

Anne Ruth Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930*. Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2008, x+254 pp., ISBN-13: 978-974-9511-40-4

Until five years ago our only western language sources for the history of Buddhism in Cambodia were Adhémar Leclère's pioneering, though problematic, *Le buddhisme au Cambodge* (1899) and the unique work of François Bizot into local traditions of esoteric practice. With scholarly interest in Cambodia largely focused either on the civilization of Angkor or the Democratic Kampuchea period (1975–79) it is refreshing to discover a new generation of researchers, many of whom were drawn to Cambodia by the humanitarian relief efforts that followed the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, making major contributions to the study of Cambodian Buddhism in the modern era. Thus, to John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie's edited collection, *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia* (2004), Penny Edwards *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945* (2006) and Ian Harris *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (2005), all of which were originally published by the University of Hawaii press, we can now Anne Hansen's study on the origins of Buddhism modernism.

This book began life as a doctoral dissertation on Uknā Suttantaprijā Ind, largely known today as the author of

*Gatilok* (Ways of the World), an influential work published in the 1920s. Covering developments from the death of king Ang Duong to the triumph of Buddhist modernism in Cambodia, expressed through the inauguration of the Buddhist Institute by the French colonial authorities at the beginning of the 1930s, Hansen gives detailed consideration to a period roughly corresponding with the careers of Ind and Ven. Mahā Vimaladhamm Thong, the inspiration behind the New Dhamma (*dhamma thmey*) movement. Hansen's text sticks closely to the writings of prominent figures in the movement whose thought would do much to re-orient traditional religiosity in Cambodia. Her prime concern is to articulate the ways in which enduring Buddhist ethical values were reshaped and given fresh emphasis in new socio-political contexts evoked by the positive and negative aspects of French colonial presence.

The first chapter sets the scene by exploring the ethical perspectives in the pre-modern Buddhist tradition. While accepting the fact that "traditional" Buddhism was never 'a singular or static vision' (p.23) Hansen provides a sound survey of relevant materials from the Cambodian 'practical canon' – *Trai Bhūm, Jātaka* (Vessantara plus various non-canonical materials) and *Pathamasambodhi* – with special attention given to the two wheels of *dhamma* theory, plus intersecting concepts of merit, power and kingship. This is followed by a discussion of the major socio-cultural shifts that took place in

nineteenth century Cambodia as a result of French, Vietnamese and Thai influences. The discussion here is especially oriented around the emergence of print culture, the colonial [re-]creation of Phnom Penh as the nation's capital and its role as a new 'translocal' centre of Buddhist intellectual activity, and the recurring phenomenon of millennialism.

Chapter 3 covers the rise of Buddhism modernism in the region, with special emphasis on the manner in which the religious reforms of Rama IV impacted on the sizeable community of Cambodian monks who, for over a century, were travelling to Bangkok in search of higher Buddhist education. The reforming spirit was subsequently imported back into Cambodia where it seems to have merged with a parallel current connected to the enlightenment discourse on religion. The melding of these cultural flows helped to stimulate an indigenous attempt to excavate the fundamental truths of Theravada Buddhism that were now deemed hidden beneath an avalanche of later accretions. Hansen identifies the most significant players in the Cambodian New Dhamma movement, many of whom (Chuon Nath, Huot Tath, etc) would go on to occupy the most senior positions in the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the period immediately after that which forms the basis of this survey.

By turning to the institutional innovations of the reformers Chapter 4 moves from the general to the particular. Hansen provides a nuanced account

of some of the influences and culture clashes behind flagship projects like the foundation of the Buddhist Institute, the mammoth effort required to create a Tripitaka translated into the national language, and the compilation of Chuon Nath's Cambodian Dictionary. All the while she is careful to show how the rapid move towards Pali-text puritanism represented both an erosion of previous models of learning and an opportunity to situate Buddhist ethics in novel contexts. The work concludes with a fair evaluation of the influence of the modernizers and by a 'commodius vicus of recirculation' we are finally led back to Uknā Suttantaprija Ind, a writer who did not feel constrained to confine his ethical observations to the merely personal. His condemnation of the 'dog's collar' (p.74) – a reference to the French policy of awarding *medailles* to suitably dutiful monks – is a clear sign that some of the figures discussed in this important study were happy to reformulate Buddhism in a more straightforwardly political manner.

The results of Hansen's research were originally published by the University of Hawaii Press (2007). This version is styled a first revised edition, although I cannot detect much evidence of revision. Fortunately the unrevised version was largely free of typographical errors but those that were present – Vimalapañña not Rimalapañña (p.102) – remain. My only mild grumble is that Hansen's training in the discipline of Buddhist studies has inclined her to transliterate Cambodian terms in Sanskritic terms.

Although this is a well-worn, EFEO-influenced path it is sometimes hellishly difficult to follow. Nevertheless, this is the most detailed account we have to date of the culture of Buddhist modernisation in Cambodia. Hansen introduces us to a variety of primary sources not previously encountered in western scholarship and draws judicious conclusions from their interpretation. As such, it is the basis upon which further useful research – it has certainly stimulated me to think a more about the precise mechanics by which Buddhist ideas travelled along the Bangkok-Phnom Penh axis in the first half of the twentieth century – might proceed.

Ian Harris

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