



**Udomittipong, Pipob and Chris Walker, eds.** *Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium: Essays in honor of the Ven. Phra Dhammapitaka (Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto) on his 60th birthday anniversary.* Bangkok: Sathirakoses–Nagapradipa Foundation and Foundation for Children, 2542/1999, 531 pages, ISBN: 974–269–154–2, US \$38.00 (paper), US \$60.00 (cloth).

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*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 (2000): 182–184  
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**T**he Venerable Prayudh (current ecclesiastical title, Dhammapitaka), also known by the pen name P. A. Payutto, has achieved one of the highest ecclesiastical titles within the monastic ranks of the Thai *sangha*. Although the Ven. Prayudh has served the *sangha* in several institutional capacities, including a tenure as the abbot of Wat Phra Phirain in Bangkok and as the deputy secretary-general of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, his high ecclesiastical rank as well as many other honors—including several honorary degrees and the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education (1994)—acknowledge him primarily as an educator and scholar. The Ven. Prayudh deserves the accolades that compare him with Somdet Vajirañāṇavararasa, considered the “founder” of the modern Thai *sangha*. The Ven. Prayudh was appointed by the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai *sangha* to oversee the revision of the second basket (*Sutta-Piṭaka*) of the Thai *tipiṭaka* project, and was the project advisor to BUDSIR (The Buddhist Scriptures Information Retrieval) Project of Mahidol University, the first complete Buddhist canon in electronic format. His two Buddhist dictionaries and his magnum opus, *Buddhadhamma*, will endure as significant and lasting contributions to Thai Buddhist scholarship.

In the opening essay of this festschrift honoring the Ven. Prayudh, Bruce Evans, who is completing the translation of the expanded edition of

*Buddhadhamma*, proposes that two themes dominate the Ven. Prayudh’s life and scholarship, wise attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*) and an emphasis on education: “The former offers an ancient Buddhist technique of thinking that can be applied by anyone in any situation ... In the latter we have the point at which Venerable Prayudh envisions the beginning of any real work of social improvement.” Evans rightly observes that Prayudh does not see himself as an innovator (in the vein, for example, of the noted Thai monk, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu), but as “applying intelligent thought” to the tradition. In doing so he brings it inward (*opanayika*) through personal reflection and then uses that knowledge to examine human life and society. When he speaks to issues of forest destruction, abortion, or the recent controversies surrounding the Santi Asok and Dhammakāya movements, his remarks are grounded in *suttas* from the Pāli Canon commentary, the history of the Theravāda tradition, and his sensitivity to the unique religious role of the *sangha* in society that should not become overly politicized.

*Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium* contains thirty–seven essays divided into five sections (“Socially Engaged Buddhism,” “Buddhism and Contemporary Thai Society,” “Buddhism and Nonviolence,” “Buddhist Contributions in the Modern and Contemporary World,” and “Buddhism and the Environment”), an introduction, and an appendix. While these categories do not account for the range of topics addressed in the volume, they do indicate its major emphases.

Although the contributors come from a variety of backgrounds, generally speaking they represent the following groups: monastic and lay Western Buddhists, e.g. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Bhikkhu Sumedho, Stephen Batchelor, and Stephanie Gaza; Western scholars of Buddhism, e.g. Charles F. Keyes, Sallie B. King, Robert Bobilin, and David Chappell; socially engaged Buddhists, e.g. A. T. Ariyaratna and Glen D. Paige; and friends and associates of Sulak Sivaraksa, the honorary editor, e.g. Pracha Hutauwatr and Jonathan Watts. Given the wide range of contributors, the essays vary significantly in content and length and fit rather loosely into the volume’s structure. The contrasts between some of the essays are often striking. For example, Buddhist Contributions in the Modern and Contemporary World includes a brief scholarly study of two verses found in Sanskrit, Pāli, and Prakrit texts by Peter Skilling, a fellow of the Pali Text Society, while in the same section Venetia Wallkey, a Buddhist artist and peace activist, offers a lengthy proposal for a Dhamma Park in Thailand in a fifty–page article. This section also includes essays on Buddhist economics, Buddhist psychotherapy, and Buddhism and agriculture, as well as a group of three essays on Buddhist education. The variety of topics and approaches represented by the volume is both a strength and a weakness.

This reviewer found one of the most provocative juxtapositions to be between Charles F. Keyes's brilliant critical analysis of the loss of the Thai *sangha*'s moral authority and the morally impassioned essays by the socially engaged Buddhists. In the light of Keyes's essay, one wonders if the moral authority of Thai Buddhism does not now depend on them rather than ecclesiastical, civil Buddhism.

In his essay, "A Dhammic Pedagogy: True Religion and True Science," Jonathan Watts agrees with Bruce Evans that the Ven. Prayudh's most vital contribution to Thai society is his focus "on bringing traditional Buddhist teachings in line with streams of contemporary social dialogue." Watts then constructs an original essay on Buddhist education rather than embarking on a study of the Ven. Prayudh's constructive theory of Buddhist education. Although Watts and others make reference to the Ven. Prayudh, other than a translation of his essay "Monks and the Forest" that illustrates his text and tradition-based approach to social problems (as noted by Evans and Watts), *Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium* does not directly address the thought of the Ven. Prayudh in any substantial way. The corpus of the Ven. Prayudh's work is considerable, and more and more of it is appearing in English. One hopes that in the future there will be another volume that not only honors the Venerable Phra Dhammapitaka, but gives this major Thai Buddhist thinker's work the attention it richly deserves.

*Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium* is available at Suksit Siam, 113 Fuang Nakhon Rd., Opp. Wat Rajbopith, Bangkok 10200, Thailand, e-mail: [sop@ffc.inet.co.th](mailto:sop@ffc.inet.co.th).