

Nirvana for Sale?



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出版者:SUNY Press

出版时间:2009-9-17

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9781438427836

What is the proper relationship between religion and prosperity? Rachelle M. Scott looks at this issue in a Thai Buddhist context, asking when the relationship between Buddhist piety and wealth is viewed in favorable terms and when it is viewed in terms of conflict and tension. Scott focuses on the Dhammakaya Temple, an organization that has placed traditional Theravada practices, such as meditation and merit-making, within a modernist framework that encourages personal and social prosperity. The Temple's construction of a massive religious monument in the late 1990s embodied this message, but also sparked criticism of the Temple's wealth and fund-raising techniques and engendered debates over authentic Buddhism and religious authority. Scott situates this controversy within the context of postmodern Thailand and the Asian economic crisis when reevaluations of wealth, global capitalism, and "Asian values" occupied a preeminent place in Thai public discourse.

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