

# The concept of legitimisation within Khmer Buddhism as an influence on Cambodian politics from 1930 - 1978

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From the restructuring of the Cambodian sangha (monastic order) under the French to the victory of the Khmer Rouge forces over the Lon Nol Government, Buddhism and its place in Cambodian society either provided or withdrew political legitimacy. It was this concept of legitimacy which made Buddhism, theoretically a religion of ascetics and non-involvement in politics, a political weapon. The sangha was used by both the right and left of Cambodian politics to appeal to the people and the King played on the quasi religious aspect of title to maintain power. Just as quickly as Buddhism provided political legitimacy, it also took it away and the decline of that very same King is testament to this. The Khmer Rouge understood this and used the religion and the traditional beliefs of the Cambodian people in their struggle. After gaining power the Khmer Rouge saw Buddhism only as a potential opponent, particularly regarding the question of legitimacy, and sought to destroy it. The question as to how Buddhism came to play this role in politics when it appears to be an individualistic religion requires not only analysis of Buddhism as a faith but also its practice in Cambodian society.

Buddhism is based on a set of laws whereby the course of the world's existence is understood to be found in the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>1</sup> It is a faith which focuses on individual consciousness and state of mind rather than acting as an institutional religious force. The Buddha taught of a world where the endless search for material wealth is based on the false premise that possessions grant greater freedom.<sup>2</sup> The faith focuses on freeing the individual of suffering through virtuous acts and a moral life which give that person good karma for the next life. This freedom cannot be achieved through society and its institutions and its substitution with another society with a greater degree of freedom is pointless.<sup>3</sup> The unfreedom stems from the society and the person's attachment to it, so it is only when a person renounces society that they are really free. Buddhism does, however, recognize that a person's ability to attain freedom can be prevented by severe economic hardships.<sup>4</sup> When looking at Buddhism and its revolutionary spirit or millennial potential, it is important first to examine the difference between the goal of the sophisticated or high Buddhist and that of the folk or low Buddhist.

Whereas for the career monk and committed ascetic the goal is nirvana, for the low Buddhist the central tenant of Buddhism as a faith is karma.<sup>5</sup> Although karma appears to predetermine one's suffering and therefore renders struggle pointless, the effects karma may emerge at any time and one's karmic potential is unknown. If for example a peasant usurped the throne and pronounced himself king this could be explained by this hidden karma. One's karma may also be transferred from one person

<sup>1</sup> Pratt, D., "Religious Concepts of 'World': Comparative Metaphysical Perspectives" *Sophia*, 31, 3, (1992), p.78.

<sup>2</sup> Puligandla, R. and Puhakka, K., "Buddhism and Revolution" *Philosophy East and West*, 20, (1970), p. 347.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.352.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.349.

<sup>5</sup> Keyes, C.F., "Millenarianism, Theravada Buddhism and Thai Society" *Journal of Asian Studies*, 36, (1977), pp. 286.

to another and there are those who use their vast sums of merit to improve the “this-worldly” conditions of those associated with them. In Theravada Buddhism two Boddhisattva’s are permitted, the first being Gotama Buddha and the second, the Mettaya or Maitreya who is the Buddha to come.<sup>6</sup> Occasionally a figure who has devoted their life to asceticism, gains a reputation for being able to help those with whom they come into contact. Such people may very rarely be recognized as Maitreya and thus gain a following which may translate into the beginnings of a millennial movement.<sup>7</sup>

Michael Vickery claims that “probably more arrant nonsense has been written in the West about Buddhism than any other aspect of Southeast Asian life.”<sup>8</sup> He was referring to the belief of some Western writers that pure Buddhism or high Buddhism and its practice in Southeast Asia should have protected the Khmers from the Khmer Rouge. The nature of the faith in Cambodia, however, is that the majority of the population were not deeply involved in high Buddhist practices. In pre-1970 Cambodian society about 90% of the people were practicing Buddhists.<sup>9</sup> The religion of the Cambodian peasantry has been described as a mixture of Theravada Buddhist and folk beliefs revolving around a variety of animistic spirits.<sup>10</sup> Cambodian villagers rarely think about following different religious traditions. The faith of the people, including Buddha, ghosts, prayers at the temple and invocations to spirits all make up what is essentially a single religious tradition. Cambodians, however, according to Mouly were more interested in the ritual “aspects of Buddhism than in efforts to search for the essential of its teachings.”<sup>11</sup> The rituals gave them a sense of protection by some supernatural power and promised a better next life.

Opportunities to gain merit through ceremonies or the offering of food to Buddhist monks, in the hope of a better next life was one of the most important elements of Cambodian Buddhism.<sup>12</sup> This is reflected through the words of an 18 year old Cambodian girl, “I think I will go to three or four Kathun festivals this year so that I will be reborn as a rich American.”<sup>13</sup> The fundamental difference between this girl’s conception of her faith and the theory behind Buddhism reflects the difference between the practice of high and low Buddhism. It also shows a breakdown in the teaching of the essentials of the faith. Mouly cites an uneducated and incompetent sangha as being partly responsible for the failure to understand the Buddhist teachings and the corruption and violence which accompanied this lack of understanding among those who visited the pagodas.<sup>14</sup> The practice of the faith had also become more elitist with the poor generally excluded from many of the practices which were considered crucial for acquiring merit and status. A period spent as a monk was believed to be essential to becoming a full adult and attaining respect from other villagers.<sup>15</sup> Those who could not afford to spare the manpower of sending their son to the monastery

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>8</sup> Vickery, M., *Cambodia: 1975-1982* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Mouley, I., “Buddhism and the Future of Cambodia” from the Library of Indochina Archive p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Ebihara, M., “Revolution and Reformulation in Kampuchean Village Culture” in Abbin and Hood, (eds) *The Cambodian Agony* (1987) p.21.

<sup>13</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Mouly, “Buddhism and the future of Cambodia”, pp. 45-6.

<sup>15</sup> Weleratna, U., *Beyond the Killing Fields: Voices of Nine Survivors In America* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 47.

suffered socially and spiritually as did those who could not afford to give alms to monks or contribute at times of festivals. There was no notion of relative donations so that the poor could feel that they had contributed by giving a little of the little they had. "Cambodian Buddhism was desecrated long before the Democratic Kampuchea regime closed the temples, by the blatant class manipulation of the faith under Sihanouk's Sangkum..."<sup>16</sup> Therefore the poor grew increasingly hostile to their inclusion from the faith and found the Khmer Rouge's notion of class importance more inclusive. "The essence of Buddhism had been generally lost all over the country and our belief had become an empty ritual. Perhaps, therefore, our Karma was bad..."<sup>17</sup>

"The new face of Buddha is involved and passionate, harsh and stern, contorted with humiliation, rage and anxiety."<sup>18</sup> This was the feeling of one Western journalist when faced with the growing politicization of the Buddhist Sangha throughout Southeast Asia and his observations led him to claim Buddhism was "a faith in flames".<sup>19</sup> The developments in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in relation to Buddhism and its practical role in society and politics in Cambodia are testament to this. Recent challenges to authority in Southeast Asia such as colonialism have served to redefine the role of the sangha in society and have questioned the authority of the monastic order.<sup>20</sup> Buddhist kingdoms in pre-Colonial Southeast Asia have traditionally resembled the galactic nature of the Buddhist world view where social and religious power branched out from the center to the periphery.<sup>21</sup> The righteous king or the universal monarch represent the secular authority while the sangha gains its religious authority from the renunciation of worldly possessions in their pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Harmony is at its height when the King's rule follows closely the teachings of the Buddha and the monk's observance of the same teachings bestows merit on the king.<sup>22</sup> A strong king was patron over a unified but weak sangha.<sup>23</sup> The French believed that religion and state should remain separate in their Southeast Asian territories and the reforms they introduced served to centralize the sangha, increasing their control. The bolstering of the center also attempted to protect the order from charismatic and potentially dangerous millennial movements at the periphery.<sup>24</sup> In Cambodia however, these reforms had the opposite effect.

In 1930 the French established the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh and one of its functions was to protect monks at the periphery from potentially disruptive contact with Thai monks.<sup>25</sup> The Institute soon began to publish its own Khmer language newspaper, the Nagaravatta (Angkor Wat). The Institute was initially established to provide a forum for furthering Buddhist studies but it soon became the

<sup>16</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p.11.

<sup>17</sup> Mouly "Buddhism and the Future of Cambodia", p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Schecter, J., *The New Face of Buddha: Buddhism and Political Power in Southeast Asia* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967), p. XII.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XI.

<sup>20</sup> Schober, J., "The Theravada Buddhist Engagement with Modernity in Southeast Asia: Whither the social paradigm of the galactic polity?" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 26, 2, (1995), p. 309.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.313.

<sup>25</sup> Chandler, D.P., *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p.16.

center for the political ideas of the monastic order and a rallying point for the growing Cambodian intelligentsia.<sup>26</sup> The main uprising of the colonial period and an incident which has been referred to as the “awakening of Cambodian nationalism” was also led by the monks and had links to the Institute.<sup>27</sup> In 1942 following the arrest of two monks on the charge of spreading discord among members of the Cambodian militia, 1000 people, about half of whom were monks took to the streets and assembled outside the headquarters of the French leader to demand the release of their colleagues. Although the protest was primarily against the French rulers, discontent was also directed towards the King for not supporting the monastic order.<sup>28</sup> The monks involved in the revolt were part of a new wave of Buddhist monks who had a good understanding of the Tipitaka (the Buddhist holy script).<sup>29</sup> They found justification in the script for the involvement of monks in politics where peace and the happiness of the people were the goal and this sometimes brought them into conflict with the monarch.<sup>30</sup>

This incident was the manifestation of a growing wave of political involvement which saw some monks joining Son Ngoc Thanh, the Buddhist Institutes former librarian, in the right wing movement the Khmer Serei or Free Khmer and a few, most notably Tou Samouth and Son Ngoc Minh, moving toward the political left. In the 1950’s the left wing was represented by the United Issarak Front which had strong appeal in religious circles.<sup>31</sup> In 1952 Son Ngoc Minh accompanied by Prom Samith toured Khmer Krom to rally support for their cause and in doing so they emphasized the role Buddhism had to play in the country’s independence struggle.<sup>32</sup> In February of 1952 forty-four monks representing monks located in the Eastern Zone of the country passed a resolution backing the Issaraks. In June of the same year Minh spoke of the convergence of Buddhism and socialism, “the cause for which we fight is just, conforming to the aspirations of the Buddhist faith.”<sup>33</sup> As early as 1953, however, the legitimacy of the monks’ increasing role in politics was being questioned. One article in a newspaper critical of the religious order backing the Issaraks, appeared under the title, “The Cambodian People are More Buddhist than their Monks.”<sup>34</sup> The monks revolt was the earliest example of the effects of an increasingly politicized sangha who had come together at the Buddhist Institute and gradually intensified the relationship between the Cambodian monarch and his people.<sup>35</sup>

The role of the Cambodian monarch can be traced back to the 9<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the Angkor period when on gaining power Jayavarman II gave himself the title of “universal monarch”.<sup>36</sup> He was elevated to the status of God-King or Supreme Ruler by the Brahman priests. Since then the position of the Cambodian

<sup>26</sup> Chandler, D.P., “Laos and Cambodia”, in Steinberg, D.J. (ed) *In Search of Southeast Asia* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp343.

<sup>27</sup> Kiernan, B. and Boua, C., *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1942-1981* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1982), p.120.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>29</sup> Mouly “Buddhism and the Future of Cambodia”, p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Kiernan, B., *How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 93.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Chandler, “Laos and Cambodia”, p. 343.

<sup>36</sup> Coedes, G., *The Making of South East Asia* (California: University of California Press, 1969), p. 97.

monarch has always included a quasi religious aspect. The man who inherited that title and role from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards was Norodom Sihanouk. The nature of government in Cambodia is such that with its Buddhist culture there was a distinct lack of intermediary structures between the Cambodian monarch and the people.<sup>37</sup> The absence of these structures took away the safeguards for democracy and during his reign Sihanouk capitalised on this. He dissolved two constitutionally elected National Assemblies during his reign and his abdication from the throne in 1955 to gain the position of Prime Minister led Cambodia to what has been called a happy paternalist dictatorship.<sup>38</sup> An emotive and at times enigmatic leader, Sihanouk has been credited with the peaceful overthrow of the French in Cambodia and with 15 years of peace and relative prosperity.<sup>39</sup> His abuses of the democratic system also contributed to the victory of a ruthless and bloody regime.

In the years of 1959 and 1960 Sihanouk was at the height of his popularity and the villagers were generally apolitical, merely echoing the views of the King.<sup>40</sup> Any subversive views were discouraged by the presence of local village militia.<sup>41</sup> The Cambodian King's legitimacy is linked to his capacity to ensure prosperity during bad times and to keep the people happy and healthy.<sup>42</sup> Sihanouk's tolerance of Vietnamese forces using Cambodian soil to transport arms made him unpopular with pro-American Cambodians. The extensive aerial bombardment of the Cambodian villages by American forces attempting to cut off military supplies to Vietnam also served to undermine his legitimacy.<sup>43</sup> The failure of Buddhist Socialism (his attempt to merge the two world views into government policy) saw Sihanouk grow impatient with Buddhist precepts.<sup>44</sup> He rejected non-violence as an effective political tool and he chose to use the death penalty against political opponents.<sup>45</sup> These actions showed him to be disrespectful of Buddhism, devalued his image in the eyes of the people and thus brought into question the religious legitimacy of his Kingship.<sup>46</sup> The stability that was at its height when the King followed closely the teachings of the Buddha was fractured and the increasingly weak king was the patron over a sangha that was neither unified nor politically weak.

The result of Sihanouk's declining popularity particularly among intellectuals and some of those pursuing high Buddhist goals manifested itself on March 8, 1970. In reaction to the devastation of villages by American bombing in the Svay Rieng province, demonstrators took to the streets to protest. The ruler's ability to ensure prosperity was questioned and ten days later the leader of the armed forces, Lon Nol, succeeded in a military coup against Sihanouk. Although high Buddhists and intellectuals had rallied for Sihanouk's departure, the low Buddhist peasantry did not rejoice. The absence of a monarch created anxiety amongst the peasants who believed

<sup>37</sup> Burgler, R.A., *The Eyes of the Pineapple: Revolutionary Intellectuals and Terror in Democratic Kampuchea*, vol. 2 in Nijmegen Studies in Development and Cultural Change (Saarbrücken: Verlag breitenbach, 1990), p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Mouly "Buddhism and the Future of Cambodia", p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Ebihara, M., "Revolution and Reformulation in Kampuchean Village Culture", p.19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, K.D., *Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with death* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 176.

<sup>43</sup> Sam, Y., *Khmer Buddhism and Politics From 1954 to 1984* (Newington: Khmer Studies Institute, 1987), p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

the country would not survive without a king whose role it was to communicate with the celestial powers.<sup>47</sup> For his part Lon Nol as first President of the Republic of Cambodia, laid the greatest stress on leading the country according to Buddhist teachings.<sup>48</sup> He argued that the war with the Khmer Rouge was a war which would decide the future of Buddhism in the country.<sup>49</sup> In preaching his message he enlisted the support of teachers and monks to convince the people that Khmer Rouge policies were a danger to Cambodian life. For their part the Khmer Rouge despite growing increasingly hostile to the monks aligned with Lon Nol, accusing them of being parasitic, used monks themselves in spreading their propaganda.<sup>50</sup> Many of the monks had been disillusioned with the governments of Sihanouk and Lon Nol.<sup>51</sup> It was a time when corruption, oppression and injustice were widespread in Cambodian society and bureaucracy. Many monks supported the Khmer Rouge when they spoke of independence, equity and revolution to free the country from colonialism and feudalism.<sup>52</sup> Khmer Rouge cadres claimed they would make a distinction between the city monks (imperialists) and the country monks (proper and revolutionary) just as they did with the lay people and this may have attracted some support from the rural monks.<sup>53</sup> There are many examples where Khmer Rouge member lied about the party's intentions towards Buddhism in promising a glorious future for the faith when their real intentions were the exact opposite.<sup>54</sup> As the war continued the monks in the Khmer Rouge "Liberated Zones" were forced to spend more time in reeducation and physical labour which made them realize their future might not be all that had been promised.

The Khmer Rouge emerged from under the umbrella of the Indochina Communist Party to gain power in Cambodia in April 1975. The leaders had been influenced by the Chinese and Russian models of communism and the Marxist notions of enfranchising oppressed people from capitalist exploitation.<sup>55</sup> Their French education provided the avenue for their Marxist learning. Many of the leaders had been teachers on their return to Cambodia including Saloth Sar (later named Pol Pot) and this gave them high status among the peasantry.<sup>56</sup> Chandler notes in his biography of Pol Pot that in his leadership he used his experience as a teacher, using slowly uttered words, calm demeanor, apparent warmth and a friendly manner which appealed to the Khmer tradition of "unruffled authoritarianism" also found in Buddhist and secular teaching.<sup>57</sup> Tou Samouth also became a charismatic figure for the movement. He had been a monk in the Buddhist Institute during WW2 but subsequently left to join the Vietminh in Eastern Cambodia.<sup>58</sup> Samouth's Buddhist rather than French education probably appealed to Pol Pot who wanted to appear

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<sup>47</sup> Jackson, *Cambodia 1975-1978*, p. 176.

<sup>48</sup> Sam, *Khmer Buddhism and Politics from 1954 to 1984*, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>51</sup> Boua, C., "Genocide of A Religious: Pol Pot and Kampuchea's Buddhist Monks" (*Center for Multicultural Studies*, University of Woolongong), pp. 3-4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Mouly "Buddhism and the Future of Cambodia", p. 45-6.

<sup>56</sup> Chandler, *Brother Number One*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

closer to the Khmer tradition than the French and it is true Samouth did appeal to many Cambodians.<sup>59</sup>

In Khmer mythology seers and hermits are regarded with great respect and a certain degree of fear.<sup>60</sup> This stems from the belief they had acquired great merit through dedication to absolute chastity.<sup>61</sup> They withdrew into the forests to meditate alone and live a frugal life. These were the first in the Khmer tradition of “forest monks” and they also served the role of educating travelers on the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>62</sup> In some cases they, and the forest monks who followed them, practiced traditional medicine, healing and mastered martial arts. From this contemplative life and total dedication they drew a formidable supernatural power.<sup>63</sup> The Khmer Rouge during their struggle against the governments of Sihanouk and Lon Nol spent a considerable amount of time in the Cambodian forests. In doing so they were conforming to the heroic stereotypes in Cambodian mythology where forest monks or exiled leaders attained these supernatural powers, wisdom and merit through their ascetic lives.<sup>64</sup> The myths also prophesised the time when they emerged from the forests and their immortality and martial arts skills served to make them invulnerable leaders.<sup>65</sup>

The Khmer Rouge knew of these superstitions and whether deliberately or not they benefited from them.<sup>66</sup> To many Khmers this group of devoted revolutionaries fitted this image and the charismatic element of the movement appealed. The Khmer Rouge and their image of totally devoted revolutionaries has many parallels to millennial movements. It lacks the religious element, although the Khmer Rouge had, prior to gaining power, promised Buddhism pride of place in its new society. One of the aspects of any religion is a set of symbols or code of ethics which is the basis for human action and the Khmer Rouge as a Communist movement had their own world view. A millennial movement’s sharp distinction between what Keyes has called the “elect” and the “damned”, represented in Cambodia as “new people” and “old people”.<sup>67</sup> Keyes also puts forward the argument that millennial movements are caused primarily by a crisis centering around political power.<sup>68</sup> The karma earned by the Khmer Rouge leaders in the forests made them meritorious and their dedication in fighting for the people suggested they were transferring this merit to others. Their charismatic leadership and teaching background aligned them with millennial movements. The effectiveness of the Cambodian Communists in this regard saw them regarded less as a political movement and more as Robin Hood type figures.<sup>69</sup>

The tradition of Cambodia’s leftist political groups, in particular the Khmer Issarak, meant that the Khmer Rouge inherited a reputation of putting the people first. In many areas the term “Communist” was used for people who had simple tastes, believed in the necessity of a good education, hated corruption and “were the only

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Saveros, P., “Indigenization of the Ramayana in Cambodia” *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51, 1, (April 1992), pp. 93-94.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Chandler, *Brother Number One*, p. 80.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Keyes, “Millenarianism, Theravada Buddhism and Thai Society”, p. 283.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Ebihara, M., “Revolution and Reformulation in Kampuchean Village Culture”, p.19.

people who cared about the poor”.<sup>70</sup> This image would have been very useful for the Khmer Rouge as it reflected the image they wished to project. The rural poor who had become disenchanted and resentful of the elitism within their religion were the most likely to be drawn to the Khmer Rouge. Buddhism had provided no barrier to class antagonism and violence and many elements of the Cambodian governmental structure had served to encourage both.<sup>71</sup> In moving from a Buddhist world view to that of the Communists the people would have seen certain parallels. Some who survived the Democratic Kampuchea period said without the killings and food scarcity they would not have fled the country.<sup>72</sup> The abandonment of possessions, family and residence for a life of working for the common good closely paralleled the teachings and life of the Buddha. The convergence of the two ideologies largely ended there and the Communist’s rejection of religion was to prove stronger than any similarities between the two world views. The legitimacy the Khmer Rouge had courted during their struggle was no longer required after their victory and the danger of Buddhism illegitimizing their rule, as it had with those who preceded them was not a risk they were prepared to take.

The Khmer Rouge used Buddhism during their struggle for power. They exploited the folklore and superstitions of the Cambodian people, but they were not the first. Sihanouk had used his title and the quasi religious connotations to which it was attached to maintain power. Monks had used their positions to give legitimacy to their political movements and Sihanouk, Lon Nol and the Khmer Rouge had all used monks in the same role. The practice of Buddhism in Cambodia was inseparable from politics and its intimate role in politics fostered disenchantment and finally hostility. Cambodian Buddhism, through its role in legitimizing political authority, destabilized the French by promoting early forms of nationalism. It contributed to undermining the leadership of Sihanouk and it refused, in the eyes of the peasants, to legitimize Lon Nol. To the Khmer Rouge this “special layer” had become too powerful.

*Monks have disappeared from 90 to 95 per cent, in the sense that the majority abandon religion. Monasteries, which were pillars for monks are largely abandoned, the people stop going to monasteries, stop having festivals and concentrate only in making dams and canals, etc. These pillars have disintegrated. In the future they will dissolve further. The political base, the economic base, the cultural base must be uprooted. Up to this stage the movement will go forward, not turn back. People run away from monasteries to work the land. It is here that we promise that monks and Buddhism will fall by 90 to 95 per cent. So this special layer has nothing to worry [us] about. So our society has changed tremendously.*<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Chandler, *Brother Number One*, p. 55.

<sup>71</sup> Vickery, *Cambodia 1975-1982*, p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> Jackson, *Cambodia 1975-1978*, p. 174.

<sup>73</sup> Boua, *Genocide of A Religious Group*, p. 12.



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