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Review of 'How To Behave: Buddhism and  
Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930,' by  
Anne Ruth Hansen, and 'Cambodge: The  
Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945,' by Penny  
Edwards

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In sum, taken together these three books enrich our vision of the spiritual dimension of Balinese painting and, in so doing, prompt readers to reassess traditional assumptions about the role of arts in society.

KATHLEEN ADAMS  
*Loyola University Chicago*

*Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945*. By PENNY EDWARDS. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. 392 pp. \$65.00 (cloth).

*How To Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860–1930*. By ANNE RUTH HANSEN. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. 272 pp. \$58.00 (cloth).  
doi:10.1017/S0021911808001630

Both of these books begin in 1860, the year that King Norodom inherited the Cambodian throne from his father, Ang Duong. Three years later, Norodom and the French would sign an agreement making Cambodia part of the French colonial empire. That both books should choose 1860 rather than 1863 as the date for their history's origin is telling, for each volume attempts, in different disciplines, to perform a history that undermines the standard categories and classifications that have dominated Cambodia ever since, for Khmer and non-Khmer alike.

Penny Edwards's book, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945*, begins with the story of one of Pol Pot's pseudonyms, "The Original Khmer." This was the term given to the class of upland minority groups by a previous generation of Khmer nationalists, so Pol Pot was reappropriating a fantasy of indigeneity and claiming a symbolic racial legitimacy for his program. Edwards quickly moves back to the years in which the Khmer nation had yet to be born, and in which Cambodian sovereignty would begin its movement from the king to the revolutionary nation via the period of French colonialism. During this time, French colonists and Cambodian elites cooperated in shaping the image of the Khmer nation, precisely by competing over the image of Angkor Wat, the enormous funerary temple that continues to dominate the Khmer national imagination.

Anne Hansen's book, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860–1930*, chooses to treat modernity and religion, instead of the nation, in the same period. Whereas Edwards focuses on the screen of Angkor Wat in the projection of the Khmer nation (p. 22), Hansen identifies Buddhism as the domain in which modernity was imagined and brought into being (p. 3). For Hansen, Buddhism's import to the social history of modern Cambodia comes out of its authority in the ethical realm. Both challenged and inspired by various processes linked to something called "modernity," influential Buddhist monks began a movement that "joined ... what it meant to live in the contemporary world with interpretations of what it meant to be a good Buddhist" (p. 3).

Both Edwards and Hansen emphasize the importance of imagination, interaction, and the lack of any determined end to the histories under examination. On the contrary, what is uniformly demonstrated in both books is precisely the creativity and agency of groups that were competing over the very products that they, together, were in the process of creating and shaping: the modern, Khmer, Buddhist nation-state.

Edwards, trained as a historian, takes a plural approach to her examination of the cultivation of the Cambodian nation during this primarily colonial period. Organized into ten chapters of roughly progressive chronology, the book examines the various influences on the image of the nation that was being shaped and reshaped. Chapter 1 focuses on the “discovery” of Angkor Wat by Henri Mouhot and its subsequent fetishization by the French as a symbol of a once-great nation’s past glory and contemporary degeneracy. Chapter 2, in turn, focuses on the rise of a truly urban space in Phnom Penh, the reorganization of social geography, and the enormous social chasms that this new geography helped to institute—ones that helped lay “the groundwork for the iconoclastic antiurbanism of the Khmer Rouge” (p. 61). Thus, she depicts a time when the image of Khmer greatness and ruin was contrasted with the French-oriented resuscitation of Khmer vitality in the image of the city.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the rise of an indigenous intellectual class and the transformation of the Buddhist *sangha* along lines commonly recognized today as “modern”: opposed to what Steven Collins refers to as “localized supernaturalism,” obsessed with doctrinal purity and textual authenticity, and opposed to the magical and protective practices which occupy so much of the time and energies of Buddhist monks. The stabilizing effect of the protectorate on Cambodia’s patronage networks enabled the rise of an intellectual class that collaborated closely with French officials in the earliest determinations of the Khmer nation. In similar fashion, colonial security interests coincided with the rise of a faction of ambitious modernizing monks who helped inaugurate the reforms of institutional Buddhism.

In many ways, the next four chapters return to these themes in terms of new persons and moments, identifying the shifts that took place in the image of the nation and its mobilization. In chapter 5, we witness the French desacralization of Angkor as they stripped it of its contemporary Buddhist trappings in order to place the temple in the eternal ethnographic present for the purposes of tourism and colonial ideology. At the same time, the Cambodian public became the greatest supporter of Angkor’s renovation, donating more money and (*corvée*) labor than any other sector. Chapter 6, which forms a central axis of the book’s argument and narrative, discusses the way in which the proliferation of the image of Angkor and (the restriction in form of) traditional handicrafts seems to have led to a “new form of identity,” that of “the model and the copy—as well as the procedure taught for its multiplication” (pp. 164–65). The search for authenticity, based on an anxiety of loss and decline, is overcome here by the skilled mimesis of those who, by copying, create authenticity anew.

Chapter 7 discusses the secularization of the *sangha*, along the same lines of authenticity, mimesis, and creation that marks Edwards’s narrative throughout.

This chapter, which focuses on the reforms imposed on Buddhism by the French, especially in the domain of education, is followed by the remarkable story of Chuon Nath, Huot Tath, and Suzanne Karpelès. The first two were rising modernist monks who would both eventually become national patriarchs; the last was a French Jew whose contribution to modernist Khmer Buddhism seems in this presentation to have been nearly as vital. These three worked together, opposing attempted interventions from many sides—Khmer Buddhist traditionalists and French officials. Karpelès was eventually forced out by the Vichy regime for being a Jew. Chuon Nath died a few years before the civil war that marked the descent of Cambodia into its very modern hell, and Huot Tath died during that period.

Having determined the tropes that would mark Khmer nationalism, and having followed their development and spread through society, Edwards uses chapters 9 and 10 to watch these tropes move into the period which marks modern Khmer nationalism proper—the launch of nationalist publications such as *Nagaravatta* and the rise of anticolonial resistance movements such as the Issarak. The Vichy regime had created a local scouting movement, combining education, military organization, and ethos, with a vision of a racial nation that would become even more important and sinister in the hands of the Khmer Rouge.

Edwards's book destabilizes the traditional narrative of European-originated modernity in which the non-European modern can always only be lacking, a copy of an original. She simultaneously manages to undermine the victimizer/victimized trope that can sometimes accompany the stimulus-response narrative, focusing instead on the intersections of desire and action that cultivated the Cambodian nation. The book can sometimes feel repetitive and overstuffed and will, for those reasons, likely resist the easy comprehension of students in undergraduate courses, though the surfeit of detail and stories is precisely what recommends it, in part, to the Cambodian specialist; graduate students of the postcolony will find this book a welcome addition to debates on subject, mimesis, authenticity, and image.

One complaint relates to the lack of a consistent method of transliteration of Khmer words. In numerous places, the same word is transliterated in different ways, giving rise to the mistaken impression that different words are actually meant. This is unnecessarily confusing and frustrating. It is an ongoing hurdle for Cambodian studies that we have no standard of transliteration but instead multiple systems that are preferred largely along disciplinary lines. There are peculiarities to the Khmer language that make a homogenous system of transliteration difficult, and agreement may be difficult to achieve, but to avoid any consistent system seems an unreasonable alternative.

Hansen's training in religious studies has led her to combine a historical approach with careful attention to the power of normative ethical reflection in the making of modernity. The creation of modernity requires, among other things, the possibility of modern citizens with modern norms of behavior that mark them as members of a fully modern and authentic nation-state. By focusing on the ways in which discourses about ethical behavior generated modernizing

religious reforms and new behavioral norms for both monks and members of the laity, Hansen identifies Buddhism as a core “site for imagining and expressing modernity in Cambodia” (p. 3).

Attending to ethics and the religious mode of life, Hansen engages in two further methodological moves that would be unremarkable if they were not so rarely followed in practice. First, she agrees with Dipesh Chakrabarty—a considerable influence throughout this book—that “the re-enchantment of our understanding of the colonial world in Southeast Asia may be necessary if we are to understand the diverse ways in which people have experienced the shift to modern ways of thinking and being” (p. 6). That is to say, taking an enchanted view of the world seriously must be a necessary component of understanding how modernization happens. Taking “others” seriously also aids in accomplishing another part of the task of “provincializing Europe”: Highlighting the authenticity of lives that do not conform to European-originated models of modernity, the unity of the modern national subject is itself undermined.

Hansen’s second move is to insist that it is in the tension between normative discourse and practiced behavior that meaning is encountered and potentially transformed. That is, meaning in one realm is not merely a distorted reflection of the other. Both of these moves accomplish laudable results: They emphasize the integrity and agency of local experience without relativizing it out of utility for comparison with other cases, and both rely on the importance of finding meaning in relationship rather than prioritizing one over the other, hence missing the importance of both.

Chapter 1 treats primarily the normative Buddhist ethical literatures of pre-modernist Cambodian Buddhism, with special attention to *jataka* tales, but also to the pedagogical and ethical writings of scholars concerned by the pace and origin of change and its meaning for Cambodians. As concerned as these early authors were, their ethical reflections took place in a almost entirely imaginal realm, with little reference to what we would normally refer to as history. By chapter 2, Hansen has introduced the counterpoint to these early reflections, discussing the changes imposed under the protectorate and the responses of Cambodians to these changes: millenarianism and some of the first pedagogical ethical texts intended for lay consumption.

In chapter 3, Hansen sets her representation into motion, showing how scholarly Buddhist anxieties about purity and power led to the adoption and elaboration of a particular form of religious purity based on a fundamentalist reading of canonical scriptures and the rejection of all other traditional Buddhist practices. This scholastic-textual Buddhism was inspired by the new monastic sect of the Dhammayuth in Siam. For reasons partly attributable to colonial competition and French colonial policy, however, this form of Buddhism became most important in Cambodia as part of a modernizing faction within the much more populous and non-royally affiliated Mahanikay.

Chapters 4 and 5 trace the development of this new Cambodian modernizing force, its rise to prominence and dominance, and throughout, its central concerns with the ethical Buddhist subject in a world that is necessarily modern, and should also necessarily be—at least in part—both Buddhist and Cambodian.

Hansen's book is clearly organized and rarely strays from a tight focus on her argument. This makes it an excellent choice for undergraduate courses, in which it can occasionally be difficult to maintain simultaneous classroom foci on arguments and exempla unless they are rigorously coordinated. Hansen's work challenges the still-dominant narratives that privilege one of our binary categories of thought instead of their creation and reshaping. But she does this, refreshingly, without ever allowing her work to descend into abstract theory. Her references to Chakrabarty's work are clear, justified, and enlightening, and her adoption of Charles Hallisey's concept of "intercultural mimesis" is productive.

The world apparently does not operate according to the binary categories that appear so fundamental to humanity's manner of apprehending it. This is easy to understand in the abstract, but few histories actually undermine powerful social categories. These two books do so, successfully and intentionally. Western scholars' attempts to comprehend and write the history of the world's postcolonies have often obscured or misrepresented the agency and role of locals in the production of modernity, and both of these books contribute to the salutary destruction of categories that perpetuate this distortion. That they do so without denying the importance of studying the colonial project or policy indicates that they have not merely reversed the traditional privilege accorded to one part of a binary pair but are doing something much more important: writing good history.

ERIK W. DAVIS  
*Macalester College*

*Sukarno and the Indonesian Coup: The Untold Story.* By HELEN-LOUISE HUNTER. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007. 216 pp. \$75.00 (cloth).

*Pretext for Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'État in Indonesia.* JOHN ROOSA. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006. 328 pp. \$50.00 (cloth); \$23.95 (paper).

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For nearly forty-five years, the momentous events of 1965–66 in Indonesia—a murky attempted purge, putsch, or coup (or successful military coup); the destruction of Indonesia's Communist Party (PKI), involving the deaths of hundreds of thousands; and the beginning of a generation of governance dominated by the military—have eluded adequate explanation by scholars and public commentators, Indonesian or otherwise. It is an exaggeration to pronounce these events collectively "one of modern history's great mysteries" (Stephen Drakeley, *The History of Indonesia* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005], 111), but they have indeed posed serious questions and given rise to remarkably acrimonious, ideologically polarized, and conspiracy-soaked debates that have affected the