



Moral Entertainment – The Buddhist Hell Parks of Thailand¹

Roman Husarski  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9264-6751>

Institute of Religious Studies

Jagiellonian University

e-mail: roman.husarski@doctoral.uj.edu.pl

Abstract

Visiting Hell parks is a popular pastime in contemporary Thailand. Situated near Buddhist temples, these gruesome sculpture gardens depict the Buddhist vision of Hell. These grotesque and violent sculptures are usually seen as an oddity and a form of low art. Perhaps for this reason, they are rarely studied by scholars. This article focuses on the parks as modern entertainment. Usually found in rural areas, these spots try to answer the challenges of the commercialisation and globalisation of Thai society. A detailed analysis of four Hell parks, Wang Saen Suk, Wat Pa Lak Roi, Wat Pa Non Sawan and Wat Pa Thewapithak, shows that these religious amusement parks serve not only as means of entertainment but are also places of Buddhist morality.

Keywords: Hell parks, Buddhist hell, Buddhist art, Thai Buddhism, political science of religion, morality and religion

Słowa kluczowe: piekielne parki, piekło buddyjskie, sztuka buddyjska, tajski buddyzm, politologia religii, moralność i religia

Thai Buddhist art, from albums to postcards, is usually represented by subtle and calm Buddha statues from Sukhothai or Ayutthaya. Thus, coming across temples dedicated to Hell (*narok* or *narokphum*)² can be a shocking experience. The Hell parks

¹ This work was supported by the Jagiellonian University's Council of Students' Academic Associations as part of the *Badanie nieortodoksyjnych świątyń buddyjskich w północno-wschodniej Tajlandii i Birmie* [Study of unorthodox Buddhist temples in Northeast Thailand and Myanmar] Grant.

² *Narok* is a Thai word with origins in the Sanskrit *naraka*. Probably the term came from a word *nir-i* which means to 'go asunder'. That etymology would emphasise that the described place destroys and purifies from wrong actions. See J. Braarvig, *The Buddhist Hell: An Early Instance of the Idea?*, "Numen" 2009, vol. 56, no. 2–3, p. 259.

(*Suan Narok*) that I describe are sculpture gardens built as a part of Thai Buddhist temples (*wat*). They depict in detail a Buddhist vision of Hell, the place of rebirth for those who committed the most sinful acts. The constructed dioramas, usually, but not always, include information about the committed sin (*baap*) and present realisations of punishments which are performed by the agents of hell (*phayayom*). The scenes are brutal, colourful, sexualised, bloody, and surreal. They are present all across the Buddhist world, and I had a chance to visit examples in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Myanmar, Korea and Japan. However, as far as I know, Thailand is the country with the highest number of Hell parks. Furthermore, new similar sites are under construction, such as in Chiang Mai, which shows that this phenomenon is still alive.

This paper is an ethnological study based on my fieldwork in Thailand (2016).³ I examine the Hell parks of four temples: Wat Pa Lak Roi, Wat Pa Non Sawan, Wang Saen Suk and Wang Saen Suk. The latter was the only one located outside Isan, the north-eastern region of Thailand, where the Thai Hell park phenomenon started. I propose considering Hell parks as a form of religious entertainment that aims to engage and influence behaviour. Imagery of Hell has been present in the Buddhist world for more than 1000 years on bas reliefs, murals, and sculptures.⁴ However, its representation in the form of three-dimensional sculpture dioramas with interactive options, creative installations, etc., is a recently new form of religious attraction. Broadly speaking they can be classified as “religious theme parks”, which are a worldwide phenomenon, characterised by modern entertainment.⁵ As described by James S. Bielo entertainment “is about creating and participating in immersive environments”.⁶ Similarly to “Ark Encounter”, a Christian theme park described by Bielo, Hell parks aim to immerse participants in a traditionalist Buddhism morality framework.

The construction of Hell parks is an attempt to give the temple a global and modern face in a quickly changing environment. However, they also contain a very conservative message. The Hell parks use strategies of modern entertainment to attract visitors, especially younger visitors, but they are strengthening the vision of rural Buddhist morality at the same time. Furthermore, I argue that the emerging of these sites is connected to socio-economic and political changes in Thailand. The marketisation and fragmentation of Buddhism as well as the conflict between Thai centre (Bangkok) and peripheries (Isan) are also significant contexts. Through comparison, I show how each Hell park differs, and how the concept evolved from the initial introduction of the Hell park in Wat Phai Rong Wua in 1971.

³ I want to thank Patryk Tomala who was my companion during my travels and whose comments about Thai culture were very valuable to me, also Adrian Hermann and Tassapa Umavijani for all comments and help with translations.

⁴ See, e.g., J. Braarvig, *op. cit.*; P.D. McMakin, A.M. Calabrese, *Buddhist Visions of Heaven and Hell in Thai Art*, np 2018; E. Gardiner, *Buddhist Hell: Visions, Tours and Descriptions of the Infernal Otherworld*, New York 2012.

⁵ P. Crispin, *Gods and Rollercoasters: Religion in Theme Parks Worldwide*, London 2019; J.T. McDaniel, *Strolling through Temporary Temples: Buddhism and Installation Art in Modern Thailand*, “Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal” 2017, vol. 18, no. 1.

⁶ J.S. Bielo, *Ark Encounter: The Making of a Creationist Theme Park*, New York 2018, p. 23.

Prosocial hell, *misemono* and rural capitalism: The different ways to interpret Hell parks

Although new religious spaces that came along with economical transformations of Thailand in the last fifty years have been the topic of various studies,⁷ only a few Western scholars have written anything in detail about Hell parks. These sites, for the most part, only grabbed the attention of sensation hunters, journalists and bloggers who described them in the “Weird Asia” category. Such usually superficial descriptions present the phenomenon as a curiosity and often skip over any in-depth knowledge of the cultural and historical context. Bogdan Góralczyk, the former Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the Kingdom of Thailand, briefly described the hells of Wat Muang and Wat Wang Saen Suk in his memoir. Góralczyk pointed out the ubiquitous nature of hell narration in Thai Buddhism, and the role it might play in prosocial behaviour.⁸ This conclusion might be supported by research.⁹

The most detailed accounts on the subject can be found in the various works of Justin Thomas McDaniel,¹⁰ and in Benedict Anderson’s case study on Wat Phai Rong Wua.¹¹ McDaniel presents the Hell parks, among other Buddhist monuments and amusement Parks, as an example of “spectacle attraction”, “socially disengaged Buddhism” or *misemono*. However, I find these frameworks to be limited in relation to Hell parks. The fact that these places are leisure sites does not mean that their goals are “not articulated”, or they are indifferent to social problems.¹² Each Hell diorama is condemning a certain sin (*baap*), understood in Buddhism as a wrong action, and many are reflecting modern problems, e.g., prostitution, marijuana, abortion, military violence against citizens, etc. The use of spectacle and attraction does not make Buddhism simply focused on fun. As I write later in detail, it is an attempt of the rural side of Thailand to catch up with modernity and to make Buddhism relevant.

⁷ See, e.g., L. Chua, *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910–1973*, Ithaca 2012; J.T. McDaniel, *Architects of Buddhist Leisure: Socially Disengaged Buddhism in Asia’s Museums, Monuments, and Amusement Parks*, Honolulu 2017; B. Monthian, P. Apinan, *Montien Boonma: Temple of the Mind*, London 2003; R.A. O’Connor, *Interpreting Thai Religious Change: Temples, Sangha Reform and Social Change*, “Journal of Southeast Asian Studies” 1993, vol. 24, no. 2; J. Taylor, *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand: The Religiosity of Urban Space*, New York 2008.

⁸ B. Góralczyk, *Zmierzch i brzask. Notes z Bangkoku* [Twilight and daybreak: Notes from Bangkok], Toruń 2009, pp. 85–90.

⁹ The cross-national analysis revealed that nations with strong belief in supernatural punishment (hell) tend to have a lower crime rate than others. A.F. Shariff, M. Rhemtulla, *Divergent Effects of Beliefs in Heaven and Hell on National Crime Rates*, “PLoS ONE” 2012, vol. 7, no. 6.

¹⁰ J.T. McDaniel, *The Agency between Images: The Relationships Among Ghosts, Corpses, Monks, and Deities At a Buddhist Monastery in Thailand*, “Material Religion” 2011, vol. 7, no. 2; *idem*, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*, New York 2011; *idem*, *Spectacle Attractions and Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, “Dorisea Working Paper” 2015, vol. 18, no. 15; *idem*, *Strolling through Temporary Temples...*, *op. cit.*; *idem*, *Architects of Buddhist Leisure...*, *op. cit.*

¹¹ B. Anderson, *The Fate of Rural Hell: Asceticism and Desire in Buddhist Thailand*, Calcutta 2012.

¹² Compare with J.T. McDaniel, *Architects of Buddhist Leisure...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–17.

Hell parks also do not match with McDaniel's description of *misemono*. The term means "show" or "exhibits" and has origins in the Japanese Edo period. *Misemono* in its origin was usually vulgar, crude, shocking, and a carnival-like spectacle aimed at surprising and impressing the viewers. The aesthetic was used by temples, which was a successful way to engage a crowd and raise funds. McDaniel writes about *misemono*:

Misemono is spectacle as purposeless delight. Distraction, but not distraction in a manipulative way, not in a sense of being distracted from political, economic, labour, and ethical concerns, but spectacle in terms of celebrating the teaching of the Buddha (and often the importance of the person who designed and funded the site) without direct purpose. *Misemono*, 'spectacle things' or perhaps 'spectacle attractions', were historically designed for temples and local festivals.¹³

I question the notion that these sites were made to create a sense of escapism. While certainly entertainment and engagement are at the centre of Hell parks, so is morality. The Hell park function is not to distract, but rather to indicate behaviours considered as correct from the point of view of the traditional and rural Buddhism. However, McDaniel downplays both the morality and socio-political dimension:

There was no hiding or pretending that these sites had explicit ritual or ethical value. They served no explicitly stated social function in terms of assisting the poor, inspiring an army, controlling a population, supporting a particular politician, or educating the youth. They were sites designed to be spectacular, to be impressive, sites to mark the honouring of a Bodhisattva or Buddha.¹⁴

I would rather argue that these techniques were used as successful tools for uttering strong moral stances. Not only do some of the creators of the parks acknowledge that their main motive in building them was to warn people against wrongdoing,¹⁵ but if we consider the Hell park as a form of text, it is clearly related to a proper ethic. Religious aesthetics do not exist in a vacuum and are related to existing political power structures.¹⁶ Furthermore, art and especially religious art should not be described outside of the social context.

In contrast to McDaniel, Anderson describes Wat Phai Rong Wua as a place infused with traditional morality, strongly connected to the Thai village traditional way of life.¹⁷ The typology of sins (*baap*) I collected from temples supports that hypothesis. *The Fate of Rural Hell...* is a detailed description of a temple, its Hell park, the life of the Abbot, Luang Phor Khom, the local community, and an effort of bringing the spirit of capitalism into Isan – the north-eastern region of Thailand, is the largest

¹³ J.T. McDaniel, *Spectacle Attractions...*, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁵ F. Wilmer, *A Thai Monk Brings Hell to Chang Mai*, "Roads & Kingdoms" 2015, August 25, <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2015/nsfw-the-hell-temple-of-chiang-mai/> [accessed: 20.05.2019].

¹⁶ A. Grieser, J. Johnston, *What is an Aesthetics of Religion? From the Senses to Meaning – and Back Again*, Berlin 2017, pp. 23–5.

¹⁷ B. Anderson, op. cit., pp. 12–33.

and, despite some progress, is still the poorest in the country.¹⁸ The Anderson research is well illustrated and is based on the author's visits to the temple between 1975 and 2010. It was Luang Phor Khom who first created a Hell park in Thailand (finished in 1971). The aesthetic of Wat Phai Rong Wua was copied and transformed in other temples. Wat Pa Non Sawan (Roi Et Province), started constructing statues already in 1969, but its Hell park was built in 80s. Wat Pa Lak Roi (Nakhom Ratchasima Province) was built in 1977. Wat Pa Thewapithak (Roi Et Province), which is more popularly known by locals as Pa Ban Ban Kluai (literally "The Temple of Banana orchards" reflecting its location), was built in late nineteen-seventies. The phenomenon become so popular that it left Isan. Wat Wang Saen Suk Hell Garden is the most recent in my study and was constructed in 1986. The temple is located near the seaside city of Chonburi (Chonburi Province). Being a popular tourist spot, it was the easiest to access.

Anderson described ambitious projects in Wat Phai Rong Wua and its huge statues from various traditions (not only of Theravada origin) to be a result of *sakon* (lit. international). *Sakon* can be explained as the Thai urge to become a modern and fully international country. Anderson calls these efforts a failure. He speculates that the Hell park would not only be not understood by international visitors but also by most Thais (especially those who grow up outside rural Thailand).¹⁹ Anderson is right. There is no doubt who the recipient is of the message of *Suan Narok*. All people presented in Hell resemble Thais and most of its figures come from Theravada Buddhism and local culture. In fact, even some Thais would criticize Hell parks as "folk Buddhism".²⁰ The Hell parks do not offer any note of explanation and do not even bother to present translated signs. The only one exception was Wat Wang Saen Suk, although its English translations contained grammatical errors. However, although not very *sakon*, these temples are strongly connected to Thai capitalism.

The rise of Hell parks in Thailand is not accidental. All Hell parks I have visited were built between the nineteen-seventies and the nineteen-nineties in the period of lush economic development, increasing disproportions between the city and the countryside, and political instability. The Isan region was particularly unstable, and the rise of its Hell park could be connected to problems of security. As it was pointed out before, one of the aims of hell imagery is to secure a religious vision of a social order.²¹ The motif of Hell often emerged in a time of crisis before, as a response to a threat, and aimed at increasing religious group coherence.²²

¹⁸ P. Janssen, *Thailand Takes a Long-Term Gamble on Isaan Region*, "Nikkei Asian Review" 2016, November 2.

¹⁹ B. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁰ Interview with Buddhist monk Somphong Phaengcharoen (September 2019), a lecturer at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and a monk. Somphong Phaengcharoen was born in Isan and he specialises in modern Buddhism in Thailand. I met with him on Skype to discuss the relevance of Hell parks for modern Thai Buddhism.

²¹ K.A. Jacobsen, *Three Functions of Hell in the Hindu Traditions*, "Numen" 2009, vol. 56, no. 2–3.

²² A.E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds*, London 1993.

As Anderson presented, Hell park was one element of Thai capitalistic religiosity of the time. Manufactured amulets,²³ the so-called lucky banknotes²⁴, and rituals involving the use of money or blessing goods (Figure 1) all become very popular. Some temples in Isan, like Wat Ban Rai in Isan, the home of the famous monk, Luang Phor Khoon, gained enormous popularity as a place to obtain these described services. Some scholars called the phenomenon the “commercialisation” of Thai Buddhism.²⁵ The obtained funds were often used for the expansion of temples and for their decoration.²⁶ They have also become a centre of new micro-economical activities. In Wat Pa Lak Roi, there was a shop with devotional articles; in Wat Pa Non Sawan, we could buy snacks and drinks; in Wat Pa Thewapithak, there was a small talisman market; in Wang Saen Suk Hell Garden, we can find stands with horoscope writers, devotional articles and even cold drinks, ice-creams and popcorn.

Another relevant factor is the charisma of temple abbots. Anderson noted that it was believed that Wat Phai Rong Wua Abbot, Luang Phor Khom, had magical powers.²⁷ So-called charismatic monks have a large degree of authority within their own temples.²⁸ As described by Pattana Kitiarsa, charismatic monks usually came from rural areas, have individualistic personas, and are believed to possess magical powers, such as the ability to channel spirits or perform clairvoyance. “They have commanded their own culturally and cosmologically structured agencies and authorities” stated Kitiarsa.²⁹ All figures in Wat Phai Rong Wua Hell park were personally ordered by Luang Phor Khom.³⁰

The monks who created the three temples in Isan that I visited, can also be called charismatic. Wat Pa Non Sawan Abbot, Lhuang Pu Khampan, is considered as a “shaman monk”, and it is commonly said that the shape of the temple shape and the figures were inspired by his visions. When I was visiting the temple, he was still giving blessing inside the “Yama head” building. Wat Pa Lak Roi, creator of Phra Khru Siri-pattaporn, is believed to bring fortune and luck. Wat Pa Thewapithak, which is more popularly known by locals as Pa Ban Ban Kluai (literally “The Temple of Banana orchards” reflecting its location), was built by Lhuangphu Rauesi-Sroi Thittasuttho,

²³ S.J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of the Amulets*, Cambridge 1984.

²⁴ P.A. Jackson, *The Enchanting Spirit of Thai Capitalism: The Cult of Luang Phor Khoon and the Post-Modernization of Thai Buddhism*, “South East Asia Research” 1999, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 21–23.

²⁵ R. Boike, G. Sprenger, *Configurations of Religion – A Debate. A DORISEA Network Discussion Opened by Boike Rehbein and Guido Sprenger*, “DORISEA Working Paper Series”, P.J. Bräunlein, M. Dickhardt, A. Lauser (eds.), 2016, no. 24, special issue, pp. 15–17; J. Comaroff, *Epilogue: Defying Disenchantment: Reflections on Ritual, Power, and History*, [in:] *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, C.F. Keyes, L. Kendall, H. Hardacre (eds.), Honolulu 1994; P.A. Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²⁶ J.L. Taylor, *Embodiment, Nation, and Religio-Politics in Thailand*, “South East Asia Research” 2001, vol. 9, no. 2, p. 139.

²⁷ B. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁸ D. McCargo, *Buddhism, Democracy and Identity in Thailand*, “Democratization” 2014, vol. 11(4). DOI: 10.1080/1351034042000234576, p. 166.

²⁹ P. Kitiarsa, *Magic Monks and Spirit Mediums in the Politics of Thai Popular Religion*, “Inter-Asia Cultural Studies” 2005, vol. 6, no. 2. DOI: 10.1080/14649370500065920, p. 210.

³⁰ B. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

another charismatic monk famous for his amulets. For this reason, the amulet market in that temple is still thriving. The only temple lacking the charismatic abbot was Wat Saen Suk. Its Hell park was installed at a time when this model of entertainment was well established in Thailand.

Origins of the Hell parks

The idea of hell has been a part of Buddhism from the beginning. The imagination of the underworld can be found before the arrival of Buddha's teachings. The best examples are various descriptions of Yama, Lord of Death. His realm and role as a judge of sinners is widely described, especially in *Bhagavata Purana* (written between 800 and 1000 C.E.). Yama would be adopted by Buddhism and he is presented in many Hell parks³¹. Also, the Buddhist hell has further similarities to the religions which predate it, specifically Hinduism and Jainism.³² It resembles prison and although it can last ages, in contrast to Christianity, it is not everlasting – for this reason, some earlier translators preferred to use word “Purgatory” to describe it.³³ There are various sources that describe *narok* which are important for Thai Buddhism. The description of hell already appears in *Kathāvatthu*, the earliest Buddhist scripture with a named author.³⁴ The other canon texts are important, especially in *Devadūta-sutta* but also in *Nimi Jātaka*, *Lohakumbhi Jātaka*, *Samkicca Jātaka*, *Bālapaṇḍita-sutta* and others.³⁵ The Sukhothai fourteenth-century text *Traiphūmikathā*, known as *Three Worlds of King Ruang*, is considered to be the first literary work by a Thai author that describes the diverse depths of Hell.³⁶ Probably, the most influential stories about Hell which influenced the architecture of Hell parks comes from the legend of Phra Malai, which is about an advanced meditator who could travel between Heaven and Hell.³⁷

There is some speculation that the story of Phra Malai has its origins in Sri Lanka, but the earliest versions, written on accordion-folded *samut khoi* paper, come from eighteenth-century Thailand. They were written in a poetic style and were illustrated. According to B.P. Bretton, the three most popular versions are: “(1) the

³¹ Interestingly in some Buddhist classical texts, like in *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, Yama also appears as a deity of heaven. “It is unclear whether these two are the same or different beings”. A. Sadakata, H. Nakamura, *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origins*, Tokyo 1997, p. 160. For more about the evolution of Yama in Buddhism see B. Siklós, *The Evolution of the Buddhist Yama*, “The Buddhist Forum” 1996, vol. 4.

³² A. Sadakata, H. Nakamura, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³³ J. Braarvig, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 259–265.

³⁵ J. Igunma, *A Buddhist Monk's Journeys to Heaven and Hell*, “Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities” 2017, vol. 6(1), p. 67.

³⁶ B. Góralczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

³⁷ B.P. Brereton, *The Phra Malai Legend in Thai Buddhist Literature: A Study of Three Texts*, Ann Arbor 1992; S. Collins, *The Story of the Elder Māleyyedeva*, “Journal of the Pali Text Society” 1993, vol. 18; M. Heijdra, *The Legend of Phra Malai*, Princeton University Graphic Arts Collection, Princeton 2018; J.T. McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–123.

Pali Maleyyadevatthera-vatthu; (2) the Lao language *Malai Muen-Malai Saen*; and (3) the Northern Thai language *Malai Ton-Malai Plai*”.³⁸ These stories focused on Phra Malai encounters (e.g. with the god Indra, the god of underworld Yama, or Bodhisatva Maitreya) and a detailed description of the nonhuman realms of existence. Many scenes in today’s Hell parks can be directly traced to Phra Malai legends. Especially because some versions of the manuscripts were richly illustrated. The motifs found in the mentioned illustrations, like men with abnormally large genitals, the thorn tree motive, humans with animal heads, etc., all have three-dimensional representations in Hell parks.³⁹

However, it is impossible to identify one main source of inspiration for Hell parks. Ethnographic studies revealed that “there is no single integrated textual tradition based on a ‘canon’” in the Theravada world, but rather Buddhist monasteries compose their dogmas based on different texts, from the *Tripitaka*, to regional works, popular commentaries, private ideas, etc.⁴⁰ The form itself was not created in Thailand. It seems that the first place which could be called a “Hell park” was established as a part of the Kōsanji temple on Ikuchijim island in the Inland Sea near Hiroshima in 1936.⁴¹ However, a hell section also appeared one year later in the Tiger Balm Garden in Singapore. The latter was a private garden until after the Second World War and became a commercial success after it was opened to the public as an amusement park. It was built by two immigrants, brothers from Myanmar of Chinese origin, Aw Boon Paw and Aw Boon Par. They were successful businessmen who earned millions selling their medical products, which to this day are widely recognised in Asia. The economic importance of Singapore for Thais, and its central location in South East Asia, make it the more plausible as a direct source of inspiration for later Thai projects, rather than the temple on the small Japanese island.

In fact, Tiger Balm Gardens share many similarities with the temples that I describe. The Singapore gardens, beside promoting the business of its constructors, also blend entertainment with morality. The dioramas included Chinese Mythological Figures, depictions from Chinese folktales, Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist figures, local Gods and Goddesses and monuments dedicated to founder brothers. Buddhist motifs are with presented in the park in reference to different legends, such as in the story of the adventures of a monk, Tang Zhen, who together with Sun Wu Gong, the Monkey God, and Zhu Ba Jie, a Pig who travels the world in search of the holy Buddhist texts. Tiger Balm Gardens presents a version of the Chinese *Diyu* (hell)

³⁸ B.P. Brereton, *Phra Malai Texts – Telling Them Apart: Preface or Performance*, “Journal of Mekong Societies” 2017, vol. 13, no. 3.

³⁹ Compare with online graphics from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century versions of the legend, M. Heijdra, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ C.F. Keyes, *Merit-Transference in the Karmic Theory of Popular Theravada Buddhism*, [in:] *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry*, C.F. Keyes, E.V. Daniel (eds.), Berkeley 1983, p. 272.

⁴¹ More about Kōsanji temple: P. Graham, *Faith and Power in Japanese Buddhist Art: 1600–2005*, Honolulu 2007, pp. 230–231.

which was shaped through the centuries by different traditions led by Buddhism and Taoism.⁴²

Called “Ten Courts of Hell”, the bloody purgatory is administrated by ten underworld kings and presents a variety of punishments which sinners can be subjected to. Each diorama has an explanatory board in both Chinese and English. Each station presents the punishment for certain lists of sins – in the case of Thai *Suan Narok*, each diorama depicts punishment for a different sin. The success of Tiger Balm Gardens was partly due to the way these sites engage visitors and also by to its moral properties. The morality it depicts is “Oriental”, not limited to any single source of religious tradition – this tendency towards universalisation is another element taken by Hell park creators which will be described later. Ten Courts of Hell is often visited by families as parents decide that it is a good place of education for their children⁴³ and a similar situation is the case with regard to today’s Thai Hell parks, which are often visited by schools and parents with children.

An impact of Tiger Balm Gardens on Thai religious architecture is highly probable, but there might be other Hell gardens influencing the architecture. When Luang Phor Khom *Suan Narok* was completed in 1971, the religious entertainment was already a global phenomenon and the best examples are hell motifs in places like the Coney Island amusement park⁴⁴ or the Bugok Hawaii water amusement park in Korea (closed in 2017). Hell houses run by evangelical Protestant churches seem to have also appeared in a similar period as Hell parks. Despite similarities, a deeper analysis reveals many differences, e.g. instead of sculptures, real actors usually depict morally challenging scenes.⁴⁵ A comparison between Christian and Buddhist manifestations of hell would require a separate study.

In Thailand, ghosts and hellish creatures are a common theme, from poetry, literature, and pop culture.⁴⁶ The ghost film (*Nang Phii*) was present from the beginning of Thai cinema and formed an important subgenre.⁴⁷ Today, movies like *Shutter* (2004), *4bia* (2008) or *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) were very successful in Thailand and attained international interest. It is hard to say to what extent cinema shaped the imagination of the *Suan Narok* artists, but it can be argued that the horror movie aesthetic increased the appeal of the sites.

⁴² S.F. Teiser, ‘*Having Once Died and Returned to Life*’: *Representations of Hell in Medieval China*, “*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*” 2006, vol. 48, no. 2. DOI: 10.2307/2719317.

⁴³ B.S.A. Yeoh, P. Teo, *From Tiger Balm Gardens to Dragon World: Philanthropy and Profit in the Making of Singapore’s First Cultural Theme Park*, “*Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*” 2006, vol. 78, no. 1, p. 34.

⁴⁴ P. Crispin, *Gods and Rollercoasters...*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ J.S. Bielo, *op. cit.*; A. Pellegrini, ‘*Signaling through the Flames*’: *Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling*, “*American Quarterly*” 2007, vol. 59, no. 3. DOI: 10.1353/aq.2007.0067; J. Stevenson, *Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance In Twenty-First-Century America*, Ann Arbor 2013.

⁴⁶ M. Umavijani, *By the Clemency of Hell*, Bangkok 1977.

⁴⁷ R. Green, *Thai Buddhism in Horror Films: Nang Nak and Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, [in:] R.S. Green, *Buddhism Goes to the Movies: Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*, New York 2013, p. 47.

Following the footsteps of Luang Phor Khom: Four Hell parks of Thailand

All of the temples I have visited use various methods of entertainment. They start with colourful entrances. In Wat Pa Non Sawan, two huge red and blue cows, hold the sign. In Wat Pa Lak Roi, the gate is made of two elephants holding a Dharma wheel, and in Wat Pa Thewapithak we are greeted by two Santa Claus and two donkeys. In Wang Saen Suk, there was a sign on the main gate saying, “Welcome to Hell”. Exaggeration seems to be the dominant feature of the decor of the space. The monumentality of some statues is impressive. The hundreds of different colourful statues that are scattered all around overwhelm the senses. Architectural solutions were created in order to evoke the effect of surprise, for example, in Wat Pa Non Sawan, the entrance to one temple hall was through a demon’s mouth (god Yama), but inside, the exit leads under the dragon. The Abbot himself would greet people inside a giant Hanuman’s mouth.

Coin activated installations are another way to engage visitors which could be found in Hell parks. As in amusement parks, they would start working after a small donation. They appeared in Wat Pa Lak Roi and in Wat Pa Thewapithak. In the first temple, it was possible to set the skeleton on a water bike, which floated on the pond and made hellish sounds or some ghost-like laughs. In the central place, there was a gigantic green head of a demon. After activation of the mechanism, the wanderers would see the deities (*deva*) in the queue coming from his eyes. Every diorama in Wat Pa Thewapithak has a speaker that would loudly play a Buddhist sermon about Hell after inserting a coin.

Other temples also tried to make donating more entertaining. The donation boxes were decorated with humorous inscriptions such as, “improve your chances of avoiding Hell by throwing in 5 Baht”. Some statues were prepared to serve the function of collecting money. In Wat Wang Saen Suk, there was even a diorama punishing those who do not give the donation. We can also read on the boxes that by supporting the temple, we can help those in Hell. There is a strong conviction in the tradition that for a layperson, there is no better way to improve the chances for a greater rebirth than to support *Sangha*.⁴⁸ The temples offer entertaining ways to fulfil religious duties.⁴⁹

Usually, the Buddhist vision of the world presupposes the existence of six spheres: the realms of hell, of hungry ghosts, of animals, of humans, of demigods, and of gods.⁵⁰ In all temples, we find more dioramas which most likely map the entire cosmos. However, it is not a consistent project. Hell, except in Wat Pa Non Sawan, in which the Hell part was restricted to the south end of the temple, was a dominant motif. The reason may again lay in their appeal. From the perspective of the cognitive science of religion, the devils, demons and ghosts, which are part of hell imagery, create memorable images and strong emotions associated with them can strengthen

⁴⁸ J.S. Walters, R.F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, “Philosophy East and West” 2006, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 161–163.

⁴⁹ However, the temples do not have entrance fees and were all free to walk around in.

⁵⁰ Z. Ashitsu, *The Fundamental Teachings of Buddhism*, “The Monits” 1894, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 163–175, pp. 233–240 [published: 2015].

this process.⁵¹ Thai Hell parks evoke many emotions ranging from fun to fear, which serve to make the message memorable. The spheres other than hell were represented through loose collections of motifs. The effect is much more chaotic. However, in all Hell parks, we will find many images of ghosts (*phi*), hungry ghosts (*phret*), and characters from Thai folk mythology.

While some temples have educational themes like scenes from the life of Buddha (Wang Saen Suk), they also present statues as monsters and dinosaurs (Wat Pa Non Sawan, Wat Pa Lak Roi), Chinese zodiac representations (all parks), native Americans and African tribesman (Wat Pa Non Sawan, see Figure 2) or battle scenes from the Thai version of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, *Ramakien* (Wat Pa Lak Roi). In the latter park, statues of huge mushrooms, a typical attribute of amusement parks, can also be seen. There are probably countless reasons why these different elements are they bring an image of wealth, universalism and globalism to the rural towns.

Other examples of a tendency for the universalisation of the temple experience are motifs which do not strictly belong to Theravada Buddhism. These include different Bodhisattvas (e.g. Guanyin/Kannon), Budai (better known as fat Buddha) and other folk images (e.g. different forms of *prets*, Thai ghosts), Chinese gods, legendary figures (e.g. Cangje, inventor of Chinese characters, Lao Tzu), and statues from other religions. In Wang Saen Suk there was a statue of the Virgin Mary and a little shrine for Islam (with a star and crescent moon). Christian statues were described as embodying “kindness” and Islam as “fidelity”. McDaniel describes this appropriation of deities and motifs as “Buddhist ecumenism”.⁵² When it comes to the Buddhist approach toward other religions, as Robert DeCaroli wrote “the incorporation of popular deities into Buddhist contexts becomes simultaneously significant as a methodology for outward expansion, a means of signalling the *Sangha*’s purity, and as an act of monastic courage and compassion”.⁵³ According to Somphong Phaengcharoen “It’s a form of generosity of Buddhism and the example of *skilful means*”.⁵⁴ The last term is explaining the Buddhist openness toward other religions as Buddhist see truth in a hierarchical way. This order also manifests in the temple space. The statues dedicated to Christianity or Islam were far from the centre of the temple. This strategy reflects what Buddhism has been doing for ages when incorporating the deities it encountered.⁵⁵ The

⁵¹ P. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, New York 2001, pp. 80–90.

⁵² “Despite the lack of a pan-Buddhist ecumenical or nondenominational movement, non-monastic Buddhist leisure sites often promote, through accumulation, assembly and display, a notion that all Buddhist schools and culture are equal and can and should coexist [...]. They often display collections of objects and decidedly non-confrontational (and perhaps a little wishy-washy) Buddhist ideas from all over Asia, mixing together newer and older pieces and ethical teachings from various teachers and sects without necessarily favouring a particular vision.” J.T. McDaniel, *Architects of Buddhist Leisure...*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵³ R. DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, Oxford 2004, p. 187.

⁵⁴ Interview with Somphong Phaengcharoen (September 2019).

⁵⁵ K. Jakubczak, *Pozorne i rzeczywiste podstawy wspólnoty chrześcijańsko-buddyjskiej*, [in:] *Benares a Jerozolima. Przemysł chrześcijaństwa w kategoriach hinduizmu i buddyzmu*, K.J. Pawłowski (red.), Kraków 2007, pp. 219–220; L. Learman, *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, Honolulu 2005.

“notion that all Buddhist schools and culture are equal”⁵⁶ seems to be false. I suggest that rather than describing these sites using terms with strong Christian connotations, it is better to see them in the broader context of the Buddhist missionary approach.

Just as in Wat Phai Rong Wua, the hungry ghosts statues are put in a Hell section. Here is another exception. Wat Pa Thewapithak excluded ghost, and in that temple, visitors can walk through a depiction of all six realms of the Buddhist cosmos. The characteristic motif of all four Hell parks are giant statues representing the famous hungry ghost couple, Nai Ngean (male) and Nang Thong (female) (Figure 3). They typify rebirth of greedy, jealous, and malicious people. While they have large bellies, they actually represent a continual hunger as understood through their thin necks and extended bodies. Their suffering is emphasised by drooping, disproportionately long tongues. It was possible to find other popular Thai female ghosts e.g., Mae Nak and the ghosts of stillborn children (Figure 4). In Wat Pa Thewapithak, there was an exhibition with deformed faces and skulls. The god Yama, a judge of each person’s karmic achievements after death, reportedly absent in Wat Phai Rong Wua,⁵⁷ was depicted in each of the four parks.

In contrast to the Christian idea of circles of hell, famously explored in Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*, or to some traditional Buddhist descriptions which divides hell into cold and hot sections, the Hell parks seem to be lacking any particular order. Instead, the *Suan Narok* dioramas were prepared freely, and subsequent parts were probably added over time. One gives the impression of a labyrinth and the feeling of being lost which increases the suggestiveness of the parks. As mentioned before, dioramas are categorised by sin, but they are not hierarchical – there are no heavier or lighter *baap*. Anderson presented categorisation in Wat Phai Rong Wua which consists of: sins between wives and husbands, sins between parents and children, offences against monks, offences against animals, and miscellaneous bad behaviour.⁵⁸

The nature of depicted sins tells us more about the morality of local monks and local problems than it does about original textual sources. Torture for the abuse of alcohol and using and selling drugs such as marijuana and opium are very common in each park. The marriage misbehaviours sound traditionalist, and includes gossip, shouting at the husband, running away from the husband, cheating on the wife, etc. As emphasised by Anderson, many sins are related to doing things in a *wat*, e.g. stealing or having sex. However, in contrast to Wat Phai Rong Wua, some temples had a wider message, for example, Anderson noticed that only those who “kill or torment domestic animals” are tortured,⁵⁹ but in Wang Saen Suk, destroying wildlife was also punished. In Wat Phai Rong Wua, there were no dioramas related to politicians or businessmen, but those who commit corruption are depicted as ghosts with pig heads. In Wat Pa Lak Roi, there is caricature scene in which a group of people carry Thai businessmen or politicians on a sedan chair and worship them as if they

⁵⁶ J.T. McDaniel, *Architects of Buddhist Leisure...*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ B. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 12–25.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

were gods (Figure 5). Scenes depicting grotesque representations of professors and the military can also be found.

Each of the visited parks also had various dioramas which punish misbehaviour towards monks. Numerous dioramas were devoted to punishments for blasphemy and the slandering of the Buddhist doctrine.⁶⁰ Hell parks not only stigmatise those who break out of the traditional Buddhist way of life, but also glorify monkhood. In Buddhism, Hell does not last forever and can be overcome after the realisation of wrongdoing and the burning out of negative karma (*kamma*).⁶¹ The statues of monks are placed in the hell dioramas (Figure 6). They teach and help those who suffer. This is an indicator of the Buddhist ideal in which the monk's life is at the top of the hierarchy and contact with them is a chance for liberation. This effect is enhanced by images of the founding abbots or altars dedicated to them inside Hell parks. If Hell parks are mimicking the chaos of modern life, they also restore order by showing the right Buddhist way and protecting the Buddhist symbols. Only in Wat Pa Thewapithak did I find one statue of a corrupt monk, who had turned into a ghost.

It is difficult to overlook the sexual aspect of Hell parks. Anderson described a controversy over Wat Phai Rong Wua, which was accused over the potential spreading of pornography, as all denizens of hell were presented naked.⁶² Probably to avoid criticism, all temples took a different approach. In Wat Pa Thewapithak, all those tortured have underwear. In Wat Pa Non Sawan, some have underwear and some do not. In Wang Saen Suk, their genitals are not depicted. In Wat Pa Lak Roi, rather than hiding them, the intimate places are exaggerated. While in Wat Phai Rong Wua, genitals were never an object of brutal punishment; in Wat Pa Lak Roi, abnormally large genitals are stretched out and cut (Figure 7). In Wat Pa Non Sawan and Wang Saen Suk, although most of denizens of Hell wear underwear, there is still a lot of sexual violence (cutting breasts, penises, drilling in the uterus, etc.). One of the remarkable representations of sexual masochism is the Tree of Thorn, the punishment for adultery, which was not only constructed in Wat Pa Thewapithak.

Although it is possible to specify paintings from eighteenth-century manuscripts that have become an inspiration for the dioramas, the element of sadomasochistic eroticisation has become exaggerated in Hell parks.⁶³ Such a strong stigmatisation of sexual misconduct is traditionalist and stands despite state support for erotic businesses and prostitution, which are important sources of profit for the national economy.⁶⁴ It can also reflect dissatisfaction with regional injustice. Research from 2012

⁶⁰ While some scholars argue that there is no such thing as blasphemy in Buddhist doctrines, in modern Buddhist countries, there are social movements with the aim to protect Buddhist symbols and to criminalise the act of disrespecting Buddhism and its founder. M. Jerryson, *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road: Buddhism, Politics and Violence*, New York 2018, pp. 152–174.

⁶¹ M. Hanks, *Merit and Power in Thai Social Order*, "American Anthropologist" 1950, no. 1913, pp. 1247–1248.

⁶² B. Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–80.

⁶³ Compare to the modern sculptures from the parks described, the original engravings look innocent.

⁶⁴ C. Baker, P. Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, Sydney 2014, p. 138.

showed that 80% of questioned prostitutes from Bangkok and Patong came there from the Isan region.⁶⁵

The punishment for abortion dioramas (in all four Hell parks) reveals once again that the Hell park functions to protect the traditional Buddhist vision of social order. There was much of the focus on it which might be an echo of modern challenges on strict abortion laws. In Wang Saen Suk, there were separate dioramas for “injection, aborticide, birth control”, for “killing the baby in ovum” and for “having an abortion” (Figure 8). In Thailand, abortion is legal only if pregnancy is the result of rape or if the health of the woman is at risk.⁶⁶ However, the abortion laws are a subject of public debate.⁶⁷

One can read in different interviews with the monks who constructed the Hell parks that their argument for building them was to warn against improper actions and wrongdoings.⁶⁸ It is commonly understood that Hell parks have teaching properties and maybe this is a reason why they are such a popular destination for school excursions and families. The popular Thai tourist website directly states that Wat Wang Saen Suk is a good place to teach children a fear of sin.⁶⁹ The large number of dioramas which were describing punishment for disobeying teachers, monks and elders (Figure 9) reflect the target. Somphong Phaengcharoen (interview 2019) acknowledge the popularity of Hell parks between parents and schools but question whether this is still effective in the age of the internet.⁷⁰ He sees three main motifs behind Hell parks: (1) to teach about cosmology in traditional Buddhism; (2) to make people aware / afraid of karma, especially bad karma; and (3) to connect people between the spiritual and material realms. His pointing to the “traditional” seems to be important.

It should also be noted that in the referred temples, there are no caricatures of the contemporary monarchy or the Thai royal court. This absence is understandable as the image of the king is protected by *lèse-majesté* law and this is a highly sensitive topic in Thailand. According to Jerryson, “in Thailand, King Bhumibol (and the network monarchy) is beyond lay critique”.⁷¹ Instead, in Wat Pan Non Sawan there is a picture of Luang Pu Kampan and Princess Sirindhorn, the sign of political alliance

⁶⁵ S. Neuman, *Female Prostitution In Thailand – Looked upon a Victim-Agent Framework*, Växjö 2012, p. 32.

⁶⁶ V. Nantavatanasirikul, *The Buddhist Ethics Approach on Abortion in Thai Society*, “Journal of Population and Social Studies” 2017, June 7, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2982600 [accessed: 23.10.2022].

⁶⁷ K. Chaturachinda, N. Boonthai, *Unsafe Abortion: An Inequity in Health Care, Thailand Perspective*, “Journal of Population and Social Studies” 2017, vol. 25, no. 3, [http://www2.ipsr.mahidol.ac.th/journal/PDF/Scopus/JPSS-v25n3_7_Unsafe Abortion.pdf](http://www2.ipsr.mahidol.ac.th/journal/PDF/Scopus/JPSS-v25n3_7_Unsafe%20Abortion.pdf) [accessed: 23.10.2022].

⁶⁸ F. Wilmer, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Nukkpidet, *Wad sānśukh sūththiwrārām chlburī wad swy thē the̐yw kī krungtheph chm pratimākrm hæng sāsānā* [Wat Saen Suk, Suthiwararam, Chonburi, a beautiful temple to visit near Bangkok], <https://travel.trueid.net/detail/816eW1B6OP4b> [accessed: 28.05.2020].

⁷⁰ Interview with Somphong Phaengcharoen (September 2019). Anderson also shows that the effect was often counterproductive, e.g., pornographic qualities of the park attracted young boys to masturbate at night, some pilgrims began to touch for luck the intimate sphere of the statue of a woman who was punished for promiscuity by eternal pregnancy, etc.

⁷¹ M. Jerryson, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

between monks and the Royal Court (Figure 10). However, the caricatures of army bring the context of years of suppression of Isan by the central government. Wat Pa Thewapithak even contains a scene of man beating a supporter of Yingluck Shinawatra (a politician from the Pheu Thai Party and the sister of controversial politician Thaksin Shinawatra) who is peacefully greeting him. Pheu Thai Party was a party of choice by Isan people and trials of its leaders lead by the army are considered as another injustice.

Conclusion

The Hell parks are a traditional answer for a dynamically changing world. Their conservative message is masked in entertainment. The discussed temples in many ways are an attempt to equalise opportunities and address economic disparities between the peripheries and the centre. However, the motif of Hell parks became so successful that it left Isan and now appears in temples all across the country.

It has previously been suggested that in the time of crisis of hierarchical Buddhism, Thais are searching for authenticity and moral support in rural areas.⁷² Hell parks attract religious engagement by the diversity of emotions they evoke from shock to a sense of fun. The spectacle brings moral messages and the possibility to fulfil religious duties in an entertaining way. The diversity of motives in the parks do not glorify democratisation but rather mimic it and remove uncertainty by highlighting the right way.

Although there are not many explicit political messages per se, Hell parks, with their moral implications should be seen as political. Hell is a sufficient narrative to catch wider social attention. It suggests a concrete attitude toward the modern world and its challenges, and it provides a vision of social order. Hell parks prove to be a good strategy of securing the positions of monks, as well as an attractive way to fulfil the religious, leisure, and economical demands of laity.

Bibliography

- Anderson B., *The Fate of Rural Hell: Asceticism and Desire in Buddhist Thailand*, Calcutta 2012.
- Ashitsu Z., *The Fundamental Teachings of Buddhism*, “The Monits” 1894, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 163–175 [published: 2015].
- Baker C., Phongpaichit P., *A History of Thailand*, Sydney 2014.
- Bernstein A.E., *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds*, London 1993.
- Bielo J.S., *Ark Encounter: The Making of a Creationist Theme Park*, New York 2018.
- Boike R., Sprenger G., *Configurations of Religion – a Debate. A DORISEA Network Discussion Opened by Boike Rehbein and Guido Sprenger*, “DORISEA Working Paper Series”, P.J. Bräunlein, M. Dickhardt, A. Lauser (eds.), 2016, no. 24, special issue.
- Boyer P., *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, New York 2001.

⁷² P.A. Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–30.

- Braarvig J., *The Buddhist Hell: An Early Instance of the Idea?* "Numen" 2009, vol. 56, no. 2–3. DOI: 10.1163/156852709X405008.
- Brereton B.P., *Phra Malai Texts – Telling Them Apart: Preface or Performance*, "Journal of Mekong Societies" 2017, vol. 13, no. 3. DOI: 10.14456/jms.2017.22.
- Brereton B.P., *The Phra Malai Legend in Thai Buddhist Literature: A Study of Three Texts*, Ann Arbor 1992.
- Chaturachinda K., Boonthai N., *Unsafe Abortion: An Inequity in Health Care, Thailand Perspective*, "Journal of Population and Social Studies" 2017, vol. 25, no. 3, [http://www2.iprs.mahidol.ac.th/journal/PDF/Scopus/JPSS-v25n3_7_Unsafe Abortion.pdf](http://www2.iprs.mahidol.ac.th/journal/PDF/Scopus/JPSS-v25n3_7_Unsafe%20Abortion.pdf).
- Chua L., *Building Siam: Leisure, Race, and Nationalism in Modern Thai Architecture, 1910–1973*, Ithaca 2012.
- Collins S., *The Story of the Elder Māleyyedeva*, "Journal of the Pali Text Society" 1993, vol. 18.
- Comaroff J., *Epilogue: Defying Disenchantment: Reflections on Ritual, Power, and History*, [in:] *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, C.F. Keyes, L. Kendall, H. Hardacre (eds.), Honolulu 1994.
- Crispin P., *Gods and Rollercoasters: Religion in Theme Parks Worldwide*, London 2019.
- DeCaroli R., *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, Oxford 2004.
- Gardiner E., *Buddhist Hell: Visions, Tours and Descriptions of the Infernal Otherworld*, New York 2012.
- Góralczyk B., *Zmierzch i brzask. Notes z Bangkoku*, Toruń 2009.
- Graham P., *Faith and Power in Japanese Buddhist Art: 1600–2005*, Honolulu 2007.
- Green R.S., *Thai Buddhism in Horror Films: Nang Nak and Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, [in:] *Buddhism Goes to the Movies Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*, R.S. Green (ed.), New York 2013.
- Grieser A., Johnston J., *What is an Aesthetics of Religion? From the Senses to Meaning – and Back Again*, Berlin 2017.
- Hanks M., *Merit and Power in Thai Social Order*, "American Anthropologist" 1950, no. 1913.
- Heijdra M., *The Legend of Phra Malai*, Princeton University Graphic Arts Collection, Princeton 2018.
- Igunma J., *A Buddhist Monk's Journeys to Heaven and Hell*, "Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities" 2017, vol. 6(1).
- Jackson P.A., *The Enchanting Spirit of Thai Capitalism: The Cult of Luang Phor Khoon and the Post-Modernization of Thai Buddhism*, "South East Asia Research" 1999, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 5–60.
- Jacobsen K.A., *Three Functions of Hell in the Hindu Traditions*, "Numen" 2009, vol. 56, no. 2–3. DOI: 10.1163/156852709X405071.
- Jakubczak K., *Pozorne i rzeczywiste podstawy wspólnoty chrześcijańsko-buddyjskiej*, [in:] *Benares a Jerozolima. Przemyśleć chrześcijaństwo w kategoriach hinduizmu i buddyzmu*, K.J. Pawłowski (red.), Kraków 2007.
- Janssen P., *Thailand Takes a Long-Term Gamble on Isaan Region*, "Nikkei Asian Review" 2016, November 2.
- Jerryson M., *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road: Buddhism, Politics and Violence*, New York 2018.
- Keyes C.F., *Merit Transference in the Karmic Theory of Popular Theravada Buddhism*, [in:] *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry*, C.F. Keyes, E.V. Daniel (eds.), Berkeley 1983.
- Kitiarsa P., *Magic Monks and Spirit Mediums in the Politics of Thai Popular Religion*, "Inter-Asia Cultural Studies" 2005, vol. 6, no. 2. DOI: 10.1080/14649370500065920.
- Learman L., *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, Honolulu 2005.
- McCargo D., *Buddhism, Democracy and Identity in Thailand*, "Democratization" 2004, vol. 11(4). DOI: 10.1080/1351034042000234576.

- McDaniel J.T., *Architects of Buddhist Leisure: Socially Disengaged Buddhism in Asia's Museums, Monuments, and Amusement Parks*, Honolulu 2017.
- McDaniel J.T., *Spectacle Attractions and Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, "DORISEA Working Paper" 2015, vol. 18, no. 15.
- McDaniel J.T., *Strolling through Temporary Temples: Buddhism and Installation Art in Modern Thailand*, "Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal" 2017, vol. 18(1). DOI: 10.1080/14639947.2017.1308687, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2017.1308687>.
- McDaniel J.T., *The Agency between Images: The Relationships among Ghosts, Corpses, Monks, and Deities at a Buddhist Monastery in Thailand*, "Material Religion" 2011, vol. 7, no. 2. DOI: 10.2752/175183411X13070210372706.
- McDaniel J.T., *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*, New York 2011.
- McMakin P.D., Calabrese A.M., *Buddhist Visions of Heaven and Hell in Thai Art*, np 2018.
- Monthian B., Apinan P., *Montien Boonma: Temple of the Mind*, London 2003.
- Nantavatanasirikul V., *The Buddhist Ethics Approach on Abortion in Thai Society*, "Journal of Population and Social Studies", 2017, June 7, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2982600 [accessed: 23.10.2022].
- Neuman S., *Female Prostitution in Thailand – Looked upon a Victim-Agent Framework*, Växjö 2012.
- Nukkipidet, *Wad s̄aensūk̄h s̄uth̄thiwr̄rām chlburī wad s̄wy th̄i thēȳw k̄l krungtheph chm pratimākrrm h̄eng s̄āsn̄ā* [Wat Saen Suk, Suthiwararam, Chonburi, a beautiful temple to visit near Bangkok], <https://travel.trueid.net/detail/8l6eW1B6OP4b> [accessed: 28.05.2020].
- O'Connor R.A., *Interpreting Thai Religious Change: Temples, Sangha Reform and Social Change*, "Journal of Southeast Asian Studies" 1993, vol. 24, no. 2.
- Pellegrini A., 'Signaling through the Flames': Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling, "American Quarterly" 2007, vol. 59, no. 3. DOI: 10.1353/aq.2007.0067.
- Sadakata A., H. Nakamura, *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origins*, Tokyo 1997.
- Shariff A.F., Rhemtulla M., *Divergent Effects of Beliefs in Heaven and Hell on National Crime Rates*, "PLOS ONE" 2012, vol. 7, no. 6. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0039048.
- Siklós B., *The Evolution of the Buddhist Yama*, "The Buddhist Forum" 1996, vol. 4.
- Stevenson J., *Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First-Century America*, Ann Arbor 2013.
- Tarnbiah S.J., *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of the Amulets*, Cambridge 1984.
- Taylor J., *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand: The Religiosity of Urban Space*, New York 2008.
- Taylor J.L., *Embodiment, Nation, and Religio-Politics in Thailand*, "South East Asia Research" 2001, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 129–147.
- Teiser S.F., 'Having Once Died and Returned to Life': Representations of Hell in Medieval China, "Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies" 2006, vol. 48, no. 2. DOI: 10.2307/2719317.
- Umavijani M., *By the Clemency of Hell*, Bangkok 1977.
- Walters J.S., Gombrich R.F., *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, "Philosophy East and West" 2006, vol. 40, no. 2. DOI: 10.2307/1399233.
- Wilmer F., *A Thai Monk Brings Hell to Chang Mai*, "Roads & Kingdoms" 2015, August 25, <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2015/nsfw-the-hell-temple-of-chiang-mai/> [accessed: 20.05.2019].
- Yeoh B.S.A., Teo P., *From Tiger Balm Gardens to Dragon World: Philanthropy and Profit in the Making of Singapore's First Cultural Theme Park*, "Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography" 2006, vol. 78, no. 1, pp. 27–42. DOI: 10.2307/490966.



Figure 1. The poster of Luang Pu Kampan who gives blessing to money, Wat Pa Non Sawan, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 2. Pure spectacle. Statues of dragons, villagers, and African tribesman. Wat Pa Non Sawan, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 3. Ghost Nai Ngean and Nang Thong surrounded by humans with animal heads which manifest the confusion of the senses as punishment for special vices, Wang Seang Suk, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 4. Mae Nak ghost with her stillborn baby. Wat Pa Thewapithak, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 5. Caricatures of social relations, Wat Pa Lak Roi, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 6. The chaos of the presented cosmos is contrasted with stable statues of monks, Wat Pa Thewaphithak, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 7. Pornographic violence was not central in 18th century manuscripts about Phra Malai, Wat Pa Lak Roi, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 8. The sign says, “The penalty for killing baby in ovum”, Wang Saen Suk, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 9. The scene presents punishment for disobeying teachers. Hell parks are common place for school visits, Wat Pa Lak Roi, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)



Figure 10. Luang Pu Kampan meets with the princess Sirindhorn, Wat Pa Non Sawan, Thailand (photo by author, 2016)