

Recent Religion - November 2018

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Charismatic Monks of Lanna Buddhism / Paul T. Cohen  
Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), Denmark 2017

xiii, 266p.  
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Lanna Buddhism is a variant of Theravada Buddhism that evolved between the 13th and 16th centuries in northern Thailand and spread to neighbouring areas of the Upper Mekong region. A salient feature is the belief in charismatic monks, some of whom are renowned for their asceticism, supernatural powers and strivings to recreate a utopian 'Buddha-land'. Issues highlighted in the book are the relationship of these charismatic monks to the state and state-controlled monkhood (sangha), the tendency for religious construction to spill over into economic development activities, and the diversity of lowland and highland devotional communities from Thailand and Myanmar. The book also explores contemporary influences on this religious tradition: the continuing marginalization of highland minorities and consequent devotion to messianic leaders, the incorporation for Lanna holy men into a national constellation of popular charismatic monks, the commercialization of Buddhism, and the patronage of wealthy urban elites. Charismatic Monks of Lanna Buddhism will appeal to scholars within the fields of Buddhist studies, Thai studies and the anthropology of religion as well as to those with an interest in the study of contemporary religious change in Thailand.

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