

Informal Northern Thai Group Bulletin

June 15, 2014

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- 2. NEW!!! A SUPPLEMENTARY TALK IN JUNE (379TH): THURSDAY 26 JUNE, 2014, 7:30 PM : “OLD POWER IN THE 'NEW CITY': URBAN LANNA IN THE EARLY 20TH C.” A TALK BY TAYLOR EASUM.**
- 3. JULY MEETING (380TH): TUESDAY 8 JULY, 2014, 7:30 PM : “CASHING IN ON CULTURAL HERITAGE: MUSEUMS AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN CHIANG MAI”. A TALK BY REBECCA WELDON.**
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**1. MINUTES OF THE 377TH MEETING: TUESDAY, 3 JUNE, 2014, 7:30 PM :
“WHITE ROBES SAFFRON DREAMS”. A FILM BY TEENA AMRIT GILL**

1.1. PRESENT : Ellen Adams, Ken Kyi Curwen, Pippa Curwen, Sarah Douglas, Jean-Marc Dubost, Louis Gabaude, Jennifer Gampell, Verity Kinston-Goitein, Elena Kelly, Mika Kodama-Douglas, Annette Kunigagon, Jasmine Kunigagon, Linda Santitharangul, Monica Meyer, Walter Meyer, Patrick Morel, Connie Mudore, Suriya Smutkupt, Sandra Wright, Somchai Santitharangul, Edward van Tuyl, Rebecca Weldon. A total of 22 at least.

1.2. THE FILM :

*Teena Amrit Gill introduced her film **White Robes, Saffron Dreams** (43min., 2013) about the discriminatory treatment of women in Theravada Buddhism in Thailand.*

Here is the Summary of the film and the History of the film-making she shares with us:

Through the life of Phra Kham Phon, a young monk, and Rochana, a Mae Chi (Thai 'nun' who takes 8 precepts) the film explores how Buddhist institutions, which provide a social security network to boys in a country where a large percent of the population are poor, do not give girls and women access to these facilities, including a free education up to the post-graduate level.

The main reason for this is the fact that while Thai boys can be ordained, girls cannot, and therefore they are not allowed to use the facilities provided by the temples.

However, a small nun's institute in the north of Thailand, started by an older Mae Chi, provides girls with an opportunity to pursue their education. Mae Chi Rochana, came all the way from her home town in Ubon Ratchathani province, near the Cambodian border, to complete her schooling here.

But such places are few and far between, and even this institute has since been shut down.

The voices of Ouyporn, an activist and trainer working with Buddhist nuns, and Bhikkhuni Dhammananda, the first Thai woman to be ordained as a Bhikkhuni (fully ordained female monk) in the Theravada tradition, weave their way through the film.

In an environment where there is very little open discussion about Buddhist institutions, and on attitudes towards women, including Mae Chis, it was very difficult to shoot this film, and to get people to speak on this subject.

The making of "*White Robes, Saffron Dreams*"

In 1994, soon after I moved to Thailand a huge scandal concerning a monk - Phra Yantra - took place which included breaking numerous rules of the Sangha: cruises in the Pacific, cash and credit card transactions, visiting sex workers. It was a story which has since become relatively familiar, but in those days it was still unusual for the mainstream press to take up issues like these. I began thinking about the women within Buddhism and wondering where the female practitioners were. And why the huge social security network of the Thai temples, and the facilities they provided for young boys and men, including free board and lodging and an access to a free education, bypassed women.

Around that time I was working as a senior research associate in the field of Gender and Development Studies, and then as a development journalist. I heard about Acharn Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, a Buddhist scholar, teaching at the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Thammasat University in Bangkok, and had the opportunity to visit Wat Songdhammakalyani, her mothers temple in Nakhon Pathom. Acharn Chatsumarn's mother, Voramai Kabilsingh, had been ordained as a Bhikkhuni in Taiwan in 1972 and after coming back established her temple - 'for and by' women.

At the temple I met a group of Sri Lankan women, active in the movement to revive the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Sri Lanka. I soon became engaged in these discussions, and larger debates around the revival of the Theravadin Bhikkhuni Sangha.

However, it was only after I moved to Chiang Mai in late 1997 and found out about a Nun's Institute north of Chiang Mai city, in Lamphun, that I began scripting the film, and planning the shoot. Around 2002 I met Mae Chi Rochana, whose story would help bring to light the issues that interested me, and helped me better understand the experiences of Buddhist women here in Thailand. I soon began shooting at the Nun's Institute in Lamphun, and followed Mae Chi Rochana to her home in Ubon Ratchathani, in North-east Thailand, to understand her background, and why she and her family decided to send her all the way to Lamphun to study.

Though by 2004 I had moved back to India (after 11 years in Thailand) I returned for the first few years to continue with my work on the film. As a result of this, and because of a lack of funding, the film took longer than expected to complete. However, given the difficulties of accessing information on the subject and finding people willing to speak on the subject, this helped deepen my understanding of these issues.

2. NEW!!!! A SUPPLEMENTARY TALK IN JUNE (379TH):

THURSDAY 26 JUNE, 2014, 7:30 PM

“OLD POWER IN THE 'NEW CITY': URBAN LANNA IN THE EARLY 20TH C.”

A TALK BY TAYLOR EASUM

Pleeeeeease Mark the day: this talk is not on a Tuesday but on a THURSDAY!

The Talk: Throughout its long history, Chiang Mai has remained a center of political, economic, cultural, and religious significance. During the nineteenth century, however, the region we now know as northern Thailand was integrated into modern Siam. Rather than look at this history in broad strokes, this talk will present the transformation of urban Chiang Mai through primary research, including several rare maps from archives in Chiang Mai, Bangkok, and London. While new powers and old elites often combined to shape the urban form of cities like Chiang Mai, at times these forces came into conflict with the central state, as in a little-known case from Nan in the 1930s. In surveying the transformation of urban Chiang Mai, and the varied responses of northern elites in other cities as well, I hope to highlight a complex local dimension of what is often seen as a tale of state formation and consolidation dominated by Bangkok.

The Speaker: Taylor M. Easum is an historian of Asia, with a keen interest in Thailand and urban history. He recently completed his Ph.D. in History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. His dissertation, entitled “Urban Transformation in the Colonial Margins: Chiang Mai from Lanna to Siam,” examines the unique position of Siam/Thailand vis-à-vis western colonialism and empire through the urban space of the country’s ‘second city’, Chiang Mai. Research for his dissertation was supported by multiple awards, including a Fulbright-Hays DDRA grant, and Quinn Foundation fellowship. He is currently assistant professor at New York University.

His research lies at the intersection of cities, power, and space in Asian history. In his research and writing, Dr. Easum explores the relationship between local history and broad historical queries, such as the nature of empire or the spread of nationalism. He is particularly interested, for example, in refocusing historical debate away from the Asian metropolis and toward the intermediate, secondary, and smaller cities of the region. His ongoing research into the urban historical traditions of mainland Southeast Asia also deals with issues of historical preservation, memory and identity, especially as manifested in urban space.

3. JULY MEETING (380TH): TUESDAY, 8 JULY, 2014, 7:30 PM

“CASHING IN ON CULTURAL HERITAGE:

MUSEUMS AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN CHIANG MAI”

A TALK BY REBECCA WELDON

The Talk: Cultural heritage is a financial boon for the tourism industry around the world. The United Nations World Tourism Organization has developed a Code of Ethics that promotes the use of income from tourist visits for the preservation of cultural sites. In the case of Europe, museums are featured on all formal tourism itineraries. Income from tourist visits significantly contributes to the development and sustainable operation of those institutions.

In the case of Thailand, one sees a different picture. Museum visits rarely figure on tour itineraries. Chiang Mai, a destination renowned globally for its natural and cultural heritage, offers many museums, archaeological sites, botanical gardens and national parks. However, tourism income rarely comes to these institutions. As a result, development of facilities and exhibitions is minimal. Ironically, tour companies often give this as a reason for avoiding them, while taking advantage of free entry to temples and villages. The talk will give a realistic evaluation of the intersection between institutions preserving natural and cultural heritage and the tourism industry in Chiang Mai.

The Speaker: Rebecca Weldon is a museum advisor who has lived in Thailand for over 30 years. Retired in Chiang Mai, she is an observer of museum development in the region and helps to promote development and sustainability of the institutions that conserve local natural and cultural heritage. She is Convenor of the Informal Northern Thai Group.

4. AN ARTICLE BY KAROOL KERSTEN ON CRITICAL ISLAM.

Karool Kersten, a former INTG speaker and now Senior Lecturer in the Study of Islam & the Muslim World at King's College, has published an article on critical islam: "**Critical Islam Muslims and their Religion in a Post-Islamist World**" which is now available for reading or downloading at:

https://www.academia.edu/7341654/Critical_Islam_Muslims_and_their_Religion_in_a_Post-Islamist_World

5. List of FUTURE INTG MEETINGS

379th Meeting : THURSDay, **26 June**, 2014, 7:30 pm : “**Old Power in the 'New City': Urban Lanna in the early 20th c.**”. A Talk by **Taylor Easum**.

380th Meeting : Tuesday, **8 July**, 2014, 7:30 pm : “**Cashing in on Cultural Heritage: Museums and Tourism Industry in Chiang Mai**”. A Talk by **Rebecca Weldon**.

381st Meeting : Tuesday, **19 August**, 2014, 7:30 pm : A Talk by **Christine Gent**, Executive Director of the World Fair Trade Organization, Asia. Topic to be announced later.

6. INTG CONTACTS : Convenor - Secretary - Website

- 1) **Convenor : Rebecca Weldon :** e-mail : < rebecca.weldon@gmail.com >. Mobile : **087 193 67 67**.
- 2) **Secretary : Louis Gabaude :** e-mail : < gabaudel@yahoo.com >. Mobile : **087 188 50 99**.
- 3) **INTG Website :** <http://www.intgcm.thehostserver.com>

**Thank you for posting the following announcements
wherever you can!**

Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)
29 years of Talks!

Old Power
in the **'New City':**
Urban Lanna
in the
early 20th c.

A Talk by **Taylor Easum**

THURSDAY 26 June 2014, 19:30

At the **ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE**

131, Charoen Prathet Road, Chiang Mai, opposite the EFEO

Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)
29 years of Talks!

**Museums and
the Tourism
Industry in
Chiang Mai**

A Talk by **Rebecca Weldon**

Tuesday 8 July 2014, 19:30

At the **ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE**

131, Charoen Prathet Road, Chiang Mai, opposite the EFEO