

Movable Peace: Engaging the Transnational in Cambodia's Dhammayietra

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The Dhammayietra is an annual peace walk in Cambodia that originated at the historic repatriation of refugees in the Thai border camps at the U.N.-monitored transition to democracy in 1992. It situates itself within the discourse and practice of "socially engaged Buddhism" that has gained visibility in Asia and American Buddhism during the last two decades. As Cambodia's particular form of socially engaged Buddhism is marked by refugee return, I will argue that the Dhammayietra's revival of Buddhism in postsocialist Cambodia is only possible because of its transnational formation. Represented as a quintessential Khmer Buddhist response to Cambodia's entrenched conflicts, the networks forged beyond the border of Cambodia have been instrumental in fashioning the face of the Dhammayietra. Though it forges its discursive identity vis a vis the "local" space of the nation, this local space is mobile. Maha Ghosananda's instruction to move "step by step" toward peace reappropriates dangerous mobility—the massive relocations during the Khmer Rouge era, refugee flight, the danger of treading on land fed with mines—and turns walking into a religious act. It is this discursive "move" that loosens the Dhammayietra's ties to the nation and allows it to slip across political and religious borders and ally itself with a diverse network of interfaith peace groups that are its transnational public forum.

In early May, a remarkable assembly of monks and lay persons traverse Cambodia's embattled terrain during the Dhammayietra, Cambodia's "pilgrimage of truth." Thousands of villagers line the roads for their arrival, ready for the *tuk mon*—blessing with lustral water—and incense that will be plunged into the water to "extinguish the fire of war." Each evening, the walkers will assemble in a local wat along the route for refreshment. Often at these times the walk's iconic leader, Maha Ghosananda reflects upon the Dhammayietra's purpose: "Peace is growing in Cambodia, slowly, step by step . . . Each step is a meditation. Each step is a prayer . . ." (Ghosananda 1992:65).

The Dhammayietra, Cambodia's annual peace walk, marks its birth by the opening of Cambodia's borders after the signing of the Peace Accords by the four Cambodian factions in the early 1990s.¹ In a country that has experienced the strangulation and unsteady rebirth of its religious identity, the Dhammayietra has come to represent the revitalization of Buddhism in postsocialist Cambodia. I will argue below that Maha Ghosananda and the Dhammayietra express this revitalization through the vehicle of "socially engaged Buddhism," a concept literally carried back to Cambodia on the heels of refugee return. Thus, the Dhammayietra maintains a balance between local legitimacy and a strategic transnationalism that has influenced its philosophy, symbolic production, and mindful practice.

SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM

"Socially engaged Buddhism" is a moniker coined by the South Vietnamese monk Thich Naht Hanh to refer to his order's commitment to a Buddhist basis for social action during the Vietnam War. Thich Naht Hanh became well known on both sides of the Pacific in the 1970s for his stance of nonviolence and radical neutrality, which earned him a nomination for the Nobel Peace prize by Martin Luther King, Jr.² In the 1980s, Sulak Sivaraksa, an outspoken Thai lawyer, took up the term and employed it as a Buddhist critique of development strategies in Thailand (Sivaraksa 1988, 1993; Swearer 1996). By the mid-1990s, an "international network of engaged Buddhists"

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(INEB) had formed with members in more than 30 countries, evincing the sophistication and vitality of contemporary transnational activism.³

Buddhism is generally characterized as having a weak social ethic; its soteriology is based on the individual route to enlightenment. The political engagement introduced by engaged Buddhists throughout Asia can be understood as a relatively new phenomenon. Such figures as Rahula Walpola, Ambedkar, Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa, and the Dalai Lama have been drawn into its ambit (see Queen and King 1996). Engaged Buddhist activists are unlike their predecessors, which were either small and countercultural reformists or the elite of a sangha who mandated changes in collusion with the power elite (Queen 1996:20). However, these activists share with Asoka, the paragon of a Buddhist social ethic who ruled India in the third century BCE, a vision of a nonviolent and compassionate society where goods and virtues are distributed evenly.

A centerpiece of the Buddhist justification for social action is the notion of interdependence or “interbeing” (Nhat Hanh 1997), the way in which all phenomenon are inextricably linked to and overlap each other. For engaged Buddhists, this translates into a concern for social accountability—the acts of one individual affect the whole, the moves of one nation shake the borders of its neighbors. The ethical practices of this social engagement are basic Buddhist norms—the eightfold path, practice of *metta* (loving kindness) and *karuna* (compassion), and the “middle path of equanimity, non-duality and non-attachment” (Ghosananda 1992:52). This is expressed in a stance of political neutrality and nonviolence. Buddhist leaders’ engagement in international politics (the Dalai Lama) and a critique of state-based development agendas (Sivaraksa) demand a foregrounding of “mundane awakening”—in the words of Weber a “this-worldly” asceticism—as equally important to the supramundane aspect of the dharma.

The Dhammayietra as a Cambodian example of engaged Buddhism has only recently been the subject of academic scholarship on engaged Buddhism partly because it is so new, emerging as a “movement” only since 1992, given Cambodia’s isolation from 1975 to 1990 due to the communist regimes of the Khmer Rouge and Soviet-backed Vietnamese. I will first trace transnational sources for engaged Buddhism, then turn to Ghosananda as the “Buddha of the battlefields” and the Dhammayietra as both transnational and local emblems of Khmer Buddhism. Finally, I will show how its theme of mobility translates the Dhammayietra’s liminality into mindful practice.

SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM AS TRANSNATIONAL

In *Engaged Buddhism*, a collection of essays on the key figures in this movement, Christopher Queen and Sallie King argue that the vitality of this movement marks a sea change in Buddhism across Asia. This sea change is in fact much broader than Buddhism, comprising a range of religious movements actively reformulating cultural politics worldwide (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Juergensmeyer 1993; Robertson and Garrett 1991; Rudolph and Piscatori 1997). This “deprivatized” religion (Casanova 1994) and its vigorous involvement in the public sphere in the last decades of the 20th century offers a counterresponse to secularization theories that have been forecasting the “disenchantment” of modern society since Weber. That this reinvigorated religious citizenship is transnational should come as no surprise, given the cross-border scope of most religious institutions since their inception. These contemporary religious formations, however, are also unlike their precedents, caught in the currents of global cultural flows that are marked by massive population movements, communication and technological innovation, and disorganized capital (Appadurai 1997; Clifford 1994; Offe 1985).

It is inevitable, then, that scholars should look for similarities among religious traditions espousing social critique and political action in their various communities. Queen and King suggest a family resemblance between engaged Buddhism and Christian liberation movements. By liberation movements they mean voluntary associations guided by exceptional leaders who

hold a common vision of society based on peace, justice, and freedom (Queen 1996:19). They are careful, however, to distinguish its philosophy from its Latin American counterpart nor do they assert that the latter has had any influence on the former. Engaged Buddhist philosophy, they point out, holds consistently to nonviolence, is less nationalistic, and is more universal than Latin American liberation theology, which tends to a greater particularism and social context. Unlike Latin American liberation theologians, Buddhist leaders are less likely to engage in a self-criticism of tradition.

Strong arguments have been made that the Protestant rationalism and reforming spirit of colonial Buddhist converts left a lasting imprint on Buddhist social ethics in Asia (Obeyesekere 1972; Queen 1996). The first generation of engaged Buddhists can be traced to Henry Steele Olcott (a Buddhist himself) who arrived in Sri Lanka in the late 1800s. The result of his energetic campaigns to politicize Buddhism produced what Gananth Obeyesekere has called “Protestant Buddhism,” a wash of Victorian Christian rationalism over Sri Lankan religious practices to remove any signs of “superstition” or indulgent spiritualism (Obeyesekere 1972).

So, too, contemporary forms of Buddhist social ethics show the marks of a vigorous transnational exchange between the West and the movements’ iconic figures. Buddhist advocates of social action, particularly the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, have drawn a large following in the West, fueled in no small part by Buddhism’s vitality as a religious practice among a middle-class intelligencia (Coleman 1999). The cultural production of American Buddhism through a remarkable array of periodicals, publishers, meditation centers, and the film industry promotes not only Buddhism’s “pure forms” but an American dhamma of social conscience, egalitarianism, and activism that has a quintessential American ingredient (Kraft 1992:xiii; see also Queen 1999). Thus, in the late 1970s and early 1980s as Thai and Sri Lankan monks were developing new forms of community service, American Buddhists were also seeking justification for social activism in their new religious practice (see Eppsteiner 1988; Jones 1992; Kraft 1992; Macy 1983). The Buddhist Peace Fellowship and Buddhist solidarity networks against state repression in Burma (Myanmar) and Tibet were established in the United States with the intent of transnational activism (Rothberg 1998).⁴

If engaged Buddhism is transnational, a fluid mixture of political forms and philosophies in an era of global cultural melange, the refugee outflow from Buddhist countries throughout Asia has contributed its own disjunctures and political reformulations of political and Buddhism in the late 20th century. According to Malkki, refugee experience of statelessness reveals the “national (read: natural) order of things” (Malkki: 1992:33). I would argue that deterritorialized peoples such as refugees (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1995; Rouse 1995) challenge the assumption that one’s identity is fixed to a place or a national culture. It follows then that their expressions of religious identity are similarly marked by this hybridity. Thus, the configurations of Buddhist activism forged in exile would necessarily carry a mix of metaphor and practice emblematic of a wide interchange.

CAMBODIAN BUDDHISM AND ITS “TRAGEDY OF HISTORY”

The Dhammayietra’s significance as an example of engaged Buddhism in Cambodia must be set within the political history of the last 20 years. Modern Cambodia has been depicted as foreign to both Western and Sinicized norms, inheriting a Theravada Buddhist conception of religion and kingship (Tambiah 1976).⁵ The upper echelons of the sangha, the community of monks, were often closely allied with the king. On the community level, Cambodian social life is organized around the wat, which was not only the main site of meeting, but also where rites of passage and healing are performed (Ebihara 1971). Traditionally, young Cambodian men join the monkhood for the rainy season to gain merit (*bon*) for a better future life and “ripen” them into adulthood.

These features were exploited by Sihanouk’s anti-U.S./pro-communist monarchy and Lon Nol’s “Buddhist holy war” to retrieve the purity of the Khmer race, culture, and Buddhism

(Yang 1987). But the Khmer Rouge's revolutionary goals interjected significant discontinuities into the sequence of Cambodian regimes. Four of the most predominant were: vast social transformation and control, a refusal to acknowledge imitation of foreign models, the dismantling of an entire market-based economy, and the extent of terror and violence sanctioned by the regime (Chandler 1991:240). Democratic Kampuchea sought to transform the nation into a "completely communist society without wasting time on intermediate steps."⁶ In so doing, they eschewed all signs of "corrupting" modern Western capitalism. This included technology, Western-style medicine, leisure time, private property, individualism, personality, and vanity (Jackson 1989; Pouchard 1989; Chandler 1991). Included here was a systematic extermination of all religious groups, and the sangha was targeted as pariah. An estimated 60,000 monks were forced to disrobe. Most of Cambodia's 3,000 monasteries were desecrated or converted to prisons. Former elites were recast as disposable "new people." Government officials, former military, and entire upper-class families were summarily executed as "enemies of the regime." But as the regime destabilized and xenophobia towards the Vietnamese escalated, "enemies within" also became suspect. Massive relocation and purges of Khmer Rouge cadre increased with paranoid intensity toward the end of 1978. The invasion of Vietnam in 1979 ended the Khmer Rouge experiment but maintained a socialist agenda, replacing one cadre of Khmer Rouge with others who had fled to Vietnam to seek the assistance of the new Socialist Republic.

Through the decade of Vietnamese occupation in Cambodia, Buddhism's rehabilitation was intended to serve the socialist state (Suksamran 1993). Monks were urged to attend revolutionary training courses and reinterpret the teachings of Buddha to support communist ideology and government policies. Any attempt to "sabotage the correct lines, subvert national and international solidarity and destroy the fruits of the Kampuchean people's revolution" would be punished (Suksamran 1993:143). Only men over the age of 50 could become monks. In the 15 years of antisectarian political culture, a younger generation of Cambodians was denied the conduit to community religious life.

Beyond the borders of Cambodia, Buddhism followed the two routes set by the mass of beleaguered refugees that converged in Thailand in 1979. For the 200,000 Cambodians who dispersed to resettlement sites in Europe, the United States, Australia, and Canada, the urban wats were sites for cultural restoration—promoting dance, language, festivals—without much attention to homeland politics (Kalab 1994; Smith-Hefner 1999). Buddhism served a similar purpose in the camps that speckled the Thai-Cambodian border. But in the mid-1980s when their *raison d'être* was to serve as sites for anti-Vietnamese resistance forces, Buddhism took a more political slant. In Site II, the largest of the camps, a Research Centre of Khmer Buddhist Association was established to reinvigorate Buddhist teachings and integrate these teachings into the faction's anticommunist agenda. One of the resources was a journal that offered a Buddhist justification of the faction's nationalist platform for the inevitable "reconstruction" of Cambodia (Suksamran 1993; French 1994). In reaction to this anticommunist resistance, several relief workers at Site II and a Cambodian monk who had resettled in Australia but returned to work in the camps founded the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation (CPR). Concerned about the culture of distrust between noncommunist factions and Cambodians in the interior, its purpose was to forge links between the sangha in the border camps and within Cambodia and to develop nonviolence training. These relief workers—Jesuit brother, Jewish activist, and Buddhist monk—drew together an eclectic collection of methods, from Quaker meditation and conflict mediation techniques to meditation models based on the work of International Network of Engaged Buddhists centered in Bangkok. When the U.N.-mediated Peace Accord was signed in 1991, one of the main tasks was the closure of all camps in Thailand and the repatriation of their occupants back into Cambodia. This decision inspired the first Dhammayietra, organized by CPR and led by another monk well known for his commitment to international peace work, Maha Ghosananda.

MAHA GHOSANANDA'S RETURN: AN ORIGIN STORY

The preeminent religious figure for peace in Cambodia, Maha Ghosananda, is hardly paradigmatic of the survivors of the Pol Pot years. He had progressed into the higher echelons of the Cambodian sangha and spent many years outside of Cambodia in India and elsewhere. While in India for doctoral study, Ghosananda met Nichidatsu Fujii, a Japanese Buddhist whose affiliation with Mahatma Gandhi had inspired him to found the Nipponzan Myohoji, an order dedicated to world peace. It was from Nichidatsu that Ghosananda learned the methods and philosophy of satyagraha that was to inform his own nonviolent advocacy in Cambodia. When the Khmer Rouge took power in Cambodia, Ghosananda had been practicing meditation under the guidance of a prominent meditation master in Thailand for 10 years. "All day long we moved the hand up and down" (Mahoney and Edmonds 1992:16). Nonetheless, when troubles with Cambodia were learned, "we cried for Cambodia every day" (p. 16).

Though he could not claim membership in the community of suffering, his reappearance in the Cambodian public is a riveting moment artfully wrought in *Step by Step* (1992), a collection of his dhamma talks. Immediately after the first flood of refugees began to appear at the Thai-Cambodian border in 1978, Ghosananda left the forest monastery to greet them. Arriving at Sakeo, the refugee camp for the Khmer Rouge, he walked directly to its center and began to silently distribute pamphlets of the *metta sutta*, the sutta of loving kindness. The story is told that

In that moment, great suffering and great love merged. Centuries of Buddhist devotion rushed into the consciousness of the refugees. Waves of survivors fell to their knees and prostrated, wailing loudly, their cries reverberating throughout the camp. (p. 18)

Thus is Ghosananda constructed by his American narrators as both the recoverer of a banished Buddhism, preserved from extermination through exile, and an emissary of its basic teaching of reconciliation and loving kindness, a message he would develop in the years as a refugee and later the leader of the Dhammayietra.

Ghosananda's move from meditation master to the "Buddha of the battlefields" was set within the circuits of exile and deterritorialized nation-building (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994). By 1980, he was the Cambodia nation-in-exile consultant to the U.N. Economic and Social Council and cofounder of the Inter-religious Mission for Peace in Cambodia. Espousing the two most important precepts of engaged Buddhist interventions in sovereignty battles—nonviolence and neutrality—among the four factions, Maha Ghosananda called his monks the "fifth army" of peace. When he appeared during the U.N.-mediated peace talks in Jakarta in 1988, his monks opened daily sessions with prayer and meditation, offered formal ceremony for peace and unity, and circulated a statement of peace.

Exile saved Maha Ghosananda from death and it revived him to action; it forged his form of engaged Buddhism and in exile he found a forum to promote it. Ghosananda's own return to Cambodia through the Dhammayietra inspired a rumor that circulated for several years that Ghosananda was the fulfillment of an old prophesy that after the brutal reign of the *thmil* (infidels), a "holy man from the west, a light skinned Khmer would appear. A prince would arrive to save his people."⁷ But his efforts to represent a peaceful resolution to conflict in Cambodia have rarely kept him there. The extended absences of the Supreme Patriarch to attend international conferences, consultations, and speaking tours has earned him some negative standing in the Cambodian community. Not a few former refugees and local Cambodians refer to him as the "jet set monk," a supreme patriarch mirroring the proclivities of Cambodia's peripatetic monarch King Sihanouk, whose trajectories between Pyongyang, Beijing, Paris, and Phnom Penh indicate to his subjects an inability or unwillingness to stay anchored in the homeland.

THE DHAMMAYIETRA TAKES SHAPE

The first Dhammayietra was conceived in the refugee camps at their point of dispersal back into Cambodia. Against the wishes of U.N. bureaucrats preparing to repatriate the 300,000 refugees and government officials of both Cambodia and Thailand, some 350 refugees crossed into Cambodia and returned home on foot, initiating the message that peace would return to Cambodia, “step by step.” Many were reunited with family members along the route. By the time the walkers reached Phnom Penh, their number had swelled to 1,000, snaking through the city (Moser-Puangsuwan 2000a).

The volatile conditions preceding the U.N.-monitored elections in 1993 encouraged plans for a second walk. This time, the Dhammayietra took off from Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, the sacred site of Cambodian nationalism in a province in constant tension between the Khmer Rouge and government forces. The walkers endured constant shelling and crossfire along the route, but by the time they reached Phnom Penh, an estimated 3,000 people joined the procession. The U.S. development officials were keen to promote a peaceful resolution to Cambodia’s factionalism and funds were granted to a Cambodian NGO to video and distribute copies of the videotape (Moser-Puangsuwan 2000b).⁸

The third Dhammayietra in 1994 proved to be the most controversial. Its itinerary through the war zone in western Cambodia cost the lives of two participants—a monk and a nun—when government soldiers accompanying them and the Khmer Rouge exchanged fire. While some of the main figures deserted the walk after this catastrophe, Maha Ghosananda resumed the walk and led it to its intended destination. In 1995, the Nipponzan Myohoji had organized a year-long interfaith pilgrimage to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. Monks of the Nipponzan Myohoji express their conviction for world peace through prayer drumming and peace walks, and have been present at many of the dhammayietras.

While the fifth walk continued the pattern of social commentary, illuminating the connection between the civil war, illegal logging, and deforestation, events in the following year broadened the scope of the peace walks and participants. Dissension within the Khmer Rouge factions had fragmented the party and numerous cadre had defected to the government side. In 1997, the sixth Dhammayietra returned to war-torn western provinces, moving through areas that were recently under fierce Khmer Rouge control. “Army of Peace,” a video portraying this walk, indicates this shift in Khmer Rouge intentions.⁹ Later in July that same year, a brief but violent coup upset the fragile balance between the royalist and socialist parties holding power in the government. An impromptu peace walk was organized by the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation and a new organization initiated by a Cambodian American.¹⁰ This event brought forth a host of projects concerned about conflict mediation. By the seventh walk, which drew attention to the second national elections of 1998,¹¹ the Dhammayietra had become the prototype for various peace walks throughout the country and the source for nonviolence trainers.

Though represented as the revival of Khmer Buddhism, the Dhammayietra has been in fact a feast of signs. The origin story begins with Site II’s Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation and its two American staff members. Their influence on the walk and its nonviolent training is reflected in its affiliation with International Network of Engaged Buddhists and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Add to this Ghosananda’s participation with the U.S. Buddhist Peace Fellowship and his own organization, Inter-religious Mission for Peace in Cambodia and the World, as well as his long-time association with the Nipponzan Myohoji, a Japanese sect dedicated to world peace inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. While the number of international participants is always small due to the walk’s strenuous schedule and Spartan conditions, it is signaled as a possible model for nonviolence movements (Moser-Puangsuwan 2000a) and is thus the subject of keen observation.

Nonetheless, the Dhammayietra was legitimized early by international and local proponents as Khmer Buddhism uniquely adapted to its constituency’s needs. There are three ways the

Dhammayietra asserts its “local” identity. First, as an engaged Buddhist response to Cambodian social issues, its annual walks have been thematically organized around social themes that dominate Cambodia’s public discourse: repatriation, elections, the Khmer Rouge/government conflict, land mines ban, and illegal logging. By so doing, the Dhammayietra has restored cosmological significance to a political world that during the Khmer Rouge era was deeply hostile and, under the Vietnamese, ambivalent to religious practice. This has revived a populist enthusiasm for religious relevance in this postsocialist period that had generally inspired lukewarm adherence among the younger generation.

Second, the Dhammayietra has a presence within postsocialist Cambodian institutions. In a sangha that now represents the convergence of diaspora and local monks, Maha Ghosananda is the abbot of Wat Sampeao Meas in Phnom Penh, which hosts the Dhammayietra offices. His alliance with King Sihanouk is well known. The king has been one of the peace walk’s greatest advocates, often offering an official welcome to the walks that have ended in Phnom Penh. Furthermore, the foreign organizers and overseas Cambodians no longer hold significant positions in the new Dhammayietra Center for Peace and Reconciliation, leaving local Cambodians as the primary architects and recipients of the message of the walk. All the walks have received generally benign coverage from local Khmer and English language newspapers in a country notorious for its intemperate journalism.

Third, Maha Ghosananda as the founding figure of the Dhammayietra offers an engaged Buddhist philosophy and practice that can be incorporated into both the monk’s and layperson’s daily life. For example, the engaged Buddhist themes of neutrality and active nonviolence also model different responses to the violence that has saturated Cambodian social relations. To achieve this, nonviolent training workshops were required for the walk’s participants to assure consistent behavior, particularly during the volatile periods of the walk. To model neutrality, CPR organizers of the walk demanded that government soldiers refrain from “accompanying” them along the route as this would incite Khmer Rouge reprisal. The government’s violation of this request was put to the test during the third walk through the war zones when government soldiers and Khmer Rouge exchanged fire. It is to the credit of the Dhammayietra’s reputation as neutral and to the walk’s intrepid organizer, Liz Bernstein, that the hostages were released unharmed with the Khmer Rouge commander’s instructions to take back the message that “we all want peace”¹²

“STEP BY STEP”: MINDFUL MOVEMENT IN LIMINAL SPACE

Skidmore (1997) has argued that the first three walks were more spontaneous and emblematic of symbolic needs of Cambodian populace recovering from violence. Later walks were more “international” and intentionally employed the symbols of Buddhism, implying by this a weakened authenticity. I would counter that the symbolic power of the Dhammayietra is not only grounded in its authentic representation of Khmer Buddhism those who did not flee the territory, but its ability to legitimate mobility. The experience of shifting political allegiances is as deeply fused to a communal notion of Cambodian identity as is the suffering under the Khmer Rouge. After nearly 30 years of war and a long legacy of border conflicts, Cambodians have a highly developed a sense of the violability of borders and the danger of trespass. The Dhammayietra reveals the liberating permeability of borders across which its participants have marched—over national borders, through war zones, across a global reach.

For Ghosananda, mindfulness meets its matter in the walk, where “each step is a meditation” and “with every step we will build a bridge.” The practice of meditation is transformed to social commentary, each of the annual walks presents a theme that the sangha and a devoted core of nuns promote as they traverse the country. If the first and second walk addressed Cambodia’s transition to democracy, the third drew attention to the civil conflict and land mines.

For local Cambodians as for its organizers, the Dhammayietra not only invests walking meditation with social significance, it converts mobility itself from its deeply ambivalent status

in Cambodia to a mindful act. If the Khmer Rouge era was characterized by urban evacuation and relocation of several million people into the countryside, followed by refugee flight and internal displacement, the peace walk recovers movement as merit-making. The annual event is cathartic to both rural and urban Cambodians because through the acts of support for the walkers and witness, they can gain merit that hastens the end of the war. For villages along the route of the pilgrimage, there are monks to feed and blessings to gain. The oblations of lustral water drench individuals and cleanse them of their wrongful acts. For those embittered from grief and exhausted by disaster, the Dhammayietra leaders' exhortations to loving kindness recall the recovery of the mind through mindful acts. Equally significant is the walk as an annual marker in the transition to democracy and the status of peace in Cambodia.

In a country poisoned by land mines, the Dhammayietra also posits the recovery of the land through the most dangerous of acts—walking. Orange-robed monks and white-clad nuns are a visibly stunning sign of the sanctification of the land, though they are careful to keep to the roads. This symbolism is accompanied by political strategy. As the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation was active in the Campaign to Stop Landmines, participants in several of the annual walks distributed petitions along the route and land-mine awareness workshops were conducted in village wats. As an act of recovery, Bodhi trees are planted along the route.

CONCLUSION

Engaged Buddhism's transnational exchange vividly illustrates the complex arrangements in which cultural identities ("Asian" or the "West") are produced in this era of permeable borders. Represented by both American supporters and local Cambodians as a uniquely Buddhist response to Cambodia's violent conflict, the Dhammayietra and its founder Maha Ghosananda embody this particular conundrum of engaged Buddhism.

The Dhammayietra and Maha Ghosananda are arbiters of exile and international politics. The networks forged beyond the border of Cambodia have been instrumental in fashioning the face of the Dhammayietra. Represented as a quintessential Khmer Buddhist response to Cambodia's entrenched conflicts, the Dhammayietra forges its discursive identity vis a vis the "local" space of the nation. But this local space is mobile. Maha Ghosananda's instruction to move "step by step" toward peace reappropriates dangerous mobility—the massive relocation during the Khmer Rouge era, refugee flight, the danger of treading on land fed with mines—and turns walking into a mindful act. It is this discursive "move" that loosens the Dhammayietra's ties to the nation and allows it to slip across political and religious borders and ally itself with a broad and diverse network of interfaith peace groups that are its transnational public forum.

NOTES

1. These four factions were the Khmer Rouge, two anticommunist groups, the royalist FUNCINPEC and republican Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), and the Vietnamese-backed government of the State of Cambodia (SOC).
2. See his exchange of correspondence in one of his earliest texts, *Lotus in a Ring of Fire* (1967).
3. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists emerged from an international conference in 1989 to offer training, support, and serve as a clearinghouse for this growing network of engaged Buddhists. It has registered remarkable growth in the last few years, precipitated in part by sophisticated use of the Internet.
4. The study of Buddhism in the U.S. and engaged Buddhism has burgeoned in the last few years, offering a much broader range on perspectives on the subject. See Prebisch and Tanaka (1998), Queen (2000), Queen, Prebisch, and Keown (2001), Seagar (1999), and Williams and Queen (1999).
5. This has some bearing on the astounding longevity of Prince Sihanouk's political survival—through the French, Japanese, Lon Nol, Khmer Rouge, and Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin regimes—and his emergence in the new State of Cambodia electorate in 1993. It was Sihanouk who gave the Khmer Rouge their name, calling his own troops, Khmer Bleu.

6. This statement by Khieu Samphan was noted by Sihanouk in his memoirs, *War and Hope: The Case for Cambodia*, p. 86. New York: Random House, 1978. It occurred after a meeting with the dying Chao En Lai in 1975. The Chinese leader advised Khieu Samphan and Ieng Thirith “not to try to achieve total communism in one giant step . . . ‘Don’t follow the bad example of our “great leap forward.” Take things slowly: that is the best way to guide Kampuchea and its people to growth, prosperity and happiness.”
7. Conversation with Bob Maat, November 13, 1994.
8. “Step by Step” was a project of the video production workshop of the Cambodian Women’s Committee for Nonviolence and Peace and funded in part by the Asia Foundation and USAID.
9. “An Army of Peace. Quest for a Non-Violent Cambodia,” a film by Chheng Daravuth Kosal, Joost Van De Port, and Cedric Janclose, Joost van de Port Productions UNV/TVK, 1997.
10. “More than 1,000 Meditate, March for Peace in Phnom Penh,” *The Cambodia Daily*, August 4, 1997.
11. “Dhammayietra Marches for a Peaceful Election,” *Phnom Penh Post*, July 24–30, 1998.
12. Bernstein, conversation, July 1994.

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