EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

JUSTIN THOMAS MCDANIEL

Steve Collins and I were sitting at a bar in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2015. We had stolen away for a few moments from a group of fifteen scholars from Europe, Asia, and North America who had come to Chiang Mai to participate in a workshop called the “Theravāda Civilizations Project.” Steve had launched this project about eight years earlier with Juliane Schober (Arizona State University). This was Steve’s late-in-life inspiration. He wanted to create an intellectual organization that had a small core of members engaged in historical, anthropological, linguistic, material cultural, and philosophical research on Theravāda Buddhism. These few members would provide free online resources, organize conferences and roundtables, publish articles, and reach out to a wide variety of younger or more highly specialized scholars who were working on related projects. He wanted to build a community, a resource, and systematize the study of Theravāda. He rightly saw that the study of Theravāda was less prominent in the academy and in classrooms than the study of Tibetan, Japanese, and Chinese Buddhism.¹ He wanted our scholars of Buddhist studies to have a seat at the table.

In that bar, we discussed all and sundry, as we often did over gin or bourbon. We laughed about our children, lamented our

relationships with our fathers, and congratulated ourselves for having spouses who put up with us. This conversation was the first time I had heard about his writing of the book I am editing now. Steve had published many articles and four books in his career. However, like most scholars, he had also abandoned a number of projects started over the years. In previous conversations I had heard about books he had planned on “Mania and Buddhism,” “Time in a Theravāda Monastery,” and the ascetic motivation of nuns (“professional female monastics” as he liked to say), among many others. I should have taken his description of this present book more seriously while he was explaining it, but unfortunately, I forgot most of that conversation. I remember thinking, though, *Well, that seems interesting, but do we really need a book on Foucault and Buddhism?* What saddens me now is that I might have missed an opportunity to ask tougher questions, to hear more details about his plans, to learn something valuable. What I do remember is that he was troubled by this project. He saw it as his last major book and wanted to provide more guidance on how to study Theravāda Buddhism (and Buddhism more broadly) and less new research or new translations. He was sixty, starting to think about retirement, a little concerned about his health, and wanted to offer future students and younger scholars something to help them find their place in the field and reflect upon why we should study Buddhism.

A little less than four years later, I regret not asking more questions about his plans for this book, as I am now the editor of it, and Steve is sadly one of the departed. I miss him. It fills me with great sadness that he can't be the one here today introducing his last book. The task of editing it has been unsettling; I feel like I am sitting in stale repose at the end of a slow divorce. The process has been both liberating and devastating. I fear that all attempts to provide Steve's last book with architecture and a

vocabulary will be effete. What I most want to get across is that Steve, as he states in the second section, was concerned ultimately with writing about “ordinary Buddhists going about their business with care.” Steve cared about people, and he deeply respected those who took deep care in how they conducted their lives. I want to care for his words and his intentions in this book, as I believe he was a true gift to our time and our field. I will attempt to explain my process and my choices below and in the endnotes.

Steve Collins was (and will continue to be) an unsettling force in my life. Surprisingly, we were not personally very close. I wish now that I knew more about Steve’s favorite albums (Steve was a huge jazz fan, and he talked about it with my son, also a jazz fan), his favorite philosophers (I don’t know the difference between Hume and Spinoza), or his favorite foods (I don’t even know if he was a tea or a coffee guy, or a scotch or a bourbon guy, really). I realize now how little I knew about his daily life. We talked about children a good amount (he wanted me to have three, and I wondered why I stopped at two) and horse racing occasionally (we both had fathers who liked to gamble), but usually the chitchat didn’t last long—he wanted to get back to work and push me. Although never my official advisor, he was like a thief in the attic of my mind, moving boxes around, rifling through old memories, looking for heirlooms, and uncovering thoughts long neglected. He made me think about things I wanted to avoid, whether my childhood or big questions about culture, gender, and identity. I liked to stick to the facts, the texts, field notes, and he pushed me into the realms of reflection, interpretation, speculation, and theory. When I wanted to remain Irish and low to the ground, fingernails dirty with dark soil, only asking questions that started with “how” or “what,” he forced me to be a little more French—regard the macrocosm—to

ask why, where to, what next? He was never my friend; I had friends; friends agreed with me, friends were impressed I could pay my rent, friends let me drink too much. He was that person you didn't want to see, because he forced you to sober up and take difficult concepts and uncomfortable emotions seriously. He provided me with a sense of urgency, a sense that writing, students, and books were to be treasured and taught. Steve was unsettling, unnerving to me, because he was unpredictable; he threw me off balance with biting criticism that seemed to be unfair, but that I would later realize was totally right. He seemed at times to have the diligence born of desperation and other times the effortless wisdom born of a life of quiet repose. He had the patience of a sage and the rash temperament of a teenager. There was no fixed hierarchy of his interests and no desire to make those around him comfortable. He was like a living koan with a smile that was both warm and ironic. I could never quite tell if he was laughing at me or with me.

I remember one time, we were in Bangkok interviewing a prominent scholar nun. He was asking questions and I was translating them into Thai. He kept pushing me to ask questions that I thought would make her uncomfortable. I tried to be subtle and to soften the tenor of his directness. He couldn't understand what the nun and I were saying, but he seemed to know that I was avoiding the questions about power and gender that he was raising. He glared at me, and I realized that he was teaching me something about the difference between learning and research—the difference between reading and digging. I was happy to keep everyone smiling and friendly; he was there to wake us up and remind us that life wasn't something to be accepted, but interrogated. I respectfully asked the nun if I could ask her some perhaps impolite and improper questions, and she smiled and said in Thai—"It's about time; now let's get real. That is why I

am a nun, after all—to get to the real” (“Chai laeo, wela ni, rao kuan put gaeo gup sing thi samkhan. Ni ben chiwit lae . . . chiwit kong maechi ben chiwit tae tae”). I went from being in control to being caught between not one, but two disapproving teachers. Steve couldn’t just make me uncomfortable, he could make me uncomfortable by proxy. This is perhaps why his death has struck a blow to me of a kind I haven’t felt in a long while: it touched in me something that I thought I had lost. I feel unsure about everything now—what I am doing, where I am going. I just know that I feel more than ever that life is not something to be accepted or gotten through, but cherished and spoken back to—something questioned, insulted, and wrestled to the ground. Steve didn’t make my life easy, but he made it seem worth something. I miss Steve. I miss being pushed, I miss being rebuked and driven. I miss being inspired and unsettled. Steve was a presence that haunted me in life. Now, more than ever, I am glad I believe in ghosts.²

This book is in many ways a ghost that has haunted me since he passed in February 2018. He sent me and several other members of the aforementioned Theravāda Civilizations Project the draft of the book and two email messages about a month before he passed away while giving lectures in New Zealand. Steve’s closest colleagues were excited by this email on January 16, 2018, twenty-nine days before he passed away suddenly:

Friends,

I am writing (to lots of people) to ask if you would be interested in reading the ms. of a book I have just finished, in draft form, and sending me your comments, major or minor. I have attached a title page and Contents, which will give you an idea of what it’s about. It is very ambitious and wide-ranging—perhaps too

much so. I like to think it's also original. I imagine that, if published, it will shake a lot of people up, for good or for ill.

I know everyone is busy, and I won't be in any way offended if you don't have time or interest to do this. If you don't just don't bother to answer this email.

Best wishes for 2018,
Steve

I wrote him back immediately, stating that I was excited to read the full manuscript. I had been drifting in the horse latitudes of my mid-career period—an unhealthy mixture of post-tenure self-satisfaction and existential despair, looking at possibly three decades in front of me without scholarly motivation and intellectual inspiration. I was happy to have Steve's ideas come and kick me in my self-contemptuous ass. He sent it and simply said, "Thank you! There's no hurry. Steve" on January 17, 2018. Little did I know then that there was indeed a great hurry.

Fortunately, that wasn't the last time I communicated with him. We also chatted over email about the "Life of the Buddha" volume of articles reflecting on the impact of the various biographies of the historical Buddha historically and literarily. He was heavily involved in that edited volume, and since he passed, Anne Hansen of the University of Wisconsin at Madison and I have taken over editing the project under the guidance of Steven Berkwitz of the University of Southern Missouri. I also was in discussions with Steve about another volume he was editing on critical terms in the study of Theravāda Buddhism. That project is currently in limbo, as the contributors are still recovering from Steve's passing and unsure about which direction we want to guide the field.

I add these details to reveal the range of projects both big and small that Steve was working on in his last month, and the care

he had for the community of scholars in Theravāda Buddhist studies. In that month he also announced that he was planning on retiring a couple of years early, when he turned sixty-seven, so that he could finish these last projects.

What he left behind, besides all of his family, friends, students, and colleagues, was a lifetime of thoughts on music, philosophy, and Buddhist studies. A few months after the devastating news, I traveled to Chicago to visit his wife, Claude, and his close friend and colleague, Professor Dan Arnold. Claude let me examine his notes for the book, look through the articles and books he had been consulting while writing it, and talk about all and sundry. Dan's son, Benjamin, kindly helped pack and ship many of the books to my office in Philadelphia, and besides the books by and on Foucault, Hadot, and Buddhist notions of the self, I was honored to give a few of Steve's books on the history and craft of jazz to my own son. Steve always said that a scholar should have interests far outside their field, and his was jazz. It fills me with joy to see my son read Steve's books on Wayne Shorter, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Dexter Gordon, and Sun Ra.

What I could gather from Steve's notes and the draft he sent was that he was struggling a bit with the structure of the book but was very confident about the content, especially emphasizing the importance of comparative intellectual approaches to the problem of the self. The book originally had three chapters, along with a preface and a few introductory notes. I allowed myself a heavy hand with the structure, reducing the three chapters to two larger sections, but a very light hand with the tone and language. I wanted Steve's unique and often acerbic wit and style to be fully present. Steve and I are stylistically very different writers, and over the years he was often quite critical of my overly American and very colloquial and familiar approach to writing. He was a proponent of "less is more" and wrote in a very precise and deliberate way. He was fond of quoting Blaise Pascal's famous

line: "I have only made this letter longer because I have not had the time to make it shorter." I am a fan of the architect Robert Venturi's motto "less is a bore." However, here I defer to my mentor. Not only did Steve want to write a short and direct book about ideas, but he also insisted that there be no footnotes to clutter the argument and distract the reader. He would have added the scholarly citations in endnotes and provided a bibliography had he not left us so suddenly. Therefore, I had to add the references for the sake of scholarly accuracy and integrity. There are endnotes to avoid clutter, and to ensure that the reader can check the primary and secondary sources. I also note in the endnotes when I made editorial choices. I tried to keep these to an absolute minimum. I largely excised the first chapter, and two sections he originally entitled "preliminary comments" and "preface," because many of the topics he brought up in them were repeated in the second and third chapters. Steve did not like repetition for emphasis. He believed that scholars should trust their readers and write things clearly once. If he had had a chance to edit his own first draft, I fully believe that he would have removed the repetitions that I did. As for the content in the first chapter, preface, and preliminary comments that is not repeated later, I will use the lion's share of this editorial introduction to discuss these points instead of providing the sections in full.

This book has two main positive, even revolutionary, contributions to the field of Buddhist studies. I say "positive" because it also has a few highly critical comments about the field that were voiced in a rather negative tone. They are not the main arguments, but I will discuss them in this introduction and include a few in the endnotes. On the positive side, Steve is here largely organizing his thoughts around what I see as the *ganthadhura* (burden of the books) and *vipassanādhura* (burden of introspection)—distinctions in the study of Theravāda Buddhism. Steve did not

classify them this way in the manuscript, but he and I had conversations about this topic, and I surmise he might have organized the book loosely in this way. Basically, *ganthadhura* is book learning. It means that a person can approach the study (burden) of Buddhism through studying texts and commentaries, listening to homilies, studying with teachers directly, and the like. They also should approach it though *vipassanādhura*, meditation, practice of rituals, performing acts of empathy and compassion, contemplating ethical conundrums, and caring for the lonely, poor, and sick. There is sometimes an inaccurate understanding that a person can choose one or the other; however, traditionally, each practitioner should focus on both.

In the two major sections of this book, Steve was trying to articulate why Theravāda mattered in much larger questions in the study of Buddhism and religion more broadly. He argued that the humanities need a Buddhist perspective on how to learn (narrative wisdom) and how to act (meditation/asceticism). He saw Theravāda Buddhists as providing thousands of examples from texts and practices that promote the idea of active and engaged learning for students of philosophy and history, as well as social and ethical actors. Steve didn't value Theravāda Buddhist knowledge over knowledge coming from any other religious or wisdom tradition, but he did argue that it has a unique perspective that should be part of humanistic studies. Humanistic studies is more than just studying intellectual, social, and cultural history for the sake of knowing more. It should make you reflect about the nature of a life well lived for yourself and for others. Steve himself struggled between being a historian and a philosopher, an archivist versus an instructor, a linguist in the library and a wordsmith in the classroom, a preserver of the past or a guide for the future. This book was his struggle with his role as a scholar of Buddhism and his role as a teacher and father

and mentor. He was uncomfortable with himself, and he provided a wonderful example to his students, that personal emotional and intellectual struggle meant that a person cared deeply about what they did for and with others.

Specifically, he used this distinction between engaged textual study and engaged practice to structure his book by titling one chapter “Wisdom” and the other “Practices of the Self.” I will summarize both here, drawing extensively from Steve’s own summaries in his original preface and preliminary remarks.

Steve’s first section, entitled “Wisdom,” is largely about the study of Theravāda texts and how a student should approach this study. It includes topics such as narrative literature (focused primarily on the *Jātaka* stories in Pali) versus systematic literature (direct instruction on ways of being wise), the importance of comedy and romance in Pali literature, and why there are so many animal stories in Pali (a topic close to my heart). It is, I believe, the single best guide to how to read Pali literature for students and scholars I have encountered and will become the *sine qua non* for my students from this point forward. As Steve so succinctly writes: “As a collection they [*Jātaka*] give voice to, and indeed I would go so far as to say they celebrate, the diversity and complexity of everyday life and its values.” He explores the ways this practice of the self actually works in textual study, expression, and performance. In his 1998 magnum opus, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* (Cambridge University Press), he first mentioned what he saw as the two ways Theravāda Buddhists express themselves in texts: through narrative and through didactic systematization. In the present book he fully explains what he means. He was dismayed by the way scholars and students often separate the study of systematic explanation of the workings of the mind, the elements of the universe, and the process of time found in texts like the seven volumes of the Abhidhamma

and its commentaries from the narrative literature found in the *Jātaka* stories, many of the suttas, and the commentaries on the *Dhammapada*. He insisted that they be studied in tandem, as long as one understood their differences in style, purpose, and performance. In the preface he writes:

There are (at least) two ways in which Narrative Thought is fundamentally different from Systematic Thought which I want to emphasize: temporality and the need in the former for what Narrative theorists call actants. Narrative theory can become extremely complex (and often unreadable). The Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter OED) defines actant simply as “Any of various narrative roles or functions which may be fulfilled by one or more characters or other entities in a text.” Originally in narrative theory the word was only applied to recognizable types—hero, villain, etc.—who often appear as opposed dualities. This kind of duality appears often in the *Jātakas*, where wise or compassionate actants are contrasted with the foolish and malevolent. . . . Systematic Thought is expressed in static, non-temporal forms of thought and textuality. . . . That is, “Buddhism” is equated with “Buddhist Doctrine” (also, alas, as “Early Buddhist Ideas”), presented as a timeless, abstract system centered around “The Four Noble Truths” (in fact “The Four Truths of Noble Ones”), the “Five Aggregates,” “Dependent Origination,” and all that. Yes, that is indeed Systematic Thought worked out in simple and complex ways by some Buddhist intellectuals, and indeed connected with Practices of Self, in some forms but by no means all.

Systematic thought has often been thought to be the most basic form of mental functioning, indeed in the past seen as the only form of Intelligence, the one which is tested, for example, by traditional IQ tests, which assess various cognitive skills. This

entirely ignores the more recent field of Emotional Intelligence, which is said (by Psychology Today) to refer to forms of mental capacity such as the ability to identify and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others. It is generally said to include three skills: “emotional awareness; the ability to harness emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and problem solving; and the ability to manage emotions, which includes regulating your own emotions and cheering up or calming down other people.”³ I think that both forms of intelligence are required from the readers or the audience of the Birth Stories to make sense of what Pali texts describe as *pañña* and *pañña*, translatable in a preliminary way as “wisdom” and “wise person.” The capacity to understand and empathize with characters within a narrative, to see the psychological and moral complexity of their actions and relations, to feel (and I do mean feel) the kinds of ethical and practical difficulties which they face, certainly requires a significant capacity for Emotional Intelligence. . . .

This is true of the great Vessantara Jātaka, for example. Like the Rāmāyaṇa, the Odyssey, King Lear, War and Peace, and countless other examples of Literature, one can read/listen to the Vessantara Jātaka and other, especially long Birth Stories, repeatedly without ever coming to definitive interpretative conclusions to them. . . . Narrative is based on a story which necessarily involves a single temporal sequencing, and at least one actant, in a way systematic thought does not. . . . Narrative theorists often call this a distinction between the narrative discourse and the story. You can tell a story in many different narrative ways, but it remains the same story, necessarily extended in sequential time, which must remain the same. In Aristotle's syllogism, nothing happens; there are no actants, no events. But these three are essential to Narratives.

Steve saw the very idea of the person who had cultivated wisdom in Buddhism as possessing systematic knowledge and emotional intelligence through reading/listening to and reflection on narrative. That wise person had a “capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgment in the choice of means and ends; sometimes, less strictly, sound sense, esp. in practical affairs: opp. to folly.” Steve wanted this distinction to be not merely definitional, but an invitation to teachers to present Buddhist primary sources in a new and dynamic way, not to excise narrative in favor of systematic teachings or see narrative as merely popular or entertaining literature. He believed that both were essential to comprehending the way Buddhists came to understand their own textual heritage. He also found that

a robust conceptual analysis of Narrative and Systematic Thought: they are, I hope, in my usage more precise than the vague “Stories” and “Doctrines.” This is especially important if one wants to avoid, as I certainly do, the common assumption that Stories merely “express” or “illustrate” Doctrines, or give voice to some simplistic moral, as do (though only apparently) folklore and “didactic” (children’s) literature (lower-case l). Many of the Birth Stories recounted in [this book] will be seen to be very much more sophisticated, in both Literary (capital L) and ethical senses than Systematic Thought, requiring emotional as well as cognitive intelligence to appreciate . . . [these stories were not the content of] “popular Buddhism,” still less “morality tales” for children, as is so often alleged. . . . Even educated and sophisticated people like stories. And many of the Birth Stories are very complex and sophisticated, as I shall try to show. They are often, and clearly intentionally so, entertaining rather than uplifting.

In this book he gives dozens of wonderful examples of how these ways of approaching Buddhist textuality can work to create wise and emotionally intelligent people. This, combined with ascetic and meditative practices explicated in the first section, forms the basis of what Steve saw as the Buddhist educational project.

The second section is called “Practices of the Self.” It is an expansive and almost lyrical reflection on why Theravāda approaches to meditation, asceticism, and physical training are such an important contribution to the modern condition. Steve by no means promoted commercialized trends of “mindfulness” in the workplace or daily “insight” meditation exercises. He was the least “new age” or urban guru-type person you could ever meet. He was a serious scholar and could come off as quite curmudgeonly, old-fashioned, and *very* Oxford-trained British. But you could also tell if you spent any time with him that he had earned his Oxford training; it was not given. He did not come from an old family with old money. He was English through and through, but like his last name suggests, he had just a bit of Irish class consciousness and a charming resentment of high tables and robed dons. He mixed his Lord Byron and John Galsworthy with a healthy dose of Oscar Wilde and Philip Larkin. He was subdued in his dress (largely black button-down shirts and black pants), in his music, and in his drink. However, despite not going in for spiritual obsessions or self-help fads, he firmly believed that Theravāda Buddhists had something important to offer intellectually to the project that modern historians and philosophers like Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault, and Derek Parfit spent their lives investigating. He saw these Western philosophers as attempting to articulate what Theravāda Buddhists had been arguing for over two millennia—that the study of philosophy and ethics is largely “practices of the self,” and therefore has to involve both textual study and an ascetic

lifestyle. This is why Steve was particularly interested in writers and scholars like Max Weber and Leo Tolstoy, who voluntarily adopted ascetic practices in eating, celibacy, and silent contemplation. He often liked to compare Benedictine, Franciscan, Augustinian, and other practices in Catholic Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East to Buddhist practice in South and Southeast Asia.

In his preface and “preliminary remarks,” as he labeled them in this draft, he explained his desire to put Hadot and Foucault in conversation with Pali Buddhist writers. His explanation is helpful and worth quoting extensively.

The fruitfulness of this attempt [at comparison] will be, I hope, on both sides: for students of Buddhism, and of Hadot and Foucault.⁴ . . . So, first, what did Hadot mean by *Spiritual Exercises* (*Exercices spirituels*)? In the essay of that title, he gives two lists . . . the first list is: research, thorough investigation, reading, listening, attention, self-mastery (*la maîtrise de soi*, Greek *enkrateia*—an important word with a long history), and indifference to indifferent things (money, for example, and also health, even though this is to be preferred). The second is reading, meditations (*meletai*), therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, self-mastery, and the accomplishment of good things. . . . The crucial point here, as it was for Foucault, is that those Ancient systems of thought and practice were not, or not merely undertaken in order to know the world better, but to know oneself and one's own subjectivity better, indeed to effect, as Hadot just said, “a transformation of our vision of the world, and . . . a metamorphosis of our personality.”

Hadot does not make any significant or programmatic distinction, as far as I am aware, between “spirituality” and “philosophy,” but Foucault does. At the outset of his 1981–82 Lectures, The

Hermeneutics of the Subject, he writes: "We will call 'philosophy' the form of thought that asks what it is that allows the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth. If we call this 'philosophy,' then I think we could call 'spirituality' the pursuit, practice and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call this 'spirituality' the set of these pursuits, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etcetera, which are not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth." . . . Neither of them was familiar, or so I hope, with the cheapening of the word "spiritual" in New Age nonsense, and occasionally, it must be said, in the "Religious Studies Industry."⁵ . . . Hadot's and Foucault's use of "philosophy" and "spirituality" (separately or together), in the precise senses they gave them, are a much more fruitful means of analysis and comparison, at least in intellectual and textual history as opposed to anthropology, sociology, history and other such kinds of discipline not primarily concerned with ideas in texts. . . . Hadot . . . intends, first, as has just been said, that the practice of philosophy should be aimed, as a continual, life-style practice, at a transformation of the knowing subject rather than simply an increased knowledge of the world. . . . He refers, second, to the experience of, rather than discourse about, such things as the "existential choice of a certain way of life, the experience of certain inner states and dispositions' concentration on oneself and the examination of conscience, trying to maintain 'the view from above' as a form of physical imagination and ethical perspective. . . .

'Philosophy' here was part of a wider askēsis."⁶ This has obvious resonances both with Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life*

and with Buddhist monasticism, at least certain aspirations ascribed to it in texts. For Foucault, Practices of Self were also, sometimes, called “technologies of Self. These are: techniques which permit individuals to effect, by themselves, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this as a way to transform themselves, to modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let's call this kind of techniques a ‘technique’ or ‘technology of self.’”

Steve didn't study meditation or ascetic practices in a narrow sense or separate those practices from textual study, philosophical or existential reflection, or even everyday learning of manners/etiquette. Indeed, what he learned from Hadot and Foucault especially was that “practices of the self” (or perhaps “practices of the non-self”) fit very well with what the Theravāda Buddhist project entails. He writes:

The phrase “Exercises and Practices of Self” could be taken very widely indeed, so widely that they would become useless as an instrument of comparison. Those of my readers who have had children, or have seen younger siblings grow up, will know that all parents, and obviously all societies, have to teach children everything, in Foucault's terms they have to be taught how to behave (*se conduire*, *se comporter*) in any and every domain: how to walk, eat, deal with waste matter, speak—and in what language(s)—how to dress, interact with others (physically and mentally), etc. The entire process of acculturation in this sense, in all societies, all civilizations, all cultures, is the cultivation of a certain kind of self, a certain kind of subject of experience and action, restricted to each communities' mores.

One might say: acculturation is a universal necessity but there is no universal culture; selves are always constructed in specific times and places, in specific ways. The results differ widely but the process is the same. This learning of specific forms of physical and mental self-control, this askēsis, from childhood on, and the introjection of culturally specific ideals, is part of what constitutes sanity in any given social context . . . the introjection and performance of certain basic components of human sociality (so-called Morality) can be seen as a kind of wisdom, promulgated at length in Buddhist texts. It is helpful in this context to remember that the French word *sage*, when used of children, can mean both “wise” and “well-behaved” (*sois sage!* means “behave yourself”!) and formation which refers both to school and University education, the inculcation of a certain kind of subjectivity, of forming a certain kind of character.

Later he continues with a more specific explanation:

A slightly less general and less comparison-useless form of self-construction consists in more specific vocations, each of which has its own construction of physical and mental subjectivity, its own askēsis. Examples are: training in the many different arts and crafts; in the production and capacity to appreciate high-status Literature (capital “L”); in athletics and sports, in military training; in alchemy and magic, etc., all of which require one formation, a training which produces a certain kind of individual who possesses certain skills, physical and mental, which others do not. One might say that vocational training produces certain kinds of skills achieved by certain kinds of person; I think one should rather say: the skills produce the persons. . . . [Hadot and Foucault] are referring not simply, or not at all, to the mere acquisition of new knowledges or skills, but to a transformation of the

individual's entire persona, internal and external—a change in subjectivity, in the subject of knowledge and not, or not merely, in the domain of knowledge which the knowing subject knows.

This transformational process Foucault called *spiritualité*, as opposed to *philosophie*. In his and Hadot's view ancient philosophers were led, ideally, by means of such Exercises to what they saw (of course to Foucault wrongly) as the discovery of a universal Truth. Foucault's work, drawing on Ancient and Medieval sources not to study them as historical documents comprehensible to the study of their own times, but to draw on them to help produce a certain kind of modern philosophy. In the Buddhist case . . . Practices of Self are not in every case connected with Truth, but sometimes simply with the transformation of consciousness in certain ways. But their pinnacle is certainly knowledge of the Truth of things, what the Pali calls "Seeing Things As They Really Are" (*yathābhūta-dassana*). Seeing this Truth is not only an epistemological matter, or one of *spiritualité* in Foucault's sense. It was ontological as well: during life it constituted Enlightenment (*bodhi*) and at death gave rise to final nirvana (better, *nirvanizing*), the transcendence of time, space, rebirth, and suffering. A change of subjectivity and "spiritual status" indeed!

From there Steve compares this approach to spirituality and/or philosophy to Theravāda Buddhist approaches to knowledge:

There are two kinds of Truth in Buddhism, which I translate as the Consensual and Ultimately Referential. Both of these indeed "function, circulate, have the weight of truth and are accepted as such." The "subject" is different in each: in Consensual Truth it is a continuing person with a serial identity who can refer to himself as "I," see himself as subject to the discourses of moral norms

and ethical constraints and—to me importantly—function as an actant in narratives. In Ultimately Referential Truth, which is not a “higher” kind of Truth but just a different one, that person, that “I” is deconstructed into its constituent parts, both textually and as a matter of experience. This is not a matter of non-judgmental, non-evaluative “bare awareness,” as contemporary psychotherapists and Modernist Buddhists like to say, but an active focusing of the mind on its contents in a Buddhistic way, that is without the assumption that there is a self which is the agent in these activities. There is, one might say, agency but no agent intentionality but no intender, attention but no attender. There is no subject but certainly the fact of subjectivity: thoughts, emotions present themselves to consciousness. Both the thoughts and emotions, and the consciousness to which they are presented, are impermanent events. These activities take place in the protected environment of monastic askēsis.

The purpose of the study of philosophy for Hadot, Foucault, and the Theravāda Buddhist writers was to investigate and interrogate the very idea of the self, and in doing so, there needed to be a concomitant ascetic practice.

Steve felt that Theravāda Buddhists (and Buddhists more broadly) had a considerable amount to add to the Catholic tradition of monastic practices that Hadot and Foucault were referencing. However, he didn't want to equate asceticism with meditation or see monasticism as simply a group of people meditating together, which he saw students do often in Buddhist studies. On meditation and monasticism more broadly he had strong opinions. On the latter, he wrote a very helpful summary of why “monk,” “nun,” and “monasticism” don't necessarily fit the Buddhist context without serious reflection on the misleading nature of these terms:

There is, I think, no alternative now than to accept the use of the words “monk” and “nun,” in relation to Buddhism. But they are misleading. It used to be said that the English word “monk” was derived from Greek, *monos*, “alone,” a definition which was then followed by the myth of Christian monasticism starting with Saint Anthony, who lived alone in the desert. It was only afterwards, so the myth goes, that Saint Pachomius organized communities of such ascetics, living the *coenobitic* life (from Greek *koinos*, common, and *bios*, life). In fact, as has been definitively shown by specialists over the last four decades, the word “monk” is derived from Greek *monachos*, meaning “single,” in the sense of being unmarried. One influential theory is that the word was originally used of communities of such single women living together in Syrian cities. As to the myth of Saint Anthony, first promulgated by Saint Athanasius in his *Life of Saint Anthony*, which was to have a very great influence on future centuries of Christians, and Christian monks, one merely has to ask, from a simple, existential and ideology-free perspective: how did he survive? Athanasius says that he was provided with bread by angels, which you can believe if you wish. Common sense suggests that he must have lived near to sources of food and water. Specialists have now shown that the standard form of so-called desert monasticism in Egypt was for men and sometimes women to live in caves or small huts near human settlements, often indeed alone, living a life of prayer and contemplation while plaiting reeds into baskets, which they would take to villages on market days and sell for money and thence food. Not “outside” of society but inside it (as everyone is) albeit on the margins of it physically.

The Pali words for monk and nun are *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī*. These are desiderative nouns derived from the root √ *bhaj*, “to have a share.” Thus, with a sociological insight typical of many Sanskrit and Pali technical terms, Buddhist monks and nuns are

those who do not engage directly in production or reproduction, but who “desire to share” in the products of it. This is why it is often said that *bhikkhu* means “beggar,” which is wildly misleading. . . . The word “celibacy” points in the same direction as *monachos*: single, unmarried. The French *célibataire*, as does Latin *caelebs*, refers simply to someone who is, from a legal and social-status point of view, unmarried. In English one can speak of a married couple “practicing celibacy” for shorter or longer periods, but this would be an oxymoron in French: you can’t practice being unmarried if you are legally married. Likewise, to use one of my favorite examples from a French dictionary explaining the word, one reads there of an old widower, with children, as un *vieux célibataire coureur*, “an old celibate womanizer,” which is nonsensical in English. It is true that in both languages the words can have, as a minor meaning, the other sense: French *célibataire* might be used to describe someone practicing chastity, and in English, at least in older English, the word *celibate* could mean unmarried. I want here to focus on the meaning “unmarried,” “being single,” as a temporary or permanent social status.

For my purposes we are not dealing here with people who happen to be, for one reason or another, unmarried, but rather with people who are, one might say, professionally unmarried, i.e. people who have taken some sort of vow, made some sort of promise, to live as a single person, for a number of months, years, or indeed for a lifetime. The word *professional* is not meant here ironically: OED has proper to, or connected with a profession or calling. Before giving the modern sense of the word as doing something as a livelihood for money rather than as an amateur, it has: pertaining to or marking entrance into a religious order. An ascetic professional has a vocation. The groups they participate in are, in sociological terminology, formal organizations: that is, not groups coming into being through the mostly involuntary,

unplanned processes of kinship or other social relations, but formal organizations consciously constructed, with their own systems of (usually) written rules, intended to attain some overtly articulated goal.

I like to call such monastic organizations homosocial institutions, usually housed in physical institutions. The word homosocial comes from feminist writing, where it can have various specific uses, such as a preference for the company of members of one's own gender, aside from anything to do with sexual preference. I think this sense is, to some extent, applicable to Buddhism. I also find it helpful as a term of macro-sociological, civilizational analysis, and I shall return to it in a moment, when offering a comparative generalization about askēsis, institutions and Truth. . . .

It is often said that monks and nuns "leave" or "renounce" the world, and indeed the phrase "world renunciation" has been standard since Weber. I think that this concept of "the world" is in a sociological context irremediably imprecise, and should be abandoned. It was typical of Weber's oeuvre—of which I am a great admirer—to take Christian theological terms and use them as instruments of sociological cross-cultural analysis, as in the rightly famous essay "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions." He did so with great acumen, and almost always with beneficially thought-provoking results. But he also got a number of things, especially about Buddhism, terribly wrong. About it he wrote: "Concentration upon the actual pursuit of salvation may entail a formal withdrawal from the 'world' [in English at least in scare quotes]: from social and psychological ties with the family, from the possession of worldly goods, and from political, economic, artistic, and erotic activities—in short, from all creaturely interests." "Withdrawal from the world" in this sense may or may not be adequate for Weber's interests, but it tends almost

always to be used by others as equivalent to “leaving society,” which is of course impossible. All monastics depend on others in society and are always and everywhere parts of it, often important parts. “Leaving the world” (*fuga mundi*) had, and has specific meanings in Christian monasticism, which is mental and not social, and which is not appropriate to Buddhism. . . .

There is in Pali a dichotomy between the “worldly” (*lokiya*) and the “super-worldly” (*lokuttara*), which is sometimes used to justify the use of the word “world” in Buddhism. But *lokiya*/*lokuttara* never have a social-spatial meaning. They are terms only used to designate individual (so called) spiritual achievement or status. So, after all these linguistic divagations, here is a cross-cultural generalization and a possible comparative project: in many, but not of course all civilizations, the search for Truth—not just any truth or truths, but an overarching and universal Truth with ontological as well as epistemological dimensions—is pursued by a tiny minority of the population, specifically in very many though not in all cases by celibate professionals (usually males) living in homosocial institutions. This is a sufficiently widespread phenomenon, in a sufficiently large number of civilizations, as to warrant attention and comparative analysis. It is not, in my view, an issue to be approached individualistically. Individuals may want to live a life of chastity and behavioral restriction, to wear always a particular uniform, and so on.

He ends this section with an important question:

What I like to call the civilizational enigma of asceticism is not why some individuals do this kind of thing but why other people pay for it. Why do some civilizations cherish and support materially as the embodiment of their highest values (at least rhetorically) a way of life which, if followed by everyone, would lead to

the extinction of humanity after a generation? Students in Introductory Buddhism classes often ask, as they should if they are paying attention: if being a monk or nun is the highest vocation in Buddhism, what would happen if everyone became a monk or nun?

On meditation, or supposedly, what most Buddhist nuns and monks do, he wrote:

[Meditation] The word is found everywhere these days, not only in academic works but also in popular Self-help books, magazines, Apps for use on cell phones, and more besides, to help their users reduce stress and achieve some measure of calm. I have no quarrel with such things. If they help people, as they certainly do in many cases, well and good. But I think that in academic studies it has become a word which prevents thinking from being lucid, open-ended and exploratory. It constrains thought rather than enabling it. . . .

A common modern stereotype about “meditation” is that personal experience, sometimes mental sometimes physical, is opposed to and superior to verbal, textual thinking. There are indeed Practices of Self in Buddhism which are non-verbal and sometimes physical. But the majority are not, and discourse, textuality are everywhere important components of them. Practices called “meditation” are forms of inner ritual, for which there is often, as with outer rituals, a prescribed series of words, a libretto, what Christians call a liturgy.

Clearly, for Steve the practice of *ganthadhura* and *vipassanādhura* were intertwined, and textual study and textual expression/performance was as much a part of meditation as the study of texts was a form of “practice of the self.”

OTHER THOUGHTS . . .

There are several parts of Steve's preface and preliminary remarks that I have left on the editor's floor, not because they are not important, but because they speak largely to members of the aforementioned Theravāda Civilizations Project and are only understood in the context of that group's meetings and ongoing conversations. They would have been most likely removed at a later stage of editing by Steve himself. However, there are a few rather important points that should be mentioned. Steve admitted that these remarks didn't fit within the structure and purpose of this book rhetorically. At the end of the preface he wrote: "This chapter, I admit, has been rather heterogeneous and has raised a large number of disparate issues," and he notes that it is quite different in style and purpose from the other two chapters I introduced above. In his typical humorous way, he stated that the chapter was "as Monty Python used to say . . . something completely different." It *is* completely different and for the purposes of this present book not necessary, but it does merit some explanation. Indeed, I plan to edit it as a separate article and publish it under Steve's name. To summarize here, the chapter is about how to study Buddhism "civilizationally."

Along with Juliane Schober, Steve started the Theravāda Civilizations group because he wanted to show how Theravāda Buddhists contributed to world wisdom. He wanted Buddhist thought, practices, and literature to be a fundamental part of a humanistic education for undergraduates in the West as much as it is in Asia. He believed strongly that the classics of Buddhist literature are on par with those of Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Chaucer, Rabelais, Goethe, Ovid, Cervantes, Homer, etc. He also believed that Buddhist approaches to the self are as valuable as those of Lacan, Freud, Montaigne, Ricouer, Aquinas,

Augustine, and Plato. He saw Buddhists as part of a civilization that has contributed equally to the humanistic endeavor.⁷ He felt so strongly about this that he formed a scholarly society, earned a six-year grant to fund discussions and publications on this topic from the Henry Luce Foundation, and included in this draft an entire chapter on the topic. I think it is worth taking a little time to cite from it to hear Steve in his own voice. While it does not necessarily add to the two major arguments presented in this book, it does offer some foundation for his motivation behind writing it. I include two short reflections Steve wrote on the subject of "Early Buddhism" and its connection to the study of Buddhism civilizationally, and finally a passage on the subject of the very possibility of translation and comparison in the study of Buddhism in the West.

*On the Civilizational Approach to the
Study of Buddhism*

Steve asked, "What does it mean to study the tradition of Pali texts civilizationally?" and then offered eight characteristics of a civilization, even though he admitted that

in the last few decades it has become, according to some, politically incorrect to use a singular concept of civilization. This is because, so it is alleged, such a usage necessarily implies acceptance of a Western-European and American grand narrative of progress, where we stand at the summit of human social and cultural evolution. I think this is nonsense. Of course some western triumphalists may do that, but as academics we can, soberly and carefully, use the concept non-evaluatively. To have civilization, to be civilized, in my sense is not in itself an achievement and

certainly not a moral achievement. . . . All human beings engage in various forms of representation and exchange, both linguistic and material. All human beings can pose themselves the questions—where does the world come from, what happens to individuals after death, why do bad people often enjoy success while good people don't?—and so on and so on, questions to which what I will call civilizational transcendentalist ideologies, which are phenomena of civilization, claim to give answers, answers which are preserved and guarded by a specific class (often called “clerics”).

The eight characteristics include:

1. The fact that civilization introduces into previously non-agrarian societies a differentiation into two classes, those who give and those who take tribute, that is, part of the wealth created by an agricultural surplus, and to varying extents in due course by trade. . . . 2. The existence of different forms of power, each with its own elite. They might be identified differently: one attempt has been to divide ideology and its power into the ideological, economic, military, and political forms. One might add, and in Burma, for example, the jurisprudential. For other purposes, certainly, one could choose different classificatory schemas. But whatever schema one adopts, the point is that there is in civilization more than one kind of power, and more than one kind of elite, who could and did both co-operate and conflict with each other. It is naïve to think of a simple binary opposition between the elite and the non-elite. 3. The presence in civilization of self-conscious and self-descriptive institutions, in both the senses of (usually but not always) physical buildings, and of their human curators, whose vocation it is to preserve in entextualized form (a word I will explain in the next section) what are seen as a

valuable multi-generational traditions, for example history and the evidence which allows it. It is wrong to ask, of any civilization, whether or not it has a sense of history, a historical consciousness. Of course it does, because it is a civilization. What kind of historical consciousness is another matter. Herodotus and the *Mahāvamsa* are quite different projects. 4. The production and multi-generational transmission of an elite Literature, both oral and written, in prestige languages, and conceived as having a special value as high-status Literature. I am not talking of folk-lore. Pali texts and the Practices of Self they describe and prescribe, offer both an ideology—that is, texts which co-operate with and celebrate other forms of power, notably the political and military—and an imaginaire—that is, texts whose main object is artistic, whether this be tragedy, comedy, satire, and much else besides, which may both support and contest other forms of power. . . . 5. Extensive vocational differentiation at all levels of society (I am thinking here of Max Weber's notion of *Beruf*, a specific vocation or calling), with the possibility, however rarely met with in fact in the premodern world, of upward (or downward) social movement. One such vocation, important to Pali texts but of course the direct concern only of an infinitesimally small number of people, is that of grammar, albeit that the existence of such a small grammatical class is of much wider civilizational significance. One cannot have a prestige language without grammarians to codify it, and, in so far as is possible, legislate its forms of expression, and be valued for doing so. 6. The explicit championing, debating and defending of certain ideas and certain values by differing groups, in conflict with identified others. This is important. Civilizations are as much arenas of lively and sometimes bitter conflict as of bland unanimity. Pali texts themselves contain values which conflict with each other. The Religious Studies Industry, seeing all Pali texts as those of a

“religion,” always think they have something to sell, some simple and unified set of values to advertise and promulgate. Often they don’t: they provide autonomous spheres of art, entertainment, beauty, and at least in one case (Vinaya rules against sex with female corpses) pornography, for their own sake. 7. The inculcation in many cases of a court culture, surrounding a king, which often requires a very demanding form of what the French call formation. This is a useful term: it implies both education and the kinds of person such an education produces. We don’t, alas, have any concept in modern English which corresponds to the Sanskrit *śi ṣṭ a*, one who is trained, formed, and thus unlike others qualified to understand and appreciate certain forms of art and other linguistic sophistication. No word in Pali seems to correspond exactly to this, though there are various lists of *sippa*-s, forms of training and knowledge. . . . An often-overlooked part of such culture, ignored by “legitimation” writing, is that of court jesters and others in similar structural positions as part of instead of opposed to, military-political power, that is to say those who are permitted, even encouraged to contest and satirize mainstream values. . . . 8. The existence of bureaucratized jurisprudential institutions, separate professions and forms of power not entirely equivalent to those of kings, albeit that the relation between these two traditional forms of life is, to say the least, variable.

Then Steve goes on to explain why he thinks the study of Buddhism civilizationally is necessary—it shows the importance of studying literature that was admittedly read, studied, and understood by a small class of elite readers, as he says theoretical physics and James Joyce are by a small class of Europeans. That certain knowledges are not widely shared doesn’t mean that they are not valuable to study as a contribution to human civilization. Therefore, he writes:

"Civilization" is thus a descriptive and analytical tool which, though like all such tools not perfect, helps to understand certain social formations, certain domains of textuality and also—though this is all-too-often not emphasized enough—certain entextualized aspirations, of which the realization, ideal or actual, may be held to be accessible to everyone or just to one or more kinds of elite. In Buddhist Studies in the last few decades it has become fashionable to say that while texts may talk of Meditation, the Path to Nirvana and other such high-falutin' things, in fact Buddhism "on the ground" consists for the most part in the revering ("worshipping" here is a dangerous word, one whose genealogy must be uncovered) of Buddha-images and relics, the wearing of amulets, and the like. To put it crudely (it cannot be put otherwise) while texts may say one thing, what Buddhists actually do is another. In my view, the empirical study of what Buddhists, in the past and now, actually do and how they live is obviously fascinating and vital. I very much enjoy spending time, in Thailand especially, watching Buddhists, and often participating with them in doing all those things. But to dismiss textual ideals as irrelevant to Buddhist history, especially to its intellectual history, is to miss a vitally important point: it is precisely the preservation of such ideals as ideals, whether or not they are actualized, which constitutes, in part, Theravāda civilization.

This motivation drove him to study the texts in the two major sections of this book:

The texts we are dealing with, being written in the prestige and learned language of Pali, are accessible only to what is, demographically, a tiny minority of any population where Theravāda civilization can be said to exist: that is, for the most part, to an elite of educated monks and lay connoisseurs in royal courts. This

fact in itself shows that Pali Narrative texts, for example, cannot be, or at least cannot all be conveying, as is so often assumed, “popular” or “folk” tales adapted to offer Buddhist “spiritual” (a horrible word) Teachings (sic) in simplified form. They are sophisticated Literature (capital L) written by adults for adults, who had the same conceptual, emotional and moral sensitivities that we moderns do. They convey and explore moral complexity, and they are entertainment, both serious and light, as much as they teach simple lessons (often for children, as is also often assumed). They are not contained within the straitjacket of “Buddhist Doctrine” assumed by the Religious Studies Industry to be the content of Pali literature. Practices of Self likewise I assume were enjoyed as admirable ideals in Pali texts, including stories, by at least as many people as those who actually practiced them. They are of a discursive and practical heterogeneity far more complex, and in my view far more interesting, than the narrow range of ideas and practices which have come to be called “Buddhist Meditation” in modernity.

Despite this argument, Steve did acknowledge that Pali literature coexisted with oral and written literature in other languages, as well as other ideologies and responses to the human condition. Moreover, Pali literature, while understood by a small elite, had influence far beyond this coterie of scholars in South and Southeast Asia. He wrote:

A rhetorical orientation to the literature of the Pali Canon (the *tipiṭaka*) as a regulatory idea/ideal—though rarely entirety of the actual texts so designated. The entire *tipiṭaka* would not, indeed, or at least very infrequently, be found together in any one time and place. Even nowadays people donate versions of the whole *tipiṭaka*, wrapped in transparent foil or some valuable cloth, to

be left like that and venerated rather than read. . . . Among elites, what I have called the Pali imaginaire . . . a potential data bank; but note that there were rarely many texts outside specialist libraries, and Pali texts always co-existed with other texts, in Sanskrit and in vernaculars. It seems to me common sense to assume that these would first and always mainly have been Narrative texts, stories being more accessible and more attractive, before Buddhist Modernism, than texts of Systematic Thought. . . .

The availability of a heterogeneous set of Practices of Self, forms of askēsis, "Spiritual Exercises," in texts as ideals, and in practices rhetorically oriented by (though not uniquely aimed at) the goal of nirvana, as both an alleged individual achievement and as the (more easily verified) social status of someone, dead or alive, designated by social acclaim as Enlightened. More often than not, I think, such Celebrities, like Pali texts, were regarded more highly in practice for their performatively efficacious value. . . . It is important that Pali (the language, the Canon, the imaginaire, practices of self, etc.) never existed alone: they always co-existed with vernaculars, often with Sanskrit: there has never been a civilization in which only Pali was valued as a prestige language.

The spread of both language and literature was empirically varied: for example, in Cambodia between the 14th and 19th centuries it is, I think, a still open question whether at any time we are looking at a "Theravāda civilization" rather than at a civilization with some Theravāda components. In thinking of the spread of Theravāda we might think of the spread of both sounds and silences: the sounds of texts read out loud (performed), of chanting, protection and other mantras, sermons, etc.; and the silences of texts as mute objects, lighting incense and candles, venerating Buddha-images (usually done in silence), Practices of Self, etc. (almost all but not quite all of these are silent practices of the mind, "Mental-Spiritual Exercises").

On Early Buddhism and Buddhaghosa's Fantasy

I was considering leaving this section of Steve's draft completely out of this edition because, unlike all of his positive and forward-thinking contributions, this seemed more vindictive. Steve developed as a young scholar under the influence of Richard Gombrich, a legendary scholar of Theravāda Buddhism. Like Steve, Gombrich is first and foremost a scholar of Indic philology. Some of the other luminaries of Steve's generation of Buddhist studies scholars are Oskar von Hinüber, Lance Cousins, Nalini Balbir, Johannes Bronkhorst, Charles Hallisey, Collette Cox, Jens Braarvig, Richard Solomon, Peter Skilling, and others. Even though all of them have been board members of or active participants in the International Association of Buddhist Studies, these are mostly men, mostly white (like me) who consider themselves mostly linguists, translators, and textual scholars concerned with uncovering the content of early Buddhist texts, translating them into German, English, or French in different ways. I was trained in this way as well. What differentiated Steve was that he was one of the only Pali-Sanskrit specialists in Buddhist studies of his generation who was seriously trained in philosophy, and as his career developed he became more and more interested in the work of anthropologists and vernacular language specialists like Ashley Thompson, Craig Reynolds, Nicola Tannenbaum, Sarah Shaw, Jeffrey Samuels, Stanley Tambiah, Michael Carruthers, Anne Blackburn, Louis Gabaude, Nancy Eberhardt, Juliane Schober, Anne Hansen, Pasuk Phongpaichit, Chris Baker, Daniel Arnold, and John Holt, and started mentoring emerging scholars like Julia Casaniti, Joanna Cook, Naomi Appleton, Thomas Borchert, Jake Carbine, Kelly Meister, Thomas Patton, and Benjamin

Schonthal, and many others. He also started working with me along with Thai scholars like Suchitra Chongstitvana, Anil Sakya, Pattaratorn Chirapravati, Maechi Vimuttiya, and Pra-pod Assavavirulhakarn, among others. He developed a great admiration for the creative textual-anthropological work of Kate Crosby. He became more social, engaged, and diverse in his scholarship and friendships. I remember him telling me when I was a PhD student that he never went to conferences and had stopped giving conference talks of any sort. Less than a decade later he was cofounding the Theravāda Civilizations Project, traveling often to Thailand, and leading conference roundtables and workshops. When I applied to the University of Chicago to work with him for my master's degree, he said I would be welcome, but that he had no interest in vernacular literature and wasn't planning to work on Thai, Lao, or Burmese material. Fifteen years later we were in the field together in Thailand interviewing nuns, he was studying the Thai language, and we were watching Thai films together. Steve's growing interest in the world of Buddhist studies beyond the close study of Pali and Sanskrit texts in the last twenty years of his short life led him to lash out at times at his former self and his early training. It seemed almost to me like a type of reckoning, a settling of scores with youthful indulgences and hesitations. His growing interest in the anthropological and vernacular literary messiness of Buddhist practice, the hybridities and the inconsistencies of quotidian Buddhist practices and expressions, made him question the linear historical, rational, and integrated view of Buddhist thought in which he had been trained. His reaction was unforgiving and fierce.

Richard Gombrich, a scholar with diverse interests, skills, and ideas, for Steve became more of a symbol of that view than a

living and growing scholar himself. While Gombrich, like many other scholars of Steve's generation, believed that scholars could and should use limited textual evidence to help speculate on and reconstruct the ideas, practices, and even daily lives of early Buddhists (loosely 500 BCE to 1200 CE), Steve found this project increasingly useless and even intellectually dangerous. For him there was little compromise on this issue, and he spoke about it as if it was a vendetta and not a scholarly leaning. In his draft, he wrote:

What can we know of "Early Buddhism"? The short answer is: nothing. The jazz pianist Herbie Hancock, as a young man in the early 1960s, joined Miles Davis's prestigious band. The music was complex and difficult, and at first, he says,

I was trying too hard . . . I kept filling up the space. . . . But there were some moments when I wasn't sure how to do that, or what was expected of me. So after a show one night I decided to ask Miles about it. "Miles, sometimes I don't know what to play," I told him. "Then don't play nothin'," he replied, not even looking up. Simple as that.

An excellent principle, and an excellent attitude to take towards those who try to fill the spaces in our knowledge of Buddhism in its earliest phase by reading backwards things found in texts written and redacted many centuries, indeed in some cases a millennium or more after the Buddha's life (whenever that was, and assuming there was such a person as "the Buddha," which is by no means certain). The results are always wish-fulfilling, make-believe fantasies. Many of these later texts are what are called Buddhist histories, *vaṃsa*-s, which are quite unreliable historiographically. Honesty here is our best policy. Don't try to fill up the spaces. In his popular and influential book, *Theravāda*

Buddhism: A Social History from Benares to Colombo, Richard Gombrich writes, from on high:

I consider extreme scepticism to be a faulty method. If we are too rigorous we can doubt most of our knowledge of the past, certainly about ancient India, where the evidence is sparse and rarely dated. I am not urging that we should claim certainty when we do not have it, but that we should provisionally accept tradition till we have something to put in its place—all the while preserving a modest awareness of our uncertainty.

It is not clear to me what “certainty” might mean in most, if indeed any areas of human life, nor why skepticism should be regarded as a “method.” It is an attitude, in my view close to integrity. Imagine that one is serving on a jury in a murder trial. Does one “provisionally” accept what people say just because they say it, and there is nothing else to go on? Convict someone just because one has no more convincing story to tell, regardless of the question of evidence? Buddhist history, obviously, is entirely unserious and unimportant compared to a murder trial, but in doing it one should proceed with the same rigor, the same principle as the legal one that something must be “beyond a reasonable doubt” (not certain) if one is to accept it. In a murder trial one does not come to a decision when “the evidence is sparse.” Ignorance is not bliss, but admitting that that is our condition is more “modest” than making up stories. The story Gombrich tells is charming and narratively strong, but while telling it he forgets completely about “preserving a modest awareness of our uncertainty.” It is a free country and he is free to make up what stories he likes, as are people to believe them. I am more concerned with the truth. If we can’t have it, we should renounce stories which are without evidence to make them “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

He further explained his strong opinions on this subject by questioning the very source of most of the knowledge we have as scholars of early Buddhist texts and history—the legendary fifth-century CE scholar-monk Buddhaghosa:

The usual date given for Buddhaghosa—4th–5th centuries AD—is based on Pali and Sinhala texts which use two different names which have to be interpreted as referring to one and the same king, whose dating is itself, of course, debatable. Why believe it? But let us be generous: Buddhaghosa, or rather what the English monk and prolific translator Ñāṇamoli referred to as “the committee called Buddhaghosa,” can “provisionally” be dated to sometime in the middle of the first millennium AD. Given that it is about that time that archeological remains of what seems to be, or to be like, the Pali language as we now know it, and some fragmentary parts of its tradition of texts, start to appear in Southeast Asia, we can only say that Theravāda civilization as we know it began sometime in the mid-first millennium AD. Theravāda Buddhism as a civilizational phenomenon begins in the earliest Chronicles, the *Dīpavaṃsa*, “The Chronicle of the Island” (i.e. Sri Lanka), and the *Mahāvaṃsa*, “The Great Chronicle,” which are mythology rather than empirical history, despite their constant “dating” of kings. Most people reading these texts apply Gombrich’s principle: “we should provisionally accept tradition till we have something to put in its place.” Why? More important than these texts is the figure now known as “Buddhaghosa.” A vast number of texts are attributed to him: commentaries on the Pali Canon—the Three Baskets of Sutta-s, Discourses, Vinaya, Monastic Discipline, and Abhidhamma, Further Doctrine(s)—as well as the stunningly comprehensive work of synthesis, the *Visuddhimagga*, “The Path of Purification.” . . .

Ñāṇamoli's remark about "the committee" is appropriate, partly because of the sheer volume of the texts attributed to "Buddhaghosa," which it is difficult to believe were the work of a single person, and also because of various inconsistencies in them . . . which are more comprehensible from a committee not always working together than from a single person. But for the sake of ease of reading I shall henceforth use the singular name "Buddhaghosa" as a shorthand way of referring to this committee.

What did Buddhaghosa do, apart from writing commentaries and *The Path of Purification*? He created, or better put together, no doubt at least from some earlier materials, a make-believe world of the time of the Buddha, when the Great Man walked the earth and Enlightenment was readily available, sometimes after a single sermon, sometimes even after he uttered a single telling phrase. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. Although some pre-Buddhaghosan textual sources in languages other than Pali do exist—all of them from the first five centuries AD—almost all modern scholarly accounts of Early Buddhism, with only a very few exceptions, rely on the Pali Canon (usually translations of it, of course). I call this "Buddhaghosa's fantasy" not because I wish to criticize it or be supercilious about it, but simply as a phrase depicting the Pali Canon as a roseate textual world of the imagination collected and constructed by Buddhaghosa, as "The Early Days." But how much earlier? The evidence, as opposed to over-optimistic and self-deluding guess-work, says that it was at the very least 500 years, a very long time then as now. I use the word "fantasy" in sense given in the Oxford English Dictionary as "Imagination; the process or faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present." Perhaps what Buddhaghosa collected and constructed as the Canon was historically accurate, perhaps it wasn't. We don't and will never know.

This approach was not entirely agnostic and negative. It did not lead Steve into a world of complete hopelessness about the value of Pali texts. Instead, it led to this book. Steve wanted to get away from the idea that we could use Pali texts to reconstruct a Buddhist past and to value it instead as beautiful and complex literature to wander in and wonder with. This book is a product of not dismissing Buddhist literature written in classical languages; indeed, he draws from Buddhaghosa's oeuvre often, but appreciating it as a historical body of thought and human achievement. For Steve, literature was like music—something to delight in and be inspired by, not historicize or use as evidence of something else. Miles and Herbie were timeless for Steve.

On Translation and the Possibility of Comparison

Steve considered himself first and foremost a translator and close reader of Pali and Sanskrit. He was a wizard at etymology and philology, and I often joked that he was as interested in grammar as he was in jazz and that he actually had four children, the fourth being the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). He even published his own Pali grammar guide (in the original draft I reviewed, it was also a “reader” for students to use for practice, but that section was dropped by the publisher because of its length). He was a master of English and Latin grammar as well and showed that a student needed to know the terms and basis of English grammar (most native speakers of English don't) in order to seriously study the syntax, morphology, and lexicography of Indic and other Indo-European languages.

He also was a master translator and always translated his own Pali instead of relying on previous editions and translations.

Indeed, he often did the field a service by retranslating Pali texts. He considered it the first principle of a scholar of Theravāda Buddhist literature to master Pali, to avoid using foreign terms to understand Buddhist concepts. In an uncharacteristically obtuse passage, he wrote:

In relation [to the need] . . . to avoid terminology taken from Christian theology, and on the contrary to search for existential, ideology-free categories, it is important to say that this is not something derived from one or other writer or tradition designated as Existentialist in Western philosophical tradition. I mean a vocabulary purged from ideological assumptions, one which sees only human beings, their bodies, their languages and history, their imaginations, their discourses, their self-consistencies and inconsistencies as existing. (People who say that academic writing is itself an ideology are beyond redemption.) For this book, Enlightenment, nirvana, rebirth, karma, the heavens, etc. do not exist. Only the human beings who imagined them into being have ever existed. The products of human imagination and action are what is to be described, not what is to be used in analysis. This often takes hard work, an askēsis of its own. It is not enough to say something like “I am presenting this in Buddhist terms . . .” or some such, and then carry on as if those categories were adequate for external analysis.

Basically, Steve argued that students and scholars should not be lazy and use English terms (often with Christian cultural baggage) to gloss Pali Buddhist terms. They should understand the Pali and explain it clearly, not just replace the word *samadhi* with “meditation” or *dharma* with “law,” and the like. He called for care in writing and communicating, not efficiency. He provided examples of how quick and thoughtless glosses could obscure

important differences in cultural context. Here is an illuminating example:

What of the words “monk,” “nun,” and “monastery” (sometimes “temple”) in the Buddhist case? Here I don’t think academic discourse can avoid implicit comparison with the Christian uses of the words, from which of course, the words derive . . . “monks” and “nuns” can be defined as professional celibates (these two words being also used in precise, non-popular senses). But this would be too unwieldy to use in English prose. “Monk” and “nun” have become so entrenched in the study of Buddhism as to be, I suppose, harmless. At one point I considered using the Pali words *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* (pronounced *bikku* and *bikkunee*) in this book as an act of deliberate de-familiarization and distantiation (*Verfremdung*), especially for non-specialist readers, but thought better of it.

According to OED the word “monastery” means a “place of residence for a community living under religious vows, esp. the residence of a community of monks,” which is, I suppose, acceptable in the Buddhist case. The Pali word usually translated as “monastery” is *vihāra*, from the verb √ *vi-hṛ* → *viharati*, which means, amongst many other things, just to live or pass time. The term *vihāra* is known in modern Buddhist vernaculars, but it is seldom used outside academic contexts. The most widely used word in Thai for the Residences of monks (there are others) is *wat* . . . always translated as either “monastery” or “temple.” “Temple” is profoundly inappropriate. In OED it is said to mean an “edifice or place regarded primarily as the dwelling-place or ‘house’ of a deity or deities; hence, an edifice devoted to divine worship. . . . Historically applied to the sacred buildings of the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and other ancient nations; now, to those of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism,

Shintoism, and the ethnic religions generally." I don't know what "sacred" means . . . still less "ethnic religions." But clearly "the dwelling-place or 'house' of a deity or deities" is inappropriate. The Residences of modern "nuns" are called in Thai *samnak*. In Burma, *kyaung* means "school," and *phon-gyi*, one term for a monk, refers to a person with great *phon/puñña/merit*. Hence a Residence is *phon-gyi kyaung*, since Residences for monks have almost always also been schools. In Sri Lanka there is Sinhala *pansala* from Pali *pañṇasālā*, an ascetic's hut, itself from Sanskrit *parṇasālā* a forest dwelling, from *parṇa*, "leaf" and *śālā*, "abode." There is also *ārāmaya*—in Thai *ārām* or *phra ārām* (*phra* being a marker of distinction, used for monks, residences, kings, and others)—from Pali and Sanskrit *ārāma*, originally an outdoor park used by monks and nuns, but soon coming to mean a Residence for them.

Each of these indigenous terms has its own meanings and uses, its own genealogy, which in a more detailed study than this would need its own investigation. "Monastery" (still more "temple") is inadequate as either description or analysis. But what to do? One can't get rid of them.

Steve then goes on to show that awareness of the cultural and linguistic origins and changing usages of words is not just scholarly muscle flexing, but important as the very foundation of comparative work:

But insistence on ideology-free vocabulary, and specifically one free from the Christian presuppositions . . . does not at all mean that projects of comparison—as long as they are conscious—are impossible. "Monasteries" are examples of what I will call "omo-social institutions," a category which, while not universal, does, I think, capture something essential to the comparative study of *askēsis* as a social phenomenon. Likewise "Wisdom Literature,"

it can . . . be used as a comparative category, once freed from the association with some books of the Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern texts with which it is now universally associated. (Google for “Wisdom Literature” to confirm this.) The analytical, etic study of Buddhism, as opposed to the emic re-description of what its texts and adherents say, must also be free from the ideological concepts of Buddhism itself. Thus, for example, it is common to translate the category of the Enlightened Persons (Buddhas and others) as “saints.” But it is better to see both kinds of person as examples of the wider category “Celebrities,” tokens of the same type.

“Celebrity” is a word often thought only appropriate to the world of modern media, but it can be more widely useful. OED defines “celebrity” as the “state or fact of being well known, widely discussed, or publicly esteemed. Later usually: personal fame or renown as manifested in (and determined by) public interest and media attention.” Premodern Buddhist media were oral and written texts, usually stories, Buddha-images (which often had their own biographies), amulets, specific (often unusual) styles of architecture, and so on. “Enlightened” celebrities only occur within them. “Saint” is a term from the Christian lexicon, where it has a specific meaning: someone who, after death, has been officially granted by the Church that status, attributed some specific position in heaven (whatever that means), and who is officially permitted to be the object of worship, another word whose genealogy needs to be sought. This word too has, to some extent, become an English word without theological connotations.

Steve provided a few other illuminating examples, and the two main sections of his book are an excellent guide for comparative work in religious studies in general. However, these sections of his original draft were the least polished and often

jumped in a single paragraph to many different asides, examples, and points. He was often like this in conversation, just offering hidden gems buried in comments on football, music, gossip, career advice, and family. He was a delight to listen to, and I hope this last book of his is a delight to read.

In 2006, Claude and Steve were considering changing cities and positions to move to Riverside, California, where I was teaching in the University of California system. They had been living in cold and windy Chicago for over twenty years, their three children were now living as adults, and they were looking for a change of scenery and intellectual inspiration. Steve visited UC Riverside three times and Claude came once. Besides their formal interviews and scholarly talks, my wife and I laughed, drank, ate, and talked with them about raising children, writing books, and our goals as teachers. Although they ended up staying in Chicago (old libraries always were more of a draw than palm trees for them) and my wife and I ended up moving to Philadelphia three years later, I will always fondly remember those joyous encounters. One I remember quite distinctly, and upon reflection over the past few months I can see that the seeds for this present book were being planted by Steve back then. He and I got into a spirited argument at an outdoor café over margaritas. He commented that I seemed to imbibe too many sad books and movies. It seemed to him that I “danced in graveyards.” I agreed, I was one of those kids who only wore black, wrote bad poetry, listened to Bauhaus and the Damned, and liked talking about the macabre. I said that I liked to test myself emotionally and psychologically. I liked to confront my own mortality. I tend to wear my emotions as scarves and hats instead of underwear and socks. I am quick to cry, quick to be angry, etc. He warned me to take life a little easier, as I had young children and should attend to joy and celebrate inspiring literature and sappy romantic

movies (Steve surprisingly loved these, it seems!), and be positive in the classroom with my students and on the playground with my kids. I should listen to more Dizzy Gillespie and less Joy Division. I should go to exhibitions of Warhol instead of Kay Sage. He said that he used to be overly negative, basked in sadness, and focused on what was wrong with the world, but for self-preservation and peace of mind, he was making more effort to be kind to himself and others. He argued, in an anti-Freudian way, that repression/suppression of negative emotions was good, almost healthy—we should choose to be gentle, kind, and empathetic instead of always “informing” or “raising awareness” about all the sadness in the world and in our own condition.

I didn't really appreciate what he was saying then. I was a “realist” and gave my students the hard facts regarding our collective slow march to death. I focused on the nihilistic tendencies of Buddhist teachings on suffering, impermanence, and nonattachment. What Steve said to me then is expressed in many ways in this book. He wanted to celebrate the civilizational contributions of Buddhists to the problem and the complex grandeur of the self. He wanted to emphasize that Buddhists simply told really good stories about overcoming suffering and cultivating compassion. While Steve was a tough critic, demanding teacher, and acerbic wit publicly, he was gentle, kind, and funny in small conversations. This book, I hope, reveals what a powerful intellect with decades of dedication to the study of a complex body of literature written in an infuriatingly difficult language can offer to a reader when they want to make peace, make connections, and warmly touch upon our shared humanity across time.

WISDOM AS
A WAY OF LIFE