

Quick Summary

Writing the history

Chapter 1 describes three frames of reference guiding the writing: personal experience, organisational development and the transmission of teachings in a cultural context. Overview of chapters. Reflections on the approach to writing.

Such A Jewel of a Place 1975 - 1981

Chapter 2 describes the social conditions that led to the founding of the Wat: the earlier interest in Buddhism, the influence of the North Coast counter-culture and the forest monastery ideal. The development of the threefold model of monastery, meditation centre and Dhamma community. The founders' energetic teaching program.

Dhamma Devotees 1982 - 1983

Chapter 3 highlights the competing ideas of the Wat's purposes reflected in monastic and lay life and describes the work of building the Wat, its collective decision-making and the ascendancy of the community. Constitutional developments and the establishment of a management committee.

The Centre Cannot Hold 1984 - 1991

Chapter 4 marks the high point of the Wat and Phra Khantipalo's influence. Though in great demand for his Dhamma teaching, increasing isolation leads Khantipalo to ordain nuns creating tension with the community. The tenth year is celebrated by the construction of the great sala. Khantipalo's increasing heterodoxy leads to a crisis of authority brought about by a turn to Dzogchen, his disrobing and eventual departure from the Wat.

A Restoration of Sorts 1992 - 1998

Chapter 5 examines the response to the crisis. Khantipalo's followers led by Ayya Khema reject his plan for a non-sectarian centre and affirm the Theravadan heritage. The Wat is reorganised as a meditation centre. The forest monastery ideal fades without Khantipalo's authority and any obvious successor, and the management committee becomes dominant. There are proposals for a more participatory organisation to replace the trust and committee structure.

Faction, Reform and Reaction 1999 - 2004

Chapter 6 explores an emerging polarisation of traditionalist and modernist values among supporters. There is growing conflict between the trustees and the committee, with trustees resisting change and modernists on the committee pursuing an agenda of secularisation. Despite efforts to maintain the Wat there are signs of decline and a developing crisis of viability.

A Fateful Loss of Meaning 2005 - 2008

Chapter 7 examines how the growing dominance of 'insight teachers' leads the board of directors to attempt to reinstate monastic control in a 'coup' against the committee and a crisis of secularity that ends the modernist project. The Wat is left searching for a monastic solution including a multi-tradition nunnery. The crisis is finally resolved by adopting a proposal to make the Wat an Ajahn Chah associate monastery under the authority of Ajahn Khemavaro in 2008.

Interpreting Wat history

Chapter 8 is a concluding chapter that reflects on four areas for interpretation of the history: assessing the historical significance of the Wat; the portrayal of the Wat's development in terms of a succession of crises; the emphasis on the concept of transmission and the dynamics of secularisation; and implications for future Buddhist organisational histories.