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II. REVIEWS

Buddhism in Life: The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism, by Martin Southwold. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983. 232 pp.

Buddhism in Life is an interesting though slightly eccentric study of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The author's basic intention is to prove that the contrast often drawn between village Buddhism and "true Buddhism," or doctrinal Buddhism, is not viable. Southwold, who did field research during 1974 and 1975, spends much of the book searching for the meaning of these two kinds of Buddhism. Thus the Theravāda Buddhists, who are the subjects of the study, at times are eclipsed by his discussions of questions such as how religious traditions should be studied and whether theology has any bearing on our understanding of Buddhism (it does). The author contends that "village Buddhism" is authentic and should not be compared to any other kind of Buddhism. Not to the Western deviation called "true Buddhism," not to the teaching of the Buddha "which is insufficiently knowable," and especially not to the scriptures which represent "the ambiguous compositions of peculiar people."

After defending "village Buddhism" vigorously for over a hundred years, the author expands his definition of it to include the practice of most Sinhalese, whether urban or rural, because he finds (seemingly in mid-book) that the general practice of Buddhism is largely similar to "village Buddhism." At this point he begins to contrast this expanded "village Buddhism" which he labels, "ministry Buddhism," with Buddhist modernism, termed "meditation Buddhism." The "ministry Buddhists" follow the village bhikkus or *grāmahavāsins* and have little interest in either meditation or the forest bhikkhus who meditate, the *āraññavāsins*. "Ministry Buddhism," like its predecessor, "village Buddhism," has little relation to the high doctrines or scriptures of Theravāda. It is "practised mainly by people other than the learned clerics, and transmitted by means other than scriptures." "Ministry Buddhism" represents a truer form of Buddhism than Buddhist modernism.

On the positive side, by adopting Robertson Smith's dictum that one should study religion by investigating practice rather than belief, Southwold offers a useful correction to the dominant

Western tendency. He shows that this method allows one to arrive at new and deeper understandings of the religion, and even of its beliefs. For example, when the author examines the practice of village Theravāda he sees that "it is rooted in a sense of responsibility for the affairs of the world and recognition of the need to help other people" (p. 124). This observation, understood as true by anyone who has spent any time among Theravāda Buddhists, provides a necessary balance to the traditional criticism—based on Theravāda doctrine—that this religion is self-centered and lacking compassion. Southwold has similar important insights about the practical implications of both the concept of rebirth and ethics.

In many ways this book elucidates our understanding of the Theravāda tradition in Sri Lanka. It also stimulates our reflection on important questions of methodology in studying Buddhism.

Southwold's approach, however, is not without shortcomings. One of the basic problems with the book is that the author, intent on upholding the validity and viability of "village Buddhism," divides Theravāda into too many separate segments, and repeats, in a new way, the mistake of the nineteenth century Buddhologists who sought "true Buddhism." If he had recognized that the central dynamic in the Theravāda tradition, since at least the time of Aśoka and the commentarial writings, has been the gradual path to enlightenment, then he might have been less interested in contrasting various aspects of the tradition and more interested in perceiving the interconnections. He could profit from Steven Collins' explanation of the "soteriological strategy" in Theravāda that permits teachings and practices to have different meanings and applications to people at different levels of the path (Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism*. Cambridge, 1982). Southwold's "Ministry Buddhism" represents the traditional Theravāda of the laity, known in this form since the time of Aśoka and the Pāli Commentaries. His description of it is useful, except that it does not exist apart from the scriptures or from the scholar monks (the elitists, as he says), nor does it even stand distinct from the great saints of the tradition, the arahants, whose attainments he doubts. If he wishes to explain Buddhism as Buddhists see it, as he says he does, then he needs to take account of the Buddhist notion of levels of attainment and wisdom. Village Buddhists understand and practice Buddhism in one way, meditators in another and the great arahants in another. All are true Buddhists; all are on the path to Nibbana, according to the

Theravāda tradition. For example, Southwold is impressed with the depth of insight that the villagers display in stating that the essential point of Buddhism is not to kill animals. To be sure, this idea has significance and denotes for villagers more than it might seem at first; however, it is not the case that this is the only meaning of Buddhism or that people at different places on the path, such as the meditators or the scholar monks he discredits, cannot have other insights into the truth of Buddhism.

Just as he misses the synchronic connections of the gradual path, so the author also misses the diachronic development of the tradition that led to this concept of the path. He does not explain properly the historical relation between Aśoka Buddhism, traditional Theravāda as established at Anurādhapura and the traditional village Buddhism that he investigated. Village Buddhism as Southwold depicts it, is cut off from all of the sources: the historical tradition, the scriptures, and even the Buddha. The result, therefore, is that the book provides some interesting glimpses of village Buddhism but gives the reader something less than a comprehensive understanding of village Buddhism as an expression of the dynamics of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition.

George D. Bond

Dhamma: Western Academic and Sinhalese Buddhist Interpretations: A Study of a Religious Concept, by John Ross Carter. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1978. x + 202 pp., Bibliography and index.

I begin my review by quoting the author's concluding statement:

The Buddha has been remembered by Buddhists because he re-discovered salvific Truth and through preaching it enabled men and women to hold it in mind, in heart, and through their living it to be held by it in the process of transcending, of salvation. '*Dhamma*: because it holds, supports"—"*dhāreti ti dhammo*.'

When the Buddha set in motion the *dhammacakka*, he released a force that has literally run through the world with saving power. The *dhamma* has assumed many forms—Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Tantrayāna, and many others—but the Threefold Refuge (*tis-araṇa*) has persisted wherever it went.