Esoteric Theravada: The Story of the Forgotten Meditation Tradition of Southeast Asia. By Kate Crosby. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2020. xiii + 304 pages. $22.95 (paperback). ISBN: 9781611807943.

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Kate Crosby's new work makes available the results of years of very important research into the tradition of esoteric meditation in Southeast Asia. Crosby recovers what had been the most widespread form of Buddhist meditation in Southeast Asia prior to the modern period. In her introduction, Crosby explains that she uses the phrase the "old meditation" (*borān kammaṭṭhāna*) because the kind of meditation practice that she is examining existed prior to those promoted during the "revival period" that began in the nineteenth century, such as *vipassan*ā or insight.

The sequence of topics begins with an examination of attitudes during the colonial period, that is, the presumptions that affected the way in which Buddhism was understood. These were not only influential at the time, but continue to affect the perceptions of Southeast Asian Buddhism today. The "colonial gaze" trivialized and dismissed all kinds of meditation practice. Also important at this historical juncture was the introduction of a Cartesian style of dualism into the intellectual discourses in Southeast Asia. In the early modern period this led to a convergence of modernist styles of meditation with Western notions of a "mind science."[1] This Western conception of the power of the mind was itself rooted in an increasingly dualistic perspective in Western discourse during the nineteenth century, an "axiomatic separation of body and mind, or between *physis* and *psyche*.... For modernist

1. See Wakoh Shannon Hickey, *Mind Cure: How Meditation Became Medicine* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) for a full discussion of "mind science."

Christians, religion concerned only the latter" (p. 16). Buddhist proponents correspondingly began to represent the practice of Buddhism as a mental process and the goal as a mental transformation. This dualist orientation molded Buddhist modernist conceptions that sharply contrast with traditional Theravāda teachings regarding the "interdependence of materiality and consciousness" (p. 16). Although "Buddhism does not ... share the Cartesian mind-body distinction," the pressure to adhere to "modern" conceptions of the autonomy of the mind meant that those "meditation practices that were associated with cognitive change from realizing Buddhist truths such as impermanence, suffering, and no-self were emphasized, while those more associated with physical transformation and material power were marginalized" (p. 17).

One of the other aspects of the colonial relationship is that no European would have studied meditation under an Asian master, as that would have meant "controverting the hierarchy of the European–Asian relationship of the period" (p. 24). Consequently, the opportunity to learn the old meditation practice as a living tradition, rather than depending solely on the textual record, was squandered.

In the colonial context the embodied nature of the old meditation, which employs ritualized visualizations by which the practitioner works changes in their own body, led to its being dismissed as inferior or as decadent. In chapter 2 Crosby goes more deeply into the distinctive features of the old meditation, which include not only an embodied understanding of the Buddhist practices, but also of awakening.

Part of what made the old meditation inaccessible to the colonial gaze was its use of the conceptual system of the *abhidhamma*, as well as other systems of thought. These latter include embryology, theories of language, and numerology. These topics are explored more fully in later chapters, while the bulk of this second chapter is a comparison of the old meditation with both the system recorded by Buddhaghosa in the *Path of Purification* and modern insight meditation. What most distinguishes the old meditation from both of these is that "the practice is extended beyond altering the quality of consciousness and attainment of insight to altering the physicality of the practitioner" (p. 43). Extending the comparison, the chapter goes into further detail about the practice of the old meditation. Although largely disregarded today as irrelevant theorizing, the *abhidhamma* is key to understanding the conceptual system of the old meditation. The history of the

development of the tradition is difficult to trace, given the vagaries of the textual record and the effects of politics, both international and monastic, on the continuity of the textual record. The next chapter explores this history, which is important for a fuller understanding of the practice beyond its being rooted in *abhidhamma*.

The third chapter provides a study of the textual sources of the old meditation and their history. Genres of this literature include both exoteric and esoteric materials, and both narratives with allegorical significance and manuals of meditation instruction. As an embodied practice, it was linked with local forms of medicine and healing. The displacement of those by Western medicine during the colonial period contributed further to the loss of status for the old meditation. The literature was also subject to loss both by policy and by accident. Decisions by colonial powers, local rulers, and monastic authorities led in some cases to purposeful destruction and in other cases to loss due to neglect. Crosby describes both this background and how some portion of the literature has survived into the present.

Rather than looking solely to "Buddhist philosophy" and the orthodox doctrinal texts as determinative for practice, it is very important to see that practice develops in a cultural context. In the next two chapters (4 and 5) Crosby details the relation between the old meditation and two other intellectual currents—ideas regarding potent language and medical practices. We can see the same process today with the introduction of psychological concepts and practices into Buddhist meditative teachings.

Chapter 4 focuses on the theories of language that structure the old meditation as a "technology of transformation." Crosby explains the importance of language, both spoken and written, as being twofold. First, "grammar is the branch of learning that describes the correct formation of the language for conveying semantic meaning" (p. 107). The second is "to see grammar as a creative, potent—one might say 'magical'—event, which captures the power of the Dhamma" (p. 107).

As Crosby notes, the "traditional grammars on which Sanskrit and Pali learning had been based were generative grammars, in which the entire language can be generated from a set of roots and formulae" (p. 110). This is a well-established aspect of Indic grammar; Frits Staal, for example, noted that an "important feature of the Indian grammarians' method is rule order, a feature of linguistics that was unknown in the West prior to the development of contemporary generative

grammar."[2] What is important in Crosby's work here is the demonstration that these linguistic conceptions structure the visualizations of the old meditation. Her presentation of the technicalities of grammatical rules as models of transformation of the practitioner is clearly presented and well worth the effort required to understand how the old meditation system integrated language.

The fifth chapter addresses the sources of the old meditation that are to be found in Indic medicine and alchemy. Particularly noteworthy here is the use of embryological symbolism for creating a "buddha within." As Crosby explains, the idea of creating a new being within the body of the practitioner is "more than a metaphor": "The methods for treating the unborn fetus in Ayurveda are applied in inducing change in the meditation practitioner as they generate a Buddha within themselves" (p. 151). Creating the embryonic buddha within involved repeated cycles of visualization. Crosby explains that this involves alchemical symbolism, particularly "letter alchemy" related to the theories of powerful language discussed in the preceding chapter.

> The elements of the path to Buddhahood, the realization of the progressive desired mental states developed in meditation and represented by *nimitta* and phonemes of the Pali alphabet, penetrate the female (i.e., practitioner's) body and enter the womb. They are then withdrawn again and applied again, with the result that the body becomes more and more suffused with the elements of Buddhahood. (p. 159)

This imagery of repeatedly suffusing the internal embryonic buddha directly correlates with alchemical transformations.

Stretching from the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries, revivals and modernizing reforms within Thailand are the subject of chapter 6. The ascension of Mongkut (1804–1868) as King Rāma IV was the pivotal moment in these changes. Once himself a monk and trained in the old meditation, in order to build his own base he gave preference to one order, the Thammayut. This use of monastic politics was part of a program to centralize power in the court and constrained the Thai sangha with a "rhetoric of a reformist, rationalist agenda" (p. 181). This led to a rejection of the old meditation and the rise of a modernized, Burmese-style *vipassan*ā. At the same time, scholastic

2. Frits Staal, *Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 32.

study (*pariyatti*) was treated as having greater authority than meditative practice (*paṭipatti*).

Similar reforms and revivals outside of Thailand in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the subject of chapter 7. This part of the history extends to monastic politics in Sri Lanka and the role of caste in the modernization of Buddhism there. In midcentury, the conflicts in Vietnam after the end of World War II ramified through Cambodia. Cambodia saw the overthrow of its government by the Khmer Rouge, who violently suppressed all of Buddhism. After the defeat of the Khmer Rouge the old meditation had a short resurgence in Cambodia, but the influence of models of meditation as a mental practice contributed to "a shift within *borān kammaṭṭhāna* toward focus on just the sitting form of meditation, in other words to become closer to the more globally accepted conception of what meditation should entail" (p. 222). The normative image of Buddhist meditation as a silent, seated, mental practice of contemplation is quite at odds with the practices of the old meditation.

The similarity between the old meditation and tantra is reflected in the phrases modern researchers have used for it, including most explicitly "tantric Theravāda."[3] Crosby describes the old meditation as engaging in "sequential, body-based practices that internalize meditative experiences to create an enlightened being within, which utilize potent language and are transmitted in an esoteric teacher–pupil relationship" (pp. 1–2). Even in just this brief description, the practices look quite similar to those of the tantric tradition, and consequently "they reminded some modern observers of tantra, others of magical lore, and were dismissed as corruptions or as influences from beyond Theravada" (p. 2). This dismissive attitude follows from portrayals of modern *vipassan*ā as the sole pure and authentic form of practice, transmitted in an unbroken direct lineage from Śākyamuni. The similarities between the old meditation and tantra are substantial, and in order to frame the explanation of those similarities, we place Crosby's explanation into a larger schema of theories regarding similarity that are employed in the field of religious studies.

3. Kate Crosby, "Tantric Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay on the Writings of François Bizot and Others on the Yogāvacara Tradition," *Contemporary Buddhism* 1, no. 2 (2000): 141–198.

EXPLAINING SIMILARITIES: A TYPOLOGY OF THEORIES

Similarity and, to a lesser extent, difference between religions seems to have been the driving force for its study from the time of first contact between Europeans and other peoples. Over the last centuries of cultural contact, several different kinds of theories have been developed to explain why religions appear to be similar to one another. Theories about similarity can be grouped into the following kinds:

A. theological and metaphysical theories
B. historical: diffusion and convergence
C. psychological theories: experience, content, and structure
D. existential theories

A. Theological and Metaphysical

Theological explanations of similarity can be seen in the response of Catholic missionaries to discovering the sacrificial practices of the Aztecs: the Devil had proceeded them to the New World. Both similarity and difference were explained by the Deceiver's evil intent to lead humans away from the true faith. The destruction or redeployment of indigenous cult images by missionaries implies a kind of parity between the "true" religion of the missionary and the "false" religion of the native—that is, similarity and difference.[4] Such interpretations were also made of Buddhism, in Tibet and Japan for example.

Metaphysical comparisons move away from the direct causality of God or the Devil as the agent establishing the similarities and differences to hypostasizing a higher, metaphysical reality that is the common source of similar phenomena.[5] In religious studies, this usually takes the form of what I refer to as the "triangulation method." This assumes that the similarity of two religious beliefs, practices, symbols, whatever, points toward some third, otherwise invisible reality or truth. In classical terminology, this is the *tertium quid*, the hypostatized "third thing" that unifies two other known things but transcends both.

4. Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz notes the ironic character of missionary activities in this regard. See Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz, "Idols and Art: Missionary Attitudes toward Indigenous Worship and the Material Culture on Nias, Indonesia, 1904–1920," in *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Thomas David Dubois, 105–128 (Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
5.

Similar to these theological–metaphysical theories are the harmonizing conceptions of Perennialism, which continues to inform at least implicitly if not explicitly much of contemporary religious studies. Perennialism provides a simple and appealing explanation of similarity on the grounds that there is only one truth, and the corollary that the essential teachings of all religions necessarily point toward that one truth. Thus, the discernment of similarities leads us toward that one truth, while any attention to differences is only a mistaken concern with the non-essentials of the social or linguistic expression of religious truth.

B. Historical: Diffusion and Convergence

Diffusionist theories assume that historical continuity is the basic explanation for similarity.[6] Thus, the similarity between baptism as practiced in an evangelical church in Los Angeles and an Orthodox church in Kiev is explained by a continuous historical tradition connecting the two to a common ancestor. Both diffusion and convergence are rooted in theories of evolutionary biology, being adapted for the historical study of religion. Diffusion is the explanation for the similarities between instances, while differences are accumulated as instances diverge from one another. This leads to the presumption that the more differences, the longer the period of separation. Convergence is the complementary theory for explaining similarity but seems to be explicitly invoked only rarely.[7] The "convergent evolution of adaptive traits can be considered to arise independent of phylogeny [i.e., of an immediate common ancestor] shaped by common solutions to similar socio-ecological problems."[8] For religion, then, similarities may arise

6. Jack David Eller, *Introducing Anthropology of Religion: Culture to the Ultimate* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 14.

7. An exception in the area of Indo-European linguistics seems to be N. S. Trubetzkoy. See Cristiano Grottanelli, "Dumézil, the Indo-Europeans, and the Third Function," in *Myth and Method*, ed. Laurie L. Patton and Wendy Doniger, 128–146 (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 129.

8. Jayden O. Van Horik, Nicola S. Clayton, and Nathan J. Emery, "Convergent Evolution of Cognition in Corvids, Apes and Other Animals," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. Todd K Shackeford and Jennifer Vonk, 80–101 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 80.

as a consequence of adapting to similar socio-cultural environments, but without an immediate common predecessor.

C. Psychological

Psychological theories can be grouped into three, according to different emphases: experience, content, and structure. According to some theories there are special kinds of experiences, called religious or mystical. Unlike the Perennialist view noted above, which claims that these are experiences of a single or unitary higher reality, a psychological theory would avoid a metaphysical claim while searching for commonalities in such experiences or in the way in which the mind structures experience. Exemplary of theories that focus on the contents of the mind are those versions of Jungian psychology in which the archetypes are taken as universal contents of the mind. Although at times Jung spoke of the archetypes as hypostatized entities only known symbolically, in perhaps less careful moments, he himself did write as if the archetypes were what we experience, and it is this version that is most open to criticism.[9] Other examples of such theories look to the way in which mind structures experience, such as Levi-Strauss' structuralism and some of the more contemporary cognitive theories of religion, such as that of Lawson and McCauley[10] and certain aspects of Pascal Boyer's theory.[11]

D. Existential

Existential theories are those that explain similarity by reference to some aspect of human existence that is shared by all humans. Thus the frequency with which the number five appears in religious symbolism can be explained by the five digits. More abstractly, the commonality of directional orientation in space: front, back, left, right, up, down, is explained by the structure of the human body. Anthropological theories commonly employ existential factors to explain similarities.

9. Alan Dundes, "Madness in Method plus a Plea for Projective Inversion in Myth," in *Myth and Method*, ed. Laurie L. Patton and Wendy Doniger, 147–159 (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 150–151.
10. E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
11. Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Conversely, feminist theories point to the fundamental difference in existential experience based on gender as explaining significant differences.

Of course, very few actual theories fall exclusively into one or another of these categories. Most theorists seem to wish to give primacy to one of these aspects, while at the same time recognizing that there is "something more." Theological and metaphysical explanations can be disregarded because they are not based on any empirical evidence, but rather speculation of one kind or another. Crosby does not offer either a psychological or an existential explanation, but is operating in the realm of history. Therefore, if the similarities between tantra and the old meditation are the result of continuity between the tantra known to have existed in medieval Southeast Asia and the old meditation, then this is an instance of diffusion. If, however, there is an historical disjunction between the two, then we are seeing a case of convergence.

Given the long history of both Hindu and Buddhist tantra in Southeast Asia, Crosby asks

> whether *borān kammaṭṭhāna* developed from the placing of a Theravada mantel over a body of practice that is essentially brahmanical or tantric.... Such a process could have taken place at a time when court sponsorship in one of the regions that are Theravada today switched to Theravada from Śaivism or Vajrayana, for example. Alternatively, is *borān kammaṭṭhāna* a development within Abhidhamma-based Buddhism that formed organically within Theravada, perhaps under some of the same influences that shaped those other traditions too? (p. 35)

This way of representing the history suggests only two alternatives, either a concealing of tantra under a "mantel" of respectable orthodoxy, or an independent, "organic" development within Theravāda of abhidhammic concepts and practices. Stated this starkly, however, we find that we are faced with a false dichotomy. There may be other, more complicated histories that cannot be subsumed into either of the two alternatives that Crosby presents.

Crosby's conclusion is that the old meditation is formed without tantric input, which in the terminology introduced above means that it is an instance of convergence. In her analysis its conceptual base is drawn only from the *abhidhamma*, together with other non-tantric cultural resources, such as embryology, grammar, and alchemy. While her argument that there is no *direct* transmission from tantric sources

to the old meditation is convincing, the additional cultural resources include two that are found throughout much of tantric praxis. These two are the embryological symbolism that provides a symbolic scaffolding for visualization practice in the old meditation and the way that the phonemes of Pāli are understood as an emanational sequence. After considering these two, a closer look at a visualization practice in more detail also reveals similarities to tantric practice.

Embryonic Tathāgata

One of the elements suggestive of influential contact between the old meditation and esoteric traditions across the tantric Buddhist cosmopolis is the use of embryological symbolism to organize meditative and ritual practices.[12] Cousins gives a lengthy quote that envisions meditation practice as the process of gestation, the meditating monk being the embryo in the womb.[13] The range of this esoteric discourse of mystic embryology includes Tibet,[14] China, and Japan, and both Buddhist and Daoist traditions.[15]

This conception of creating a buddha within the body of the practitioner is at the heart of the text known today as *The Golden Flower*, perhaps made most famous because of Carl Jung's commentary on it. A text usually identified as one of Daoist internal alchemy, it is rife with Buddhist concepts and imagery. For example, the internal, embryonic buddha is referred to as "*rulai*," that is, "*tathāgata*," indicating a version of *tathāgatagarbha* thought. This same symbolism is found in the

12. See for example the embryological symbolism employed in the Śaiva Siddhānta *homa*: Richard K. Payne, "Ritual Studies in the *Longue Durée*: Comparing Shingon and Śaiva Siddhānta *Homas*," *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, 3rd ser., 13 (2011): 223–262.

13. Lance Cousins, "Aspects of Esoteric Southern Buddhism," in *Indian Insights: Buddhism, Brahmanism, and Bhakti: Papers from the Annual Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions*, ed. Peter Connolly and Sue Hamilton, 185–207 (London: Luzac Oriental), 200–201.

14. Francis Garrett, *Religion, Medicine and the Human Embryo in Tibet* (Oxon, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2015).

15. Anna Andreeva, and Dominic Steavu, eds., *Transforming the Void: Embryological Discourse and Reproductive Imagery in East Asian Religions* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016).

Shingon tradition of Japanese tantra as well.[16] The symbolism of creating an internal buddha through repeated visualizations of an embryonic nature is very similar to that in the old meditation as both Crosby and Cousins describe. Crosby refers to Ayurvedic sources for this symbolism in the old meditation. But in addition to tantric Buddhist, Śaiva Siddhānta—also known to have been historically important in Southeast Asia—includes instances of practices that employ an embryological symbolism. Although the use of embryological symbolism in ritualized visualizations of transformation of the practitioner' body cannot be said to be uniquely tantric, the historical role of both tantric Buddhism and Śaiva Siddhānta in Southeast Asia suggests a plurality of sources, including tantric ones, in the formation of the old meditation.

Phonematic Emanation

An important part of how the old meditation is systematized has been identified by Crosby with the generative grammar of Sanskrit, adapted for Pāli. However, the creative, potent, or magical aspect that she refers to is more akin to the cosmogony of phonematic emanation. This is a speculative metaphysics regarding the creation of everything out of and in the order of the phonemes of Sanskrit. Although the language of the old meditation is Pāli rather than Sanskrit, and the elements in the list of creation are Buddhist rather than Hindu, the underlying conception of the power of language is exactly what one would find in a text of Hindu tantra. Unfortunately, Crosby seems to conflate these two different aspects of Indic understandings of language. She opens chapter 4 with a quote from *The Purity of Sound* (*Saddavimala*). This old meditation text begins with a concern about the conceptual meaning of the teachings, but that concern is defined in terms of the phonemes of Pāli. As Crosby summarizes:

> The phonemes morph into the creation of the individual, including all aspects of the Abhidhamma analysis of what makes up the psychosomatic person: their physicality and consciousness with all the possible attributes, good and bad, that can attend them. The noble eightfold path, the traditional summary of Buddhist practice, and... the creation and periodization of the cosmos are all said to develop

16. James H. Sanford, "Wind, Waters, Stupas, Mandalas: Fetal Buddhahood in Shingon," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, nos. 1–2 (1997): 1–38.

> from the phonemes of the Pali alphabet, with generative grammar literally acting as the source of all creation. (p. 107)

As with the idea that visualization can create an embryonic *tathāgata*, there is nothing uniquely tantric about phonematic emanation. Saying that, however, requires that we at least briefly note what we mean by tantra. Tantra is not identified by some singular defining characteristic, nor a list of family resemblances, but rather a patterning of elements that when configured as a system of cultic practice is recognizably tantric. This means that we need to think of the category of tantra as a wide range of grays, rather than as an artificial binary.

While Crosby provides a fairly detailed description of the old meditation, we can gain a different perspective by examining a specific practice from a contemporary esoteric Buddhist group in Burma. The practice involves becoming one with the Buddha through ritual and visualization and can reasonably therefore be characterized as located somewhere on the range of tantra. The *ariyā-wezzā* organization studied by Niklas Foxeus operates in the same conceptual realm as the old meditation. Foxeus gives a relatively detailed description of one such practice as performed among modern esoteric practitioners in Myanmar/Burma. He describes a set of preliminary practices, which include presenting offerings, recitation of texts, establishment of a protective boundary, making vows, and "a set of truth declarations [P. *saccakiriya*] that wish for mundane and supermundane results."[17] These preliminaries are then followed by six steps of visualization as such.

First, the practitioner visualizes the Buddha seated on a throne beneath the *bodhi* tree at three inches distance from the practitioner, a ray of light connecting the "white tuft of entwined hair (P. *uṇṇa*) between the eyebrows of the Buddha"[18] and the same spot on the practitioner's forehead. Next, the Buddha is visualized as taking a seat on the practitioner's head, and then in the third and fourth stages, sinking down to the practitioner's waist, "covering the upper part of the yogi's body."[19] At the fifth stage "the complete transformation of the yogi occurs.... The bodily factors are not the yogi's anymore; the yogi's body

17. Niklas Foxeus, "'I Am the Buddha, the Buddha Is Me': Concentration Meditation and Esoteric Modern Buddhism in Burma/Myanmar," *Numen* 63 (2016): 426.
18. Ibid., 429.
19. Ibid., 429.

has disappeared and the yogi should think thus: 'I am the Buddha, the Buddha is me.' The yogi's own body has disappeared and he or she has transformed into the living Buddha."[20] This is an instance of "ritual identification," the practice of visualizing and experiencing oneself as an already fully awakened buddha that is widely found throughout tantric Buddhism.[21]

Between the fifth and sixth stage, there is an optional stage in which the practitioner visualizes themself "gradually transforming into a cosmic Buddha seated cross-legged on Mt. Meru."[22] In the sixth stage, the body of the Buddha begins to shrink until having "shrunken to nine inches high and two inches wide" and is visualized as entering the interior of the practitioner's body, from the diaphragm to the throat, where it remains for the rest of the practitioner's life. As with many Buddhist rituals, this practice then concludes with the transfer of merit.[23]

Although researchers on modern esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia have tended to caution, noting suggestive similarities with tantric Buddhism, or using the term in a purposely broad sense, the visualization practice described by Foxeus has significant similarities to a tantric *sādhana*. Central to tantric *sādhana* is the imaginal identity between the practitioner and the deity evoked in the ritual. The Japanese terminology for ritual identification is "entering me, me entering" (*nyūga-ganyū*), equally descriptive of the visualization described by Foxeus. Additionally, not only is the central ritual act the same, but the framing actions are similar as well. The symbolism of incorporating a visualized buddha inside of one's body is also found in the *Golden Flower*, a Dao-Buddhist text with considerable similarity to not only this practice but also to the embryo symbolism found in works described by Crosby.

Considered from the perspective of practice this calls into doubt the theory that modern esoteric Burmese Buddhism is an independent creation, a novel form constructed afresh in the modern era. The degree of similarity of the practice Foxeus describes with other

20. Ibid., 429.

21. See Richard K. Payne, "Ritual Identification and Purification in Esoteric Practice," in *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Practice*, ed. Kevin Trainor and Paula Arai (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

22. Foxeus, "'I Am the Buddha, the Buddha Is Me,'" 429.

23. Ibid., 430.

"mainstream" tantric practices from as far afield as Japan strongly indicates continuities across the Buddhist cosmopolis. While the breach in the textual tradition means that tantric texts as such are not present in modern Burmese Buddhism, the similarities in the practices suggests that they were not only present in the past, but were formative of the modern practices as described by Foxeus.

Conversely this suggests that the study of tantra should also expand its scope and take into consideration a wider range of sources and styles of practice. Crosby's study of the sources of the old tradition suggests that the study of tantra should include both the wider cultural resources, such as linguistics and medicine, but also textual sources, such as the *Abhidharma*, beyond the major texts of praxis that are often taken as definitive of the tantric tradition.

CONCLUSION

Esoteric Theravada is systematic and comprehensive, including political and monastic history, textual studies, comparative inquiries, and details of a rich meditative practice, which differs radically from those most commonly associated with Theravāda. This book is interdisciplinary in a way not commonly encountered in Buddhist studies. This complexity is one of the strengths of the work, since it does not depend on a single dimension of scholarship. It does not feel like an exaggeration to suggest that *Esoteric Theravada* makes a landmark contribution to the field of Buddhist studies. While it builds on previous work by Crosby and others, this work is like the forming of crystals, making seen what had previously only been glimpsed.[24] This is a key turning point in the development of the study of Buddhism in modern Southeast Asia.

At the same time, the work is part of the changing discourse of Buddhist studies more generally. Over the course of the last half

24. Those glimpses in European and American Buddhist studies scholarship come first with the publication in 1896 of an unnamed Sinhalese Pāli text edited by T.R.W. Rhys-Davids. This was published under the title *The Yogāvacara's Manual of Indian Mysticism as Practised by Buddhists* (London: Pali Text Society). The term *yogāvacara* that Rhys-Davids adopted for the title refers to the practitioner of the kind of meditation presented in this manual. The manual was then translated by F.L. Woodward and published in 1916 under the title *Manual of a Mystic, Being a Translation from the Pali and Sinhalese Work Entitled the Yogāvachara's Manual* (London: Pali Text Society).

century, very gradually to start with, but with increasing prominence, the representation of Theravāda Buddhism as the originary version of Buddhism has been replaced by a richer and more complex history. That history, revealed largely by archeological and art historical methods, shows a complex relation between not only different lineages of Buddhism, including tantric ones, but also Śaivite traditions.

The importance of Crosby's contribution is first that it uncovers what is not simply a tradition of practice that has been largely forgotten in the modern era, but one that had been actively repressed. As such it establishes the old meditation tradition as a valid and important area of inquiry—one that is also of value for a wider audience of practitioners.