



ISSN 1076-9005
Volume 5 1998: 358-360
Publication date: 16 August 1998

Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand.
By Kamala Tiyavanich. University of Hawaii Press, 1977, xxi + 410 pages,
ISBN 0-8248-1781-8, U.S. \$29.95.

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In exploring Thailand's forest monk tradition, Kamala — according to whom Thai authors are referred to by their first names, and thus that convention is followed here — analyzes the birth of the modern state of Thailand and its impact on Buddhist monasticism. Kamala's account of modern Thai history focuses on the centralizing force of Bangkok, which in the nineteenth century sought to unify diverse groups of people in what is today known as Thailand through, among other things, language and religion. One dimension of this centralizing tendency was the effort at the center to marginalize many Buddhist practices, including some festivals patronized by monks, as well as other activities considered by Bangkok monastic officials to be improper activities for the sangha. According to Kamala, these officials judged spiritual development by scholastic achievements rather than by contributions to society such as farming, or by successful meditative states which, in addition to scholarly acumen, were highly valued by regional Buddhists, monks and laity alike. Bangkok's insistence that despite manifold cultural practices monks conform to one vision of Buddhism resulted in the *Sangha Act* of 1902, designed to prevent local monks from perpetuating regional Buddhist traditions. Eventually modern "state" Buddhism emerged, with one language — Thai — and, more importantly, with a marked de-emphasis of meditation, which initially contributed to the decline of the forest monks' contemplative tradition. Undaunted by the administrative control of Bangkok's centralizing monastic authority, meditation monks have continued to defy the state's vision of the sangha, instead embodying and representing the practices of "regional" Thai Buddhism.

Kamala's historical discussion of the differences between "state" and "regional" varieties of Thai Buddhism, and their relationship to the forest monk tradition, is of great value to the scholar and student of Southeast Asian Buddhism and contributes much that is new to the field of Buddhist Studies. The study picks up where S. J. Tambiah's 1984 classic on Thai Buddhism leaves off: Kamala explores in detail the lives of forest monks and how those lives are shaped by institutions at the center; Tambiah's study focuses on the ways in which Thai forest monks and their activities actually shape the center, Bangkok. Yet the critique with which Kamala begins her study— that contemporary historians insist "Thai" Buddhism is the urban, bookish Buddhism of the state, rather than of the regions (p. 2) — is unfounded, particularly considering the work of Donald Swearer. Swearer's 1995 study of Buddhism in Southeast Asia (which, if her bibliography is any indication, Kamala does not seem to have consulted) provides a balanced account of Buddhism at the center and at the periphery in Thailand. In addition, while he focuses on Thailand in his *Buddhism, Im-*

perialism and War (1979), Trevor Ling, whose work Kamala does not mention, argues that Buddhism in Bangkok is “unrepresentative of the Thai Sangha as a whole, the vast majority of whom live outside the capital and adhere to the traditional Thai Buddhist forms and practices” (p. 57).

Despite having set up a straw man, Kamala proceeds successfully to recount the modern resurgence of the forest monk tradition in Thailand, connecting the resurgence to political developments at the center. However, despite her lively discussion of the emergence of state Buddhism and its impact on the contemplative tradition in Thai Buddhism, she could have benefited from studies of Sri Lanka, another Buddhist country in which a type of state Buddhism developed at roughly the same time. In short, Kamala seems uninterested in the state Buddhism of Sri Lanka, scholarship on which could have provided an interesting contrast for developments in Thailand. Though Kamala contributes many fascinating life histories of a variety of Thailand’s forest monks, thereby demonstrating that despite the state’s efforts to control the hinterlands regional varieties of Buddhism are alive and well in Thailand, her study does not take advantage of the work of many who share her interests in the relationship between the state and religion in Buddhist countries. Thus, some aspects of Kamala’s study lack scholarly thoroughness.

This lack is particularly striking in the areas of the study that treat monks and gender dynamics. Kamala could have benefited from Liz Wilson’s 1996 study of Buddhist meditation and the female form or, if Wilson’s study was not available, the plethora of other studies on gender and Buddhism, inasmuch as Kamala features monks and their sexuality without comment. Indeed, while Kamala pays careful attention to detail in her descriptions of many elements of her subjects’ lives, including wandering monks’ fears (of traveling alone, living in cemeteries, and so on), bodily suffering, and sexual desire, she does so without scholarly reflection. The striking lack of scholarly reflection and the gaps in the bibliography, however, should not blind us to the rich historical and anthropological data that Kamala has assembled into a very readable account of the forest monk tradition of Thailand. Kamala’s study is a welcome book and will prove to be a valuable resource at the undergraduate teaching level.