

In addition, the author's elaboration of the Thai concept of 'community culture' (*watthanatham chumchon*) is inadequate. 'Community' and 'culture' mean vastly different things in that particular framework than they do in Santi Asoke's vision. The other key shortcoming is the book does not adopt a standard transcription system for Thai terminology. Spelling of Thai-language terms is very inconsistent. Finally, the book has not been thoroughly edited and thus requires further copy-editing and proof-reading.

This book is the revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation with some additional updates. Its style and prose are rather technical, and its organisation is constrained by the standard format of a dissertation. Nonetheless, the book has some merit in its systematic representations of two prominent new Buddhist movements in Thailand. It can be usefully included in reading lists for scholars and readers who are interested in the current state of Thai Buddhism as well as in Southeast Asia's new religious movements.

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Spreading the Dhamma: Writing, orality, and textual transmission in Buddhist northern Thailand

By DANIEL M VEIDLINGER

Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. Pp. 259. Bibliography, Notes, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463407000331

In the conclusion of his study of the emergence of writing in northern Thailand, Daniel Veidlinger states that he has attempted to 'see the strings' – 'the mechanism by which much of the literary wealth of Buddhism in northern Thailand has been created, sustained, and passed down' (p. 205). For those interested in the history of Buddhism in the region before the twentieth century, this study does just that. However, it also does much more, placing the history of writing in a small corner of the Buddhist world into the larger history of religious scriptoria in Europe and South Asia. He not only closely examines Pali manuscripts – including the marginalia, wooden covers, orthography, colophons and binding strings – but also the ways in which these manuscripts were circulated and stored. This study of the movement and place of texts within a community has much to say to those in medieval Catholic, Islamic and Taoist studies who are concerned with the interplay between medium and message in textual production.

Veidlinger's book is a considerable reworking and reframing of his 2002 University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation. It is part of the 'Politics, Meaning, and Memory' series edited by David Chandler and Rita Smith Kipp which includes several provocative studies in Southeast Asian Buddhist Studies by Penny Edwards, Anne Hansen and Shawn McHale. This reviewer learned much from that dissertation and was happy to see Veidlinger expand his close study of the culture of Pali manuscript production to a more comparative and historically contextual study. He examines how palm leaf manuscripts were composed and transmitted, often orally, and shows how these

processes have much to tell us about manuscript cultures worldwide. He draws on the comparative studies of Mediterranean, South Asian and Middle Eastern, Chinese and European textual communities. For example, he notes that Denise Troll's study of Catholic scriptoria and literacy could benefit from a comparison with northern Thai scribal practices where writing was similarly seen not as 'self-expression and intellection, but a manual labor ... The monk was obliged to perform this labor by religious duty' (p. 132). Veidlinger emphasises that writing was not originally seen as essential for a community that highly regarded the value of memorising and orally transmitting Pali texts, but slowly grew into a meritorious activity connected closely to the training of a monk and the economy of a monastery. Therefore, scholars of Benedictine and Cistercian scriptoria, who consistently emphasise the balance between *ora et labora* in monastic life, would be well served by Veidlinger's work, as would scholars influenced by Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong.

Besides offering a detailed study of the physical and intellectual lives of monastic scribes, Veidlinger carefully traces the history of the transmission of Pali texts from Sri Lanka, India, and Burma to northern Thailand. This serves as a good introduction to students who are interested in the study of texts across shifting contexts. To this end, he makes three novel contributions to the field. First, he shows that the *araññavāsī* (forest dwelling) lineage of monks were the ones most connected to the emergence of writing in a largely orally based interpretative community in Chiang Mai and how their connections to royalty in the kingdom of Lan Na allowed writing to become a primary part of monastic work. Second, he helps solve (although there still is not enough evidence to state conclusively) the problem of the missing library of Thā Sōi, which may have been, as Veidlinger suggests, located in Phayao and not lost to the flooding after the building of the Bhumibol Dam. Third, he shows that there was no sustained 'cult of the book' in the region as is emphasised for other parts of the Buddhist world by Susan Cherniak, Natalie Gummer, Gregory Schopen, Lorraine Gesick and Dan Stevenson. This last contribution shows how the historical context of northern Thailand cannot be ignored by textual scholars of Buddhism, and that writing did not become a religiously meritorious and magically protective activity until the nineteenth century. This is supported by this reviewer's observations that *yantra* (protective diagrams) manuscripts and amulet production did not become popular in the region until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, Veidlinger's close study further emphasises the fact that northern Thailand's intellectual Buddhist culture was significantly different from its Siamese/central Thai and Khmer neighbours and that we cannot simply talk about a 'Thai' Buddhism, but must pay close attention to local textual practices.

Despite his major contributions to both Buddhist and religious studies, Veidlinger's work remains largely historical and classical. He does not offer any close observations on the ways monks in the region today treat manuscripts or what role they play in local pedagogical practices. Furthermore, there is little mention of vernacular manuscripts, local narratives or oral rhetorical practices. He highlights the 'Golden Age' of Pali manuscripts, while eliding the equally golden period of vernacular textual production. Finally, the work of contemporary Thai scholars is not consulted for insights on historical developments, codicology, local economies and pedagogical practices. However, Veidlinger should not be criticised for what he did not do, when he

does offer considerable insight into the intellectual and social history of monastic life in the region, and to the nature of scribal practices in general. I have already assigned this book in my graduate courses on Buddhist literature and history and plan to use it in a comparative course on religious textual communities worldwide. It is a clear, concise, highly readable, and innovative study that will be a perennially useful resource.

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