

A “Chick Tract” Contextualized for Buddhist Thailand?

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I have to commend the folks at Chick Tracts for making a good effort to produce a contextualized tract for Buddhist Thailand.

If you are not familiar with Chick Tracts, they are a brand of cartoon tracts that are (in)famous in American evangelicalism (and fundamentalism?) for their very direct nature. They are engaging little tracts that draw you in, keep you reading, and usually end up with the main character being cast into hell after watching a “This Was Your Life” movie before God’s judgment throne. The best way to describe Chick Tracts is “in-your-face.”

In the Chick tract, “The Tycoon,” (http://www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0016/0016_01.asp), a wealthy Thai Buddhist businessman is commended for his large donations to the temple. Periodically through his life, Christians try to tell him the Gospel but don’t get very far because they are quickly ejected from his presence, or he himself ridicules them. He dies in a car wreck and is condemned before God’s judgment throne.

Is this tract contextualized well for Thai Buddhists?

The Pluses

- Merit making, idolatry, the Buddha, and Buddhism are all addressed and contrasted with Christianity.
- All the people in the tract look Thai
- Cartoon format keeps people reading
- The Tycoon is a character that would be familiar to Thai readers

The Minuses

- Buddhism and Buddhist monks are portrayed in a very negative light. The hostile words put in the mouths of Buddhist monks would make Thai Buddhists feel like both their religion and national identity is being attacked and insulted.
- The tract has a very direct and abrasive feel to it. This is an even bigger turn-off in the Thai context than in the West
- White European looking Jesus
- The few times that the Tycoon hears the “Gospel” are very brief, confrontational, and minimalistic, as if all he needed to do was consent to a few facts and pray to receive Jesus.

A Contextualized Failure

While many Thai Buddhist readers would not be sympathetic to the tycoon who is judged for his self-serving merit making, they would, however, feel confronted and attacked by this tract. In the the story of “The Tycoon”, the more humble attempts at making merit by the reader is thoroughly condemned. While the tract is to be commended for zeroing in on key aspects of Thai beliefs and worldview that conflict with the Gospel, the abrasive nature of the tract likely creates an emotionally defensive reaction among readers. Because of this, a barrier is erected against further consideration of the Gospel, instead of a bridge for further investigation.