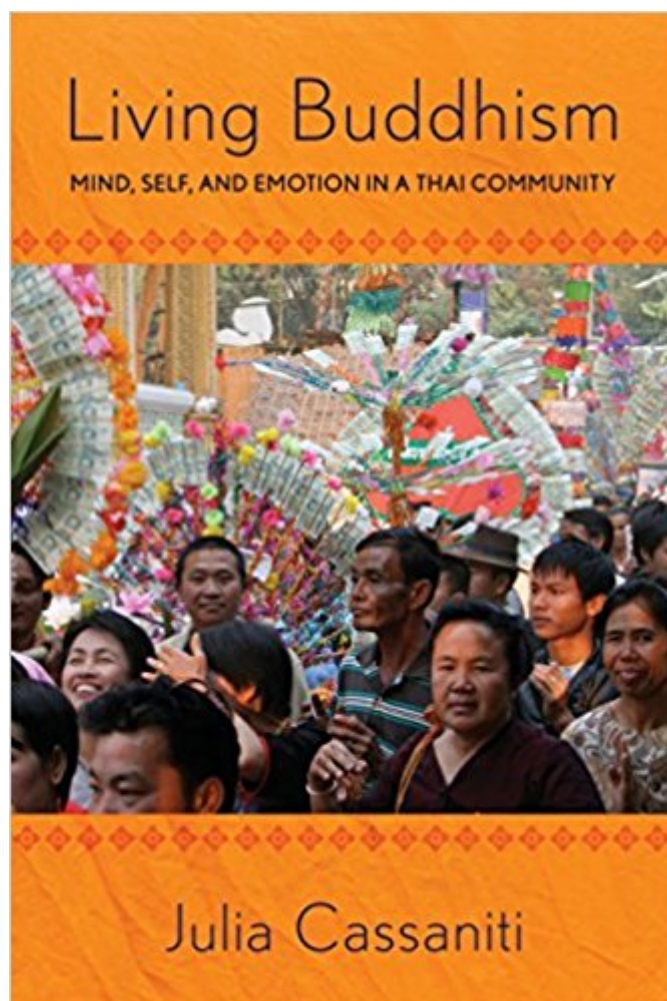


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Living Buddhism: Mind, Self, And Emotion In A Thai Community



Synopsis

In *Living Buddhism*, Julia Cassaniti explores Buddhist ideas of impermanence, nonattachment, and intention as they are translated into everyday practice in contemporary Thailand. Although most lay people find these philosophical concepts difficult to grasp, Cassaniti shows that people do in fact make an effort to comprehend them and integrate them as guides for their everyday lives. In doing so, she makes a convincing case that complex philosophical concepts are not the sole property of religious specialists and that ordinary lay Buddhists find in them a means for dealing with life's difficulties. More broadly, the book speaks to the ways that culturally informed ideas are part of the psychological processes that we all use to make sense of the world around us. In an approachable first-person narrative style that combines interview and participant-observation material gathered over the course of two years in the community, Cassaniti shows how Buddhist ideas are understood, interrelated, and reinforced through secular and religious practices in everyday life. She compares the emotional experiences of Buddhist villagers with religious and cultural practices in a nearby Christian village. *Living Buddhism* highlights the importance of change, calmness (as captured in the Thai phrase *jai yen*, or a cool heart), and karma; Cassaniti's narrative untangles the Thai villagers' feelings and problems and the solutions they seek.

Book Information

Paperback: 232 pages

Publisher: Cornell University Press; 1 edition (October 27, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801456711

ISBN-13: 978-0801456718

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #39,620 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in [Books > History > World > Religious > Buddhism](#) #26 in [Books > History > Asia > Southeast Asia](#) #223 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism](#)

Customer Reviews

“With a beautiful blend of stories, research, and her own field experience, Julia Cassaniti unlocks the secrets of creating calmness and the power of letting go. *Living Buddhism* is a must-read for everyone—expert and nonexpert alike—who’s interested in how our cultures

shape our emotional lives." •Hazel Markus, Davis-Brack Professor in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University, coauthor of Social Psychology

"In *Living Buddhism*, Julia Cassaniti convincingly shows that complex philosophical concepts are not the sole property of religious specialists but play a central role in providing lay Buddhists a means for dealing with life's difficulties as well. She integrates the fields of Buddhist studies and anthropology well, showing effectively how they inform and can learn from each other. Her storytelling makes us care about the Thai villagers and why they react the way they do to the problems and challenges in their lives."

•Susan M. Darlington, Hampshire College, author of *The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement*

"*Living Buddhism* is written in an engaging journalistic style. The reader shares Julia Cassaniti's struggle to come to terms with the worldview she encounters in the northern Thai village of Mae Jaeng and, like her, arrives at a hard-won appreciation of the local perspective. Cassaniti's intimate relationships in the community allow her to provide detailed case studies that nicely illustrate the complexities of applying Buddhist concepts to everyday life."

•Nancy Eberhardt, Knox College, author of *Imagining the Course of Life: Self-Transformation in a Shan Buddhist Community*

"This book sparkles with normalcy, meaning that it neither seeks to impress the reader by hiding behind theory nor obscures the subject with overinterpretation. Julia Cassaniti laughed, danced, and cried with a small group of villagers in Northern Thailand for extended periods of time. She writes with refreshing clarity and humility about these relationships. This allows the readers to experience the abiding sense of impermanence that sustains people through everyday suffering and learn with them how to become both Thai and Buddhist without hardly noticing."

•Justin Thomas McDaniel, University of Pennsylvania, author of *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*

Julia Cassaniti is Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Washington State University.

I read the book for an Anthropology class and compared to the few ethnographies I have read, this is one of my favorites. Even if you are not an aspiring anthropologist like myself, there are still many nuggets of interesting ideas and beautiful stories in Cassaniti's novel. The price was rather pricey for such a small book and a college student, which is why I gave it four stars. Nonetheless, the book is a great and fast read.

A beautiful, well-written story of a young woman's spiritual transformation; a brave new perspective on the principles of Buddhism.

One of the best ethnographies I've ever read. Interesting, accessible, and eminently thought-provoking, this ethnography is a must-read for anyone interested in human emotion. Reading this book blew my mind and completely changed the way I view affect and the role of culture in human experience.

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