

Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman

Cambridge Studies in
Social Anthropology 6

Buddhist Monk Buddhist Layman

A study of urban monastic organization
in Central Thailand

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Most anthropological and sociological studies of Buddhism have concentrated on village and rural Buddhism. This is a systematic anthropological study of monastic organization and monk-layman interaction in a purely urban context in the countries where Theravada Buddhism is practised, namely, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Laos and Thailand. The material presented is based on fieldwork carried out in Ayutthaya, Central Thailand. Dr Bunnag describes and analyses the socio-economic and ritual relations existing between the monk and the lay community, and she demonstrates the way in which the role of the monk is used by some men, wittingly or otherwise, as a social stepping-stone, in that for the son of a farmer a period in the monkhood can provide the education and contacts necessary to facilitate his assimilation into the urban lay community at a social and economic level which would otherwise have been impossible. Finally, Dr Bunnag places the material presented in a broader theoretical context by reviewing it in relation to anthropological discussions concerning the nature of Thai society as a whole.

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