

Luang Pho¹ Khun as a Postmodern Medium²

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Abstract

Widely known as the "superstar magical monk" in Thailand for decades, Luang Pho Khun has been cited by the press, scholars, and social critics as a prime example of the commercialization of Buddhism and the increase of supernatural and magical practices within Buddhist institutions in contemporary Thailand. In this paper, I will take Luang Pho Khun and his famous cult as postmodern religious signifiers. What do these signifiers mean in contemporary contexts of Thai religion and society? Under the turbulent times of Thailand's economy and sociocultural transformation since 1980s, I argue that Luang Pho Khun should be read as the postmodern medium, guiding and blessing the Thai populace through their chaotic, noisy, uncertain, and unexpected daily experiences. My arguments will be supplementary by ethnographic field accounts and intensive readings on the subject of Luang Pho Khun. Most information presented in this paper was gathered in 1997 and 1998.

Keywords: *cult of Luang Pho Khun, postmodern religion and mediumship, commercialization of Buddhism, religion in contemporary Thailand*

¹The honorific title of *Luang Pho*, literally "reverend father," is usually added to the first name of senior and respected Buddhist monks in Thailand. In this case, the monk's first name is Khun. The public and his followers always address him as Luang Pho Khun. The spelling of the monk's name both in the English language press and in scholarly works, is inconsistent. Jackson (1997; 1998) and *The Nation* (a Bangkok-based English language newspaper), for example, spells the name as Luang Phor Khoon.

²A paper prepared for the International Conference on Southeast Asian Religious Mosaic on the Third Millennium, organized by Mahidol University International College, Salaya Campus, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, February 1-4, 2001. This paper was originally appeared as a chapter in my unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Pattana Kitiarsa 1999).

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