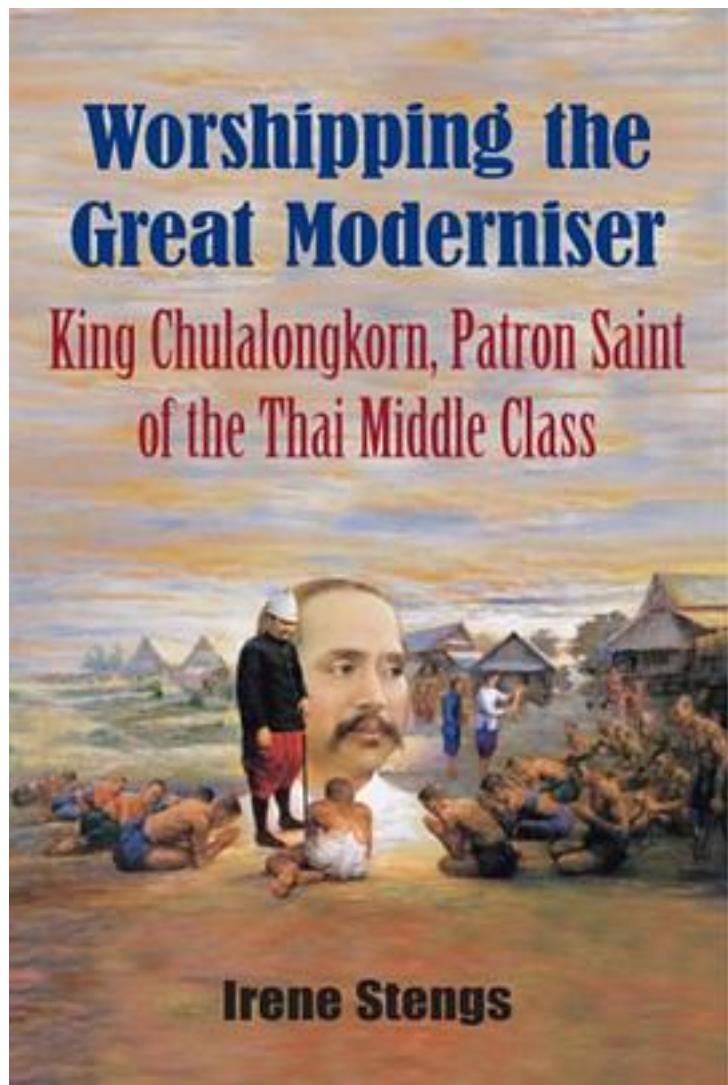


Worshipping the Great Moderniser



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Contemporary Thailand has seen the rise of an immense cult focused on King Chulalongkorn the Great (r. 1868-1910). In *Worshipping the Great Moderniser*, Irene Stengs explores the continuing appeal of King Chulalongkorn and considers what this ruler's unprecedented popularity says about modern Thai society.

Arguing that the exalted expectations of kingship are a product of the ambitions and anxieties of Thailand's expanding middle class, she compares the popular image of King Chulalongkorn with that of the present king, the highly venerated King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Stengs demonstrates how ideas and imaginings of Thainess, modernity, and kingship have culminated in what she terms "modern Buddhist kingship," a concept that draws on traditional idioms but is highly modern. Her search for the social imaginary surrounding Thai kingship and Thainess during the past century and a half yields an intriguing amalgam of popular religion, Buddhist kingship, nationalism, and material culture.

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