

the preparation and performance of an annual ritual strengthens the community and takes the villagers out of time to a past that was not shattered, while at the same time enabling them to imagine a future in which the cultural, social and moral world is intact again. This is one of the most fascinating parts of the ethnography, but I could not help wondering what happened to some of the villagers to whom I was introduced earlier on in previous chapters. The author mentioned that 10 per cent of the villagers — all of them former Khmer Rouge soldiers — were Christian converts. This is an unusually high percentage of conversion for most Cambodian villages. Zucker explores how Christianity offers individuals avenues of coming to terms with a violent past. I would have liked to learn more about the meaning of conversion for the remaking of the moral order of the collective. Can Christians participate in Khmer rituals that incorporate Buddhist monks and practices? If not, what does that mean for the making of village communities and sociality? How is the conversion of former Khmer Rouge soldiers perceived by Buddhist villagers? And how do Christian converts relate to the rest of the village? Building on Zucker's fine in-depth ethnography, future research may explore these questions.

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Mediums, Monks and Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today. By Pattana Kitiarsa. Chiang Mai and Seattle: Silkworm Books and University of Washington Press, 2012. xxi + 170 pp.

Magic and related kinds of phenomena have long presented a problem in the study of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. In part this is because those studying Buddhism have had a tendency to privilege textual forms of Buddhism and, in particular, the imagined original Buddhist

community which scholars among other actors have reconstructed from these very texts. These reconstructions were developed primarily in the late nineteenth century, and they are of course intimately related to various colonial projects (both pro- and anti-) widespread throughout Asia. While scholars have long understood that this is the case, the “Protestant presuppositions” — as the Sanskrit scholar Gregory Schopen (1991) puts it — remain with us. In this understanding “true” Buddhism is about self-cultivation and developing knowledge about the fundamentally illusory nature of the world; magic, the worship of spirits and gods, and similar phenomena have been seen as derivative, merely “cultural” and less important to understand. This perspective has, ironically, been common even in the anthropological study of Theravada Buddhist communities. While anthropologists have not always seen magic as lesser and derivative, they have often continued to view magic and cults as diametrically opposed to Buddhism. The problem has been, however, that these practices persist and remain intertwined with the practice of Buddhism. And so it remains necessary to continue to find better models for thinking about the religious sphere of the Buddhist worlds of Southeast Asia.

Pattana Kitiarsa’s new book, *Mediums, Monks and Amulets*, does not so much create a new model for thinking about this challenge as it resurrects an older one with some updated glossing to provide a convincing sense of Thai Buddhism. The category of “popular Buddhism” that Pattana uses — a category long ago used by the important scholar of Thai culture, high and low, Phya Anuman Rajadhon — is not “folk Buddhism” but rather the

large-scale, cross-social spectrum of beliefs and practices — incorporating the supernatural powers of spirits, deities and magic — that have emerged out of the interplay between animism, supernaturalism, folk Brahmanism, the worship of Chinese deities and state-sponsored Theravada Buddhism. (p. 2)

It is distinct from the folk traditions in Pattana’s reading in that it is “translocal, transreligio-cultural and transnational” (p. 2). In some ways, Pattana’s theoretical model reads like the “lived religious

traditions” which have become an important part of studying religion (and in particular popular Catholic traditions) in the United States. While Pattana is not drawing explicitly on that framework, he addresses the wider concern that the study of religion (whether in religious studies or anthropology) has taken on in seeking to understand the formulation of moral subjectivities in the context of modernization. Unfortunately, while Pattana identifies extremely important aspects of religiosity in Thailand and Southeast Asia more broadly, it is not clear to me that “popular Buddhism” does what he wants it to do. Like Justin McDaniel in his recent book *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk* (2011), Pattana is struggling to develop (or recuperate) a set of tools and vocabulary to explain contemporary Thai Buddhism in both clear and dynamic terms. However, also like McDaniel, it is not clear that he has effectively done so.

Nonetheless, this is a book that is well worth reading for some deeply valuable ethnographic framing. Pattana does two striking things here. First, the book is framed by his own experience of ordination to honour his mother. He effectively highlights his own location as native son and ethnographic observer. More importantly, however, locating his work in his family history and experience provides an immediate, profound emotional depth. The material that he interrogates is about the lives of people, a point that — while obvious in some ways — tends to be at best overlooked. Second, much of the book explicitly and implicitly links monks and mediums. These figures stereotypically represent the bifurcation of magic and Buddhism and are generally not discussed together. By bringing these figures together, Pattana demonstrates that there are differences between these figures in the popular Buddhist world of Thailand, but that they are often less than we might think. His treatment of these differences contrasts in this regard with that found, for example, in Rosalind Morris’s *In the Place of Origins* (2000).

This is not a flawless book. The argument in the first chapter that popular Buddhism should really be understood as “hybridity” rather than “syncretism” seems like a lot of energy for not much payoff. There are several moments when Pattana appears to avoid

coming to conclusions, perhaps thinking that his framing would do this work for us. He has a chapter about the “rise and fall” of the Chatukham-Ramathep amulet, which is very good on the rise but almost completely ignores the decline in the amulet’s popularity. The book’s lack of a certain measure of historical depth also poses some problems. For example, it is claimed that we can see the development of new forms of piety within Thai popular Buddhism, especially in relation to the development of prosperity forms of Buddhism. He fails, however, to consider that, rather than being a historical shift, what we see are aspects of Buddhism that have long been present but have not been visible in scholarship on the subject.

Most readers of this review will know that Pattana Kitiarsa died several months after the publication of this book. Just as his ordination to honour his mother frames the issues that the book interrogates, his own death lingers around it, at least for those of us who are his contemporaries. Pattana was a young scholar, and one is left with a clear sense of loss over what he did not have a chance to do both in his life and as a scholar. Indeed, while his previously published work is interesting and worthwhile, I sometimes felt that a preoccupation with postcolonial theory got in the way of his analysis. That is not the case in *Mediums, Monks and Amulets*, where theory never gets in the way of the people. Whether this shift was the result of his illness, a change in research focus that came with his work with Thai labouring communities in Singapore, or simply where this material was taking him is impossible to know from reading the book. Regardless, this very accessible (and thus teachable) book is emphatically marked by a profound humanity and concern for the people that Pattana studied.

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Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World. Edited by Zawawi Ibrahim. Petaling Jaya: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia and Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2012. 499 pp.

How has globalization affected the social sciences? How has it changed the character of social science pursuits? Has it altered how the academe perceives and conceptualizes social phenomena, necessitated new constructs and discourses and social theories, and challenged — or even undermined — our academic and intellectual paradigms? In an excellent effort to compile the writings of twenty-three luminaries in the social sciences and humanities, Wan Zawawi has done yeoman's service to help us address these questions.

This hefty and finely edited book is deftly divided into four parts — "Epistemological challenges", "Social Science and Knowledge in Asia, Southeast Asia and Local Society", "Islam, Gender and Statism", and "Cultural Studies, Cultural Production and Agency" — with a total of nineteen chapters. Such a thematic treatment allows scholars to delve into particular sections that are of interest and for pedagogues to assign those sections of relevance to their courses. Getting through such a voluminous book would normally be a reviewer's nightmare but I have found reading many of the chapters a delightful experience, not just for their sharp prose but for the nuanced ideas contained therein. A book review such as this one can scarcely do justice to the rich content purveyed by the many prominent scholars featured in this volume.

Two keynote chapters, by Clive Kessler and Anthony Reid, address the debate on the epistemological role of social science in an era