk but, literally, it means “great holiness” or those who spend at least ten years in the Order and are not the “yellow rogues” who temporarily take up the homeless life and earn their living by using the yellow robe. The third ranked status is upazin or an assistant or junior monk. The lowest ranked status is koyon or novices who have no commitment to stay for a long time in monastic life. The result of merit-making is up to the ranked status of the receiver. For example, to feed and give alms to monks is considered to be more meritorious than to feed laity, to give alms to sayadaw is more meritorious than to give it to a novice.

Generally, Burmese Buddhist monasticism is a hierarchy community of brotherhood living together within monastic bound and following 227 Buddhist precepts in the Vinaya-pitaka (the Pali Canon of monastic discipline). The importance of monasticism can be noticed in its role for the community and as a means to prepare the renuncient for salvation. There are two largest divisions of the Burmese Sangha: the Thudhamma Order and the Shwegyin Order. The Shwegyin Order arose from a controversy that developed within the Sangha during the reign of King Mindon (1852-1877). Both Order accept the same basic doctrine of the Pali Canon but are different in the interpretation of the rules concerning the conduct of monks. The Shwegyin monks are more strict to the original doctrine while the Thudhamma monks apply the monastic rules to modern life. They can smoke tobacco, foretell destiny, practice medicine, and so on. This is not a strange

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7 Adrienne Suddard, *op.cit.*, p. 79.
phenomenon in Theravada countries. In Thailand as well as in Ceylon, there are generally two kinds of monastic lives; one holds fast to the original texts and the other applies the texts to practical life. Laypeople, however, pay more attention to moral precepts rather than the monastic rules for monks.

III. Burmese Buddhist Monasticism in Spiro’s Freudian Interpretation

Monasticism which Spiro took as the core institution of Buddhism was not originated by the Buddha. Before the Buddha’s renunciation, there had already been a number of ascetics in India who, according to the general notion of monasticism, lived together under the same religious leader and set of religious regulations. Nevertheless, after the Buddha’s Parinibbāna, monasticism becomes the important institution in securing Buddhist doctrine. Monks are normatively viewed as the true Buddhists when they belong to a certain monastery. The vital role of monasticism is also confirmed in the Tipitaka to be the representative of the Buddha himself. The primary concern of Buddhist monasticism is in otherworldly (lokuttara) achievement, not in the worldly affairs (lokiya). Though Buddhist doctrine does not encourage monks to enter worldly affairs, in practice, Buddhist monks in general, cannot avoid cooperating with the laity. Being in a monastery, a monk has merely exchanged one social system for another. Generally, if monks do not follow monastic rules, though they are alms receivers and practice meditation, they are hardly considered monks.

Spiro, like Freud, believes that experiences in earlier life always determine behavior and perceptual structures of a person in later life. The way a child is brought up will determine his entire future life. Considering in religious context, the actors’ own personal backgrounds provide experiential confirmation for the truth of the religious doctrines, and the religious doctrines provide authoritative sanction for the actors’ own convictions.  

According to Spiro, Buddhist monasticism is a means for satisfying unconscious needs developed in childhood. He believes that all human being possess unconscious needs and that all religions have cognitive patterns and social roles which are used for their sublimation. Besides, he views Burmese Buddhism as a compromise between the

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requirements of normative Buddhism and the demands of Burmese personality since all great religions are products of some inner conflicts. In this paper, in order to clarify Spiro’s arguments concerning Burmese monasticism and monks’ behavior, the concept of sex, father, Oedipus complex, and narcissism will be examined.

A. Sexual Drive

Burmese Buddhist monks are ascetics. They not only possess no dispensable property, but also abstain from sex and all luxuries of life. To be a good monk is to be against one’s own desire. This is rather a difficult practice for the indulgent. Monks should do only what is necessary for life and avoid all excess. For example, while eating, a monk must always tell himself that he eats in order to survive, not to satisfy his appetite. Since monk takes a vow of chastity, sex is to be avoided. A monk who commits sexual intercourse must be expelled from the monastery. A monk who expresses his sexual desire will be condemned by other minor rules. He can be allowed to remain in the monastery but he has to declare his violation in front of the monastic community. In the Buddhist view, sex which includes all kinds of sensual desire, is the greatest obstacle of salvation. It disturbs concentration and mental serenity. At this point, Buddhism agrees with Freud that sex is a powerful basic drive of human beings and always tries to dominate human behavior. But, whereas Freud finds no way to overcome sexual drive, Buddhism believes that sexual desire can be eliminated and eradicated by right understanding and right determination.

Spiro, through Freudian theory, indicates that Burmese monks still possess all human desires. They have desires, fears, hopes, anxieties, and aspirations like other Burmese men. The reason they prefer monastic life to common life of laity are various: to escape human difficulties, to obtain easy living, etc. Nevertheless, Spiro observes that monastic life does not eradicate their sexual drive. It can only transform it or suppress it. Thus, many monks still behave as laity or sometimes worse.\(^9\)

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B. The Concept of Father

In the monastery, according to Spiro, monks are “Sons of the Buddha.” The Buddha, as a father, represents the head of the monastic family. Monks are “sons” who should obey and follow the rules prescribed by “the father.” Spiro also notices that the motives of renunciation of “the sons” and that of “the father” are different.

Whereas the Buddha was a prince who, in order to become a monk, renounced the wealth and high status of his position, his Burmese “Sons,” stemming from a depressed social stratum, enhance both their status and their standard of living inestimably by becoming monks.11

Here, as Spiro has suggested, the Buddha, the father, is the ideal person, Buddhist Burmese monks, the sons, are those who behave in the opposite direction. They violate the rules of “the father.” For example, instead of living in poverty, some monks enjoy luxurious life; they possess a television set, live in big and pleasant buildings, etc. all these unnecessities and facilities are presented to them by lay-people who profoundly have religious faith and innocently encourage desire of these monks.

C. The Oedipus Complex

Spiro believes that the monastic life of Burmese monks signifies the Oedipus complex.

The monks renounces any sexual claim not only on his mother, but in compliance with the demands of his “father” -monks, it will be recalled, are “Sons of the Buddha” - on all other women as well. For the monk, all women are (forbidden) mothers. To exchange for this renunciation he can even, as an adult, continue to enjoy the dependency of early childhood. In short, by obeying the commands of the “father,” including the command of not sleeping with the “mother,” the monk can enjoy that state to which he (and probably most of mankind) aspires-the state of absolute succorance.12

11 Ibid., p. 329.
12 Ibid., p. 342.
Spiro thus concludes that monks obey the Buddha by abstaining from sexual intercourse with women who possess the image of “mother” because they journey back to the stage of childhood were the command of “the father” is so powerful and dependency on “the mother” is indispensable.

D. Narcissism

“Narcissism” is psychologically related to sexual drive, fear and conflict with the power of “the father,” and Oedipus complex. Spiro defines “narcissism” as “an overriding preoccupation with self, regardless of its consequences for the welfare of others.” In his opinion, monks are generally narcissistic. They have excessive interest only in their own affairs. Besides, their narcissism can be seen in their renunciation. They abandon their wife and children in order to search for their own salvation. Spiro indicates that:

Although the Burmese, as we shall see, do not censure those who leave their families in order to enter the monastery (on the contrary, they admire them for their ability to cut off their attachments), they are critical of men who do not divorce their wives prior to ordination. This, for them, is a monk of selfishness.

Spiro believes that “narcissism” is not the product of present experience. It is a long accumulation of self-love since childhood. It is a result of sexual drive: the desire to be loved. Narcissism in a child encourages him to challenge with the power of the father in order to win his mother’s love. Thus, it brings about the Oedipus complex, the hatred of the father and the love and dependence on the mother. As Spiro has observed, Burmese monks behave according to their psychological development from childhood.

Because Theravada Buddhism teaches people to get rid of their desires, Spiro views it as oppose to human nature.

Theravada Buddhism teaches that all experiences entails suffering, where most people agree that many experiences afford pleasure and even true happiness. Theravada Buddhism insists that the

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13 Ibid., p. 344.
14 Ibid., p. 345.
extinction of desire is a requisite for salvation, where most people believe that the satisfaction of desire is one of the marks of salvation. Theravada Buddhism demands emotional detachment and the renunciation of the world, where most people seek attachment to friends and loved ones, power and position, self and possessions.\(^{15}\)

Spiro, therefore, comes to the conclusion that, since Theravada Buddhism ignores human nature, it fails to entail a good Theravada Buddhist.

IV. Spiro’s Freudian Interpretation and the Problems of Burmese Buddhist Monasticism

Spiro, like Freud, accepts that men always live with some inner conflicts. They have to cope with themselves, with their own desires, in order to survive happily in community. In his opinion, monks possess no qualities above human level. They are not holy by birth and that is why they cannot be expected to abandon all human desires and habits only by having worn yellow robes. Monks still have sexual desires, fears, anxieties, and so on as laymen but they are trained to suppress them or express them in some appropriate ways. Spiro has also seen that Burmese Buddhist monasticism is the best way to train monks.

As a culturally constituted defense, the monastic institution resolves the inner conflicts of Burmese males, by allowing them to gratify their drives and reduce their anxieties in a disguised and therefore socially acceptable manner, one which precludes psychotic distortion, on the one hand, and criminal “acting-out,” on the other. Hence, the monk is protected from mental illness and/or social punishment; society is protected from the disruptive consequences of antisocial behavior; and the key

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 9-10.
institution of Burmese culture-Buddhist monasticism-is provided with a most powerful motivation basis.\textsuperscript{16}

Though monastic life requires strict discipline, men are always willing to become monks. Spiro explains with Freudian presumption that men are motivated to join the monastery in order to escape the suffering and misery of human life. However, according to Spiro, Burmese Buddhist monasticism cannot eradicate human desire. Its regulations are not intended to extinguish nonmonastic drives but rather to channel their expression in certain desirable paths.\textsuperscript{17}

As to the problem of sexual desire, Spiro explains that Burmese monks are not without sexual desire but they are men who must control sexual desire. Spiro even indicates that the monastery is a place to save face of those men who have problems of sexual impotence. That is reason why men who cannot live in society with sexual problems decide to enter monastery. At this point, Spiro seems to admit that monastery is the place to suppress sexual drive which is a basic instinct of mankind as well as the best place to solve sexual problems. It is rather unlikely, in my opinion, for the monastery to be able to achieve the two opposite roles and Spiro’s conclusion is certainly not the aim of the monastery itself.

Apart from sexual drive, Spiro also use Freudian theory to explain monks’ infantile complex. Psychologically, according to Spiro, monks’ relationship with their supporters is child-parents relationship. And monk’s sponsor is his parental image.

Before he is ordained every monk acquires a lay “sponsor” who undertakes the expense of the ordination and who, for as long as the monk remains in the robe, continues to provide for his welfare by supplying him with special meals, building him (if possible) a new monastery, caring for any special needs, and so on. This sponsor acquires the title of “father of the monk” (yahan: apha) or “mother of the monk” (yahan: ama), depending on sex, and the monk refers to his sponsor as “my father” or “my mother.”


\textsuperscript{17} Melford E. Spiro, \textit{Buddhism and Society}, p, 365.
Notice that while in Catholicism the priest or monk is “father” to the layman, in Buddhism the reverse is the case.\textsuperscript{18}

The problem of Spiro’s Freudian interpretation of Burmese monasticism is in the concept of “father” and “mother” which here is different from the Buddhist notion. According to the \textit{Vinaya-piṭaka}, \textit{upaṭṭhāka} or supporters means the one who shows personal attentions to or serves monks\textsuperscript{19}. This word, literally, does not include the concept of “father” or “mother” within itself. The supporter may be considered as a “father” if he is older, or as a “mother” if she is older, than the monk s/he supports. But if the supporter is younger than the monk, he cannot convey the concept of “father.” The relationship between a monk and his “father” (or mother) is different from that between a layman and his parents. Monk, as a so-called holy person, always stays in higher status than lay-people, even than his own parents. When the supporters or his own parents enter the monastery, they have to pay respect to the monk. The monk himself does not pay respect to his parents since he is a member of the holy world not of the profane world as laity. According to Spiro’s Freudian theory, the concept of “father” is accompanied with the concept of domineering power and opposition with a son, and the concept of “mother” conveys the meaning of the person on whom the son can rely. This interpretation cannot work in Buddhist monasticism because the concept of “father” here does not convey the meaning of a powerful figure. Monks are called “Sons of the Buddha” and “Disciples of the Thus-Gone” because they have inherited his teachings and passed them over to the people, not because they are afraid of his power or want to place themselves in his place. In other words, the Buddha is the dead father for the Theravada Buddhists whereas God is the living Father for the Christians. Moreover, both “father” and “mother” as well as all other supporters are believed to depend on monks as their meritorious accomplishment. They serve monks in order to achieve their moral virtue and religious goal. Monks, on the other hand, depend on supporters only as their physical support not spiritual support. The

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 341-2.
concept of “father-mother” conveys almost no meaning for monks who deny social obligation and retire into the brotherhood of monastery.

Spiro uses Freudian theory of child psychology to explain that monks are still possessed by their infantile experiences. They still remind themselves of their earlier period in order to gain their mental security.

The reinstatement of that (real or fancied) blissful period of infancy, in which all needs are anticipated and satisfied by the all-nurturant mother, is a recurrent wish, conscious and unconscious, of mankind, appearing (disguised and undisguised) in fantasy, dream and myth. In societies such as Burma, in which there is a sharp discontinuity between indulgent satisfaction of dependency in infancy and its frustration in childhood, one would expect this wish to be especially powerful, and the monastery may be viewed as an institutionalized means for realizing that wish. The monk can regress and reenact the role appropriate to that infantile period. This regression is symbolized in the very physical appearance of the monk. With his shaven head and eyebrows (required by the Rule) he required a foetalized appearance consistent with the psychological foetalization we have been discussing.20

This explanation is rather misleading. Monks do not shave their hair because they want to regress to infantile period and the appearance of the monk with no hair cannot be taken as a symbol of that regression. According to the rules in the Vinaya-piṭaka, hair should be removed from the monks’ head in order to differentiate them from laity, to decrease their burden of taking care of their body, and to keep them away from physical appreciation.

You are not, O Bhikkhus, to smooth the hair with a comb, or with a smoothing instrument shaped like a snake’s hood, or with the hand used as such an instrument, or with pomade, or with hair-oil of

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beeswax. Whosoever does so, shall be guilty of a dikkatā.\textsuperscript{21}

Dikkatā is a Pali word literally means “badly made.” Here, it means evil. Those monks who do not cut their hair accordingly or decorate their hair with any materials are to be condemned evil. Thus, monks should shave their hair in order to avoid physical appreciation and to decrease their burden, not in order to return to their infantile period.

Beside, Spiro’s Freudian interpretation of Burmese monasticism indicates that monks are generally narcissistic because of their infantile complex. Since they are always fed by their supporters as children are fed by their parents. They, then, get used to this habit which encourages them to keep on demanding from laity. Spiro criticizes that narcissism of monks can be seen in all times and places, even at the funeral.

In accordance with his role requirements the monks expresses no sympathy to the bereaved for their loss, he offers them no consolation and in general show no special concern for them. Rather it is \textbf{he} who is the object of concern. It is he for whom food is brought; it is he who is fed; it is he who must be brought from and returned to the monastery.\textsuperscript{22}

This interpretation goes too far. It is possible that monks do not show any sentimental involvement with the bereaved since they are trained to consider death as a natural phenomenon. Besides, monks according to the Vinaya-piṭaka, are supposed to preserve their expression, such as not to be excessive in being satisfied or dissatisfied, by right understanding that all is changeable.\textsuperscript{23} Monks, however, are unlikely to show no sympathy or to offer no consolation for the bereaved since they are also trained to be merciful to all beings.

Let none deceive another, nor think scorn of him in any way whatever. Let him not in anger or ill-will desire another’s ill-fare. Even as a

\textsuperscript{21} Kullavagga, V. 2,3. (Vinaya Text) quoted in Max Müller, \textit{The Sacred Books of the East}, Vol. xx, p.69.
\textsuperscript{22} Melford E. Spiro, \textit{Buddhism and Society}, p. 344.
mother, as long as she doth live, watches over her child, her only child, -even so should one practice an all-embracing mind unto all beings.\textsuperscript{24}

Another example used by Spiro to illustrate his Freudian theory of narcissism is a Buddhist myth of Prince Vessantara who abandoned his wife and children in order to be a future Buddha. This example is quite problematic since this myth exists in the \emph{Jātaka} which is compiled in later minor texts and aimed only to illustrate the merit of charity. There is no evidence that the Buddha told this story himself. And since Spiro calls it a myth, it cannot be counted as a real story. It thus cannot be considered literally but only purposively and symbolically.

Spiro, as well as Freud, begins is procedure of analysis with the theory of child psychology: infantile sexual drive, need of dependency on mother (who always takes the image of care and tenderness) which leads to the jealousy and hatred towards the father or the Oedipus complex and narcissism. Freud does not make clear in his psychological theory as to the meaning of “sex” and the sequence of infantile sexuality: whether the Oedipus complex generates the sense of narcissism or the sense of narcissism forms the Oedipus complex or both are two modes of the same thing. However, according to Spiro’s explanation, sexual drive is the primary motive of all expressions of monastic behaviors.

V. The Justification of Spiro’s Freudian Interpretation of Burmese Buddhist Monasticism

Sex, in Freudian theory, is the primary source of human activities. It can only be transformed or controlled but cannot be eliminated. Spiro understands Burmese monasticism through this theory but he also finds that Burmese monks can well preserve their chastity.

Nevertheless, since Burmese layman are quick to criticize them, and since the Buddhist unlike the Christian monastery is always open to the public, it would be difficult for sexual derelictions to remain undiscovered. This does not

\textsuperscript{24} \emph{Metta-Sutta} of \emph{Khuddaka Pāṭha} and \emph{Sutta Nipāta}, v. 143 quoted in F.L. Woodward (trans.), \emph{Some Sayings of the Buddha} (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 44.
mean that all monks are chaste, but it is probably fair to say that cases of unchastity among village monks at least – are extremely rare. I discovered only one in my investigations.  

Spiro further explains that Burmese monks can well preserve their chastity because of their fear of social critique, not because they can accomplish the Buddha’s teachings. In Freudian psychology, Id (instinctive drive) possesses the strongest power in human mind. The Super-ego (conscience or moral consciousness or social demand) cannot overcome the power of Id, and whenever the Super-ego tires to push Ego (self-consciousness) against Id, there will occur a transference neurosis. At this point, Buddhism and Freudian psychology take the opposite poles. Buddhism teaches that man is good by nature but may be bad by his deeds (karma). Being in a state of human being is considered to be in a good state caused by a satisfactory amount of meritorious accumulations from the past lives. By being human beings, men can have freedom of choice in their deeds and can be reborn in a higher state if they choose meritorious deeds. To do meritorious deeds is to overcome destructive instincts and, finally, all desires. To attain salvation means to be able to eradicate all instinctive drives and to destroy self-attachment. In order to be able to overcome oneself, one has to follow the Eight Noble Paths of the Buddhist doctrine step by step. By this way, Id can be eliminated. Spiro’s explanation of Burmese monks’ behavior can be interpreted in 2 ways: 1) Burmese monks, after having followed the Buddhist teachings, can eliminate sexual drive or 2) They cannot eliminate it but can transform or suppress it. Nevertheless, Spiro chooses to conclude his investigation that Burmese monks can only suppress or transform their sexual drive instead of the other possibility because he is confined by Freudian frame of understanding. Freudian

psychology explains man’s behavior and man’s reaction to his environment by two major concepts: the concept of sexual drive and the concept of fear. Sexual drive in Freudian theory encourages man to do something and fear holds man back from doing something. In the explanation of Burmese monks’ behavior, Spiro uses the concept of fear as a motive of monks’ chastity. Monks can avoid sexual activities because they are afraid of being expelled from the Order and condemned by public opinion.

It is inevitable for Spiro to view Burmese monastic behavior as a projection of infantile complex since Freudian theory does not allow a place for holiness. As Freud believes, religion is nothing but the outcome of the Oedipus complex.

Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity; like the obsessional neurosis of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father.29

In Freudian view, the image of the “father” is “power”. The relationship between son and father is love-hate relationship. The son hates his father but at the same time admires him. He always tries to raise himself to the rank of the father. In the primitive cult, as Freud had noticed, a savage’s attitude to his ruler, as a neurotic, is derived from a child’s infantile attitude to his father.30 From totemic religion, Freud proceeds to the interpretation of Christianity as to the relationship of God and man.

The psychoanalysis of individual human beings, however, teaches us with quite special insistence that the god of each of them is formed in the likeness of his father, that his personal relation to God depends on his relation to his father in flesh and oscillates and changes along with that relation, and that at bottom, God is nothing other than an exalted father. As in the case of totemism, psycho-analysis recommends us

to have faith in the believers who calls God their father, just as the totem was called the tribal ancestor.\textsuperscript{31}

The Freudian interpretation of the Christian God as an exalted father leads to the crucification of Christ as an expression of Oedipus complex.

The very deed in which the son offered the greatest possible atonement to the father brought him at the same time to the attainment of his wishes against the father. He himself became God, beside, or, more correctly in place of, the father. A son-religion displaced the father-religion.

I should like to insist that its outcome shows that the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus, by this explanation, by being crucified on the cross, Christ can place himself in the rank of God, the Father. He can accomplish his wish against the father. The development of Christianity from Judaism is therefore the process of the Son trying to defeat the Father and replace himself in the position of the Father.

The Mosaic religion had been a Father religion; Christianity became a Son religion. The old God, the Father, took second place; Christ, the son, stood in his stead, just as in those dark times every son had long to do.\textsuperscript{33}

However, Freud’s assumption that infantile complex had constructed all religions seems to be inadequate to be widely accepted, since his observation and investigation was done mostly with his neurotic patients, not with the normal. Besides, every religion has its

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 147.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 154-6.
own characteristics and development which cannot be generalized or explained by only a single theory. Moreover, the origin and fundamental principles of religious theory and Freudian psychology and different from each other. Freudian theory is based on empirical investigation, religious theory, on the other hand, begins with the ideal world and interprets phenomenal world accordingly. As to the concept of “father,” Buddhism does not take “father” as an image of power. Both “father” and “mother” in Buddhism are images of mercy and have no connection with sexual drive and Oedipus complex as suggested by Freud. According to Buddhism parents are like the god Brahma for their children.

Monks, those families where mother and father are honoured in the home are reckoned like unto Brahma, they are ranked with the teachers of old; worthy of offerings are such families. “Brahma,” monks, is a term for mother and father, “teachers of old” is a term for mother and father. “worthy of offerings” is a term for mother and father. Why so? Because mother and father do much for children, they bring them up, nourish them, and introduce the world to them.34

Here, “father” and “mother” are in an equal rank of the respectable for children. “Mother” who is always first mentioned in Buddhist teachings is considered somewhat more important than “father” as to her role in the household. Since many basic ideas in Eastern context are different from those in Western context, it is thus problematic and even unlikely to apply any Western theories concerning way of life to the Eastern.

The son, by loving himself, tries to preserve himself from the power of the father and, by loving his mother, tries to replace his father. This Freudian view of the concept of “love” is different from the Buddhist view. “Love” in Freudian context connects with the concepts “sexuality” and instinct” whereas “love” in Buddhism, in the meaning of parents-child relationship, means “mercy” and “compassion.” Parents bring up their child with mercy and the child

34 Anguttara-Nikaya, i. 132, ii 70; Itivuttaka. P. 109 quoted in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and I.B. Horner, The Living Thoughts of Gotama, the Buddha, p. 115.
responds their kindness with honour and respect. There is no differentiation between “father” and “mother” in the son’s heart. In Buddhism, “parents” is the single image for the son: the image of Brahma, the creator and merciful god of the world.

In Freudian view, “mother” who is a gentle and kind protector of the child is his earliest sexual object. Because of his libidinal development, he may somehow change his love-object from his mother to his own self and this may be called narcissism. In Buddhism, there exists no idea of “mother” as a sexual object for the child and mother-son relationship can hardly lead to the Oedipus complex or narcissism. Since the Asian family is normally extended, there are a lot of relatives in the same household and, thus, “mother” may not be “the first sexual object” of the child. Sometimes, the grandmother or some other relatives, because of their eagerness for the newborn, may try to take the role of the “mother” for the child. Sprio’s Freudian interpretation that narcissism of the Burmese monks is due to their infantile regression is therefore disputable.

VI. Conclusion

Sprio’s Freudian interpretation of Burmese Buddhist monasticism indicates the inadequacy and impropriety of Freudian theory in interpreting and analyzing Eastern religious practices. This impropriety can be claimed as due to the difference in the development of thoughts and practices as suggested by Freud and religious doctrine. Whereas Freudian theory is based on the significance and influence of sexual drive on human behavior; religious doctrine, especially in Burmese Buddhism, focuses on the power of mental discipline which leads to an enlightenment and destruction of all desires. Whereas Freud develops his theory from the role of sexuality and its transformation, Burmese Buddhism develops its doctrine from the event of the Buddha’s enlightenment and his self-mastery which transforms himself from Prince Siddharatha (or Siddhattha) into the Blessed One. Whereas Freudian theory affirms that man is always subjected to his own desire, especially to his sexual instinct and the attempt to overcome it will lead to a neurosis, Burmese Buddhism, on the other hand, believes that man can overcome his own desire by his determination and appropriate practices as formerly done by the Buddha. Whereas Freudian theory illustrates human behavior as it is, especially as expressed by his clinical patients, Buddhist doctrine illustrates human conduct as it
should be and how it should be. Thus, the arguments based on the Freudian approach and used to cope with Burmese monasticism are in a different level from the content and practices of the Buddhist doctrine itself. As long as Spiro’s assumption that monks’ behavior is a regression into infantile sexuality cannot be accepted as an axiom, his interpretation of Burmese monasticism is still obscure and thus indicates that Freudian theory is confined in itself and cannot work well in any issues which exist in a different background.
Bibliography