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Religious Tourism in Northern Thailand: Encounters with Buddhist Monks. By Brooke Schedneck. University of Washington Press, 2021. 242 pp.

Tourism research on Chiang Mai is relatively nascent, having emerged only around twenty years ago following the trend of tourism research in Thailand. Most of the research has been undertaken by master's students of the Graduate School, Chiang Mai University, and academics from the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Architecture, and the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University, focusing mostly on topics such as tourism development, marketing strategies, ecotourism and the impacts of tourism. In recent years, however, there have been attempts to expand tourism research in Chiang Mai by incorporating interdisciplinary topics such as fine arts and architecture. But there is a lack of sociological and anthropological perspectives on tourism research in Chiang Mai, which would otherwise provide more critical analysis of the topic. For instance, to date there have been only four research projects examining Buddhist cultural tourism: the management of temples to facilitate tourists; the relationship between Buddhism and tourism; the use of tourism to preserve Buddhism; and how monks prepare themselves to communicate with foreign tourists visiting local temples. The absence of a variety of research questions pertaining to tourism research in Chiang Mai is responsible for the shortage of analyses and theories around the topic.

Schedneck's latest book, *Religious Tourism in Northern Thailand*, fills this gap and offers a refreshing look into the topic of tourism in Chiang Mai. It is an exploration of Buddhist encounters in transnational settings, focusing on the interaction between tourism and Buddhism in the age of urbanization. The book explores the impact the tourism boom has on religion from various points of view: that of monks, locals and transplanted locals, as well as short-term and extended-stay tourists. With Schedneck's expertise in religious studies and drawing from her own encounters with Buddhism in

Chiang Mai, the book offers a refreshingly honest perspective on the subject. Since the book explores the often-neglected intersection between tourism and religion, it will undoubtedly become a reference publication on the subjects of tourism and religion, which would draw interest not only from scholars in tourism studies but also religious studies. Moreover, the lucid writing style of the author makes the book easy to follow and thus useful to readers with some interest in Chiang Mai.

Regrettably, the book does not delve deeper into the topic of tourism itself. Tourism is merely used as an entry point for Schedneck to highlight the central theme of the book: how Buddhist monks in Chiang Mai adapt to the challenges of globalization. Nevertheless, Schedneck explores the theme innovatively by describing the ways in which local monks grapple with tourism. Chapter 1 sets the tone of the book by describing the history of “Buddhist encounters” (p. 17) between tourists and apprentice monks in Chiang Mai. Here, Schedneck selected Buddhist apprentice monks as the book’s principal actors, eschewing the head monks who are considered to be in a position of authority in religious studies and politics, in order to re-direct the focus away from temple and bureaucratic politics. This choice makes the book stand out among other books on Buddhism studies as it highlights stories and activities of everyday Buddhism, such as the informal learning sessions referred to as ‘Monk Chat’.

Chapter 2 describes the impact of religious tourism on local monks and explores the agentive ways in which the monks respond to tourism. In this regard, monks are portrayed as active participants and actors who drive the development of religious tourism in Chiang Mai. Chapter 3 describes the interaction between Buddhism and other religions, an opportunity enabled by tourism. It highlights how tourism creates a space in which adherents from different faiths feel sufficiently comfortable to share their experiences and perspectives without advocating the superiority of one faith over another. Yet, chapter 4 interestingly shows how tourism provides an opportunity for Buddhist proselytization. It describes how the monks are keenly

aware of their mission to propagate Buddhism to tourists who exhibit some interest in their religion.

While the first four chapters focus on the various encounters enabled by religious tourism, it is only in the last chapter that the book truly examines tourism as a focal subject. Indeed, chapter 5 focuses solely on Buddhist volunteer tourism in Chiang Mai, discussing especially the promise of authenticity in Buddhist tourism vis-à-vis its realization. It is rare to find writings about Buddhist volunteer tourism in Chiang Mai, and Schedneck's exploration of this subject fills this gap exceptionally well. Her insight helps portray the topic differently from the works of other Western scholars, who mostly critique the practice of volunteer tourism from a neocolonial perspective. While it serves as a good penultimate chapter by delving into the subject of tourism, this chapter starkly highlights the lack of balance in the book, whose preceding chapters focus predominantly on Buddhism. The field of tourism research could have benefitted more from the book had the author provided a more in-depth analysis on the topic of tourism. Understandably, this imbalance is perhaps due to the author's expertise in religious studies, resulting in tourism being overshadowed by the topic of Buddhism as the central theme of the book.

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