

Review

The Birth of Insight: Meditation, Modern Buddhism & Burmese Monk Ledi Sayadaw by Erik Braun

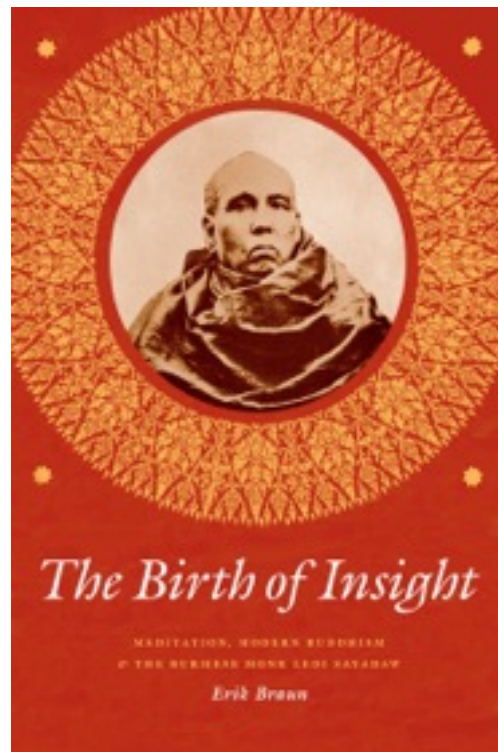
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013

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In *The Birth of Insight* Erik Braun provides a compassionate analysis of several aspects of the deep impact the Burmese Modernist meditation teacher Ledi Sayadaw had on Burma, greater Southeast Asia and the United States. At first Braun unpacks the sinews of the hagiography of the Burmese monk, delineating his lineage. Although in places this hagiography can only be traced through a means of suggestion based upon the available source material, Braun is able to demonstrate the ways in which Ledi Sayadaw became more of a teacher living by example, like the Buddha himself, rather than being concerned with individual words, prayers and publications. Nevertheless, the impressive biography of Ledi Sayadaw includes many fascinating narratives, such as inspiring one student monk to attempt to burn as many copies of his books as possible!

Braun has carefully compiled an analysis of at least 25 original works by the Burmese monk that unfold his own understandings about the potential for the popularization of lay meditation and lay movements. From here it is possible to measure the impact of Ledi Sayadaw through the discourses of the forest tradition and Buddhist modernism. Through the spread of these movements the impact of Ledi Sayadaw himself can be established. However, another theme that Eric Braun has offered—the demonstration of the impact of the Ledi Sayadaw School in Burma and Thailand specifically—indicates the global vision of the teacher, particularly as it impacted those “foreigners” who would appear as a result of American involvement in the region. While the impacts of this policy from a grand scale were devastating, the influence of the cultural interaction between certain American Peace Corps volunteers and Ledi Sayadaw’s teachings were profoundly important for the study of Buddhism. Burmese Buddhist



teachings and the emphasis on meditation and compassion reached a new form of global audience in the form of international academia. As such, Erik Braun’s new study will be of interest to any students or scholars who are working on studies of Burma, Burmese history, Buddhism, Southeast Asian culture, meditation and even neuroscience and psychology. To that end, Erik Braun has offered one of the greatest contributions to the study of Buddhist modernism in recent years.