

# THE MONK AND THE KING: KHIEU CHUM AND REGIME CHANGE IN CAMBODIA

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## Preamble

Much Buddhist thinking on statecraft is an interpretation of mythology. In the Theravāda the dominant view has been that the best kind of polity is one controlled by a strong yet benevolent ruler who bases his government in some rather imprecise manner on the paradigmatic model of Asoka whose semi-legendary rule is believed to have been conducted in accord with the *dhamma*. By making the *dhamma* the basis of his actions this ideal figure ensures political stability, prosperity, harmony and freedom from natural disasters, while the same multiplier effect ensures a flourishing Buddhist religion (*sāsana*) and monastic order (*saṅgha*). The notion is well expressed in the *Kurudhamma Jātaka* (No. 276; J. ii. 365ff) a legend that concerns the son of Dhanañjaya, king of the Kurūs, who ruled over a community where everyone, from top to bottom of the social scale - including the eleven categories of person residing in the king's household - scrupulously followed a moral code based fully on the five precepts (*pañcasīla*). The country was prosperous and happy in consequence.

The fact that Buddhism is not theistic in any conventional sense of that term has meant that it has not been inclined to regard any ruler or political system as having ultimate sovereignty. Rather, political legitimacy<sup>1</sup> derives from how closely any form of governance expresses the true nature of reality as revealed in the teachings of a Buddha (*dhamma*). “True” law, then, is not regarded as the command of a sovereign power but as an accurate expression of the eternal principles of righteousness, and a ruler or government may be regarded as just only when he or it acts as a conduit through which these principles act positively upon the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Skilling (2007: 202) has cast doubt on the value of the term “legitimation”, arguing the term “... to be unsatisfactory – it simplifies a complex of social and conceptual forces, and in the end explains little. King, *saṅgha*, and brahmins were partners in a complex organism of state protection and state welfare Buddhism.”

Any cursory study of South and Southeast Asian inscriptions will make it abundantly clear that a significant proportion of Buddhist rulers have been considered by at least some of their contemporaries in such Asokan terms. Accordingly, they have been eulogized in outrageously flattering terms. But if we strip away the mythological conventions and soberly assess the actual circumstances of specific regimes by the canons of historical scholarship some will be seen to approximate more closely to the ideal than others.

This paper seeks to address the following question: “Does the Theravāda tradition possess an effective means of dealing with a king who claims to be righteous when, apparently, he is not?” More specifically I wish to highlight the career and writings of the prominent Cambodian Buddhist monk, Khieu Chum (1907-75) in an attempt to determine whether his intellectual project, which roughly coincides with the period in which Norodom Sihanouk ruled the country, may be seen as a response to this question. It is not my intention here to offer my own assessment of Sihanouk’s period of governance. Neither do I wish to suggest that Khieu Chum’s perception of Sihanouk’s shortcomings were correct nor, indeed, that the conception of “Buddhist kingship” may be a meaningless category. My goal is simply to demonstrate how the argument has been constructed and how, rather than being a bizarre deviation from canonical norms, it can be said to follow from certain elements embedded in earlier Theravāda literary traditions.

The reader who is anxious to engage immediately with the Cambodian situation and with Khieu Chum’s approach to the problem may pass on to the appropriate section [Section 2] of the paper without further ado. But I would urge anyone who wishes to locate our author in his wider religious, historical and cultural context to turn first to the following brief survey of historical sources in the hope that we may identify some of the key categories with which he would fashion his own distinctive religio-political vision.

## **1. Buddhism and Statecraft– Theravāda Sources**

There is much in the early literature of the Theravāda tradition to suggest that the Buddha had little to say on the issue of statecraft. His relations with contemporary monarchs were fairly numerous but they were, on the whole, the same as those he maintained with other members of the laity. He responded to their queries and offered them wise counsel, but he did not pretend to give advice on how they should conduct their kingly duties. Furthermore he did not dissuade them from initiating wars and committing crimes on the grounds that this would only inflame their crueller proclivities (Bureau 1993: 38).

### **1.1. The Passive Approach**

Pasenadi, king of Kosala, was devoted to the Buddha. The Buddha in response discoursed with the king quite regularly and appears to have offered him one of the earliest examples of advice on diet – a short verse on the virtues of moderation - in world literature.<sup>2</sup> But none of this prevented Pasenadi from

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<sup>2</sup> Pasenadi ate from a bowl the size of a cartwheel and was rather obese (S. i. 81).

engaging in normal kingly business. He battled with the neighbouring state of Magadha, only managing to defeat king Ajātasattu after some of his courtiers overheard a conversation between the monk Dhanuggaha Tissa – who had lived previous lives as an expert military strategist - and a monk friend. In the discussion Dhanuggaha described Ajātasattu’s ignorance of the arts of war and profiting from this information Pasenadi captured his rival alive.<sup>3</sup> In the *Culasaccaka Sutta* (M.i. 227ff), furthermore, the Buddha seems to accept the king’s right to “...execute those that have to be executed” despite the fact that such action is clearly contrary to basic Buddhist ethics.

The Buddha’s passivity in the face of kingly power is, perhaps, best expressed in texts that expound the notion of the “wheel-turning king” (*cakkavatti*), of whom Asoka is the pre-eminent example. The mythological setting is a gradual unfolding of vast aeons of time. On this grand stage righteous kings emerge who by ruling according to the *dhamma* ensure that both the natural and human realms prosper. Eventually the *cakkavatti* recognizes that his time is near and he abdicates to embrace a final portion of his life living as a forest-dwelling renunciant. The reins of power are handed over to his son – we are in dynastic territory here – and all being well the son recapitulates the Asokan model. But from time to time the transition is not successful. The succeeding king is selfish and unrighteous. He rewards the undeserving, his ministers are corrupt and the land gradually slides into war, famine and anarchy. The *cakkavatti* corpus suggests no remedy for this new state of affairs. In a sense, the political and economic situation is a reflection of the accumulated demerits of those reborn into the realm and the message is clear. All one can do is to grit one’s teeth and endure. Things will improve again but only in the *longue durée*.

## 1.2. Exhortation and Admonition

This, however, is not the only response to poor governance found in the canonical materials. A more positive strand of thinking emphasizes the possibility of reform. King Ajātasattu is a case in point. Of renowned unrighteousness, we are told that he eventually felt shame for his evil actions and with great “fear and trembling” he made his way to the Buddha’s dwelling place where the latter preached to him the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*. On hearing the *dhamma* Ajātasattu repented his previous actions that had included all the most heinous crimes - patricide, regicide and an attempt to kill the Buddha. Buddha concluded the encounter by expressing satisfaction at the king’s public confession of his transgressions and without more ado the king was “forgiven”, an action that has come in for some criticism from Buddhist modernists. In the opinion of one prominent modern Sri Lankan politician and Buddhist scholar, for example, the Buddha let Ajātasattu off “almost too lightly” (Malalasekera 1974, I; 32).

Exhortation and admonition of poorly performing rulers is a common theme in the *Jātaka* literature. The *Gaṇḍatindu Jātaka* (No. 520; J. v. 98ff) is a typical example. It tells the story of a wicked king whose rule causes his people great suffering. The *bodhisatta*, who on this occasion has been reborn as the spirit of a *gaṇḍatindu* tree, admonishes the king by magically appearing before him in the royal bedchamber. Suitably

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<sup>3</sup> . *Vaḍḍhaki-sukara Jātaka* (No. 283; J. ii. 403f).

chastened, the king tours his kingdom in disguise, rapidly confirming the truth of the future Buddha's words, repenting and devoting the rest of his life to the exercise of good governance.

A benchmark in determining how far the practice of statecraft conforms to the high ideals of the *dhamma* may also be found in the so-called ten royal virtues (*dasabidha-rajadhamma*). The ten, said to have their *locus classicus* in the *Mahābhāṣa Jātaka* (No. 534; J.v. 354-382),<sup>4</sup> but hardly attested in other genres of Indian Buddhist literature, may be rather late in their formulation. They are: generosity, morality, liberality, uprightness, gentleness, self-limitation, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance, and non-obstruction.<sup>5</sup> Any king who manifests these in his exercise of power may be regarded as a righteous ruler although, as we shall see when we turn our attention to the political writings of the Cambodian monk Khieu Chum, this particular conception of Buddhist governance can appear to be something of an oxymoron.

### 1.3. Regime Change

The *Kakkāṭa Jātaka* (No. 267; J.ii. 341-5) is another illuminating source but one that goes beyond exhortation or even prescription to something more genuinely revolutionary. A simple tale of the *bodhisatta* who, in the form of an elephant, tramples to death a giant crab that has frightened away the rest of the herd from their drinking hole, it can be read as an explicitly activist tract. That the story has been employed as a counter to alleged tyranny and as a means of protecting the wider community from harm is evidenced by the fact that Burmese nationalist leader U Nu (1907-1995) is known to have deployed the *Kakkāṭa Jātaka* in his political utterances. For U Nu the text also specifically underlined the need for action, as opposed to inaction, to overcome suffering in this life (Sarkisyanz 1965: 171).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Other *Jātaka* also offer versions of the list, eg. J. i. 260, 399; ii. 400; iii. 320; v. 119, 378.

Candier (2007: 23 n. 54) lists the principal sources according to the Burmese tradition.

<sup>5</sup> Parallel sets of ethical guidelines, such as the ten *kammaṭṭhā* that apply equality to kings and their subjects, are perhaps better known.

The *dasabidha-rajadhamma* are, however, well-attested in the literature of Southeast Asia:

1. *dāna* – making donations; 2. *sīla* – abiding by the five or eight religious precepts;
3. *paricāga* – giving up of [one's own] belongings, elephants, horses, clothes, gold and silver, and donating it to the *senā-amat* (i.e., high-ranking officials) and close friends; 4. *ājāva*– rectitude; 5. *maddava* – gentleness to elderly people; 6. *akkodha* – freedom from wrath; 7. *avibhiṣsa* – refraining from harassing the population; 8. *khanti* – having patience; 9. *sacca* – sticking to the truth and not accepting lies; 10. *avirodha* – no violation of ancient royal customs, rules and traditions.

These qualities of kingship are repeated in the premodern legal writings of Cambodia. See *Codes Cambodgiens* (Leclère: 1898, I, 77).

Huxley (1995, 200) observes that the list is composed of “...five abstract virtues which are then doubled by adding five close synonyms”.

<sup>6</sup> It is surprising that the *Jātaka*, as arguably the most explicitly political section of the Pali canon, has been used in this manner in recent times. The Burmese nationalist monk U Ottama (1879-1939) writing to his brother from

In the category of materials more positively oriented to the notion of “regime change” one may also place the sources relevant to the figure of Mahāsammata, “the great elect”. Paradoxically, many Southeast Asian dynasts have incorporated the term into their royal titles but in the *locus classicus* of the notion, the *Aggañña Sutta* (D. ii. 80ff), it is perfectly clear that the political legitimacy of Mahāsammata derives from his elected as opposed to dynastic status. The essence of the doctrine is the fact that Mahāsammata enters into a social contract with the people who have selected him as an individual fit to exercise power in accordance with the *dhamma*.<sup>7</sup> If he does not deliver on his side of the bargain he can be removed. But the doctrine also implies that there is little in theory to prevent someone claiming this mantle from emerging to challenge the legitimacy of rulers who fail to deliver on their promises or, indeed, who have acceded to power by birthright alone.

Some Burmese kings had observed coronation rituals that made these responsibilities perfectly clear. A portion of King Badon’s (Bodawphaya) double consecration in 1783 and 1784 dealt with the consequences of breaking the oath to be a righteous Buddhist ruler. “If you are heedless...may the world be in turmoil, may great storms arise and great earthquakes crumble the earth, and the fires of hell burst aflame on earth, may evil omen and witches and souls in torment hover over the palace and cause fear and trouble, may the cobra and viper and tiger roam and devour you” (Okudaira 2000: 124). But such provisions formed no part of the consecration ceremonies of Cambodian kings, or at least this appears to be true of those materials that have been subjected to scholarly scrutiny. *Braḥmajakrit prābhābhīsaek*, a late seventeenth century treatise on the consecrations of three Cambodia kings certainly makes no reference to the contractual nature of kingship although it does allow that the king may return all uncultivated lands acquired by nature of his kingly status back to the ordinary people. The attitude demanded by the text of the Cambodian king’s subjects, including high dignitaries, is one of complete submission to the king’s will (Mikaelian 2007: 143 -4). Another Cambodian law code from approximately the same period, *Kram sruek*, certainly defines severe punishments for court officials who oppress the people but the king is strangely absent from the picture and the notion of his censure is simply not an issue (Mikaelian 1999: 123).

Badon may have been an exception that proves the rule. U Hpo Hlaing (1829-1883) had been brought up in the Burmese royal court and subsequently became one of King Mindon’s (1808-1878) principal ministers. They had quarrelled from time-to-time but a serious breach occurred in 1871, when Hpo Hlaing published *Maha-Samata Vinicchaya Kyàn* (An Analysis of the Mahāsammata Concept) to remind the king that he did not have a divine right to rule but must respect the social contract that he should have forged

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Calcutta urged him to ponder the significance of being born a human and therefore helping others. He subsequently reinforced this point by reference to the *Mahākapi Jātaka* (No. 407; J. iii. 369-75), a work in which the king of the monkeys builds a bridge to enable his eighty thousand subjects to escape a potentially dangerous situation. Through the knavery of one of his band he perishes but we are led to understand the significance of this act of self-sacrifice. For further use of *Jātaka* stories by U Ottama, see Smith (1965: 97).

<sup>7</sup> On the importance of social contract in the election of Mahāsammata, see Huxley:1996.

with his people. This was followed up by *Raza-dhamma-thingaba-kyan* (*Companion of Dhamma for Royalty*) a work that argued for the abandonment of absolute power in Burma and the adoption of a constitutional approach to monarchy (Huxley 2007: 41).<sup>8</sup> In this book Hpo Hlaing draws heavily on *Jātaka* materials, especially the *Tesakuñā* (No. 521; J.v.109-125) and the *Mahābañsa*. He also deviates from traditional expositions of the ten royal virtues by stressing the fact that the last in the list, non-opposition (*avirodha*), should not be interpreted as a simple encouragement of cooperation between the king and his people. Rather, the king should not oppose the wishes of the five estates of traditional Burmese society, ie. monks, novices, laymen, officials, and the people.<sup>9</sup> The implication is clear. When a ruler ignores the will of the people, he may be legitimately ousted, or in Hpo Hlaing's own words, "when the king does not respect the wishes of the people (*pyi-thu*), the people hate him and then try to find a new ruler and destroy the current one. If the king is too strong to destroy the people run away and this also leads to the ruin of the country" (quoted by Candier 2007: 32). Not surprisingly the work was rejected by Mindon's successor, King Thibaw.

#### 1.4 *Jātaka*

In Theravāda Asia the *Jātakas*, both canonical and extra-canonical, were an abundant source for the production of versified romances well into the first half of the twentieth century. In Cambodia, for example, many of these stories were widely known and they have formed the basis of popular theatre as well as elite literary works (Khing Hoc Dy 2006: 25). The vagueness and naïveté of their formulation meant that the texts themselves have never been used as detailed manuals of statecraft. But the same cannot be said of commentarial and related genres of writing.

An example here is the *Kurudhamma Kaṇḍa Pañho*,<sup>10</sup> a text probably composed in the Middle Mekong region some time between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This expansion of the previously mentioned *Kurudhamma Jātaka* moves us "...from simple to complex, from amateur to professional and from the boring to the interesting". It was probably composed as a city charter and, in Huxley's well-chosen words, it represents an evolution "...from ethics to statecraft by using the dramatis personae of Jātaka No. 276 to expound palace life from a management studies perspective. It provides job descriptions and flow-charts of responsibility for the king and for ten of his subordinates" (Huxley 1995: 192).

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<sup>8</sup> Hpo Hlaing, *Raza-dhamma-thingaba-kyan*, Rangoon, Kuthalawati Press, 1960.

For an English translation, see Yaw Mingyi U Hpo Hlaing, *Rajadhammasaṅgaha*. Translated by L.E. Bagshawe from the biographical preface and edition made by Maung Htin (U Htin Fatt), Rangoon, Sape U Publishing House, 1979. [http://burmalibrary.org/docs/THE\\_RAJADHAMMASANGAHA.pdf](http://burmalibrary.org/docs/THE_RAJADHAMMASANGAHA.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> The notion still has contemporary relevance. Aung San Suu Kyi has written of the importance of the ten *rajadhammas*, with particular emphasis placed on the last in the list, for "...nonopposition to the will of the people (*avirodha*) tends to be singled out as a Buddhist endorsement for democracy". As such it represents "...respect for public opinion and just law" (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991: 173).

<sup>10</sup> Published by Jaini (1986) as the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Lokaneyyappakarana* (Treatise on Secular Discipline), a work that circulated quite freely in post-Angkorian Southeast Asia. Jaini ascribes the text he edited, now in the National Museum of Bangkok, to an unknown 15<sup>th</sup>-century monk living near Chiang Mai.

That the political significance of the *Jātaka* literature has been widely recognized is readily demonstrated. In Burma the Monywa Sayadaw (1766-1834) wrote the *Raṣaw-wada-kyan* around 1830 for King Bagyidaw. It was a synopsis of all known *Jātakas* designed to show the king the kinds of fatal errors – said to be as numerous as the “cells in a beehive” – made by rulers of the past (Candier 2007: 19). The *Vessantara Jātaka* (No. 547) is the most-well-known representative of the genre but it contains a political message that can cut both ways. On one reading it is a paean of unambiguous praise for the virtues of benevolent kingship. Yet if this is the case why did the Bangkok court try to deemphasize the significance of the text from the second half of the nineteenth century? This was not merely part of the modernist project of demythologization, it also had something to do with the known potential of reading the text in a subversive manner. This seems to be the reason that Rama I, in one of his first measures on coming to power, prohibited comic or obscene (*talok khamornng*) performances of the *Vessantara Jātaka* (Jory 2002: 59). The concern was not only that certain “rogue” monks might act in a “shameful” manner when reciting the story and consequently bring Buddhism into disrepute. The text could also function as a mirror by which the current regime might be measured and its enactment might easily become the locus of popular discontent or even revolt.

### **1.5. Post-canonical works of moral and political guidance - *Nīti* and *Cpāp'***

Side by side with canonical sources the Buddhist traditions of Southeast Asia have long recognized the authority of various didactic manuals (*nīti*) devoted to moral instruction on both the personal and political plane. Such Pāli works are quite compatible with the moral framework of the Theravāda and are found throughout the region. One of the best known of these, the *Lokanīti* was used in monasteries for the moral instruction of the young. Father Sangermano, for example, tells us that this was so in early nineteenth-century Burma (Sangermano 1833: 144).<sup>11</sup> But in Burma at least the *Lokanīti* was also employed as the basis for political discourse well into modern times, as the use of the text by such contrasting figures as U Nu and Ne Win makes clear (Bechert and Braun 1981: xl).

In Cambodia various vernacular works of moral instruction (*cpāp'*) emerged from the sixteenth century. The origins of the genre have never been precisely established but Pou's suggestion that they reflect an amalgam of *Nīti*, *Jātaka*, and an indigenous tradition of gnomic utterances or proverbs (*bāky cās'*) seems very likely (Pou 1981). A common classification of these works divides them into two categories – *Cpāp'* designed for a general audience without distinction of class, age, etc., and *Cpāp'-neti* that seem to have been composed specifically for kings and their ministers. Composition of the *Cpāp'-neti* is ascribed to members of the court, senior ecclesiastics, or to legendary figures of the ancient past<sup>12</sup> The fundamental premise is

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<sup>11</sup> For another account of the importance of the text in Burmese indigenous education, see Kaung: 1963.

<sup>12</sup> A Cambodian tradition has it that four *bodhisatta* are the exemplars of particular Theravāda virtues: Vessantar - generosity, Teme - endurance, Mahosadha – intelligence, Vidhūr - political wisdom (Pou 1988: 486). Vidhūr is deemed the legendary author of at least one of these works.

that kings must act according to ancestral traditions and it is the function of literate and wise men to remind them of these duties.

The *Cpāp’-neti* are reasonably explicit on what should happen to a ruler who is perceived to have neglected his duties as defined by the Buddhist tradition. Two quotations should suffice. The first predicts anarchy and revolution:

If a prince does not study the *dhamma* / he will not be able to assuage the maladies  
affecting the people.

They will rebel out of disappointment and anger / and they will rise up en masse.

He will be the cause of violent agitations / Sufferings and destructions will affect the  
kingdom.

A great mass of the people will revolt / Or will be dispersed and broken up.

(*Cpāp’ Vidhūrapaṇḍit* vv. 5-6)<sup>13</sup>

The second seems to hint at the possibility of an untimely death, or perhaps even assassination, for a ruler who strays seriously into unrighteousness:

The *dhamma* is the way that protects and defends beings

And assures them success. It is better to lose a fortune than to die.

But it is better to die than to lose the essence of the law.

(*Cpāp’ Rājaneti* v. 28)<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly the two quotations precisely mirror the views expressed by Hpo Hlaing above.

Having established that the Theravāda tradition possesses a variety of strands, both in its classical canon and in its late premodern manifestations directly relevant to the question “what should be done about perceived poor governance?”, and that the passivist approach promoted by those who view Buddhism as a purely individualist and other-worldly soteriology emphasizing emancipation through self-mastery is only one of several, let us now turn our attention to mid-twentieth-century Cambodia.

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<sup>13</sup> *jā ksatr buṛṇ rēn dbarm / buṛṇ toḥ sā jamṇī drūn*  
*rastr dās nīn camṇeṇ / ak’ citt khīn satv com rom*  
*nīn koet ktāu kraḥāy / dukkḥ antarāy bhap’ pḥtai krom*  
*rastr phaṇ nīn khīn com / jrom kḥcāt’ kḥcāy didai ṇā* (Pou 1988: II, 490-1).

My translation, with reference to the French version of Saveros Pou.

<sup>14</sup> *dbarm neh tamḥpūnman / ruom raksā prāṇ*  
*oy mān ktī gāp’ / sāv paṇ’ dhan dhān*  
*kuṇḥ oy khluon slāp’ / sāv slāp’ guor gāp’ / ras dbarm kuṇḥpī paṇ’* (Pou and Jenner 1978: II, 392).

My translation, with reference to the French version of Saveros Pou.



## 2. Cambodian Buddhist Monk Khieu Chum (1907-75)

According to his autobiography<sup>15</sup> Khieu Chum was born into a very poor peasant background in Saang district, Kandal province in 1907. He entered a nearby monastery, Wat Setthi, as a novice at the age of 17 and two years later in 1926 he transferred to Wat Langka in Phnom Penh where by all accounts he had to struggle to survive and get a decent education until he was given higher ordination by the pagoda's *cau adbhikār*, Venerable Lvī Em (1879-1957), in 1928. Chum's ordination name was Bhikkhu Dhammapalo, a highly significant title given his later attitudes and career.<sup>16</sup> Under Lvī Em's guidance Chum rapidly progressed through the monastic curriculum and established himself as a disciplined and competent student of Pāli and related topics. By 1934 he was sufficiently well-educated to take up a number of teaching jobs in provincial monasteries and this he continued to do throughout the 1930s and early 1940s by which time he had also built up some competences in a variety of foreign languages.

Khieu Chum's arrival in the new capital had, in fact, coincided with a crucial period of intellectual and political ferment within the *saṅgha*. A modernist monastic grouping called the Thommakay or "new Mahanikay" (*mahānikāy thmī*) led by Mahāvimaladhamm Thoñ (1862-1927)<sup>17</sup> had recently been established and members of this new movement were beginning to employ modern European methods of critical scholarship in the interpretation of Buddhist doctrine and practice. Several of Thoñ's most able younger protégés, such as Chuon Nath and Huot Tat, had benefited from intensive study in this new methodology under the tutelage of the EFEO in Hanoi and they were already well progressed on the path that would, in time, lead them to become the highest ranking monks in the kingdom.

### 2.1. Cambodian monks and politics

In the late 1930s the French colonial government, as part of a general modernization programme, had attempted to romanize written Khmer. A similar policy had been adopted in Vietnam with little sign of resistance from an indigenous intelligentsia who generally regarded the measure in a positive light (DeFrancis 1977). In Cambodia, by contrast, the measure provoked some hostility, especially from monks who regarded it as an attack on traditional learning. At around the same time that these developments were

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<sup>15</sup> Khieu Chum 1967. This text is a particularly early example of the genre.

It has sometimes been said that autobiography only emerged as a distinctive form of Cambodian writing during the Pol Pot period when those under arrest and interrogation were forced to recount their life stories. This cannot be entirely accurate.

<sup>16</sup> It means "protector of the *dhamma*". Although there is no indication from his writings that Khieu Chum knew anything about the activities of the great Sri Lankan lay Buddhist reformer Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) there are more than a few parallels in their attitudes to the threat posed to Buddhism by unhelpful exterior forces.

<sup>17</sup> For more on Thoñ, Nath and Tat, see Hansen 2006-7: 33-37.

fomenting King Sisowath Monivong died in April 1941 and the French chose Norodom Sihanouk as his successor.

Penny Edwards has observed that the colonial patronage of the Cambodian monarchy meant that a cadre of pro-monarchical and paternalistic anti-colonialists, Sihanouk being the most obvious example, emerged in a way that would never be the case for Burma where the British strenuously avoided all support for the royal family (Edwards 2007: 214). This is certainly the case but in some Cambodian eyes, especially those already opposed to further French control of the nation, Sihanouk's selection as king by the colonial power would mean that he was automatically discredited. Such detractors would in time include influential sections of the newly radicalized Buddhist *saṅgha*.

Opposition to the romanization measure focused on Venerable Hem Chieu<sup>18</sup> a teacher at the École Supérieure de Pāli who was arrested on 17 July 1942 and charged with eight offences including the planning of an anti-French uprising, involvement in secret meetings with the Japanese, and “using witchcraft to make Cambodian troops invincible”. The French had searched Hem Chieu's monastic dwelling and found a signed yet undated document described by Locard as a “manifesto of political reform”.<sup>19</sup> This very interesting manuscript contained a list of sixteen demands. The eleventh of these was a call for a boycott on monastic almsrounds.<sup>20</sup> The document also makes a number of surprising references to the un-named king. This king “is *not* a Buddhist” [item 13 - my italics], monks should refuse to be involved in *keathen* ceremonies organized by the king at the end of *vossa* [item 14] and they should “have nothing to do with him [item 15]. We can assume that Sihanouk is the object of Hem Chieu's ire.

Found guilty of sedition Hem Chieu was imprisoned on the prison-island of Poulo Condore (Koh Tralach), where he died in 1943 at the age of 46. Angered that he had been defrocked by his own ecclesiastical superiors under significant pressure from the colonial authorities and without the necessary Buddhist rituals, around 1,000 people, about half of whom were monks, gathered for a demonstration on 20 July. Since the monks carried umbrellas, Sihanouk later derided the demonstration as an “Umbrella War”. The event is generally regarded as the first coordinated act of anti-colonial forces within Cambodia, and there can be little doubt that concerns about the status, character and external control of Buddhism influenced the overall motivation of many of the participants (Harris 2005: 137-144).

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<sup>18</sup> For biographical details, see Locard 2006-7: 71.

<sup>19</sup> The document was discovered by Henri Locard at the Archives de la Justice Militaire (Le Blanc Archives, Sous-Dossier B) and quoted in Locard 2006-7: 74).

<sup>20</sup> “Overturning the alms bowl” (*pattam nikkujjana kamma*), i.e. refusing to accept alms and depriving the donor of the opportunity to earn merit, seems to be an old tradition in Theravāda Buddhism.

In Burma such boycotts seem common. They occurred in 1921 when around 1,500 monks in emergency session at the Shwedagon pagoda determined not to accept food from those who had been witnesses for the prosecution that led to the jailing of the nationalist monk, U Ottama. A boycott was also imposed on members of the Burma Communist Party in 1950 and in August 1990 when the Burmese Monks' Union (*saṅgha samaggi*) boycotted the military by refusing to accept alms from them and their relatives.

Khieu Chum's autobiography tells us that he had moved in the circle of Hem Chieu before the latter's imprisonment and death in captivity and this seems to have fired his nationalistic fervour. Indeed, there is evidence that as a relatively young monk he had been selected by Son Ngoc Thanh to join Hem Chieu and other monks including Pang Khat, So Hay and Uk Chea<sup>21</sup> to preach the nationalist message around the country (Sorn 1995: 370). In 1945 after the brief Japanese interlude Chum left Phnom Penh, first to settle in Battambang and then to cross the border into Thailand. It is difficult to be precise about how long he stayed there but he came back in 1949 having interacted with un-named individuals who were concerned about Cambodian freedom.<sup>22</sup> It seems likely that one of these was Son Ngoc Thanh, the organizer of the 20 July 1942 demonstration and one of the key figures behind Cambodia's "first" newspaper, *Nagara Vatta* that had been launched in 1936 by Thanh and his associates who were working at the Buddhist Institute.<sup>24</sup>

In 1938 *Nagara Vatta* had published an editorial calling for harmony between the Buddhist sects and "one nation, one religion". Its readers were encouraged to think of themselves as Khmer rather than as members of specific factions, whether religious like the Thommayut or Mahanikay, or in any other way (Edwards 2007: 208). It looks likely that this call for a purified *sangha* was the expression of a desire for a return to a monastic order before the divisions engendered by the Siamese-inspired reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. As such it contained a strong implicit criticism of the royalist attitudes of the Thommayut and an aspiration towards the re-establishment of a purified Mahanikay.<sup>24</sup> Bunchhan Mul (1971: 118) confirms Chum's membership of the circle and, as far as I can determine, Khieu Chum's first published essay, a work that makes specific reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a short editorial entitled 'Peace in Buddhism' in *Kambuja Suriya*<sup>25</sup> the house journal of the Buddhist Institute.

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<sup>21</sup> Another Wat Langka-based monk who seems to have crossed the border into Thailand in the aftermath of the July 1942 demonstration (Locard 2006-7: 77).

A Khmer Issarak (Independence) movement had been founded with Thai government support in Bangkok in 1940. A very loose alliance of different groupings, in time the Issaraks would split into two camps. The first was leftist in orientation and would in due course morph into the Communist Party of Kampuchea. The second, associated with Son Ngoc Thanh, was anti-monarchist and republican. It is known as Khmer Serei (Free Khmer).

<sup>22</sup> Khieu Chum may initially have fled to the Dangrek mountain border region immediately after the events of July 1942 but I have been unable to confirm this.

<sup>23</sup> Son Ngoc Thanh subsequently served as Prime Minister of Cambodia August-October 1945 and again March-October 1972.

<sup>24</sup> My interview with Chum Kanal, Phnom Penh 14 May 2009.

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that some of the policies the *Nagara Vatta* group proposed for the reorganisation of the monastic order have been adopted by the current government. For although the two orders were formally re-established as part of the creation of the Kingdom of Cambodia in late 1992, in reality the Thommayut has almost ceased to exist.

On the differences between the two orders, see Harris 2005: chapter 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Kambuja Suriya* 28 (7) 1956: 603-609.

Now Khieu Chum's preceptor Lvī Em was regarded as the best of Phnom Penh's traditionally educated monks. Despite the fact that he was not a member of the Thommakay he had been appointed as the second director of the École Supérieure de Pāli in 1928, following Thoñ's death. Other markers of the colonial power's esteem for Em followed. He became director of the newly created Tripitaka Commission (Royal Ordinance No. 106) on 14 December 1929 and he received the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1934 (Edwards 2007: 195-6 & 203). But Lvī Em had been Hem Chieu's superior at the Pāli school and may also have been his monastic preceptor.<sup>26</sup> In the aftermath of the Umbrella War Nath and Tat's support for the French seems to have shown no indication of wavering. Indeed, to demonstrate his loyalty to the French line Choun Nath had composed the country's national anthem. But Lvī Em decided to take action. In protest at the colonial power's meddling in the *saṅgha* he resigned from his posts as Director of the Pali High School and President of the Tripitaka Commission (Chheat Sreang et al 2005: 58).

This seems to me to be the first indication of a split between the pro-French modernizers who had emerged from the Thommakay and a newer monastic segment that, although it was prepared to accept the new forms of Buddhist scholarship introduced under French influence, was less enthusiastic about the longer term impact of colonialism on the country. The split was not simply ideological, however. It was also a split between the two most powerful Mahanikay monasteries in Phnom Penh. Wat Unnalom had been the home of Hem Chieu, as it was of Nath and That, but in the aftermath of the Umbrella War I think that we can begin to detect an opposing centre of influence at Wat Langka.<sup>27</sup> The role of Prince Sisowath Monireth (1909-75) is also relevant here. He was one of the two most prominent royals to be associated with Wat Langka and he would preside over Lvi Em's funeral rites in 1957.<sup>28</sup> As we have already noted, King Sisowath Monivong had died on 24 April 1941 and Prince Monireth was his eldest son and the "legitimate" successor. But Admiral Decoux, Governor-General of Indochina, decided to place the crown on the head of the 18-year-old Norodom Sihanouk instead. Monireth had originally been opposed to Son Ngoc Thanh and the *Nagara Vatta* group. But he started to support them after he lost out in the fight for the throne (Englebert 1998: 140, n.24)<sup>29</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that it was his plan to

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<sup>26</sup> I have not been able to establish this but it is certainly the case that while Hem Chieu entered the order as a novice monk at Wat Unnalom his higher ordination occurred at Wat Langka (Locard 2006-7: 71).

<sup>27</sup> Differences between the two monasteries in terms of their location may also be significant. Wat Unnalom is located on the riverbank a short stroll from the Royal Palace while Wat Lanka is around a kilometre to the south and in close proximity to the Independence Monument (*vimean ekareach*).

The fact that Wat Unnalom was pro-royal and Wat Langka anti- was confirmed in my interviews with Hing Kimthan, Phnom Penh 31 May 2007 and Hin Yang, Phnom Penh 17 February 2009). Even today there are tensions between the two – but that is another story!

<sup>28</sup> See *Pravatti vatt laṅkā braḥ kusumāram* 1967: 22.

<sup>29</sup> Sihanouk had been encouraged by the Japanese to declare Cambodia's independence on 13 March 1945. Son Ngoc Thanh returned from Tokyo six weeks later and was made Foreign Minister in a government almost entirely formed of pro-French [ie. anti-nationalist] traditionalists. But on 9 August 1945 seven young men stormed the royal palace

lead a troop rebellion that may have precipitated the French decision to arrest Hem Chieu. Certainly Monireth was banished to Tonkin following the 20 July 1942 manifestations (Locard 2006-7: 75). As one of Lvi Em's most celebrated and loyal students, and as a member of Monireth's inner circle, Khieu Chum would in time become the most powerful and explicit champion of the Wat Langka line.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike most intellectually active Phnom Penh-based monks Khieu Chum avoided almost all honorific titles. He seems to have criticized those who did – the vast majority of learned and senior members of the *saṅgha* – no doubt earning himself a deal of enmity from his fellows. Indeed, when Lvi Em died in 1957 Chum refused the requests of his fellows at Wat Langka to take up the reins as *cau adbhikār*.<sup>31</sup> He also refused the offer of post as *Preah Pothivong*, the third-highest rank holder in the Mahanikay hierarchy, vacated by Huot Tat when he became supreme patriarch following the death of Chuon Nath.<sup>32</sup> In the autobiography he makes the point that, unlike many monks, he had almost no friends.<sup>33</sup> He also suffered for a variety of illness, including heart disease, and this I think accounts for his well-known irritability and it is the key to his highly disciplined daily regime. He wrote extensively and gained a solid reputation as one of the most able preachers in Cambodia.

By the early fifties he certainly was close to members of Son Ngoc Thanh's Khmer Serei circle. We know that in 1952 he had joined Ea Si Chov, another prominent member of the movement, when the latter went to Thailand.<sup>34</sup> Both Khieu Chum and Ea Si Chov entered a pagoda in Bangkok, possibly the

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to try and force Sihanouk's abdication. They arrested most of the cabinet, excepting only Son Ngoc Thanh and Prince Sisowath Monireth. The former became Prime Minister four days later but only served for two months. According to Chandler (1991: 23), "...his leadership revealed[ed] no systematic political agenda". We do not know whether Thanh and Monireth were behind the "coup" but from that time on Sihanouk despised Thanh.

<sup>30</sup> One of Chum's works is specifically dedicated to his preceptor (*Viññāṇaṃ dassanaḥ* 1967: i) and many others contain references to Em's stature as a scholar of the Adhidhamma.

<sup>31</sup> Kao Sim subsequently became *cau adbhikār* of Wat Langka (*Pravatti vatt laṅkā braḥ kusumārām* 1967: 25). His successor was Put Som Ol.

<sup>32</sup> My interview with Chum Kanal, Phnom Penh 14 May 2009.

<sup>33</sup> His close association with Venerable Pang Khat appears to be the exception. Pang Khat had come to Phnom Penh from Wat Phnom Del, Batheay district, Kompong Cham and was a Sanskritist who had joined the Tripitaka Commission in the 1940s and participated in the Umbrella War. He confessed his involvement, disrobed and was tried in Saigon. Subsequently Pierre Dupont, Secretary of the Buddhist Institute after Karpèles' dismissal, intervened on his behalf and he was reordained (Chheat Sreang et al 2005: 52). He later taught Sanskrit at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

<sup>34</sup> Ea Si Chov was a Sino-Khmer graduate of Sisowath High School and had been a student in Paris where he regularly joined Ieng Sary, Saloth Sar [aka Pol Pot], Hang Thun Hak, etc. at Keng Vannsak's flat for political discussion. However the group soon split. On one side were the proto-communist, pro-Viet Minh like Ieng Sary; on the other Ea Si Chov and Hang Thun Hak who sided with Son Ngoc Thanh. The latter grouping argued for the non-violent methods that had led to Indian and Burmese independence. They also feared Vietnamese dominance if Ieng Sary's line was followed (Short 2004: 59-61).

On his return to Phnom Penh in May 1951 Ea Si Chov was appointed director of the Cambodian Mores and Customs

same one, and it seems that Chum eventually became its *cau adbhikār*. He remained in Bangkok until Cambodia gained independence, becoming a fluent Thai speaker. While in Bangkok he also collected various documents related to the Khmer language and seems to have returned with a book that he had written on Khmer literature.<sup>35</sup> This may, in time, have transmogrified into his controversial grammatical work *Kambuj veyyākar(ṅ)*, published in 1962.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.2. Towards the Khmer Republic (1970-75)

On his return to Cambodia in 1954 following the country's independence Khieu Chum's links with

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Commission at the Buddhist Institute (My interview with Hing Kimthan; 31 May 2007). In January 1952 he, Thanh and some un-named monks at the Buddhist Institute established the newspaper *Khmer Kraok* [Khmer Awake] (Reddi 1970: 183-4). It was soon banned by the French authorities.

On 9 March 1952 Son Ngoc Thanh, Ea Si Chov, and Hang Thun Hak, and others drove from Phnom Penh to the Thai borders, ostensibly to check customs posts. In fact they were met by Kao Tak, a well-known Issarak, near Kralanh in the north of Siem Reap province and joined the Issarak forces.

Ea Si Chov appears to have been an ascetic [he didn't drink, gamble or dance] and intellectual figure. Having joined the Issarak he supervised political training at Chantaraingsey's base camp but he became disillusioned, argued with Thanh, and settled in a Bangkok monastery. He eventually returned to Cambodia and died around 1959 (Chandler 1991: 59-61)

<sup>35</sup> One of my informants claimed that part of the reason for going to Bangkok in the first place was to try to recover the documents that had been taken away by the Siamese during the post-Angkorian period. These events are widely believed to have traumatized and culturally impoverished the Cambodian people ever since. The journey then can be read as an effort to recover a lost inheritance (Harris 2005: 30-31).

<sup>36</sup> The period from the early nineteen-forties through to the sixties, from the inception of the anti-colonial struggle through to the achievement of national independence, represents a high-water mark in writing on the Cambodian language.

Chuon Nath completed the first volume of his Cambodian Dictionary (*Vacanānukram Khmaer*) in 1938. The second was to follow in 1943.

Towards the end of the sixties Chuon Nath argued heatedly with Khieu Chum. The *saṅgharāj* was especially angry about Chum's attempt to ascribe gender to nouns and he condemned *Kambuj veyyākar(ṅ)* on national radio. By that time Khieu Chum was at loggerheads with Chuon Nath on other grounds such as the supreme patriarch's acceptance of monastic titles and honours and his use of an official motorcar – all of which Khieu Chum regarded as inimical to the life of a *bhikkhu*.

Because of Chuon Nath's reaction no-one took Khieu Chum's grammatical works seriously. It is variously described as a work written in haste or one overly dependent on French grammatical categories.

Khieu Chum does not seem to have been surprised at the negative reaction to *Kambuj veyyākar(ṅ)* but predicted that it would come to be valued fifty years in the future (Interview with Tep Phon, Phnom Penh 18 February 2009). He was also unconcerned about Chuon Nath's reaction since he regarded himself as more widely read and less single-minded than the *saṅgharāj* (Interview with Hing Kimthan, Phnom Penh 31 May 2007).

To a certain extent this is born out by the fact that Keng Vannsak asked Khieu Chum to assist him when he was writing his own influential work on modern Cambodian (Keng Vannsak 1966). Nath's dictionary had included many new words based on Sanskrit and Pali but Keng Vannsak argued that it would have been more patriotic to unearth Mon-Khmer words from the Angkorian period.

Hem Chieu and Son Ngoc Thanh meant that he was suspected of seditious activity, especially by those in the royal palace. He claims that Sihanouk wanted him to be expelled from the monastic order. But his preceptor rose to his defense. Lvi Em wrote to Queen Kossamak in Chum's support and this seems to have led to an eventual exoneration. For some time to come he kept a low profile and gave all outward signs of supporting the royal family, probably as a means of ensuring that his books could be published. His pre-1970 writings, like the final chapter of *Jivit tašū* (1969) which concludes with a panegyric to Sihanouk's successes in bringing about progress in the country, are generally very respectful towards Sihanouk and his mother Queen Kossamak,<sup>37</sup> and he only seems to have deviated from that line after 1966 when things started to go badly awry in the country. Some commentators may conclude from this that Khieu Chum was a cowardly writer; never really willing to speak truth to power. But when we consider the fate of those who were prepared to tackle Sihanouk head on during the period we may be persuaded to moderate our criticism.

One of Hem Chieu's biographers has made the point that his success as a preacher was largely based on the fact that he gave sermons in his own words (Kong Somphear 1972). In other words he did not make them up merely from stock expressions derived from Pāli literature. The same could most definitely be said of Khieu Chum who drew on a wide general knowledge that transcended the boundaries of traditional Buddhist learning.<sup>38</sup> By the 1950s he had gained the reputation of being one of Cambodia's most lively, controversial and famous public speakers and his rhetorical skills were in great demand. He was, for instance, one of only two monks to preach at *saṅgharāj* Chuon Nath's funeral.<sup>39</sup>

A good illustration of Khieu Chum's preaching style comes from a story told to me by a senior figure at today's Buddhist Institute who first heard him preaching at a ceremony to honour the parents of a wealthy family around 1954 or 1955 in Kompong Thom province. Like any good modernist Khieu Chum

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<sup>37</sup>In these writings Khieu Chum variously refers to Sihanouk as the "royal patron of Buddhism" [*Buddhavidya rioeri puṅy-pāp* (A Life that Conquers the World) 1969: iv] and "head of state and father of the nation" [*Jivit jhmalḥ lok* (A Life that Conquers the World) 1969]. The latter work and *Jivit santibhāb* [(Peaceful Life) 1970: iv] also contain dedications to Queen Kossamak. However, in private conversation Khieu Chum seems to have referred to Sihanouk as "grandfather pot-belly" (*tā kampōn*).

<sup>38</sup>Khieu Chum had a large personal library arranged in different sections according to language of composition (Interview with Suong Som, Prey Veng town 17 February 2009).

<sup>39</sup>The other was Venerable Kan Ael, the chief monk of Kandal province (Interview with Suong Som, Prey Veng town 17 February 2009).

Chuon Nath died 25 September 1969 at the age of 86, and as the date for his funeral was set astrologically for a date sometime after Sihanouk departed to Paris, it was thought best to postpone. But after the March 1970 coup the ceremony was pushed back even further. Then another problem emerged. Monks from all over the country were needed to perform the obsequies and meet to elect a new *saṅgharāj*. But many were now living in areas occupied by the communists. Lon Nol was also concerned that such a large gathering might not be supportive of the new government and that disturbances may arise (Pomonti and Thion 1971: 298 n.16). The ceremony finally began on 27 January 1971. The ex-patriarch's body was incinerated on 29 January (*Réalités Cambodgiennes*, 5 February 1971).

tended to reject traditional Theravada cosmology and its semiotic capacity to “make inequality enchant”. He emphasized the fact that talk of heaven was like giving a child a balloon when it was unhappy and that heaven and hell are nothing more than a product of the human imagination.<sup>40</sup> During the sermon he also lampooned the notion of divinities by noting that there are supposed to be many female divinities in heaven but few males. As a result Indra enjoyed all the female divinities as his concubines. Such ideas offended some of his older listeners and they walked out. The young listeners, of whom my informant was one, were, on the other hand, very excited by this new form of preaching.<sup>41</sup> Khieu concluded by criticizing contemporary society on the grounds that the gap between rich and poor was too great and that the rich exploit the poor. He encouraged his listeners to do something to change this situation discouraging the traditionalist line that the rich owe their position to past *karma*.<sup>42</sup>

Up until the mid-sixties Sihanouk had managed to employ the “Buddhism Socialism” of his Sangkum movement to forge a united if unstable front between left and right. But this was soon to unravel.<sup>43</sup> One of Sihanouk’s ruses was to employ his traditional title as protector of religion by accusing his enemies of seeking its destruction. The silencing of opposition, then, could be justified as a means of preserving the inheritance of the Buddha. And those who criticized him were nothing more than the “gravediggers of Buddhism”.<sup>44</sup> But not everyone was persuaded by the tactic.

As the period continued Sihanouk gradually lost the support of influential members of the monastic sector. There were several reasons for this, but chief among them was that the Buddhist credentials of the Sangkum were starting to look like window-dressing. Sihanouk’s behaviour and the corrupt conduct of his entourage were a particular cause for concern. But his brutal treatment of Preap In, an ex-Democratic Party member and associate of Son Ngoc Thanh, who was arrested and publically displayed in a cage prior to his execution by firing squad in January 1964 after having been given a free pass to attend the National Congress in Phnom Penh, was a major turning point.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it seems that Khieu Chum and In Tam,

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<sup>40</sup> An important theme in his book, *Pañhā narak-suorg* (Problem of Heaven and Hell) 1962.

<sup>41</sup> A number of interviewees have told me that Khieu Chum was particularly good at communicating with young people. He understood their vocabulary, ways of thinking, and habits of speech in a way that most established monks did not. But he preferred pagodas to the University, possibly because he was embarrassed at not having any “proper” qualifications (Interview with Suong Som, Prey Veng town 17 February 2009).

<sup>42</sup> My interview with Meach Pon, Phnom Penh 24 February 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Chandler (1991: 87) suggests that Sihanouk’s Buddhist socialism was influenced by Thiounn Mumm, Ea Si Chov, etc. The merits and demerits of Sihanouk’s rule, looked at from a strictly Buddhist perspective, form no part of this study. The matter must await further analysis.

<sup>44</sup> Keng Vannasak’s 1967 poem *Trapeang Kraleng* describes the site in Kampong Speu where Sihanouk executed such gravediggers, including Preap In (Keng Vannasak 1976: 9).

<sup>45</sup> Under torture Preap In confessed to membership of the Khmer Serei and to having received CIA backing to overthrow Sihanouk. Sihanouk claimed to have “no inhibitions in signing the death warrant” and ordered that a fifteen minute newsreel of the execution be played in the country’s cinemas for a month after the event (Corfield 1994: 34). The effect of this was to appall a significant proportion of the population and the issue still recurs from time to time in Cambodian political discourse. Hun Sen, for example, has threatened to show the newsreel once more as part of a wider campaign to discredit the ex-king (*Cambodge Soir*, 5 April 2005).



subsequently one of the leaders of the 1970 coup and the most experienced politician of the early Khmer Republic period before disagreements with Lon Nol forced him into the wilderness, spoke together of their revulsion at the former's monastic residence (*keot*; Pāli: *kuṭī*) in Wat Langka on the day before the killing.<sup>46</sup>(See Figure 1.)

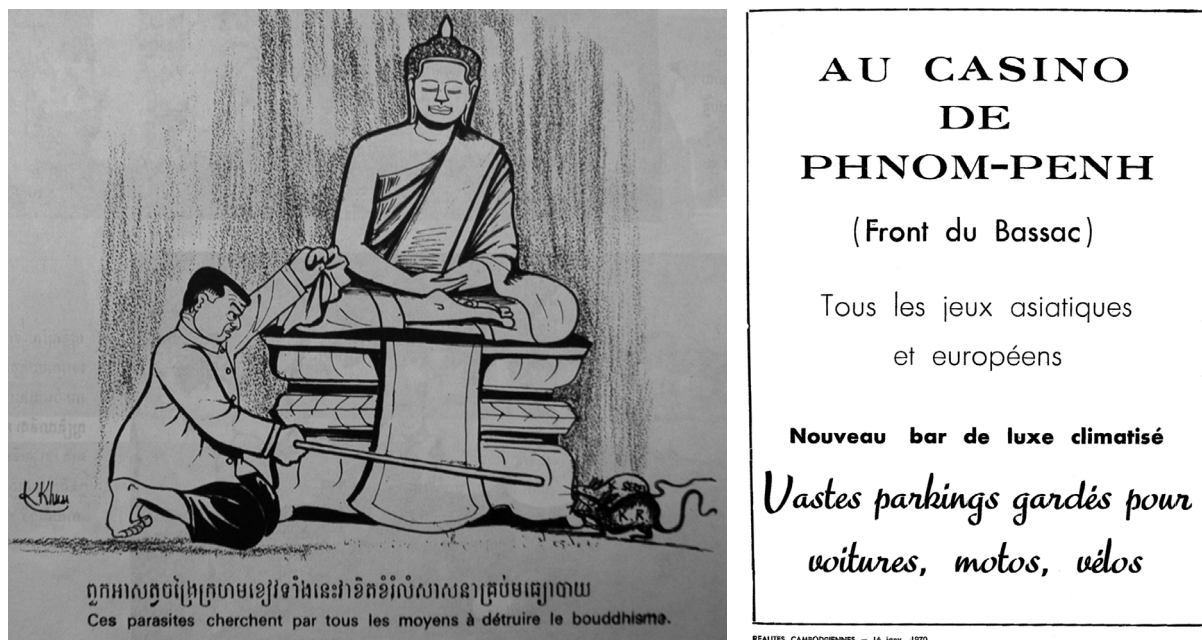


Figure 1 (left) : “These parasites try to destroy Buddhism in every possible way.” Cartoon from *Anak jāti niyum* (The Nationalist)<sup>47</sup>; Figure 2 (right) : Advertisement from *Réalités Cambodgiennes*, 15 August 1969, p.25.

Latter in the decade the establishment of a government casino in the capital led to bankruptcies and an upsurge in the country’s suicide rate (Figure 2). To many it was another indication that the authorities condoned fundamental violations of basic Buddhist morality. In defense, Sihanouk persuaded Cambodia’s chief monks to broadcast the fact that his actions were justified. He would not go to hell for his actions. The incident inspired Keng Vannsak’s poem about the craven cowardice of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, *Je n’irai pas en enfer* (I will not go to hell):

“N’est-ce pas, chers Vénérables,  
Zélateurs et Honorables

<sup>46</sup> My interview with Chum Kanal, Phnom Penh 14 May 2009.

Preap In was In Tam’s nephew and the latter had been involved in his arrest.

<sup>47</sup> *Anak jāti niyum* was one of the most widely circulated Khmer/French language newspapers of the 1960s. Edited by Pho Proeung it took a deferential line towards Sihanouk (Népoté and Abdoul-Carime 2006: 125).

Du Bouddhisme? Ai-Je commis  
Certains péchés non admis?"  
Non, Monseigneur!<sup>48</sup>

(Keng Vannsak 1976: 24-27)

Against this background Chum's profile as a Buddhist public intellectual and man of substance was growing. In 1966, for example, he successfully resolved a dispute over the issue of intentionality in merit-making among Buddhist lay meditation practitioners in Kratie province,<sup>49</sup> a wrangle that even the combined forces of two of the country's top scholar monks, Venerables So Hay and Kem To, had been unable to bring to a satisfactory conclusion.<sup>50</sup> He had also become an associate of some of the key figures behind the overthrow of Sihanouk in 1970. He had known Lon Nol, In Tam and Long Boret, the final Prime Minister of the Khmer Republic before its overthrow by the Khmer Rouge, for quite a long time and he claimed to have written his book *Uttamgati jivit* (The Ideal of Life 1971) at the request of Lon Nol. But as we have seen, his connections with Hang Thun Hak<sup>51</sup> and Son Ngoc Thanh, both of whom were to assume positions of high responsibility in the Khmer Republic period, went back to the early forties. Various informants have told me that members of this circle visited him in his *kat* at Wat Langka for discussion and advice both before and after the coup. Indeed, he may have been one of the coup plotters.

So it was natural that Khieu Chum should have broadcast his support for those involved in Sihanouk's overthrow almost as soon as it had happened. Many young monks seem to have supported his outlook and around the same time Lon Nol bizarrely suggested that he disrobe and take up the role of a two star army general! Khieu Chum refused but offered to advise Lon Nol on anything within his broad area of expertise. A number of reliable informants have told me that he ended up writing many of Lon Nol's speeches, although I have been unable to corroborate this.

Some of Lon Nol's close associates may have been suspicious of Chum because of his prior involvement with Son Ngoc Thanh's Khmer Serei grouping and its Thai and US backers. But Chum also knew Lon Nol's controversial younger brother, Lon Non, rather well. Soon after the coup Lon Non invited Khieu Chum to join his Republican Committee, an organization designed to gain the support of ex-Khmer

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<sup>48</sup> "Is it so, supporters and respected representatives of Buddhism? / Have I committed any unacceptable crimes? / No, Your Royal Highness!"

<sup>49</sup> Kratie seems to have been a major centre for meditation in the pre-Pol Pot period.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Hin Yang, Phnom Penh 17 February 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Hang Thun Hak had been a student of literature who frequented Keng Vannsak's circle in Paris in the early 50s. He subsequently became Director of the Royal University of Fine Arts and wrote a number of plays critical of government corruption. His close links with Queen Kossamak, however, protected him from harm. After the establishment of the Khmer Republic Hang Thun Hak seems to have become close to Lon Non and he served as the country's Prime Minister between October 1972 and April 1973, following on immediately from Son Ngoc Thanh.

Serei in an on-going conflict with Sirik Matak.<sup>52</sup> He was also tasked with bringing about a rapprochement between Lon Nol and Son Ngoc Thanh (Corfield 1994: 108). Other members of the Committee met every night at Lon Non's office close to Wat Preah Put Mean Bon,<sup>53</sup> including the "youth representative" Ros Chantrabot, a young teacher of philosophy at the Yukanthor and Sisowath High Schools, and Colonel Les Krasem, a prominent figure in the Cham Muslim community. Khieu Chum seems to have operated as the "representative" of Buddhism.

His activities elicited a considerable degree of adverse criticism. A US Embassy report around the time described Khieu Chum as the "most outspoken Buddhist monk in Cambodia"<sup>54</sup> while the *Morning News*,<sup>55</sup> a violently rightist and pro-Sirik Matak newspaper accused him and his associates, including Hang Thun Hak and Ros Chantrabot, of being communists. Indeed, Khieu Chum's opponents often incorrectly accused him of being a communist monk (*lok song kommunist*).<sup>56</sup>



*Figure 3: Khieu Chum speaking with journalists following monks' demonstration of Oct. 1971 (Photo courtesy of Laura Summers).*

While this was going on Chum and his ex-Umbrella War veteran colleague Pang Khat beavered away for several months drafting a manifesto for the Khmer Republic. Both monks also seem to have had a hand in composing a national anthem for the new regime.<sup>57</sup> A little later Chum was the main organizer of a series of demonstrations made by Phnom Penh monks on 21 October 1971 demanding that Lon Nol be appointed Head of State (Figure 3).

On the morning of 10 March 1972, banners had appeared on the walls of Wats Koh and Langka giving support to the decisions of a Youth Congress reconfirming this desire and later that same day Cheng Heng, the acting Head of State, made a radio broadcast saying that he no longer had the ability to serve the nation and asked that his position be taken over by Lon Nol. On 14 March 1972 Lon Nol celebrated his new role with a group of monks, army generals, majors and ordinary people, totally 108,

<sup>52</sup> Sisowath Sirik Matak was Sihanouk's cousin but had been a key figure in the coup to overthrow him. The latter has written that he "...hated me from childhood days because he thought his uncle, Prince Sisowath Monireth, should have been placed on the throne instead of myself. He even had a notion that he himself should have been chosen" (Norodom Sihanouk 1973: 27).

Sirik Matak renounced his royal title once the Khmer Republic had been established but his influence increased with the onset of Lon Nol's ill-health; hence the intrigues mentioned above.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Ros Chantrabot, Phnom Penh 23 February 2009.

<sup>54</sup> US DoS 3345, dated 11 December 1970.

<sup>55</sup> *Damnoeun Peal Preuk* (*តារាងប្រឹក្សាប្រឹក្សា*) was edited by Ly Eng – see Népote and Abdoul-Carime 2006: 90 & 105.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Meach Pon, Phnom Penh 24 February 2009.

<sup>57</sup> *Anak jati niyum* (The Nationalist) Vol 12, No. 425, 13 August - 6 September 1970: 17.

attending.<sup>58</sup> Khieu Chum's old friend Son Ngoc Thanh was appointed Prime Minister and the period probably represents the zenith of Khieu Chum's political influence. It did not last very long. He was also to broker Son Ngoc Thanh's resignation the morning after the two of them had a long conversation at Khieu Chum's *keot* at Wat Langka on the evening of 15 October 1972.

On 24 March 1972 leaflets had appeared in the streets condemning Chum whose meetings with students were contributing to a detrimental political atmosphere. *Saṅgharāj* Huot Tat, either voluntarily or under compulsion from the monk's opponents in government, was obliged to issue a statement reproving Khieu Chum and Pang Khat for their activities. At around the same time the supreme patriarch is reported as having described Khieu Chum as a revolutionary monk (*preah song padevoat*).<sup>59</sup> But this only amplified student support for the two monks who attended another youth congress on 29 March at the student's request (Bunchhan Mul 1973: 85-91). Chum responded to Tat's criticism by arguing that there is nowhere in the Tripitaka that says monks should not be involved in politics<sup>60</sup> and that, in any case, the Buddha encouraged his followers to exercise their judgement.

Another possible run-in with Huot Tat, this time over Chum's newspaper articles, seems to have occurred in early 1973.<sup>61</sup> A meeting of senior monks at Wat Unnalom almost unanimously condemned Khieu Chum's political engagement but once again he was defended by a Wat Langka colleague, Put Som Ol, who at that time was the pagoda's *cau adbhikār*. After the meeting a rumour circulated to the effect that Khieu Chum would be arrested. He remained secreted in his *keot* for two weeks and a Thai Embassy car

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<sup>58</sup> The number 108 has a mystic significance in Theravāda Buddhism.

<sup>59</sup> My interview with Ros Chanrabot, Phnom Penh 23 February 2009.

During this period of political turmoil Huot Tat invited Bunchhan Mul to a meeting at which Mul suggested that the only way out of the impasse was for the *saṅgharāj* to write a letter to key figures asking for unity to be restored. Tat said that he had already thought of that but that nobody was willing to deliver the letters. Bunchhan Mul said that he would act as the go-between and the *saṅgharāj* secretly wrote three letters calling for reconciliation to Lon Nol, Sirik Matak and Cheng Heng. Huot Tat's personal clerk delivered a separate letter to In Tam. The four recipients wrote a joint response saying that they were ready to come together and they did not want any more divisions (Bunchhan Mul 1973: 91).

<sup>60</sup> A debateable point! Chum Kanal was an eyewitness to the exchange (My interview with Chum Kanal, Phnom Penh 14 May 2009).

The response is not so uncommon. In 1998 a Thai monk called Phra Ajaan Mahaa Bua was criticized over his campaign to "help the nation" (*chuy chaut*) with donations of gold solicited as a means of boosting the treasury reserve. When criticized for crossing the line into politics he responded, "...where is the line and who has drawn it? How can you call it crossing the line when a monk is concerned for his country?" (*Bangkok Post*, 9 July 2000).

The previous year another monk, Phra Khruu Prasarnsawikhet, appealed to ordinary people to help the government repay IMF loans, "...when the economy of the country is good, people give [offerings] for monks to build the temple...now the country is facing an economic crisis, so the monks will organize [offerings] to rebuild the country" (quoted by Taylor 2001: 135).

<sup>61</sup> I am not absolutely certain that this is a separate incident from the one described in the previous paragraph.

apparently waited outside Wat Langka to whisk him away to safety across the border should anything untoward happen.<sup>62</sup>

### 3. Khieu Chum's Post-1970 Writings

Khieu Chum's published oeuvre is very extensive and most of his works have been republished in quite extensive print runs in recent years.<sup>63</sup> This fact underscores his significance amongst that small section of Cambodian society that reads works on the application of Buddhism to the needs of wider society. He is also well-known and highly regarded in educated *saṅgha* circles. His early works are rather conventional expositions of Buddhist *dharmma* and need not detain us unduly. But as he got into his stride as a writer, and certainly as the 1960s unfolded, he began to draw on wider themes. One of the more obvious characteristics of this phase of his output are the frequent references to European and American writers, politicians and historical personages. To convey something of the range, he cites Darwin, Dalton and Mendel (*Buddhavidyā roeṅ puṇy-pāp* [Buddha's Knowledge of Merit and Demerit], 1969), Bergson and Comte (*Jivīṅ santibhāb* [Peaceful Life], 1970), Napoleon, Bossuet, Emerson, Roosevelt, Virgil, Shakespeare, Stephenson, Faraday, Henry Ford, Johnny Wiessmuller [?], and William James (*Jivīṅ taśū* [Life Struggle], 1969), Voltaire (*Pañhā anāgat* [Problem of the Future], 1961), Tennyson, Mill and Arnold (*Sakal cintā* [Universal Mind], 1972), Mendel and Haeckel (*Dassanaḥ sākal* [Universal Vision], 1968), DeValera, Mussolini, Hitler, Gandhi and Lenin (*Pañhā jivīṅ* [Problem of Life], 1960) to name but a few. The reference to scientists is, in fact, quite common amongst Buddhist modernists of the period (Lopez 2008); the positive orientation towards figures of the totalitarian right and left is little more puzzling. Yet Tagore also admired Mussolini and, as Craig Reynolds has suggested in his discussion of the writings of a contemporary Thai author, Luang Wichit, the political ideologies of such individuals was largely beside the point. What mattered here was that they were individuals who made things happen on a grand scale (Reynolds 2006: 239).<sup>64</sup>

The theme is picked up in Khieu Chum's personal life and attitudes. He was a strict disciplinarian with a "protestant" work ethic. If the students and monks living with him at *koṭ* 33 did not follow the rules he threw them out. He rose at 4am every morning and after a brief period of calisthenics he patrolled the rooms with his rattan cane ensuring that everyone was up and ready for their studies. He appears to have absorbed French attitudes about the "lotus eating" Cambodians. His concern about their lack of perseverance

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<sup>62</sup> My interview with Prak Prum, Phnom Penh 25 May 2004. Prak Prum claims that he attended to Khieu Chum's needs during this period of enforced withdrawal.

The story suggests that Khieu Chum had maintained some sort of contact with the Thai authorities since his two periods of exile in Bangkok in the 40s and 50s.

<sup>63</sup> The "controversial" grammatical work, *Kambuj veyyākaraṅ* (Grammar of Cambodia), is a signal exception.

<sup>64</sup> Comparison may also be usefully made here with Sukarno's often expressed admiration for Hitler, Atatürk and De Valera (Anderson 1998: 1-2). I am grateful to Tomas Larsson for pointing this out to me.

is nicely illustrated by a sermon of the 1950s in which he reworked a traditional poem about weaving to make the weaver start his work early in the morning rather than the “cool afternoon” mentioned in the original (Yang Sam 1987: 43).

Khieu Chum, then, is a thoroughgoing modernist and there is no hint of premodern millennialism in his writings. Yet the appeal to western scientific and political culture is not, to my mind, an expression of cultural inferiority. Rather, Khieu Chum is striving to transform Buddhism into a universal form of knowledge that freshly illuminates the intellectual traditions of other parts of the world while at the same time marking out Theravada culture and the Cambodian people as a major node in the global civilizational system.<sup>65</sup>

Stylistically Khieu Chum’s writing is typical of other nationalists who grew out of the *Nagara Vatta* group. One indicator is the very frequent use of the word “our” (*yoerñ*) to define something distinctive of the Cambodian people, as in Khieu Chum’s short book on grammar for children, *Veyyākar(ñ) yoerñ* (Our Grammar, 1966) (Népote 1998: 153-4).<sup>66</sup> During the Khmer Republic he no longer felt restrained in expressing his political preferences openly and all the formulaic expressions of support for the royal family found in his pre-1970s works are now absent. The new leitmotif is that the Buddhist religion does not depend on the institution of kingship, a form of political organization that had been decisively rejected by the Buddha when he left his own palace home to live the life of a recluse. Notwithstanding the fact that the Cambodian people had endured “...thousands of years of absolutism, arbitrariness and tyranny”<sup>67</sup> the time was ripe to embrace the reality of the Khmer Republic on the grounds that its political philosophy reflected the fundamental insight of the Buddha. In a real sense, then, Chum’s mature exposition of Buddhist doctrine can be regarded as a response to and exposition of the notion expressed in Hem Chieu’s manifesto of political reform [item 13, see n. 21 *supra*] that “...the King is not a Buddhist”.

What follows is an exposition of the principal points that make up Khieu Chum’s mature thinking on the monarchy as contained in his three post coup works, *Buddhasāsanā prajādhīpateyy sādharmaṇarattḥ* (Buddhism, Democracy and Republic, 1971),<sup>68</sup> *Prajādhīpateyy cās’ duṇṇ* (Ancient Democracy, 1972),<sup>69</sup> and *Sakal cintā gaṃnit srāv jrāv* (Universal Mind: Thoughts for Research, 1972)<sup>70</sup> that at 719 pages in length, somewhat shorter than the 1252 pages of *Kambuj veyyākar(ñ)* published in 1962, is Khieu Chum’s last book and can be considered his *magnum opus*.

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<sup>65</sup> We find a very similar process at work in the writings of Samak Burawat, a philosophy teacher at Mahamakut University, Bangkok, in the late forties to early fifties. His attempt to transform Buddhism into a “universal knowledge” (*wicha sakon*) or a “single system of knowledge” (*pen an nung an diawkun*) through its integration with Marxism and Social Darwinism resulted in books like *Panya* (Intellect, 1954) and *Witthayasatmai kap phrasi-an* (The New Science and Mettaya Buddha, 1970) (Day and Reynolds 2000: 54).

<sup>66</sup> Another is use of the related term “pure” (*suddh*)

<sup>67</sup> Manifesto of the Committee of Intellectuals for the Support of the Salvation Government 18 March 1970; quoted by Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Monash University, 1999: 387.

<sup>68</sup> Abbreviated *BDR*.

<sup>69</sup> Abbreviated *AD*.

<sup>70</sup> Abbreviated *UM*.

As we might expect from the foregoing discussion he regularly stresses the importance of learning and hard work and regrets the fact that the Cambodian people are poorly educated. This leads to problems in the political domain where unscrupulous politicians are never challenged for offering bribes for votes. However, Khieu Chum's answer to the query, "What if we are given money, wine, rice, or boiled chickens by corrupt politicians but don't vote for them? Are we virtuous or not?" is positively Baconesque.<sup>71</sup> We are virtuous for we prevent them from gaining office. The Buddha, furthermore, taught that alms-givers should expect nothing in return for their generosity (*BDR* viii).

Lack of a proper education also inclines the people to see Buddhism in materialistic terms. The construction of a new temple or the performance of lavish funeral practices, both of which are economically crippling for the poor, take precedence over the project of inner transformation (*AD* 71; *UM* 666). Such criticisms of the commodification of Buddhism was to become common after the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s,<sup>72</sup> but this seems to me to be a very early formulation.

Khieu Chum is familiar with Greek axial age figures like Solon, Cleisthenes and Pericles (*AD* 11-23) as well as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (*BDR* 71). But the main points of *Prajādhīpatēyy cās' durṇ* (Ancient Democracy) is to argue the superiority of Buddhist over Greek democracy, of *dharmādhipatēyy* over *prajādhīpatēyy*.<sup>73</sup> The Buddha's attitude towards social and political organization is better than the Greek democrats because while the latter are characterized by a combination of wholesome as well as unwholesome factors, Buddhism is entirely wholesome (*AD* 14). To give one example, the Buddha accepted monks from all caste backgrounds into his religious community (*saṅgha*) and in this community they all became equals (*AD* 19-20). This, then, is a true democracy or *dharmādhipatēyy* while Greek democracy was actually a form of aristocracy (*AD* 23). Greek democracy did not give rights to the lower orders. Furthermore, it also had the death sentence, as demonstrated by the execution of Socrates (*AD* 108-110). The implication is that this could not happen in a true Buddhist polity, even though the evidence of history points towards a somewhat less heartening conclusion.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> When Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was Lord Chancellor of England he was disgraced after being accused of accepting bribes. He admitted the offence but argued that the money had no influence on the decisions he made.

<sup>lxxi</sup> E.g. the Thai monk Mahaa Bua Yaanasampanno's mid-nineties critique of commodified Buddhism (*phuttha-phanii*), 'Nowadays there are only flamboyant monastery buildings while the heart [ie. the *dhamma*] and the training of the heart is ignored. And even though the buildings may look grand, inside [in the heart] it is a mess...religion has now changed to become more worldly. When people see it they say this monastery is beautiful, but no-one says the monks and novices are like shit.' Phra Ajaan Mahaa Bua, *Lak-matchimaa-saaitthaang-romyen* (The Principle of the Middle Way in the Peaceful Path), Bangkok, 1996 (2539): 122-3 - quoted by Taylor (1999: 164).

<sup>73</sup> In *BDR* 12 *prajādhīpatēyy* is said to be an "element with form" while *dharmādhipatēyy* is "formless". I do not fully understand the distinction.

<sup>74</sup> Early Buddhist texts recommend a lengthy list of exceptionally harsh penalties for minor infractions. Punishment for burglary, theft, or carrying off another man's wife could include caning, amputation, kindling a fire in the mouth after opening it wide with spikes ("Rahu's mouth"), putting a red hot iron on the head after the top of the skull has been removed ("gruel-pot") and a variety of other barbarisms (*M.i*, 87, *Mih.*197, etc.). A similar list is reproduced the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Cambodian law codes where such punishments are specifically related to the crime of treason during war (Leclère, Adhémard 1898: 234ff).

Like the Burmese consecration texts and the later works of U Hpo Hlaing mentioned above, Khieu Chum is aware of the importance of the Mahāsammata-related social contract arrangement that ought to exist between ruler and ruled. As if to underline this, he speaks approvingly of Rousseau, Europe's prime exemplar of the doctrine, and notes that unfettered sovereignty (*adbipateyybbāb*) is a dangerous thing (*AD* 122-5).<sup>75</sup> The problem for the king who does not observe the social contract, and Khieu Chum is inclined to feel this applies to all monarchs without qualification, is that he rules through his "own power" (*aṃṇāc rapas' kbluon*) and this is nothing more than autocracy (*attādhīpateyy*) (*BDR* 15). This is also distinctly anti-Buddhist. And although Khieu Chum does not spell it out I suggest that he regards autocracy as a form of political reification or, in more explicitly Buddhist terms, an unjustified attribution of "self" or substantiality (*atta*; Skt. *ātman*) to a conditioned thing. This simple yet profoundly mistaken viewpoint provides the ground from which all kinds of attachment and aversion, understood psychologically, morally and politically, must inevitably arise.<sup>76</sup>

In another sense kings are like the gods (*devatā*). They are "self-appointed" and their method of selection for high office is at odds with the ontological constitution of the universe. It is both contrary to *dhamma* but also "unconstitutional" in a more narrowly legalistic manner (*UM* 269-70). Like the *devatā* kings use trickery when they are born as humans and as a "king" they claim that they will "save the country". But for Khieu Chum "salvation" (*sroc-srañ*) is a "cheating term" (*BDR* 33)!

Also like the gods, kings claim that everything belongs to them and, as such, they have the power to "eat the realm". "Heaven has ordained it". This "cheating" humbles the people and makes them frightened, easily controlled and ignorant (*UM* 703). Yet, in fact, kings are nothing more than beasts (*tiracchana*) and at one point Khieu Chum - rather chillingly in the light of what was later to occur to the monastic order in Democratic Kampuchea - refers to them as intestinal worms in the body politic (*brūn rāstr*). "The Buddha at the time of his enlightenment found out that all kings fail to follow the law and fail to exercise pity for the people. They drink the blood, eat the flesh and consume the energy of the people like a leech" (*UM* 707).<sup>77</sup>

Kings have no right to take common property like water, etc. to themselves (*UM* 673-5). In their ignorance people assume that heaven is a positive thing without bothering to enquire whether it exists or

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<sup>75</sup> For another reference to Rousseau, see *BDR* 71.

<sup>76</sup> Such issues are at the heart of a recent Japanese debate over "Critical Buddhism" (Hubbard and Swanson 1997). This is not only a conversation about the impact of creeping metaphysics in Buddhist discourse. It is also a debate about the misapplication of Buddhism in the political domain. Its champions, Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō, stress the importance of a proper stance on "non-self" (*anātmavāda*) as a means of challenging creeping essentialism both in Buddhist philosophy but also in the way that major Japanese thinkers have come to envisage the historical role of the Japanese people. A good example here is the Imperial Way Zen (*kyōdō zen*) that developed after Buddhism had been criticized for not sufficiently promoting the uniqueness of the Japanese character (*nihonjinron*) during the Meiji period (1868-1912).

<sup>77</sup> On the Khmer Rouge notion that monks are leeches, see Harris 2007: 63.



not (BDR 34). If they did they would discover that the popular preoccupation with heaven, hell, deities, astrology and the sprinkling of holy water is without basis and the metaphysical foundations of kingship when probed by the enquiring mind melt into thin air (UM 230-266 & 673-5). In this way Khieu Chum exposes the manner in which traditional Buddhist cosmology has been used as an instrument of political control.<sup>78</sup>

A number of objections naturally arise to all of this. The first relates to the Buddha. Why, if kingship is an illusion, "...did he choose to be reborn in a royal setting, as Temiya for example?" For Khieu Chum this is easily dealt with. The future Buddha was born reluctantly as Temiya.<sup>79</sup> The *Jātaka* story tells us that he only agreed to rebirth in a royal family after a lot of hassling by Sakka. In fact, he went along with the suggestion only so that he could eradicate the power of kings. In the denouement of the story he persuades the king to give up the throne and become an ascetic. Similarly the Buddha was reborn as a *brahmin* to eliminate the misunderstandings of the *brahmins* (BDR 15-20). Furthermore, both Temiya and Siddhattha saw the cruel conduct of their fathers with their own eyes. And they were so shocked that they experienced a strong desire to escape from their future ancestral commitments (UM 707).

Khieu Chum provides subsidiary arguments. The Buddha had another reason to seek rebirth in a monarchical setting. His plan to attack kingship would not have worked had he not been a prince for he would then have been accused of acting purely out of "envy" (BDR 69). And his attitude towards kingship is demonstrated by his own interactions with Bimbisāra, one of the *saṅgha*'s most significant lay patrons. So impressed was the latter that he offered half of his kingdom to the Buddha when they first met. Yet the latter refused saying, "to swallow up the kingdom would be like swallowing my spittle. Once it has hit the ground it cannot be re-swallowed" (BDR 20; UM 707).

One of Khieu Chum's more innovative devices is his reworking of the doctrine of the 'ten duties of the king' (*dasabhidha-rājadhamma*). We have discussed this already as one of the restraints placed on the exercise of monarchical power by the *Jātaka* tradition. But in Khieu Chum's hands it is transformed in a surprising manner. For him the Buddha, who has eschewed physical weapons in the fight to establish dhammocracy (*dhammādhipateyya*), prefers instead the weapon of the *dasabhidha-rājadhamma*. The revolutionary nature of this weapon is demonstrated by its capacity to destroy kingship at its root. No individual in the past, present or future could live by these rules and remain a king. Maybe a "stone-like human" could do so but no such being has ever existed. The notion of Buddhist kingship is an oxymoron, while the transformative power of the ten rules is such that their practice will change any individual into a Buddhist lay-follower (*upāsaka*).<sup>80</sup> They are corrosive of the spirit of kingship (BDR 65-68; UM 708-9) and for Khieu

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<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the manner in which recent Thai political thinkers have begun to criticize the political manipulation of the Traiphum cosmology, see Reynolds 2006: 221-3. One consequence of the critique, found in Cambodia as well as in Thailand, is a migration in meaning of the term *cakkaravatti* from "wheel-turning king" to "imperialist".

<sup>79</sup> The story of Temiya is found in the *Mugapakkha Jātaka*, J. vi. 1-30.

<sup>80</sup> For a discussion of the semantic range of the term *upāsaka*, see Crosby 2006: 177-178. She makes the point that it is active practice rather than mere passive approval of the *buddhadhamma* that defines the *upāsaka*. We might say that for Khieu Chum the king may "protect" Buddhism but he does not "practice" it.

Chum, it seems, a king cannot be a Buddhist lay disciple until he has renounced the throne.

The ideal *upāsaka* then is someone who submits to the sovereignty of the *dhamma* (*dhammādhīpatēyya*). Or put in a slightly different manner, he should practice “dhammocracy” or Buddhist democracy.<sup>81</sup> The term *dhammādhīpatēyya* is ubiquitous in Khieu Chum’s later writings (*BDR* 12 & 64, *AD* 11-23, 108 & 110) but it is also multivalent. When the concept is placed in a political context Chum largely understands it as meaning the “power of legislated law”. From here it is a relatively short step to a distinction between laws enacted by a particular individual, i.e. a king, and those that have the assent and, indeed, are legislated by the entire assembly (*saṅgha*) of all citizens (*BDR* 64). For Khieu Chum this is the real function of *dhammādhīpatēyya*.

This extension of the normal sense of the term *saṅgha* follows the logic of Buddhist modernism that has a tendency for categories derived from the realm of the purely monastic, such as discipline (*vinaya*), to break out of their original confines to influence the wider socio-political landscape.<sup>82</sup> According to Khieu Chum the Buddha understood that the monastic order would become legislators after his death. This seems to be a reference to his ruling that monks might modify the “minor rules” with the full agreement of the community (*D.* ii.154). But the Buddha also “... realized that *bhikkhus* knew well enough about human problems to make laws” (*BDR* 29 & 64). The *saṅgha* has the capacity to legislate on its own account and on behalf of the population at large. It has a long history of debate, the rules of which indicate its democratic credentials. All monks have the right to express their thoughts and if full agreement cannot be reached then a decision can be made “according to the majority” (*yebhuyyasikā*). Buddhist monastic discipline also allows for elections or ballots (*AD* 33-46). All of this can easily be transposed into the political domain where the term *saṅgha* migrates in meaning to define a populace as a whole.

The people have a right, then, to fear the king and Khieu Chum continually makes the point that monarchs are first in a list of four things to be feared (*bhaya*), the others being robbers, fire and flood (*BDR*

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<sup>81</sup> The main canonical source for the three *ādhipateyya* (= “being over-lord”, supreme rule, lordship, sovereignty, power) is *D.* iii. 220 and *A.* i. 147-150 where things are said to be motivated by advantage for oneself (*attādhipateyya*), for others (*lokādhipateyya*) or for the sake of doing what is right (*dhammādhīpatēyya*). Also see *Vism.* 14 [i.34]. We can assume that the three *ādhipateyya* were the subject of innumerable sermons with varied exegesis throughout Buddhist history. My thanks to Lance Cousins (personal communication 6 July 2009) for helping me understand this point.

The term *dhammādhīpatēyya* is often translated as “dhammocracy” and I will observe this convention for the rest of this discussion. It is also a key concept for the Thai modernist thinker, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (Phutthathat; 1906-93) but he only began using the term in the late 1970s. In Phutthathat’s view *dhammādhīpatēyya* can be expressed through any form of political organization (Jackson 2003: 236) while Khieu Chum is very much of the opinion that it can only be expressed fully in a republican system.

<sup>82</sup> Or as Reynolds (2005: 225) puts it, the *vinaya* is one of the “...networks of power on which larger political structures...rest”.

55 & 96, *UT* 705).<sup>83</sup> For Chum eliminating kings is better than paying homage to the Buddha a billion times (*UM* 673-5)!

The ideas contained in Khieu Chum's post-1970 oeuvre clearly provide a religious justification for those who successfully plotted to overthrow Sihanouk. Although he did not condone Lon Nol's madcap scheme's of religious war against communists and other non-Buddhist unbelievers as contained in the latter's 1970 tract, *Campāṃṃ Sāsana* (Religious War), Chum certainly did offer some sort of Buddhist defence of the Khmer Republic, the short-lived regime that he served so prominently before his own poor health and the wider maelstrom of regional conflict intervened. Khieu Chum had argued that republicanism represented the middle way between monarchy and communism. He also predicted that communism would never have a major influence in Cambodia (*AD* 76).

While he was writing these last words only a few short strides away in another monastic dwelling at Wat Langka a group of young monks sympathetic to the communist cause were planning more radical changes to the structure of Cambodian society, politics and culture.<sup>84</sup> When the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975 Ven. Khieu Chum was regarded as a leading figure in the hated Republican regime. As such he was an important target and a few days later the Khmer Rouge opened fire on Wat Langka but only damaged one building, Khieu Chum's *kot* 33. He was not there and it seems likely that he was arrested at the Calmette Hospital where he was being treated for high blood pressure. No one really knows what happened to him after that.

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<sup>83</sup> The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* contains a number of short *Bhaya suttas* that enumerate the four fears. But there is more than one list. In the *Bhaya Sutta* of *A. i.* 178f. they are given as fire, flood and depredation by robbers, plus the addition of old age, disease and death. In the version found at *A. ii.* 121 they are birth, old age, disease and death while only the second version found at *A. ii.* 121 reproduces the list of fire, water, kings and robbers, although not in the order given by Khieu Chum.

<sup>84</sup> Meah Mut, soon to become a leading figure in Democratic Kampuchea, was a monk living in *kot* 13 at that time (My interview with Chum Kanal, Phnom Penh 25 January 2006). For more on Meah Mut, see Heder & Tittmore 2004: 46, n.60 & 87.

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សង្ខេប

*The Monk and the King: Khieu Chum and Regime Change in Cambodia*

ដោយ Ian Harris

នេះគឺជាការសិក្សាលើកទីមួយលើប្រវត្តិ, ឥទ្ធិពលនិងគំនិតនយោបាយនៃព្រះតេជគុណខៀវ ជុំ (១៩០៧-៧៥) ដែលជាសង្ឃល្បីមួយអង្គ ហើយដែលមានបណ្តាញទំនាក់ទំនងសំខាន់ៗមួយក្នុងសកម្មភាពនយោបាយរបស់ព្រះអង្គនៅផ្នែកខាងដើមនៃសាធារណរដ្ឋខ្មែរ(១៩៧០-៧៥)។ ព្រះអង្គធ្វើការជួញដូរយូធីន ដែលក្នុងនោះតែងតែយកព្រះពុទ្ធសាសនាមកជាបង្អែកគាំទ្រការរំលោភបំពានប្លង់ខ្មែរ។ អត្ថបទនេះធ្វើវិភាគទៅលើសំណើរបស់ព្រះអង្គក្រោយឆ្នាំ១៩៧០ ហើយពិនិត្យមើលបរិបទទូទៅនៃចរន្តពុទ្ធសាសនាថេរវាទ ដែលមានទស្សនៈពាក់ព័ន្ធនឹងការគ្រប់គ្រងរដ្ឋ។

**Abstract**

*The Monk and the King: Khieu Chum and Regime Change in Cambodia*

Ian Harris

This is the first detailed study of the career, influences and mature political thought of the prominent Cambodian Buddhist monk, Khieu Chum (1907-75). An active and well-connected figure during the early part of the Khmer Republic period (1970-75), Khieu Chum was the author of a number of works that provided a Buddhist justification for the overthrow of the Cambodian monarchy. This article analyses Khieu Chum's post-1970 literary output and seeks to situate his ideas within a wider current of Theravāda Buddhist discourse on acceptable forms of statecraft.

**Résumé**

*The Monk and the King: Khieu Chum and Regime Change in Cambodia*

Ian Harris

Voici une toute première étude détaillée sur la carrière, les influences et la conviction politique de Khieu Chum (1905-75), un moine bouddhiste khmer très en vue. Actif dans ses multiples relations durant la première période de la République khmère (1970-75), Khieu Chum était l'auteur de plusieurs travaux donnant l'aval bouddhiste au renversement de la monarchie cambodgienne. Cet article fait l'analyse de la production littéraire de Khieu Chum d'après 1970 et cherche à replacer ses idées dans un plus vaste courant theravadin qui discourait sur les formes d'organisation étatiques.