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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### I. ARTICLES

1. The Mongol Khans and Chinese Buddhism and Taoism, by *Sechin Jagchid* 7
2. From Mādhyamika to Yogācāra, an Analysis of MMK, XXIV. 18 and MV, 1.1-2, by *Gadjin m. Nagao* 29
3. Dynamic Liberation in Yogācāra Buddhism, by *Alan Sponberg* 44
4. Yogācāra and the Buddhist Logicians, by *Alex Wayman* 65

### II. SHORT PAPERS

1. Sambodhi in Aśoka's 8th Rock Edict, by *A. L. Basham* 81
2. Can Meditational Practice be Measured? A Report on a Quantitative Survey, by *Jacques Maquet* 84
3. Nirvana and Metaphysical Experience, by *Ismael Quiles* 91

### III. BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

#### *Reviews:*

1. World Conqueror and World Renouncer, by *S. J. Tambiah* 99
2. Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions, by *Roderick Hindery*. 103
3. Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation: Theory and Practice, by *Minoru Kiyota, assisted by Elvin W. Jones* 106
4. Chandi Borobudur: A Monument of Mankind, by *Dr. Soekmono* 108

#### *Obituary:*

1. Paul Demiéville, by *Alexander W. Macdonald* 110

### III. BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer. A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, Vol. 15 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1976).

Some decades ago, Hocart and Paul Mus drew attention to the role of royal power in Theravāda Buddhism. The latter's *Barabudur*, concerned with much else besides Theravāda Buddhism, was a veritable monument, inspiring awe because of the dazzling talents of its author, but apparently little visited and certainly never ransacked by contemporary researchers. More recently, Heinz Bechert's masterly three-volume survey, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967-1973), combined extraordinarily wide reading with great clarity of exposition. However, the influence exercised by Mus and Bechert has been limited by the absence of English translations of their massive contributions. Since the last war, in the Burmese corner of the Theravāda field, the labours of Gordon Luce, the thoughtful work of E. Sarkisyanz, the conscientious volumes of M. E. Spiro and the lively analyses of E. M. Mendelson have opened up new perspectives. Meanwhile, the thrust given by Louis Dumont, notably in his *Homo hierarchicus*, towards the integration of Indology in Social Anthropology has had a seminal effect both on field research and on theoretical writings. But there is, to my mind, nothing quite like Tambiah's latest volume.

Tambiah has had long and varied experience as a field anthropologist both in Sri Lanka and in Thailand. He is already well known for his work on *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*, published by the Cambridge University Press in 1970. His latest work is aimed at a wider audience. It is concerned not only with twentieth-century Thailand and the results of the author's own field-work; it also seeks to contribute to theoretical studies on the relations between Church and State throughout Indian and South East Asian history. In a word, it is concerned with the practical and theoretical functioning of Buddhism and Hinduism, and it is written in English. It is a

very ambitious book; and it is, unfortunately, a very badly written one. Its turgid prose is thick with pretentious jargon; there is much repetition; and the author has a passion for parenthesis which this reader found irritating. Once one has understood what is, so to speak, in brackets, the effort is not always rewarding. Let me say at once that I found the second part of the book (pp. 200-530), devoted to ethnographic descriptions and much less theoretical than the first part, much the more interesting. There Tambiah tells us much about what he discovered in the field: the information is often new or difficult of access, and the knowledge that is transmitted is situated against the 19th- and 20th-century historical background. In these pages the author is concerned with "the provisions of the Sangha Acts of 1941 and 1963; the study of present-day monastical institutions; the plotting of the careers of monks, the routes they took and the patronage system they relied on; the appreciation of the doctrinal interpretations and activism currently in vogue among the educated monks; the probing of the links between the ecclesiastical and political hierarchies, between prominent monks and ruling politicians; the discerning of the present role of kingship vis-à-vis Buddhism on the one side and ruling élites on the other" (p. 4). He shows us that "the existing ecclesiastical hierarchy, the recent Sangha Acts, and the educational aspirations of the present-day monks" must "be referred back to developments in King Chulalongkorn's reign, especially culminating with the Sangha Act of 1902; similarly, today's issues, idiom and language of reformism and scripturalism take their major precedents from the era of Mongkut, first when he was monk and later king (1851-1868), not to mention the sectarian split and the policy towards educated monks who disrobed to take up valued lay positions. Moreover these developments were inflected by the nineteenth century political history of Thailand—when it collided with the West and launched upon modernisation" (*ibid.*). All this is put across relatively clearly and this reader sympathises with the author's view that to practice good anthropology in a literate society one must have a solid knowledge of history. Buddhism is treated throughout as a serious social force, and its historical and contemporary impact are examined in terms that are more pertinent than the ill-informed, if clearly expressed, theses of Max Weber. Tradition, mythology and popular cults are not dismissed as minor and relatively unimportant facets of a great philosophical enquiry; and the artificial barriers set up between rival disciplines in Western academic circles are consistently ignored.

All this is well and good; but the first part of Tambiah's book is much less satisfying. One gets the impression that an appendix to the ethnographic text swelled to ungovernable proportions in the course of the author's ruminations, and that he decided that the only thing to do with it was not to keep it in a drawer but to publish it as an introduction to the results of his fieldwork. The first hundred pages or so deal with the passage of the idea of *rājadharma* to that of *dharmarāja*. The brahmanical theory of society and kingship is contrasted with the early Buddhist conception of "World Process," Dharma and Kingship; and Aśoka's reign is envisaged by Tambiah as "a model both generating and legitimating political action" (p. 54). This model,

he argues, served to shape society not so much in India—where the Mauryan empire soon broke apart—as in South East Asian countries, where transplanted Indian ideas shaped kingship and polity. In Thailand and in other Eastern Theravāda lands, the moral progress schematised in the original Aśokan model slipped into the formulation of a paradoxical identity: the world conqueror, the *cakkavatti*, became equated with the world renouncer, the *bodhisattva* (p. 96). Around this new equation converged the original polarised themes from both Hinduism and Buddhism. There is nothing particularly new about these ideas; and they have been expressed more clearly and discussed more succinctly elsewhere. My quarrel with this aspect of Tambiah's work lies in his off-hand and unscholarly use of secondary sources. For instance, despite the space accorded to Aśoka, no mention is made of Przyluski's basic work on the *Aśokāvadāna* (incidentally, it is perhaps pertinent to remember that Aśoka was an *upāsaka* but never a monk); several pages are devoted to the Buddhist Councils but there is no mention of the work of André Bareau; Heine-Geldern is referred to for his 1942 American article but there is no mention of his fundamental "Weltbild und Bauform in Südostasien"; the *Traibhūmikathā* (p. 96) is a text and not a man (it has been translated by Coedès and Charles Archambault in the Publications of the École française d'Extrême-Orient); and so on. While it is true that Tambiah's latest book draws attention indirectly to the absence of any attempt at a comparable analysis in the vast field of Mahāyānist studies, one may question whether it was advisable to separate, in such a wide-ranging study, the Theravāda material from other Buddhist documents. To recall the conflicts between Church and State in China might have been more apposite than the author's excursus into Medieval Europe (pp. 360-364). It would have been justifiable, to illuminate the discussion, to remind readers of Paul Demiéville's admirable pages on Buddhism and War (*Choix d'études bouddhiques* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973], pp. 261-299). Again, note might have been made, at least *en passant*—so much else that is not directly relevant is mentioned—of the theory and practice of the *lugs gr̄is/qoyar yosun* among Tibetans and Mongols (see, most recently, K. Sagaster, "Das System der Beiden Ordnungen," *Die Weisse Geschichte* [Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976], pp. 9-49).

I understand that a French translation of Tambiah's work is in preparation. Let us hope that the occasion will be seized to reduce the English to a more palatable form, to correct the numerous misprints, to tighten up the analysis, and to bring the bibliography up to date and into closer relationship to the text. If the *Barabudur* of Paul Mus figures in the Bibliography of the English edition, there is no indication anywhere in the text that Tambiah has read it. I have seldom been so exasperated by a book that interested me so much.

Alexander W. Macdonald