

## An Ethnographic Study on the Reconstruction of Buddhist Practice in Two Cambodian Temples: With the Special Reference to Buddhist *Samay* and *Boran*

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### Abstract

This paper aims to contribute an understanding of the historical experience and current situation of Cambodian rural society by throwing light on changes and reconstruction of Buddhist practice in two temples in the central region of Cambodia. It is well known that the country suffered extraordinary societal upheaval during the rule of Democratic Kampuchea (1975–79). However, intensive field research of these changes has been scarce until now. Theravada Buddhism, which was declared the state religion since Cambodia's independence from French colonial rule, was one cultural aspect most harshly suppressed by the regime. All Buddhist monks were forced to return to secular life in 1976 and Buddhist activities came to complete cessation during this era. However, since the collapse of the Democratic Kampuchea regime in 1979, Buddhist practice started again spontaneously. This paper, based on long-term rural fieldwork, describes the specific situation of the demise and rebirth of Buddhist practice in the local community.

At the same time, this paper also focuses its attention on the history and actual conditions of division within village Buddhism. In fact, two differing styles of Buddhist practice, which are indicated by local people through the words *samay* (new/modern) and *boran* (old/ancient), have been observed in the research area. The so-called *samay* practice, which has its origin in the reformist monks' movement that began in the center of national Sangha in the 1910s, was introduced to one of two temples studied in the 1940s. On the other hand, the other temple studied upheld traditional practices called *boran* until the 1960s, but accepted a part of *samay* practice in its reconstruction process in the 1990s for the first time. In other words, the confrontation between Buddhist *samay* and *boran* emerges in a more complex manner at present than in pre-war times. This paper analyses local people's varied attitudes toward the division of Buddhist practice, with careful consideration of the relationship between temples and their communities in light of the recent socio-economic changes of the local people's lives.

**Keywords:** Reformist practice, discontinuity, reconstruction, village Buddhism, modern, tradition

### I Introduction

Over two decades has passed since the demise of the Democratic Kampuchea. It is well known that Cambodia suffered extraordinary societal upheaval under the rule of the regime. Although this era was short, the changes were extreme. Since its collapse in 1979, many journalistic and

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academic studies have reported on the specific conditions in Cambodia at the time. However, those analyses have scarcely extended beyond generalizations to review the situation before and after the disaster. In this paper, I try to make up for the gaps in understanding regarding the experience of Cambodian society by throwing light on the historical changes and the reconstruction of Buddhist practice in two neighboring Buddhist temples.<sup>1)</sup> To provide the context for my research, I will first sketch out a brief history of Cambodian Buddhism, which has experienced demise and rebirth in recent years.

Some form of Theravada Buddhism spread among the people of Cambodia in the thirteenth century [Chandler 1996: 69]. Although the historical process of the adoption of Buddhism by Cambodian culture remains a topic to be researched, it is believed that Buddhist *vatt* (temple-monastery) were established by the end of the fifteenth century in most villages throughout Cambodia<sup>2)</sup> [Keyes 1994: 44]. It was widely observed in the nineteenth century that Cambodian people offered food to monks begging for alms, and numerous Khmer males customarily spent time in temples as monks [e.g. Leclère 1899]. And it is important to note that a movement for the development of a Cambodian Sangha began at the center of the country when King Ang Duong (1798–1859) invited a Khmer monk named Pan (1824–94) from Vatt Bovornnivet, the central temple of Thammayut Nikay in Bangkok<sup>3)</sup> [Edwards 1999: 263]. Then, the practice of Thammayut Nikay, the recent Buddhist practice promoting strict adherence to Buddhist precepts that was initiated by King Mongkut (1804–68) in Siam, was introduced to Cambodia and two differing sects in Cambodian Buddhism originated, the Thammayut Nikay, which enjoyed royal patronage, and the Maha Nikay, which traditionally attracted broad popular support [Leclère 1899: 122; Edwards 1999: 275]. While the Buddhist practice in each part of the country in those days is thought of as carrying on arbitrarily, several religious and literary institutions were established by the beginning of the twentieth century under the rule of French Protectorate, and institutional Cambodian Buddhism started to prosper.<sup>4)</sup> After Cambodia became independent in 1953, Theravada Buddhism was declared as the state religion and the number of monks in the country increased to 65,062, while Buddhist temples numbered 3,369 in 1969.

The situation of Cambodian Buddhists began to decline in 1970. In April of that year,

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- 1) The fieldwork in the research area was conducted in March 2000, June 2000, September 2000, and from December 2000 to April 2002. It was financed by research grants from the Matsushita International Foundation, Japan.
  - 2) Transcriptions in this article are based upon the simplified version of Franco-Khmer transcription system developed by Franklin E. Huffman. For details refer to Heder and Ledgerwood [1996: xvii]. As for transcriptions of place name, I follow those seen in the official census [Cambodia, NISMP 1999].
  - 3) The Khmer court at the time was subject to Siam, and Ang Duong's sons, the future King Norodom (1834–1904) and Sisowath (1840–1927), were both ordained at Vatt Bovornnivet [Edwards 1999: 263].
  - 4) It is said that French administrators aimed to eliminate Siam's influence from Cambodia and officially sponsored the establishment of institutions such as the École Supérieure de Pāli (1922), the Royal Library (1925), and the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh (1930) [e.g. Edwards 1999: 312].

Cambodia was plunged into five years of internal warfare,<sup>5)</sup> and the following state Democratic Kampuchea (hereafter, DK) marked the beginning of societal upheaval for the Cambodian population. Religion was one of the aspects of culture most harshly suppressed by the regime.<sup>6)</sup> Although some monks remained during the first year of rule, all were forced to renounce their yellow robes by the beginning of 1976. Temples were no longer sacred and parts of them were destroyed for DK building projects. Buddha images were daubed over with coal, and daily acts of faith were banned. After the ouster of the DK's rule from most of Cambodian territory in January 1979, a socialist government was formed under the initiative of Vietnam. Various Buddhist rituals had resumed spontaneously, but what was important at this time was the lack of any Buddhist monks in Cambodia. As a rule, ordination in Theravada Buddhism requires the presence of a minimum of five monks, and one of those monks, called *upachchhea* in Khmer, assumes the role of precept-giver. To become a monk, one must receive 227 precepts from the *upachchhea* in ritual. And on September 19th 1979 the government held an official ordination ceremony at Vatt Unnalaom by inviting Theravada monks from the part of Vietnam known as Kampuchea Kraom, the homeland of a Khmer population in the downstream region of the Mekong delta<sup>7)</sup> [Keyes 1994; Hayashi 1995a; 1995b; 2002]. Buddhist monks officially reappeared in Cambodia at this time. At the same time, however, the socialist government set the ordination age restriction and did not allow men under 50 years old to become monks. This policy, which continued for the next 10 years, illustrates the government's desire to control the revival of Buddhism.<sup>8)</sup> It was only from the beginning of the 1990s that Buddhist practice in Cambodia was set into full revitalization. As is seen in Table 1, the number of monks dramatically increased after the abolishment of the age restriction in 1989. Restoration of public order after the national election in 1993 contributed in a major way toward the vitalization of various religious activities in rural life.<sup>9)</sup> In 2001, the number of temples increased to 3,798, apparently more than pre-war times.<sup>10)</sup>

However, apart from the physical recovery of Buddhist temples and monks, Buddhist practice in present-day Cambodian rural society has never been studied well until now. Furthermore, it was difficult to get approval for intensive field research in rural villages since

5) The rural way of life was severely threatened by fighting and bombing during the civil war. According to one report, 997 monasteries were destroyed from March 1970 to June 1973 [Yang Sam 1987: 58].

6) Chantou Boua [1991] reported there were a number of Buddhist monks killed in the beginning of the DK era.

7) Hayashi [1995a; 1995b; 2002] uncovered that another official ordination ceremony was held in the suburb of Phnom Penh prior to the ceremony by the *upachchhea* of Kampuchea Kraom. In the former case, an ex-monk had renounced the world in front of the survived Buddha statue without any participation of *upachchhea* monk. It is important to notice that the monks in the former case also had a certification of the ordination, which was approved by the authorities.

8) The government wanted to ensure that the young male population did not avoid national military service requirements by ordaining as a monk.

9) The resurgence of Thammayut Nikay came about with the return of Sihanouk to Cambodia in 1991.

10) This means 3.5 villages on an average in Cambodia have a *vatt*. There were estimated 13,406 villages in the country in 1998 [Cambodia, NISMP 1999].

**Table 1** Number of Theravada Temples and Monks in Cambodia, 1969–2001

Year	Number of Temples	Number of Monks
1969	3,369	65,062
1970–75	n.d.	n.d.
1975–79	n.d.	n.d.
1979–81	n.d.	n.d.
1982	1,821	2,311
1983–87	n.d.	n.d.
1988	2,799	6,497
1989	2,892	9,711
1990	2,900	19,173
1991	n.d.	n.d.
1992	2,902	25,529
1993	3,090	27,467
1994	3,290	39,821
1995	3,371	40,218
1996	3,381	40,911
1997	3,512	45,547
1998	3,588	49,097
1999	3,685	50,081
2000	3,731	50,873
2001	3,798	53,869

Source: Interview with Mr. Tan Sokhan, the director of Buddhism department, Ministry of Religions and Cults

Notes: The number of monks includes novices.

No data is available for the period of 1970–79, 1983–87, and 1991.

the end of the 1960s until the Khmer Rouge ceased to be a political force in 1998. Most Cambodia scholars still make reference to the American anthropologist May Ebihara's research during the period of 1959–60 as the only one major comprehensive ethnographic study in Cambodia [e.g. Ovesen *et al.* 1996: 2]. Ebihara conducted her fieldwork in a village southwest of Phnom Penh and presented her analyses on social structure [1968: chapter 3], residence patterns [1977], village religion [1966; 1968: chapter 5], status of women [1974] and other themes. But, my reading of Ebihara's works leads me to the conclusion that we must be aware of the rationale behind her descriptions that shaped and limited her understandings.

At first, I think that her analyses of Cambodian village life should be reviewed with reference to the development of anthropological theories concerning lowland rice growing societies in mainland Southeast Asia. Starting with the Cornell-Thai project that studied a community near Bangkok called Bang Chan since 1948 [Sharp *et al.* 1953], many American anthropologists have conducted research in Thailand, Burma, and Laos. Consequently, analytical concepts such as “the loosely structured social system” [Embree 1950], and “the syncretism scheme of Buddhism and animism/folk religion” [e.g. Brohm 1963; Kirsch 1977] were introduced as models for understanding each society in the region. And these concepts actually affected Ebihara's descriptions of a Cambodian village. From another perspective, I

think her descriptions should be carefully reconsidered today in light of the upheaval of society that occurred after the completion of her research: the civil war, the rule of the DK regime and socialist policies in the 1980s. All make us aware of various changes in contemporary Cambodia. Ebihara herself revisited the village in the 1990s and made reports on some aspects of social change and on villagers' narratives of life during the DK era [Ebihara 1990; 1993a; 1993b; 2002], which are crucial but do not supply much empirical data.

In this article, I explore the issue of the historical changes and the reconstruction of Buddhist practice in two rural Cambodian temples. The fundamental concern is in documenting basic facts regarding the changes observed and presenting one analytical basis to study the division in village Buddhism in rural Cambodian society. I use the term "village Buddhism" to show the attention focused on the Buddhist practice as a part of local people's lives. Although a number of studies have been done on Buddhist activities in Cambodia since the mid-1990s [e.g. Bertrand 2004; Guthrie 2004; Marston 2004; Poethig 2004], they are almost never based on long-term fieldwork and lack the full consideration of local community conditions. My study, based on over a year of rural fieldwork, is unique in this sense; therefore, I try to interpret the issues comprehensively, putting them in the specific social context of the research area. Moreover, I also try to examine the issues from a historical perspective, which is quite contrary to some other recent anthropological studies that conceptualize Cambodian culture as a changeless entity.<sup>11)</sup> In the following sections, this paper will firstly describe the setting of the research area and the visible differences in Buddhist practice between the two temples. And then, I will focus on the fact that the local residents currently indicate these differences in Buddhist practice with the contrastive adjectives *samay* (new/modern) and *boran* (old/ancient). This paper then starts to review the historical background of the differing practices in the local community. After that, it will turn its attention to the contemporary context again and analyze the actual processes of reconstructing Buddhist practice under way since the beginning of the 1990s. In the last part, the discussion of this paper will develop the analysis of people's varied attitudes toward the so-called *samay* and *boran* style of Buddhist practice. Finally, the paper will illustrate the reconstruction of village Buddhism, regarding the Buddhist temple not as the harmonic center of the community, but rather as a place of conflicts and compromises in local people's lives.

## II Buddhist Temples and the Community in San Kor Commune

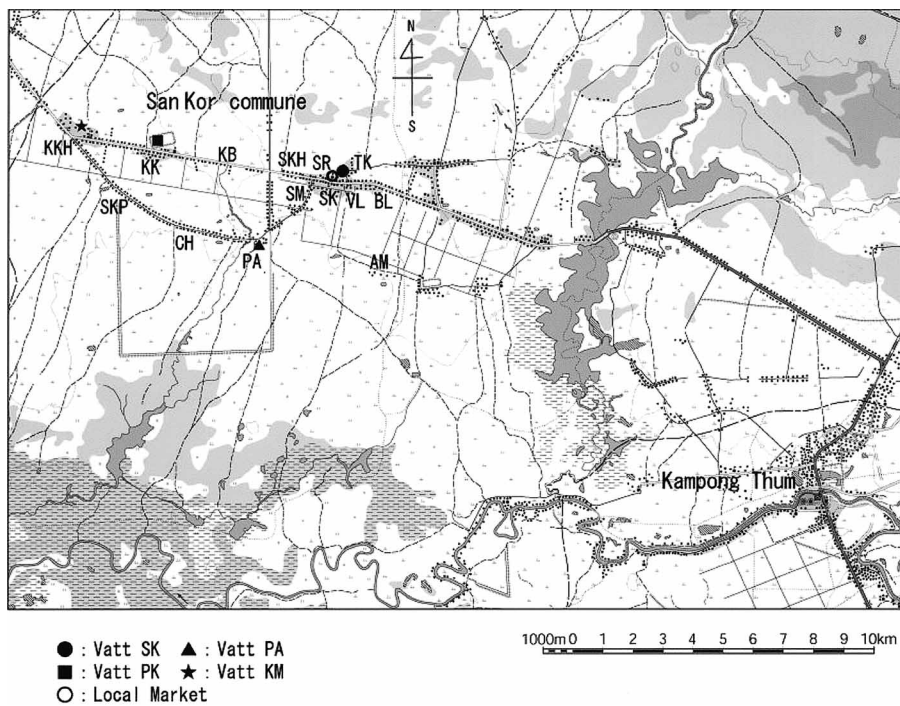
This paper focuses on the Buddhist temples and community in San Kor commune, Kampong Svay district, Kampong Thum province, located east of Tonle Sap Lake. In 2000, all of the 212

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11) For example, Alexander Hinton [1996; 1998a; 1998b] recently studied murderous behaviors that had been seen during the DK period by using theoretical concepts of psychological cognitive anthropology such as "psychological dissonance" and "cultural model" and discussed the behaviors generated from violent ethics in Cambodian culture. My standpoint for studying cultural practice is quite different with him.

temples in the province are Maha Nikay.<sup>12)</sup> There are 23 temples in Kampong Svay district, but five of the nine communes in the district only have a single temple.<sup>13)</sup> The other 18 temples are concentrated in four communes including San Kor, which is about 20 km from the provincial capital along National Route 6A.

San Kor commune consists of 14 villages, with four temples (see Map 1, and Table 2). VL village, where I stayed during the research, is located along the National Highway, and had 149 households according to my own count in March 2001.<sup>14)</sup> On the other hand, PA village, which I also surveyed, lies about 2.5 km south of the Highway, and had 94 households in June 2001. Most households in both villages rely on wet-season rice cultivation,<sup>15)</sup> but VL village has



Map 1 Research Area

- 12) According to the provincial officials of Ministry of Religions and Cults in Kampong Thum, there were some temples of Thammayut Nikay in the pre-war time. Some have been reconstructed as Maha Nikay temples, and others have not yet been reconstructed.
- 13) Among the 21 temples of Kampong Svay district I surveyed in 2000, 18 temples had been reconstructed in the 1980s. The latest case of reconstruction in the district is in 1993 due to greater security in the region.
- 14) I use the concept “household” as the group of family members who share social and economic responsibility, which is often referred to by Khmer word *bontuk* (load, burden, responsibility, duty, function [Headley 1977]). It includes the persons who are studying or working outside their villages as long as they maintain relations such as remittance.
- 15) The paddy fields in the area could be roughly classified into two types; paddy fields near the hamlet and floating rice paddy fields about 3 to 8 km far south in the flooded area of Tonle Sap Lake.



**Table 2** Basic Population Data of Villages in San Kor Commune in 1998

Village (in code)	Population		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female
KKH	1,797	881	916
KK	1,456	685	771
KB	1,636	785	851
SKH	1,897	905	992
SKP	404	193	211
CH	555	277	278
PA	579	292	287
SM	1,345	625	720
SR	1,007	457	550
SK	643	276	367
VL	846	410	436
BL	592	296	296
TK	377	183	194
AM	352	165	187
Total	13,486	6,430	7,056

Source: [Cambodia, NISMP 2000]

Phnom Penh. However, Table 4 shows PA village households did not have many people residing outside of the village. This suggests the uneven development of village household economic activities within the commune.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, as seen in Table 5, the penetration rate of manufactured products is higher among the households of VL village than PA village. Here, I focus on Vatt SK and Vatt PA, because they are the oldest of the four temples in San Kor commune, and provide a rich environment for examining local social history.<sup>20</sup>

Both temples were reconstructed in 1981.<sup>21</sup> Vatt SK is located near the local market. In the Buddhist Lent season of 2001, two monks (*phikkho*) and 22 novices (*samaner*) and some

a small population of schoolteachers, policemen, and traders in the market along the National Highway.<sup>16</sup> In PA village, other than rice cultivation, village households were engaged primarily in small-scale fishing. Tables 3 and 4 show the population composition of village households of both villages by age group and sex.<sup>17</sup> These tables illustrate that the majority of village population at present was born after the DK era. And Table 3 demonstrates that VL village households had many people, especially young females, residing outside of the village.<sup>18</sup> This feature was brought about starting in 1998 when many young village girls began to work at garment factories in the suburbs of

- 16) According to the commune chief, the number of traders engaging in business in the market is about 150 families; some sell goods in stalls, some operate fresh vegetable and fish stands in the open air.
- 17) This number of village population is different with that in the official census in 1998 as shown in Table 2, because of the difference in both the time of research and the definition of village households.
- 18) Table 3 also shows that in the age group of 0 to 9 years old male population is quite more than female. It may seem to be unnatural, but I don't have any answers to explain this.
- 19) The socio-economic development of villages in research area has accelerated since the mid-1990s. For example, the rice mill machine was first introduced to VL village in 1995, and increased up to 11 in 2001. For more details, see Kobayashi [2004].
- 20) The local population estimates that Vatt SK and Vatt PA were constructed at the end of nineteenth century at the latest. On the other hand, Vatt PK was originally constructed in 1965 through the assistance of Vatt PA and reconstructed in 1991. Vatt KM was newly constructed in 1991.
- 21) In this paper, I consider the "reconstruction" of temples to be when a temple can facilitate the continued residence of Buddhist monks. Buddhist activities by laypersons generally restarted from 1979, prior to the revival of Buddhist monks.

**Table 3** Population Composition of VL Village Households

Age Group	A, Population in Village			B, Population out of Village			Percentage of B in A+B
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	
0-9	196	109	87	0	0	0	0
10-19	200	113	87	63	22	41	24.0
20-29	93	37	56	68	37	31	42.2
30-39	104	58	46	11	6	5	9.6
40-49	72	27	45	2	1	1	2.8
50-59	51	18	33	0	0	0	0
60-69	43	21	22	0	0	0	0
70-79	12	5	7	0	0	0	0
80-89	4	0	4	0	0	0	0
Total	775	388	387	144	66	78	15.7

Source: Author's research in March 2001

**Table 4** Population Composition of PA Village Households

Age Group	A, Population in Village			B, Population out of Village			Percentage of B in A+B
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	
0-9	135	69	66	0	0	0	0
10-19	129	65	64	10	8	2	7.2
20-29	67	31	36	14	6	8	15.4
30-39	63	28	35	1	1	0	1.6
40-49	44	20	24	0	0	0	0
50-59	29	10	19	0	0	0	0
60-69	21	8	13	0	0	0	0
70-79	12	8	4	0	0	0	0
80-89	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	500	239	261	25	15	10	4.8

Source: Author's research in June 2001

**Table 5** Penetration of Manufactured Products among Households of Two Villages

Item	VL Village (149 households)		PA Village (94 households)	
	Households in Possession	Penetration Rate (%)	Households in Possession	Penetration Rate (%)
Car	2	1.3	0	0
Motorcycle	43	28.9	8	8.5
Bicycle	129	86.6	72	76.6
Radio	93	62.4	34	36.2
Television	23	15.4	7	7.4
Sewing machine	19	12.8	1	1.1
Clock	85	57.0	22	23.4
Gasoline engine	19	12.8	13	13.8

Source: Author's research in March 2001 and June 2001



laypersons were in residence.<sup>22)</sup> The head monk (*chavathikar*) of Vatt SK was the 75-year-old Monk KS who was born in PA village. He was ordained once at Vatt PA when he was 21 years old. After returning to secular life 6 years later, he married and earned a living for his family by rice cultivation. He was ordained again at a temple in Santuk district, Kampong Thum province in 1989, but has resided in Vatt SK as the head monk since 1990. Although badly damaged in the DK period, the reconstruction of buildings in the compound steadily progressed since the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>23)</sup> The *sala chhan* (meeting hall) with cement posts was newly constructed in 1993. And the three-storey *preah vihear*, the building with *seyma* (a sacred boundary), once finished construction in 1970, had its top floor and roof repaired during the period of 1998–99.

On the other hand, Vatt PA lies at a distance of about 3 km south of the National Highway. It is surrounded by paddy fields, and the floodwaters of the Tonle Sap Lake reach the south end of its compound at the height of the rainy season each year. There were 8 monks, 26 novices and some laypersons present during the Buddhist Lent of 2001. The head monk of Vatt PA was the 28-year-old Monk TK, who was born in CH village. He was ordained in 1991. After staying at the temple for one year, he traveled to several temples in Kampong Cham, Kandal, Pousat, Bat Dambang province and Phnom Penh. He came back to the temple in 1996 and was promoted to the head monk in 1997. The temple's *preah vihear*, constructed in 1964, survived through the 1970s.<sup>24)</sup> When I first visited the temple in March 2000, there was only a wooden *sala chhan* that had been built in 1985. However, it was replaced by a new larger one with cement posts in April 2001.

A temple is recognized as a sacred space by the existence of a monastery organization, the disciplined order of Buddhist Sangha. This is evident from the behavior of Cambodian people, who take off their hats before entering the temple compound, carefully avoid drinking alcohols inside, and maintain other respectful behavior. The monastery's organization in a temple is characterized by a hierarchical structure in which a head monk presides over the other monks and novices serving under him.<sup>25)</sup> Furthermore, it is important to note that this hierarchical relationship in the monastery extends to the national Sangha's organization in parallel to the secular administrative structure.<sup>26)</sup> Specifically, the head monk of each temple is supervised by an *anukon* (district-chief monk) in each district, who is also under the supervision of a *mekon*

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22) In Cambodia, it is usual to see some laypersons living inside the temples, such as *daun chi* (women disciplinants who hold 10 precepts) and *kauneses lok* (young boys who give assistance to monks).

23) It is interesting to note that the government troops and Vietnamese soldiers were stationed in the compound of Vatt SK until 1989.

24) It survived through the DK era because of its function as a rice storehouse.

25) Two other senior monks are often appointed to assist the head monk, called *krou sautr sdam*, and *krou sautr chhveng*. According to my observations, the head monk is referred to simply as *lok krou* (teacher) or *lok krou thum* (big teacher) in everyday conversation, and other constituents of monastery are *kauneses* (students) of him.

26) The relation and duties of head monks, the district-chief monks, and provincial-chief monks were clearly written as the rule of Cambodian Sangha in 1962, and reaccepted in 1993 again [Cambodia, National Sangha of Maha Nikay Sect 1994].

(provincial-chief monk) in each province. Therefore, it is vital that a Cambodian Buddhist temple-monastery be studied not only as situated in the surrounding community, but also in the context of its affiliation to the national Sangha.

In Cambodia, the Buddhist temple has often been regarded as the center of the community or of village life<sup>27)</sup> [e.g. Delvert 2002; Ebihara 1968]; however, the concrete relation between the temple and its community has rarely been discussed. Theoretically, a temple is open for everybody and it is a matter of choice for villagers to visit a given temple.<sup>28)</sup> I therefore use the term community not as a rigid geographical entity or membership association, but as an unbounded social group, which becomes actualized by the accumulation of interactions based on preferences for a certain temple. In fact, the community in the above sense is often referred to by Khmer word *chamnoh* (subordinate, dependent) of the temple. As seen in Table 6, the villages that are recognized as *chamnoh* of Vatt SK and Vatt PA by the local people show overlap. For example, VL village is considered as *chamnoh* of both the temples. Thus, there are villagers who support the temples in various activities such as joining rotating groups that prepare food for monks in the temple. Additionally there are several special figures among the *chamnoh*, such as *achar vatt* and *kanakammeakar vatt*, who organize certain temple activities.<sup>29)</sup> The former is “the layman who arranges a ceremony in a Buddhist temple” [Headley 1977] and performs important functions in organizing religious rituals, whereas the members of *kanakammeakar vatt*, literally “temple committee,” serve to handle secular affairs. In short, the community of a Cambodian Buddhist temple called *chamnoh* consists of a few *achar vatt*, *kanakammeakar vatt* and an unspecified number of villagers.

**Table 6** *Chamnoh* Villages of Temples in San Kor Commune

Temple	Vatt SK	Vatt PA	Vatt PK	Vatt KM
<i>Chamnoh</i> villages	SR, SK, VL, BL, TK, AM	KB, SKH, SKP, CH, PA, SM, SR, SK, VL, TK	KK, KB	KKH

Source: Author's research

27) On a theoretical basis, this perspective seems to have its origin in the structural functionalist's viewpoint for analyzing so-called bilateral kinship societies in mainland Southeast Asia, which is especially often seen in the anthropological works in the 1950–60s. Nowadays, the perspective is frequently found in the reports of the development agencies and NGOs.

28) For example, it is not unusual for a person to receive the Buddhist lay precepts in a temple on a Buddhist Sabbath day and then receive it at another temple on the next Sabbath day.

29) It is to be noted that the Khmer word *achar* basically indicates the person who has a special knowledge and skill of some kind in the broad sense as the instance of *achar kar* (person who leads wedding rituals) and *achar khmaoch* (person who leads funeral rituals), so that it is usual to find several figures who are called as *achar* by villagers in a village. According to the instruction of Ministry of Religions and Cults, a temple should have two or three *achar vatt* elected by votes of the people of *chamnoh*, and ranked by names such as *achar thum* (big *achar*) and *achar rong* (vice-*achar*). As for *kanakammeakar vatt*, it sometimes includes female members.

Considering the situation of overlapping of *chamnoh* between the neighboring temples, it is obvious that the comparative review of the Buddhist practice in each temple is significant for understanding the reality of village Buddhism in Cambodian rural society. However, as far as I am aware, there are no studies focusing closely on this relationship. May Ebihara noticed the overlapping *chamnoh* but didn't pursue the issue further. For instance, she describes a kind of factionalism between the villagers of her study evident in the different attitudes toward the neighboring two temples: one was Maha Nikay and another was of Thammayut Nikay [Ebihara 1968: 377–382]. It is noteworthy that she reported that the villagers failed to organize one annual festival held in the post-harvest season during her research, because they had been split in their opinions regarding which temple's monks should be invited to the occasion [*ibid.*: 184]. Although her descriptions did not include much more account of these phenomena and only emphasized functions of the temple as a moral, social, and educational center in village life, I believe that the consideration of overlapping temple communities is a key to the study of village Buddhism. Here I would like to start to pursue this observation by focusing on the example of *pithi kanbin* in Bon Phchombin, one of the largest Buddhist annual festivals in Cambodia.

### III Same Festival, Different Practice: The Example of *Pithi Kanbin*

Bon Phchombin is widely recognized by Cambodian people as one of the country's most important traditional Cambodian Buddhist festivals.<sup>30)</sup> However, the reputation of "traditional" does not mean that the ceremony is culturally uniform across the country. It is held annually for 15 days in the last half of the month of *pheatrobot* of the Khmer lunar calendar.<sup>31)</sup> During this season, people visit temples to join various rituals and offer food and money to monks in the hope that such merit-making deeds will benefit the spirits of dead relatives.<sup>32)</sup> To be more precise, in the case of rural temples, 13 groups of *chamnoh* are formed, and each group is assigned to perform one day's *pithi kanbin* activities in the temple.<sup>33)</sup> Based on my own observation with the villagers of VL village, the order of practice of *pithi kanbin* in Vatt PA and Vatt SK in the year 2000 season can be summarized as shown in Tables 7 and 8. Here, we can see the similarities and differences in the same festival of two neighboring temples.

In both cases, the ritual of *pithi kanbin* began in the evening. It is common practice in Cambodian Buddhist rituals to start with laypersons' chant of *nomosekar* (adoration for Buddha, dharma and monk) toward the Buddha image, secondly shifting to *som seyl* (request for

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30) The final day of Phchombin is a national holiday and a lot of school students and factory workers in the cities return to their home to celebrate with their families.

31) This corresponds to the season of September to October in Gregorian calendar.

32) It is commonly said that people ideally visit as many as seven temples to participate in merit-making rituals during the season in order to transfer merit to their ancestral spirits.

33) Thirteen groups organize the *pithi kanbin* for 13 days during the season, except for 2 Buddhist Sabbath days. In this manner we can see concrete relationships between a certain temple and villagers of *chamnoh*.

**Table 7** Summarized Order of *pithi kanbin* in Vatt PA

September 25th, 2000

Time	Events
18:00	Monks and novices are invited to the <i>sala chhan</i> (meeting hall) and villagers offer them some tea with sugar. The <i>achar vatt</i> leads villagers to face the Buddha statue and chant <i>nomosekar</i> (adoration for Buddha, dharma and monk). Then, the <i>achar</i> leads others to chant the word of <i>som seyl</i> (request for Buddhist lay precepts) toward a monk. Monks and novices chant <i>preah parit</i> (protective prayer of Buddha) all together.
19:10	Monks and novices get out of the <i>sala chhan</i> .
19:33	Villagers specially invite a monk to the <i>sala chhan</i> for <i>tesana</i> (preaching the sermon).
20:08	The preaching is finished, some villagers prepare mosquito nets on the <i>sala chhan</i> for sleeping, others sit in a circle and chat over a cup of tea.

September 26th, 2000

Time	Events
4:00	Most of villagers begin to get up, some women have already cooked sticky rice.
4:50	The ritual called <i>chap baybin</i> starts. Villagers squat on the <i>sala chhan</i> , face to east and raise the bowl with sticky rice over the head, and then they repeat the prayer in Khmer after the <i>achar</i> . Finally they gather around a large tray and pick the rice with their fingers and drop it on.
5:07	The <i>achar</i> leads villagers to face the Buddha statue and chant <i>nomosekar</i> .
5:22	One monk and four novices are invited to the <i>sala chhan</i> , the <i>achar</i> leads others to chant the word of <i>som seyl</i> .
5:35	Putting the tray with a heap of rice in front of the monk, villagers pray the prayer of <i>proken</i> (offer to the Sangha) after the <i>achar</i> . The monk and novices scatter the water with fingers over the tray, while recite the word of blessing.
5:48	Villagers walk down the <i>sala chhan</i> with the tray carried on the shoulder at the head of them, they arrive at the east of the <i>preah vihear</i> (building with sacred boundary) and squat with the face to east, and then repeat the prayer all together after the <i>achar</i> .
5:53	After finished the prayer, each villager grasps a handful of rice on the tray and walks around the <i>preah vihear</i> three times as doing <i>bâh baybin</i> (throwing the piece of rice into the dark bush).
6:40	Monks and novices are invited to the <i>sala chhan</i> for offering of porridge for breakfast.

Source: Author's research

Buddhist lay precepts) toward a monk, and ending with listening to *tesana* (preaching the sermon). All of these were marked by the lead of *achar vatt* of each temple. However, the *pithi kanbin* in two temples were characterized by some clear differences. For example, the order in Vatt SK lacked one step of *bâh baybin* (throwing the piece of rice into a dark bush) which took place in the morning of the second day in the case of Vatt PA (see Photo 1). It is widely believed among Cambodians that *chidaun chita* (literally, grandparents) and *praet* (evil spirits, ghost [Headley 1977]) appear in this ground in the season of Phchombin. The participants in Vatt PA provided interpretation for me saying that this deed is for the purpose of feeding those spirits hiding in the darkness. They claimed that this is the way passed down from their *chidaun chita* as their own national custom (*propeiney cheat*). However, when I asked Mr. PP (1940–), the prominent *achar vatt* of Vatt SK who was ordained as a novice in Vatt SK in 1955

**Table 8** Summarized Order of *pithi kanbin* in Vatt SK

September 27th, 2000

Time	Events
18:40	Monks and novices are invited to the <i>sala chhan</i> (meeting hall) and villagers offer them some tea with sugar. After this, monks and novices get out of the <i>sala chhan</i> .
19:13	The <i>achar vatt</i> leads villagers to face the Buddha statue and chant <i>nomosekar</i> (adoration for Buddha, dharma and monk). Then, monks and novices are invited to the <i>sala chhan</i> again. The <i>achar</i> leads others to chant the word of <i>som seyl</i> (request for Buddhist lay precepts). After this, monks and novices chant <i>preah parit</i> (protective prayer of Buddha).
20:10	Most of monks and novices get out of the <i>sala chhan</i> . The head monk is invited for <i>tesana</i> (preaching the sermon).
21:08	The preaching is finished, villagers prepare mosquito nets on the <i>sala chhan</i> for sleeping, or sit in a circle and chat over a cup of tea. Some of them go back to sleep their home.

September 28th, 2000

Time	Events
4:30	Villagers begin to get up. A group of <i>daun chi</i> (women disciplinant) invites others to sit in front of the Buddha statue and chant <i>nomosekar</i> and other various prayers all together. Most of participants are women and the <i>achar vatt</i> don't join in.
6:00	The chanting is finished.
7:36	Monks and novices are invited to the <i>sala chhan</i> for offering of porridge for breakfast.

Source: Author's research

and was appointed as the head monk during 1966–69, he explained the reason of the lack of *bâh baybin* in Vatt SK as that:

If one wishes to transfer merit to the dead, rice should be offered to a monk as a source of merit. In Buddha's sacred words in the Tripitaka, we could not find any explanations about *bâh baybin*. Such practice is really meaningless, because merit must be transferred through Buddhist monks. Dogs eating rice on the field can't help anything.



**Photo 1** *Bâh Baybin* in Vatt PA

For him, the popular Buddhist notion of *praet* counts for nothing. Instead, he emphasized the importance of following Buddhist doctrine more strictly.

Moreover, some other differences between the *pithi kanbin* in two temples can be pointed out from the perspective of participant observation. In the case of Vatt SK, many villagers including *achar vatt* and *kenakammekar vatt* returned home from the temple after listening to

*tesana*,<sup>34)</sup> and a group of pious women conducted the predawn chanting of various Buddhist prayers that lasted for more than an hour.<sup>35)</sup> In Vatt PA, most villagers spent the night in the temple chatting about the teachings of Buddha, or exchanging village rumors. The *achar vatt* and *kenakammekar vatt* of the temple stayed overnight at the temple as usual during the season despite their exhaustion from fatiguing works conducted every night. It is also important to understand the differences in *pithi kanbin* ritual in the two temples in San Kor commune, where there is an obvious gap in the amount of monetary contribution toward the temples during the season. As seen in Table 9, the sums of money collected by the *chamnoh* people to contribute toward the building projects in the temple, called *pachchay kâsang* in Khmer, was much greater in Vatt SK than in Vatt PA.<sup>36)</sup> The table also shows the clear disparity in the amount of money among the *chamnoh* villages of Vatt PA. More specifically, the amounts of the days charged by the villages of SKH, SK, SR, SM, VL, all of them located in the vicinity of the market, were higher than other villages.

Finally, I must add one more observation on Buddhist practice in the two temples in San Kor commune described above. In practice, the local people in San Kor commune use the Khmer word *samay* (new/modern) and *boran* (old/ancient) to refer to the differences in the Buddhist rituals in the two temples. Thus, such as Vatt SK is *vatt samay* (the temple of new practice) and Vatt PA is *vatt boran* (the temple of traditional practice).<sup>37)</sup> Sometimes the people express their ideas about the different practices, such as “I don’t like *samay*.” More interestingly, these two expressions, *samay* and *boran*, were also frequently found in the local people’s offhand remarks toward others: in some cases in a self-effacing manner, but quite often as open criticism of the other’s religious attitude, such as “They are too *boran*.” In fact, these perceptions are primarily based on retrospective recognition of change, and the contrast refers to various objects and ideas in village life. This paper will focus more closely on these

34) In this case, I think geographical proximity between the village and the temple might be less important than the fact of the absence of rituals in predawn.

35) The chanting of women in the early morning was led by a few *daun chi*, who were the active members of ANLWC (Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia), which was founded in 1995 with the support of the government and foreign agencies.

36) The money offered from laypersons to Buddhist Sangha is called *pachchay* in Khmer. In the occasion of *pithi kanbin* in the temple of research area, three kinds of *pachchay* were collected: *pachchay bangsokaul* handed to the head monk, *pachchay tesana* offered toward the monk that preached the sermon at the night, and *pachchay kâsang* for the building projects in the temple. The money to buy food and materials for using in the festival was also called *pachchay* but was not included in *pachchay kâsang*.

37) After finalizing the first draft of this paper, I happened to learn of the existence of a recent article in Spanish by Dr. John Marston[2002], which analyses about the trends of Buddhist *boran* in the post-socialist Cambodia, and received the unpublished manuscript of an English version of the article by courtesy of the author. He focuses attention on *boran* as a way of considering what form religious movements take in Cambodia after the end of socialism, and examines three cases of *boran* temples. Although there is a gap between his interest in Buddhist *boran* and the scope of this paper as the ethnographic study on the reconstruction of Buddhist practice in understanding of the division in village Buddhism in Cambodian rural society, I try to incorporate it into the concluding part of this paper.

**Table 9** *Pachchay kásang* Collected during the Season of Bon Phchombin in 2001

Day	Vatt SK		Vatt PA	
	Villages in Charge	Amount in Riel	Villages in Charge	Amount in Riel
1	VL	132,900	(c)	23,700
2	VL	120,500	PA	49,500
3	VL	135,500	CH	55,000
4	SR	151,400	SKP	30,700
5	SR	172,200	KB	25,000
6	TK	147,000	KB	34,000
7	SK	182,400	SKH	116,500
8	SK	151,600	(c)	34,600
9	SR	120,400	SKH	70,400
10	(a)	125,000	SK	139,200
11	BL	145,200	SR	201,300
12	(b)	150,500	SM	123,900
13	SK	158,400	VL	177,600
14	SK	158,500	SM	180,000
15	(c)	347,700	(c)	572,500
	Total	2,399,200	Total	1,833,900

Source: Author's research

Notes: (a): The day was charged by the group of teachers of the elementary school near the market.

(b): The day was charged by the villagers of BK and TB village in the neighboring commune.

(c): The days were charged by the whole *chamnoh* people of the temple.

At an exchange rate of US\$ 1 = 3,900 riel.

contrasting expressions in Buddhist practice in San Kor commune in the following sections. At first, I will examine the origin of the issue in the pre-war historical context.

#### IV The Reform of Vatt SK in the 1940s

When and how was the so-called *samay* style of Buddhist practice brought about in Vatt SK? Based on narratives of elderly people, the Buddhist practice in Vatt SK had been conducted in the traditional manner by the beginning of 1940s. Furthermore, they unanimously related that the change of practice in Vatt SK had been guided by the hand of Mr. LH (1906–46), who was reputedly the richest person in San Kor commune at the time.<sup>38)</sup> He worked as a paddy-rice wholesaler, among other roles, and frequently traveled to Phnom Penh and sometimes further to Saigon. Although the details are not clear, he enhanced the personal exchanges with monks in Vatt Unnalaom in Phnom Penh, and finally built the two-storey *kot* (building where monks

38) Mr. LH was born in San Kor commune. His father is a Chinese immigrant from Fujian province and mother is a Cambodian-Chinese (“Sino-Khmer”) born in San Kor. According to his daughter, he had spent no time as a monk in his youth.





Photo 2 Kot built by Mr. LH in Vatt Unnalaom

live) in the temple compound with his own resources<sup>39)</sup> (see Photo 2).

Vatt Unnalaom can be considered as the center of institutionalized national Buddhism in Cambodia. Since King Norodom (1834–1904) relocated the capital from Odongk to Phnom Penh in 1866, past and present *sângkheareach* (the highest ranking monk in the national Buddhist Sangha) of Maha Nikay sect had continuously resided in the temple. And as a matter of further interest, it is at Vatt Unnalaom that a group of Maha Nikay monks led by the two outstanding religious figures, Samdach Chuon Nath (1883–1969) and Samdach Huot Tat (1891–1975), embarked on the reform of popular Buddhist practice, which they claimed were based on the strict interpretation of the Tripitaka<sup>40)</sup> [e.g. Edwards 1999].

According to Huot Tat [1993: 11–12], their reform, begun in the 1910s, resulted in a division between the reformist monks and the adherents of tradition in and around the Sangha of Maha Nikay. The latter group upheld traditional popular practice without reconsidering it according to Buddhist scriptures. They also referred to the reformist monks, who intently study texts and chant Buddhist prayers in not only Pali but also in Khmer, as *thoa thmey* (new dharma). Furthermore, the traditionalists expressed open hostility toward the reformists.<sup>41)</sup> I cannot pursue a discussion of this movement at the center of national Sangha here, but it may be useful to quote historian Penny Edwards' conclusion that Nath, Tat and other reformist monks tried "to translate their beliefs and ideas about the true and proper shape of Khmer Buddhism into a coherent body of thought and literature which, by the 1930s, had emerged as the authentic, national model of Khmer Buddhism" [1999: 301].

Focusing on the changes in practice in Vatt SK in the 1940s again, it is understandable that Mr. LH imported the new style Buddhist practice from the capital to the rural temple. The specific contents of change that took place in Vatt SK at the time as described by Mr. PP and others are listed as Table 10. Mr. PP insisted that the main assertion of the instructions was the return to Buddha's teaching in the Tripitaka, emphasizing the causal circle of *kâmm* (Pali.,

39) The *kot* was specially dedicated toward a superior monk named Prach Pâl in Vatt Unnalaom. Nowadays we can see it standing as it had before the civil war.

40) Samdach Chuon Nath was appointed to the highest rank of Maha Nikay sect during the period of 1948–69 and Samdach Huot Tat acceded to the rank until 1975. Nowadays Nath is recognized as a national hero in Cambodia for projects he helped to put in place: the Khmer translation of Tripitaka, the first Khmer language dictionary, and other efforts.

41) The reformist practice is also referred to as *thoa prae* (dharma in Khmer translation). And the conflicting situation at the time can be understood from Tat's description of how bricks and stones were thrown into the residence of Nath and Tat in Vatt Unnalaom at night when they started to claim the practice different from tradition [Huot Tat 1993: 13].

**Table 10** Specific Contents of the Reform in Vatt SK in the 1940s

Item	Before the Reform	After the Reform
Place for meal of monks and novices	Separated with different lines by monks and novices	Both monks and novices form one line
Chanting of monks and novices	Separated in place and time by monks and novices	Carried out by monks and novices all together
Language for chanting	Pali only	Pali with Khmer translation
Texts for learning	Palm leaf texts	Printed books
Targets of offering	Buddha, dharma, monks and other spiritual entities	Buddha, dharma, monks only
Offering items	Flower, candle and other traditional offerings	Flower and candle only

Source: Author's research

kamma; Skr., karma) in life, and denying reliance upon others such as spirits. Thus, these changes demanded that pleas for help in popular Buddhist rituals be discarded. As for monks, it leveled the hierarchical principle between monks and novices, encouraging them to learn and enhance Buddhist knowledge all together, and required them not only to memorize the sacred Pali texts but also to receive lessons about them in Khmer. For example, it considered that the recitation of Pali phrases was insufficient, and strongly asserted that the translation in Khmer should be presented together. Those changes covered everyday monastic practice as well as the contents of popular rituals, and should be regarded as a kind of reform of the temple.

However, the reform of practice in Vatt SK provoked a controversy and conflict among the local people despite the legitimate interpretation upon which the changes were based. Although the incident occurred half a century ago, the seriousness of the break is clear from the fact that some of the monks residing in Vatt SK had moved to Vatt PA as a consequence of the reform. At the same time, Vatt SK seemed to lose a great number of *chamnoh* as was demonstrated by villagers — some of whom did not offer food to the monks of Vatt SK, avoided the temple or did not walk in the compound of the temple after it changed. Further evidence of this change is seen as a majority of men in VL village between the ages of 60 and 69 were once ordained in Vatt PA, and they explained that the reason for their choices was that their parents disliked Vatt SK at the time.<sup>42)</sup> Getting another perspective on the conflict, it could be largely attributable to the personal attitude of Mr. LH. Allegedly he used to say that he could afford all food and money for monks in Vatt SK without anyone's participation, when he encountered objection from others. His words are seemingly against the nature of the Theravada Buddhist temple as an open place for everyone, and indicate that Mr. LH implemented the reform by using his financial power without sufficient negotiation or compromise.<sup>43)</sup>

42) In the population of VL village, the number of men of the ages 60–69 years old who had spent time in monkhood was 16. Actually, half of them had been a monk or novice in Vatt PA.

43) The local people also remembered that he built a small hut in the temple compound when ↗

In short, when Mr. LH initiated the new practice in Vatt SK, a large number of local people in San Kor felt the new practice was too confining, and directly opposed participating in it.<sup>44)</sup> There are plenty of historical narratives in the community alluding to this conflict, and it likely continued until the end of the 1960s. According to Mr. PP, when he was the head monk of Vatt SK, the local families that ardently participated in Buddhist activities in the temple numbered only around 20, and the 13 rotation groups that organized *pithi kanbin* at the time consisted of one to two families.<sup>45)</sup> Most villagers in the vicinity of the temple rarely invited the monks of Vatt SK for Buddhist rituals at home. However, the temple at the time used to receive support from other *vatt samay* outside of the commune. Some of these temples helped to find a well-educated monk to invite as a teacher, and some gave financial assistance to construct a new building for the study of Pali and so on.<sup>46)</sup> It is in this historical context that the differentiation of the Buddhist practices of *samay* and *boran* was created in the commune.

## V The Recent Changes in Vatt PA

After the coup d'état erupted into warfare in 1970, San Kor commune fell under the control of the communists. Local residents recalled that their livelihood activities were partly suspended by American bombing, but various religious activities continued with very little changes until 1973. As the communists conducted propaganda campaigns targeting the local people, some monks decided to return to secular life because Buddhist monks were being criticized as parasites of society. Other monks were fascinated with the justice the propaganda claimed and traveled to join large meetings in different regions.<sup>47)</sup> However, it is in February 1974 that most of residents in San Kor, including monks and novices of Vatt PA and Vatt SK, were forced to move to the city of Kampong Thum by the government military.<sup>48)</sup> The commune had quite a

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↙ approaching death and did not allow his wife and children to get close to his deathbed, because he was a man of extraordinary devotion and did not want to have a fixation for this world. This story leads us make sense of his strong faith for Buddhism.

44) It is said that the people despised the supporter of Vatt SK in the way of saying of *khiq* at that time. In my opinion, this saying was from the title of book named *Khiq padebat* (the practice of laypersons) that was published by the reformist monks since the 1920s.

45) The local group supporting the temple at the time consisted of several wealthy figures in SK village who had kinship relations with Mr. LH, and some of their relatives in surrounding villages. In addition, a large number of monks in the temple in those days were not natives of San Kor, for instance Mr. PP who was born in Tbaeng commune, adjoining west of San Kor.

46) According to Mr. PP and others, there were several temples that experienced the reform of practice prior to Vatt SK in the vicinity of the provincial capital, including temples in Kampong Svay commune of Kampong Svay district, or some part of Stoung district. The penetration process of reformist practice to the region is an issue for future research.

47) One ex-monk who resided in Vatt PA at the time recalled that he traveled to attend a large meeting of Buddhist monks held in the top of Kulen Mountain in Siem Reap province in 1973. As for the communists' effort to organize Buddhist monks, Kiernan wrote about the case in Prey Veng province [1985: 345].

48) The relocation operation of local residents by the government force was targeted to the broad area in the west and northwest of the provincial capital.

small population during this year and some revolutionary monks resided in Vatt SK, but they had to earn their living themselves.<sup>49)</sup> In the same year, Vatt PA, where the communists' base was situated, suffered air attacks from American forces and a fire destroyed a great amount of palm leaf texts in the temple. In April 1975, the people returned from the provincial capital to their homes, but most of them were not allowed to live in villages and were ordered instead to settle in the wastelands. All religious practice was banned. All the Buddhist monks in the region were forced to renounce their yellow robes by the beginning of 1976, causing a downturn in Buddhist practice. Vietnamese troops came to the area in January 1979, and most of the villagers in the commune returned to settle in their villages for the first time since 1975. Buddhist activities started again spontaneously. Elderly people would gather in the temple compound and chant in front of the surviving Buddha image on every Buddhist Sabbath Day, after which respected ex-monks blessed them. Then, in 1981 four local men over the age of 60 were ordained at a temple in the provincial capital and returned to reside at Vatt PA and Vatt SK. These newly ordained monks brought about the revival of the Buddhist monkhood in the commune, but because of ongoing fighting in the region various religious activities were not conducted in an orthodox manner.

Turning from the pre-war historical narratives to the contemporary context again, a group of old men and women who participated in Buddhist rituals in Vatt PA consistently told me that the present practice in Vatt PA was not like that in old times, and complained in Khmer that: *samay haoey* (changed to the new/modern one). This suggests that the usage of the contrastive expressions of the Buddhist practice *samay* and *boran* had shifted focus. Based on their explanations, the recent changes in Vatt PA can be characterized as shown in Table 11. The

**Table 11** Representative Contents of Recent Changes in Vatt PA

Item	Until the 1960s	In the 1990s
Place for meal of monks and novices	Separated with different lines by monks and novices	Both monks and novices form one line
Chanting of monks and novices	Separated in place and time by monks and novices	Carried out by monks and novices all together
Language for chanting	Pali only	Pali with Khmer translation
Texts for learning	Palm leaf texts and printed books	Printed books
Targets of offering	Buddha, dharma, monks and other spiritual entities	Buddha, dharma, monks and other spiritual entities
Offering items	Flower, candle and traditional offerings	Flower, candle and traditional offerings

Source: Author's research

49) One of ex-monks who stayed in Vatt SK at the time explained that they would plow a rice field and climb a palm tree to make sugar by themselves.

changes in practice are clear. For example, monks and novices in Vatt PA used to be strictly separated in the place and time for chanting and eating, but now they do these activities together. Chanting was done only in Pali before, but now it is followed by Khmer translation. And interestingly, these changes in practice correspond to the reformist's perspective that once provoked a severe antagonistic reaction from the *chamnoh* of Vatt PA. In short, *samay* and *boran* now referred to the difference not only between Vatt SK and Vatt PA, but also the division inside Vatt PA itself.

How did these changes come about in Vatt PA? Mr. SS (1968- ), who had been the head monk in charge of Vatt PA during 1991-96, was a key figure within the early stage of the reconstruction process in Vatt PA. When I asked about those changes in practice, he explained that: "Excessive conservatism is unnecessary, and any practices not found in the Tripitaka need not be carried out, even if they were once standard in prior times." I consider this statement to be quite agreeable from the perspective of Theravada doctrine, but I also think that there is room for further analysis. The life story of Mr. SS, as an example of young monks in post-socialist Cambodia, raises two factors that are keys for understanding the restoration of Cambodian Buddhism.

The first factor is related to the absence of empirical observation of traditional practice during their boyhoods. Once Mr. SS related: "When I became a monk, it was difficult for me to use monk's language properly, because I couldn't learn it by imitating elderly monks."<sup>50)</sup> The basic traits of speech etiquette for a monk might be the object of learning for a Cambodian youth in any other era, but his story indicates that young monks who were ordained in the very early stage of the reconstruction were especially estranged from the traditional Buddhist context.<sup>51)</sup> Mr. SS and other 13 young men aged 18-21 spent two months at Vatt PA to learn the basic prayers for ordination, and then participated in the ordination ceremony in December 1988 at a temple in Stoung district, about 20 km west of San Kor commune. This was the second group to be ordained from the commune since 1979. Because the group of young men, including Mr. SS, was born in the end of 1960s, the eve of civil war, they had grown up in wartime without the experience of participating in traditional popular Buddhist rituals until their adolescence.

The second factor is related to the rule of the Cambodian Sangha since its reconstruction in 1979. After spending one year at Vatt PA, Mr. SS and fellow monks departed from Vatt PA because security in San Kor commune had deteriorated in 1990.<sup>52)</sup> They found sanctuary at Vatt

50) For example, the Khmer first person pronoun changes from *khnhom* to *athma*, once men become monks.

51) In addition, the texts used by the young monks in learning were different. While monks and novices in Vatt PA in pre-war times had used palm leaf texts, which were handed down through generations, for their studies, monks use printed texts after the reconstruction. I could not find any cases in which monks use palm leaf texts in their studies in the 39 temples in Kampong Svay and Stoung Saen district, Kampong Thum province, although the palm leaf texts have not vanished completely from the religious scene in the country.

52) The withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from the region in 1989 resulted in the deterioration of security. At that time some wealthy villagers spent daytime in village and went to sleep in the ↗

SY, where the *anukon* of Kampong Svay district resided, and learned *thoa* (Pali, dharma) and *viney* (Pali, vinaya) under the *anukon* for one year. During this time Mr. SS became more familiar with the reformist practice, not the traditional one once practiced in Vatt PA, because the *anukon* in the district is known as a strong advocate of reformist thought and practice. However, what is more important is that no monk in the district except for the *anukon* could supervise the ordination ceremony as *upachchhea* then and now. In other words, the privilege of *upachchhea* in Cambodian Buddhism was once widely given to monks with adequate knowledge and over 10 years' experience in the monkhood in pre-war times, but since the rebirth of Cambodian Buddhism in 1979 the title and role were approved only for particular government-appointed monks, so that the government could secure control over the ordination processes.<sup>53)</sup> Even after the official declaration announced the return to the rule of the Sangha as it was in the pre-war era in 1993, in Kampong Svay district, the *anukon* continued to serve as the *upachchhea* at every ordination ceremony in the district. All of the succeeding monks and novices in Vatt PA consequently have a relationship with the *anukon*, and are influenced by him to varying degrees.<sup>54)</sup> That is, even as monks' practice in Vatt PA has been reconstructed, the freedom to choose an *upachchhea* aligned with the temple's tradition as it had been in the pre-war time has not existed. This is a result of both regional circumstances and also the government's intentional regulation.<sup>55)</sup>

## VI Reconstruction of Buddhist Practice in the Two Temples

As described above, the historical experience of the local society in the 1970–80s resulted in the elicitation of different attitudes among the people regarding Buddhist practice. First and foremost, the discontinuity of rural life from the status quo ante caused by warfare and the DK rule is of primary importance and affects various spheres of social life as a matter of

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↘ provincial capital every night. The market of San Kor commune was burned out once in a battle between Khmer Rouge army and the government in 1990. The instability in the region continued until 1993.

- 53) This insight from fieldwork is also supported by relevant government documents. Based on the government *sarachâr* (circular) No. 02–82: KRS. SR in 1982, the socialist government of the day approved the roll of *upachchhea* only for government appointed monks [Li Sovi 1999: 11], and the following circular in 1989, which asserted the abolishment of age restriction, still upheld restriction over the title and roll of *upachchhea*, requiring appointment by the state [*ibid.*: 16]. Finally in March 1993 government circular No. 02/93: KChS changed the description of the qualification of the *upachchhea* from government appointed to follow the rules of Cambodian Sangha in the pre-war time [*ibid.*: 30].
- 54) Some monks and novices in the district customarily visit the *anukon* before entering the Buddhist Lent season. The act is called as *thvay krou* (pay homage to the teacher) and helps us understand the continuous relation with the *upachchhea* and fellow monks.
- 55) My survey conducted at 19 of 21 temples in Kampong Svay district demonstrates that the issue of the changes in monks' practice after the DK era was also an important concern in other temples. This trend may partly come from the situation that the provincial officials of Ministry of Religions and Cults, the *mekon* of Kampong Thum province, the *anukon* of Kampong Svay district at present are all adherents of *samay* style. The comparative study in different regions is a topic for future research.

**Table 12** Statistics for Men of VL Village Who Were Monks or Novices

Age Group	A, Number of Males in Village	B, Number Who Were Monks or Novices	Percentage of B in A
15-19	37	0	0
20-24	17	1	5.9
25-29	20	1	5.0
30-34	27	1	3.7
35-39	31	0	0
40-44	13	0	0
45-49	14	3	21.4
50-54	8	5	62.5
55-59	10	4	40.0
60-64	11	8	72.7
65-69	10	8	80.0
70-74	4	3	75.0
75-79	1	1	100
Total	203	35	17.2

Source: Author's research

Notes: Males who are monks are uncounted.

Males under 14 years old are omitted because ordination as a novice is not common for them.

generational gap between the old and the young.<sup>56)</sup> Particularly clear in this context is the complete cessation of Buddhist practice during the DK era. As seen in the case of VL village (Table 12), in the male population today, monkhood experiences are different according to age group.

The process of reconstructing Buddhist practice since the beginning of the 1990s in the case of Vatt PA resulted in some visible changes. In other words, the everyday monastic practice of young monks changed to the so-called *samay* style that the reformist monks had maintained. This means that the scope designated by the word *samay* was extended in the temple. However, I think the historical narratives and the remarks about the present situation must be analyzed comprehensively in order to realize under what conditions the reconstruction of Buddhist practice in these temples is progressing today. Additionally, if one pays attention to the local people's present participation in the two temples in, for example, the rotation group of *pithi kanbin*, it is apparent that Vatt SK currently draws many more local people than in pre-war times. In order to comprehend this interesting phenomenon, it is helpful to reconsider the varied attitudes of participants.

The first instance is Monk KS, the head monk of Vatt SK. He was ordained in Vatt PA in pre-war times, but resides in Vatt SK today. When asked about the practice of *boran*, he related

56) As for the aftermath of the DK regime, I do not deny the opinion that argues the harsh life experience at the time affected the people's cognitive processes. However, this paper concentrates on analyzing it within the context of social change, instead of approaching a certain individual from the psychological perspective or of using analytical concepts such as "social memory."



that he accepted these practices when he first became a monk but began to question them through his own study of Pali scriptures.<sup>57)</sup> Nowadays he emphasizes the importance of *kāmm* in life at every occasion of preaching the Buddha's teaching, and strongly criticizes the practice of *boran* as Buddhist practice mixed with Brahmanism (*promanh sasana*). His case corresponds with others like Mr. PP, who has been a monk for relatively long time and has enough knowledge to explain the practice of *samay* using appropriate Buddhist idioms.<sup>58)</sup> The second attitude toward the issue is seen in the person who simply disagrees with the effectiveness of *boran* practices, such as Monk TK, the young head monk of Vatt PA. He speaks some English,<sup>59)</sup> and although he has a good knowledge of Pali scriptures, he prefers to discuss social issues such as "social development" and "human rights" in his preaching. This type of attitude can be found in both monks and laypersons, young and old. Some interpret the invalidity of *boran* practice through use of the scientific knowledge, and some talk about it according to personal experience.<sup>60)</sup> The third could be described as the majority of the local people. They are close-lipped about the issue. They know the difference between the two kinds of practice in their actual sense, but seem to be indifferent. If one asks why they repeatedly participate in a certain temple's activities, they might simply describe their choice with emotional words such as like (*chaul chett*), and happy (*sabbay*). The last instance is the person who somehow professes adhesion toward the practice of *boran*. Some strongly stress this preference with the word "national custom" or with theoretical knowledge of Buddhism that they claim to be traditional. Sometimes they talk of *boran* practice with a somewhat nostalgic air. In sum, the local people participating in Buddhist activities in two temples can be considered as lying on a spectrum. Here, the self-claimed Buddhist *samay* are on one end, the self-confessed Buddhist *boran* are on the other end, and the majority of *chamnoh* people are situated between.

As for *boran* and *samay* distinctions in contemporary Cambodian Buddhism, John Marston [2002] presents his consideration through a sketch of three Buddhist temples in Kampong Cham and Kandal provinces, which have a reputation as *vatt boran*. According to him, "contemporary *boran* represents the memory of *boran* Buddhism as it existed prior to 1975 and the idea of continuity with the traditional practices of specific wats and spiritual leaders. Insofar as this memory is partial and shaped by the contemporary political and social landscape,

57) When he was ordained in his youth, he had traveled to reside in a temple in Kampong Cham province for three years. He said the practice of the temple was *boran* but had a good teacher of Pali. According to him, the temple in Kampong Cham didn't have a Pali school for official education of monks in those days.

58) As for the *anukon* of Kampong Svay district, the monk once told the local people the reason of his strong assertion of the reformist practice of emphasis on the causal circle of *kāmm* and self-help in his preaching at the large festival I observed as that: "If you believe spirits would help you out of the mess, what were they doing during the Pol Pot period? All of the agony of the Pol Pot period came from our *kāmm*."

59) He learned English, when he resided in the temples in Phnom Penh. Today it is very popular for young monks in Phnom Penh and other cities to attend private foreign language or computer school, in addition to the learning of Pali.

60) Some old persons told me during the research that: "The traditional rituals had been stopped for many years. And our life may not change so much if we do or not."

the re-emergence of *boran* is a new phenomenon.” I think his standpoint for studying *boran* in present-day Cambodian Buddhism, as a new movement, is quite agreeable. While he also notes that “at the core of our discussion is the ironical fact that *samay*, what once ‘reform’ Buddhism, becomes the religion of tradition as remembered from the pre-1975 years, and *boran*, in claiming to be more authentic, implies a reform of *samay* — although not consciously in the direction of the modern,”<sup>61)</sup> I think the contraposition of the concepts *samay* and *boran* is too clear-cut, because, if one hopes to focus on them for the purpose of studying village Buddhism, one must start from the realization that elements of so-called *samay* and *boran* in fact co-exist in local people’s lives.

Then, why does Vatt SK attract many more people today in comparison with pre-war times? Considering the variety of the participants I categorized into four types, it is essential to focus on the third category, the majority of *chamnoh* who keep silent about the issue of the differences of practice. And a review of the socio-economic setting of the research area seems to be the crucial key to understanding the phenomenon. At first, one should keep in mind the general mood of economic vitalization in Cambodian rural society after the national election in 1993. As apparent from the case of VL village, which had begun to send many young girls to garment factories in the vicinity of the capital in 1998, the expansion of village household economic activities in recent years steadily affects the lives of villagers.<sup>62)</sup> In addition, in the case of the research area, the uneven development of the village economy within the commune can be understood from the example that the villages in the vicinity of the market collected much larger monetary contributions than the remote villages (see Table 9). The two Buddhist temples and the local life of *chamnoh* people in San Kor commune are situated in this kind of rapid socio-economic change and differentiation. This affects how *chamnoh* people participate in the temple. In the last instance indicated in Table 13, it is clear that Vatt PA draws most of its monks and novices from its own *chamnoh* villages, but Vatt SK does not. Among the total 24 monks and novices in Vatt SK during the Buddhist Lent season of 2001, 15 were not San Kor native. Ten of 15 came from Damrei Slab commune in Kampong Svay district, and 4 other novices came from Prasat Balangk district, both of which are remote and forested areas located north of San Kor commune.<sup>63)</sup> The present *chamnoh* temple community of Vatt SK includes a number of wealthy families, many more than the community of the remote temples. Few of their children are ordained and reside in the temple, but they eagerly join the activities and make offerings to the monks in the temple in the hope of making merit.

61) As for this statement, I must add to notice that Marston argues that the socialist government’s emphasis on the scientific integration of religion into social life, as a part of the state project of modernity, meant that *samay* was emphasized to the exclusion of *boran* and the issue of *boran* and *samay* began to re-emerge in 1989. Basically he discusses *samay* and *boran* as analytical concepts, while this paper focuses them as a way to describing the division of village Buddhism.

62) For example, weddings in VL village in recent years marked a large increase of expenditure for the reception banquet in inverse to the abbreviation of ritual procedures.

63) Both Damrei Slab commune and Prasat Balangk district have local temples, but, according to some novices and their parents, they are ordained and reside in Vatt SK because of the better dietary and education condition.

**Table 13** Distribution of Birthplace of Monks and Novices of 4 Temples in San Kor Commune

Birthplace	Vatt SK	Vatt PA	Vatt PK	Vatt KM
<i>Chomnoh</i> villages	6	32	9	9
Other villages in San Kor commune	3	1	3	0
Other communes in Kampong Svay district	10	0	0	0
Other districts in Kampong Thum province	5	0	0	6
Other provinces	0	1	0	2
Total	24	34	12	17

Source: Author's research during Buddhist Lent season of 2001

One more unique characteristic of the so-called *samay* practice of Vatt SK is relevant here. Although the explanation of the theoreticians, who I categorized as the first type, about their own practice leaves us with an impression of continuous assertion of the primary importance of Buddhist doctrine, it doesn't mean that there is no room for stretching the interpretation. To cite a specific instance, the discussion of *som seyl* (request for Buddhist lay precepts) in Vatt SK suggests this. Upholding *seyl* (Buddhist precepts) is definitely one of the primary means of making merit for Theravada Buddhists. And there are two kinds of lay precept: *seyl pram* (literally, five precepts: do not kill, do not steal, remain celibate, do not lie, do not drink intoxicating beverages) and *seyl prambey* (literally, eight precepts: add three more precepts with *seyl pram*, do not eat after noon, do not listen to music or attend occasions of entertainment, do not decorate the body with perfumes, jewels and others). Then, both precepts are given from a monk to laypersons through the recitation of request on every Buddhist Sabbath day. However, the situation of *som seyl* is quite different between Vatt SK and Vatt PA in these days. All of the participants on Buddhist Sabbath day in Vatt SK request *seyl prambey*, but most of the people request *seyl pram* in the case of Vatt PA.<sup>64)</sup> This difference between the two temples could be attributed in the conception of *som seyl* in each temple. When I asked why they do not request *seyl prambey* on Buddhist Sabbath days in Vatt PA, the participants in the temple answered that: "it is too heavy to uphold, because if one is to hold *seyl prambey*, one must stay at the temple the entire day in order to keep it properly." At once, the participants in Vatt SK do not deny these difficulties of upholding *seyl prambey* and do agree that it is the traditional way their parents once practiced. However, the *achar vatt* of Vatt SK constantly gives the instruction that: "it is less necessary to stay at the temple, but rather it is essential to keep it wherever you are."<sup>65)</sup>

The question is not which idea of *som seyl* is correct, but I think we can understand from this example why so-called *samay* practice of Vatt SK attracts the local people today. Mr. PP, the *achar vatt* of Vatt SK, is always confident with his interpretation of the practice, and leads

64) There were only a few old men and several women who requested *seyl prambey* among the participants numbering about 50 in Vatt PA. Even the *achar vatt* of the temple requests *seyl pram*.

65) This instruction of *som seyl* in Vatt SK began from the 1980s, under the guidance of the former *achar vatt* who were the head monk of the temple in the 1950s.

the participants on every occasion. Then, indeed, most of the participants on Buddhist Sabbath day in Vatt SK, who I categorized as the third type, go back to their business at home immediately after finishing the recitation of *som seyl* in the morning. His instruction is agreeable because the local people around the market have come to enjoy more developed livelihoods in recent years. Of course, the instance of Vatt SK is one specific case of so-called *vatt samay*, and the explanation introduced above cannot be applied simply to all temples called *samay* in present-day Cambodian rural society. As Marston related what *boran* means today does not imply the same thing for all temples that identify themselves as *boran*, and the meaning of *samay* today also differs depending on the circumstance in each case.

In the case of the reconstruction of Buddhist practice after the discontinuity in San Kor commune, the existence of strong adherents to *boran* practice, the fourth category I asserted, cannot be overlooked, either. Because they often talk about their faith in very personal terms, or simply say that it is their tradition, persuasive analysis might be possible after the careful examination of life history narratives, which is impossible to do here. However, from another perspective, it seems to be helpful again to consider the socio-economic setting of research area with regard to some contrasting expressions pointing to individual distinctions such as *neak phsar* (people residing in market area)/*neak srae* (literally, rice-cultivator, means people residing in rural area in the broad sense), *neak mean* (people of wealth)/*neak krâ* (people of economic difficulty), *kaun chen* (literally, children of Chinese)/*kaun khmaer* (literally, children of Khmer), all of which appear frequently in the daily conversations of local people. Then, indeed, some of villagers in PA village often told me that their lives are different from *neak phsar* living in the vicinity of the market of San Kor.<sup>66)</sup>

The word *samay* or *samay haoey* has a multiplicity of meanings in contemporary Cambodian society. At first, one must be conscious of the fact that the indication of *boran* and *samay*, ancient and modern, has a kind of special function to provide a reference to a turning point in various historical changes in their life, like the *mun kraoy* (before after, in Khmer) contrast, which is very often related to experiences resulting from warfare and the rule of the DK regime, not only in the local people's narratives but also in academic descriptions of contemporary Cambodia. Moreover, the indication of *boran* and *samay* emerges in a more complicated manner in reference to Buddhist practice, because it shows another association with the reformist Buddhist practice that originated from the central of national Sangha in the 1910s. Thus, Buddhist theoreticians frequently speak out about what is *samay* and what is *boran* according to their own Buddhist knowledge. However, if one respects the perspective that it might make sense when situated in the specific context in which the contrastive expressions are used, one must be aware that the indications are also used for differentiating one from others. Furthermore, I believe that the socio-economic gaps in the local residents' everyday lives are primary sources of the conflicting identification of others. The existence of

66) As Michael Vickery reported in his pioneer study of post-DK Cambodia [1986: 128–130], economic discrepancies in the form of market/village contrast emerged from the very early stages of societal reconstruction of Cambodia.

strong adherents to either *boran* or *samay* Buddhist practice might, in a way, demonstrate a sense of rivalry in the local people's lives.

At last, in addition to the multi-layered spectrum of the participants in Buddhist rituals, the overlapping situation of the *chamnoh* temple community should similarly be regarded as a reality of great importance. As mentioned in the second section, a Buddhist temple is open to everyone. And even the *achar vatt* of Vatt SK joins and supervises the Buddhist rituals in Vatt PA according to circumstances.<sup>67)</sup> When Mr. PP participated in the rituals in Vatt PA, he always emphasized: "We all are Buddhist. Dharma of Buddha is only one." And actually, people can join the activities of either temple for their fundamental concern—merit making for this life and the next. This basic situation gives us the impression of a harmonious Buddhist temple. And indeed, May Ebihara once described the Cambodian temple as the social center of the village life. However, this paper's close analysis of the ethnographic conditions in and around the two neighboring Buddhist temples lead me to conclude that the Buddhist temples in present-day Cambodia is characterized by tension and negotiation among the participants of varied background, young monks and old laymen, the rich and the poor, the so-called modernists and the so-called traditionalists. The divisions sometimes emerge as criticism, and sometimes appear as compromised lament toward the current situation, while on the surface they are draped with the Buddhist ideals of peace. Although these issues require further elaboration, I hope that this paper contributes to the understanding of the reconstruction of Buddhist practice in contemporary Cambodian rural society.

## VII Conclusion

It is well known to contemporary Cambodia scholars that the country has undergone extensive social change, but comprehensive studies of this change are relatively few in number. This paper, as an ethnographic study based on long-term fieldwork, explored the historical changes and the reconstruction of Buddhist practice in two rural temples in the research area. Firstly, this paper discovered some visible differences in the Buddhist practice of those temples, and the differences described by the local residents in terms of *samay* and *boran*. According to the social history of the research area, Vatt SK, one of two temples studied, had experienced a series of changes in its religious practice in pre-war times. The new practice, which originated from the reformist movement of traditional popular Buddhist practice in the center of institutionalized national Sangha in the 1910s, had been installed in the temple by the initiative of one local rich person in the 1940s. It caused a severe controversy among the local people concerning about their Buddhist tradition and resulted in the break of the *chamnoh* temple

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67) One such circumstance is Bon Kathen, a common Buddhist annual festival in Theravada culture. It occurs around the month of November and aims to offer the monk's yellow robes called *kathina* in Pali toward each monastery. In the case of Bon Kathen of Vatt PA of the year 2000, Mr. PP led the recitation in the ritual of offering *kathina* to the monks by the request of the *mchas bon* (literally, owner of the ceremony, means a certain family or group which plays a central role in organizing the ceremony).

community. Elderly people remembered that at the time most local residents around Vatt SK opposed the new practice, and instead supported the practice of Vatt PA, the other temple studied here. It is at this time that the indication of Buddhist *samay* and *boran* began to be used in the area in order to differentiate one's religious attitude. Thus, Vatt SK became to be called *vatt samay* against Vatt PA called *vatt boran*.

Moreover, this paper also illustrated the recent changes of practice in Vatt PA, and the shift of the local people's attitudes regarding the Buddhist practice of *samay* and *boran*. In the early stages of reconstructing Buddhist practice in the temple, the newly ordained young monks did not hesitate to change their practices according to the circumstances they faced. Because they grew up during the period of civil war and the rule of the DK regime, they did not have the experience of learning by observing religious practice. The old palm leaf texts of the temple burned in the fires of the civil war. And the religious policy of the socialist government in the 1980s and the local condition of continued warfare in the beginning of the 1990s provided the connection of the group of young monks in the temple with the so-called *samay* style of Buddhist practice. However, the practice in Vatt PA did not completely change to reflect the interpretational legitimacy claimed by the reformist theoreticians. Some rituals in the temple are still carried out in accordance with the so-called traditional way, and many old people complaint about the recent *samay* practice of the monks. In sum, the picture of confrontation of the Buddhist *samay* and *boran* in recent years is emerging not only between the temples but also inside the temple.

Finally, this paper analyzed the reconstruction of Buddhist practice in these two temples by considering the multi-layered spectrum of the participants and the overlapping *chamnoh* temple community. The present-day local society is characterized by varied attitudes towards *samay* and *boran* Buddhist practices. The participants in rituals can be considered in the multi-layered gradational spectrum with the self-declared Buddhist *samay* on one end, the self-professed Buddhist *boran* on the other end, and most local people situated in-between. The majority of local people seem to have shifted their preference in recent years from the *boran* style of Buddhist practice to the *samay* style: however, this does not mean they share the same notion of what *samay* is. Considering the setting of the research area and the pattern of the people's participation in the temples, the different features of Vatt SK and Vatt PA can be understood in light of local socio-economic changes that have accelerated since the mid-1990s. Meanwhile, the *chamnoh* community is not defined by exclusive membership, but rather overlaps between temples in the same geographical area. At once, Buddhist ideals encourage the people to participate in the rituals together, as fellow Buddhists. However, this paper's focus on the expressions of *boran* and *samay* uncovered the existence of conflicts and compromises behind what is often presented as the harmonious Cambodian Buddhist temple atmosphere.

I present this paper as the first ethnographic study of Cambodian village society and religion after the DK era. The insights from this community study provide a basis for a deepened understanding of contemporary Cambodia. At the same time, it also has relevance for other societies that suffered warfare or totalitarian state rule, where generational gaps have



resulted from the discontinuity of traditional life. Therefore, the Cambodian experience provides a valuable comparative perspective with regard to revitalization of Theravada activities among Thai people in Yunnan province of China, or Buddhists in Laos. Moreover, the religious activities observed must be analyzed within the political and socio-economic contexts of reconstruction of each country. Thus, I believe that this paper's ethnographic descriptions of a rural Cambodian community make a useful contribution to the understanding of religious dynamics in contemporary mainland Southeast Asian societies.

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