

Book Review

Chiu, A. S. (2017). *The Buddha in Lanna: Art, Lineage, Power, and Place in Northern Thailand*. University of Hawaii Press, 2017. 243 Pages

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The Religious statue is an important material culture of every society, not just a material but it is a way of life for devotees. This book is an important contribution to the religious culture history of the Buddha statue in Lanna, an important region of northern Thailand. The region has a unique Buddhist materials culture. It illustrates how Buddha statues function from a historical perspective and ethnic-religious identity. Many previous studies on Buddha statues in Thailand always focus on art history and unwittingly overlooked the political and ideological role. But this writing started with a major question 'Why are Buddha images so important in Tai society' The author argued that Buddha statues are the production of living societies. This lets us realize about the building process of the Buddha statue is closely involved with local living, expressed practical religion, and politics between traditional kingdoms. Moreover, using rich primary evidence: manuscripts of local chronicles and inscriptions, is the distinctive point of this writing.

From the local chronicles, the author analyzed the relationship between Buddha statues and local rulers in the ancient kingdoms. It lights up that some Buddha statues are considered more sacred than others. These Buddha statues, are not only religious icons but implied the symbol of political legitimacy. For many kings, patron the Buddha statues are great to make merit. And many chronicles always connected the local sacred Buddha statues to Buddhist stories. This is why some sacred Buddha statues have been relocated to many ancient kingdoms throughout the history of the northern region. In addition, Buddha statues were the integrated object of local communities, the building process connected many actors: craftsmen, Buddhist monks, political rulers, and local people. The Buddhist monks have a prominent role in the consecration ritual of the Buddha statues. And creating storytelling about the statues is not only a religious fairy tale but it is a recording of local history, reflecting the relationship between monks and lay patrons.

The sacred religious objects always created special places. As the author pointed that the local chronicles in Lanna described the visit of Lord Buddha in many local areas. This story implied that the northern region is the place of the holy Buddhist kingdom. Especially, from the local legends indicated that many Buddhist pagodas in Lanna are the places that keep the relics of Lord Buddha. Based on this belief Lanna is closely connected with Lord Buddha's story.

It would be ideal if the author clarified how the Monarchy's Buddha Images and ordinary people share and divide the religious life heritage. And how were Buddha pictures treated by the Chakri dynasty of Bangkok after the Lanna Monarchy ended? The problem of duplicating several significant Buddha pictures is discussed in Chapter 7, but the historical turning point remains unclear.

This book is outstanding research on the interaction between Buddha statues and their devotees. It depicts we can understand the historical development from the religious belief of local people. And may have the answer to the basic question, that is why some Buddha statues are more sacred than others and involve the national ideology.