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Call for papers : “Gift protection in South and Southeast Asia” – DHARMA Workshop September 2024

BY AMANDINE WATTELIER-BRICOUT · PUBLISHED 22/03/2024 · UPDATED 28/03/2024

A Workshop on gift protection will be held at the campus Condorcet in Aubervilliers, France, **from 24th September 2024 to 26th September 2024**. It will be hosted by the ERC-DHARMA project through the CNRS and its Centre des Études Sud-Asiatiques et Himalayennes (CESAH).



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You are invited to submit a proposal for a 40-minute presentation, including discussion. Although attendance in person is strongly preferred, if necessary, it will be possible to deliver your talk remotely, as the workshop will be a hybrid event.

If you wish to participate, please contact the convenor, Amandine Wattelier-Bricout, **by email before April 15th, 2024** (amandine.bricout@gmail.com). A title and an abstract (150-300 words) will be expected **by the end of June**.

Workshop theme: Gift protection in South and Southeast Asia

Authors of *dānanibandha* works designate gift-giving or *dharmadāna* as an act of pious charity (*pūrta*) and, since its main goal is to sustain *dharma*, sometimes elevate it, by metonymy, to being equated with *dharma* itself. Such pious donations are arguably specific to South and Southeast Asia, because they do not fit Mauss' theory of giving, which should contain three components: giving, receiving and giving back.[1] Whatever the gift, be it a *brahmadeya*, a *bhūmidāna*, a tank foundation, or a manuscript, the donor does not expect a gift in return from the recipient, but on the contrary, hopes for an eternal reward from a spiritual sphere,[2] and thus tries to ensure the perpetuity of his gift.

Part of such a gift's efficiency therefore depends on its being protected over time by persons other than the donor or recipient. What are the means used by donors and recipients to perpetuate the gift? Who is appointed to protect it? Which deities or which concepts or beliefs are invoked to guarantee long-term protection? What sorts of images, visual warnings or material arrangements may be used to deter theft, damage or embezzlement? What political, religious, or juridical protection structures may be called upon? What impact did the need to protect and perpetuate gifts have upon the South and Southeast Asian world as a whole, on its jurisprudence, on its political structures, on the relationship between the political and religious spheres?

Although the Indian theory of gift-giving has been discussed by several scholars, the general focus has been so far on donors and recipients. Conversely, gift protection has received relatively little attention. Yet protection too concerns both donor and recipient, and its study could contribute to a better understanding of South and Southeast Asian notions of donation and of the "institutionalisation" of Hindu asceticism, the overarching theme of the DHARMA project. This workshop aims to throw light on the means – physical, material, visual, conceptual, juridical, political, religious – by which donations have been protected across time, in order to generate religious merit uninterruptedly. All contributions welcome.

[1] Marcel Mauss, « Essai sur le don : forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques », *L'Année sociologique* (1896) 1 (1923): 30–186 and 1990 (1922). *The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*. London: Routledge.

[2] The *Dānanibandhas* extensively deal with the definition of *dharmadāna*: according to Devala in his *Dānakāṇḍa* (I.14) a pious gift is giving without any worldly purpose. See David Brick, *Brahmanical Theories of the Gift: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Dānakāṇḍa of the Kṛtyakalpataru*, Harvard Oriental Series (Cambridge, MA: Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University, 2015).



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