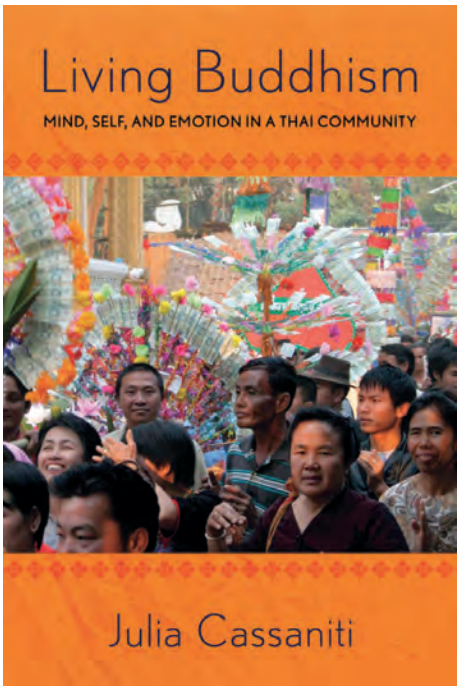
a lone bird and a sun burst, are among the beads transported from Bead Mound to the Thalang National Museum in Phuket.

Noonsuk Sr.'s premature death deprived his family of his affections and precluded more excavations to enrich our knowledge of Peninsular Siam. His son, Wannasarn, is left with the childhood memories of accompanying him on fieldwork to one of his favourite sites: the largest Brahmanical complex in Sichon, now dated to the 4th-8th century CE. We are glad that the impressionable eight-year old followed in his father's archaeological footsteps, forging academic associations with esteemed scholars whose respect for his late father is reflected in the warm and generous tributes in this informative and eminently readable commemorative volume.

Lia Genovese




*Living Buddhism: Mind, Self, and Emotion in a Thai Community* by Julia Cassaniti. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8014-5400-4 (hardcover), US$69.95; ISBN: 978-0-8014-5671-8 (paperback), US$22.95.

In *Living Buddhism*, Julia Cassaniti demonstrates how the idea of *anicca* (impermanence), more often considered a prerogative of lofty monastic Buddhism, is actually central in formulating the psychological as well as social life of the people in a rural village in Northern Thailand. How is emotional and religious life entwined in the everyday experiences of people in the remote village? The approach to Buddhism as it is lived among ordinary people is in line with recent works in Theravada Buddhism which focus, not on the monastic or doctrinal Buddhism, but on the everyday practices of lay people. The uniqueness of this book is that it does so by seeking out how Buddhists in rural villages live the seemingly high and remote tenets of Buddhist teachings.

The book is an outcome of Cassaniti's involvement in the lives of people in a village over a ten-year period, including a long-term stay for eighteen months in 2005-6. In this village which she calls "Mae Jaeng", a two-hour drive northwest of Chiang Mai, Cassaniti became especially close with two families. She conducted sixty interviews in this village with the Buddhist northern Thai inhabitants, and for comparative purposes, she also ventured into a Karen Christian village nearby where she conducted sixty further interviews. These interviews with questions regarding people's religious lives and ideas constitute the basis for Cassaniti's understanding of her theme, while the main storyline revolves around the two families in Mae Jaeng with whom she had the closest relationship. The process of her field research is explained clearly from its

very beginnings, which, along with the easy flow of the narrative and avoidance of jargon, makes the book a wonderfully approachable text for beginners of ethnographic fieldwork.

Cassaniti, a young *farang* woman from the U.S., finds herself initially perplexed by the calmness and what seemed like emotionally subdued lives of the people in the village, and gradually finds herself understanding this through her intimate association with two families. As the protagonist, she begins to feel there is something "off" about her directness and expression of emotions, such as joy at finding beautiful scenery, or anger at the oppressive hot weather. She finds herself being treated in such instances with "disdainful bemused expressions" (60). The readers will share the anguish and frustration experienced by the author, through the narrative of the events, especially those surrounding the problem of alcoholism and hospitalization of one of the main characters. Cassaniti intersperses her thoughts and analyses as she narrates the development of this drama, which in effect becomes the centerpiece of the ethnography.

The introduction sets the tone by laying out the central issue, which is not about Buddhism in a temple, nor in books nor meditation courses, but Buddhism as part of day-to-day living. How is Buddhism related to a "range of emotional and behavioral practices that make up the cultural psychology of people in the community" (15)? *Anicca* is introduced as the key concept. If she asks ordinary villagers about it, they will point her to ask the monks in the village temple, who in turn point her to ask monks in Bangkok. Cassaniti gradually succeeds in hearing people talk about "impermanence" in a way that is relevant to their own respective lives. While impermanence might more easily be associated with suffering and pain, surprisingly the villagers tell her how this idea makes them feel better by allowing them to "let go". "By crafting calm and cool-hearted emotions, one is able to more easily let go of affective attachments" (31).

Chapter One begins by explaining how Cassaniti, after"hanging around" for a while, began to conduct interviews. Then the idea and practice of calmness (*jai yen*), which came up in all the interviews, is introduced, and Cassaniti explains how the monastery is central to cultivating calmness. In this rural setting, Buddhism is far from becoming vacuous, but remains well connected to the community, and people "shap(e) their subjectivity by their actions, …by practicing and repeating certain kinds of bodily and affective comportment" (57). Cassaniti goes as far as to say "the most common reasons that people throughout Mae Jaeng attend their wat has to do with cultivating or practicing cool-heartedness" (58), whether sitting in meditation, making merit, or associating with other villagers.

The second chapter, titled "Heat", begins by introducing some "misfits" in the village, including Cassaniti herself. Through this realization, she learns about "the crafting of a cool heart", which she connects with Buddhist practice. To make this point clearer, she moves to the Karen Christian village Baan Ko Tao. Here she finds a different "emotional tenor". In contrast to the calmness and the quiet in the Mae Jaeng temples, there is "a sense of robust emotionality, full of loud church music and animated discussion" (74), which renders the cool-heartedness in Mae Jaeng more evident. Cassaniti points out that there is no direct word for "emotion" in Thai, and here launches into a discussion in comparative psychology, expounding on the non-translatability and culturally specific

nature of emotions. It is not that Thais in Mae Jaeng are without emotion or that their emotion is weak, but "it is the strength of low-arousal emotion that is practiced and aspired to" (82).

Chapter Three is about "letting go" of affective attachments that are the basis of coolness and the acceptance of impermanence, and how this is accomplished by"making the heart" (*tham jai*), especially in the face of unexpected tragedy. This is followed by descriptions of Buddhist rituals and festivals, which are acts of merit-making but also of constructing affect such as coolness and letting go. There is an intriguing discussion on gender and power, where Cassaniti discusses behavioral and affective norms and expectations based on social categories. She finds that there is very little gender difference in emotionality or affective comportment, yet interpersonal hierarchy is important and gender is inscribed within it. Among social unequals, the subordinate is expected to "rein in" her/his emotions. She points out how women in Northern Thai society lead matters both in and outside the household, are expected to uphold morality, and are less allowed to relieve tension or escape responsibilities, so that somatization of stress is more often found among women.

The theme of Chapter Four is about holding on, or the inability to let go. It is also the beginning of the drama centered on Sen, one of the main characters, whose drinking problems become pronounced after his grandmother's death. He is unable to accept change, let go of attachments, and accept his homosexuality. The Karen village appears again in comparison. Impermanence, which is central to understanding the emotional tenor and importance of letting go in Mae Jaeng is not relevant in Baan Ko Tao. For Karen Christian villagers, more important is talking about issues of the self with others, including the psychiatrist, while in Mae Jaeng, such preoccupation with issues of the self might be considered an inability to let go. Cassaniti points out that Sen is "inscribed within the larger cultural orientation" of Mae Jaeng, and his problems were understood within them.

Chapter Five begins by explaining the notion of karma. To the villagers, karma is not a matter of belief, but an organizational principle in life, such as common sense or a natural order of things, which is referred to in explaining (mostly negative) things that happen to people in everyday life. Yet it is an unsettled principle for each person, in that everybody has different usage and explanation for it in different contexts. The relationship between accumulating merit on the one hand, and the objective of getting out of the karmic circle, or between calmness of mind and desire or intentionality is ambiguous. The chapter then turns to the drama of Sen and his family and friends. After much anguish and frustration, Cassaniti comes to assume an indispensable role in sending Sen to the hospital. Her involvement in the turn of events and her reflections on it constitute a crucial process by which Cassaniti reaches an understanding of emotion, acceptance, and issues of mind, body and health.

In conclusion, Sen's recovery is referred to in terms of "letting go", in emphasizing how people"craft subjectivities in everyday life through engagements with local religious ideas". Local psychological models for health and well-being are shaped through religious and cultural constructs. As with recent discussion of agency, which situates it in specific cultural contexts, Cassaniti considers agency in the northern Thai

Buddhist context, relating it to acceptance and letting go. The title, "Living Buddhism" not only refers to how Buddhism is alive in the everyday life of Mae Jaeng people, but also how they live Buddhism, how they practice, make sense of and deal with events and happenings in everyday life.

The book speaks to existing literature in two different theoretical contexts. It starts off by engaging in discussion on Buddhism. The division, according to Melford Spiro, between lofty monastic Buddhism or nibbanic Buddhism on the one hand, and the everyday popular Buddhism or karmic Buddhism on the other, is questioned. While the questions and framework for understanding Buddhism are laid out very clearly from the beginning, questions regarding emotions and cultural psychology begin to be developed only as the story progresses and then more intensely as Sen's story unfolds. The book in its entirety makes a strong case on both themes, which is to say, regarding how Buddhist teachings shape the lives and emotional orientations of the villagers, and how self, mind and emotion must be understood in cultural context, rather than as assumed universals.

The strengths of the book are thus many. But here, I will posit questions that arose in my mind. First, wherever relevant throughout the book, Cassaniti refers to her interviews, how certain points repeatedly appear (or do not appear) in the interviews. Yet the reader does not get the sense of an overall distribution of responses. The passage in Chapter Three on gender and power is rather frustrating in that it is not written in a way that grounds the conclusion in the actual distribution of responses according to gender or power. I wondered, for example, how older men of authority as well as younger men about to go into the world talked about impermanence differently. Especially since the two younger men who are written with more detail of character and behavior, Sen and Ta, are both, if I may use the author's own expression, "misfits", who are unable to "let go". Is this a coincidence, or is there something about young men and the difficulty of "letting go"? Second, how relevant are other aspects of religion and ritual in the discussion of impermanence and letting go? How, for example does magical Buddhism appear in the religious everyday life of the villagers, and how do they reconcile that with ideas of "impermanence" and "cool heart"? Or, how does Sen's parents' involvement with *yo rei* relate to their own problems with "letting go"? And, going back to gender issues, how are women's responsibilities in the household and community related to the matrilineal spirit cults that are so often discussed in relation to rural Northern Thailand? In other words, the book, in its focus on impermanence and various central tenets of Buddhist doctrine, leaves out the many other aspects of Northern Thai religious life, some of which may well articulate with the discussion and analysis provided.

However, having said that, I realize that dealing with such questions may compromise the impact and readability of the analytical and narrative storyline, which Cassaniti is very careful to maintain throughout the book despite the richness of her ethnography. I strongly recommend *Living Buddhism* to all scholars of psychological / medical anthropology, Buddhist studies and Thai studies, as well as for undergraduate classes in any of these disciplines, and even more widely, for anyone interested in understanding other cultures.

Yoko Hayami