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## **Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand (Critical Dialogues in Southeast Asian Studies)**

*Monica Lindberg Falk*

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**Monica Lindberg Falk : Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand (Critical Dialogues in Southeast Asian Studies)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand

(Critical Dialogues in Southeast Asian Studies):

Religion plays a central role in Thai society with Buddhism intertwined in the daily lives of the people. Religion also plays an important role in establishing gender boundaries. The growth in recent decades of self-governing nunneries and the increasing interest of Thai women in a Buddhist monastic life are notable changes in the religion/gender dynamic. This anthropological study considers religion and gender relations through the lens of the lives, actions, and roles in Thai society of Buddhist nuns (mae chii). *Making Fields of Merit* presents a unique ethnography of Thai Buddhist nuns, examines what it implies to be a female ascetic in contemporary Thailand, and analyzes how the ordained state for women fits into the wider gender patterns found in Thai society. The study also deals with the nuns' agency in creating religious space and authority for women. It raises questions about how the position of Thai Buddhist nuns outside the Buddhist sangha affects their religious legitimacy and describes recent moves to restore a Theravada order of female monks.

"The book is an excellent introduction for students and those who are interested in gaining further insight into the religious experiences of Buddhist women and nuns in Thailand. It is also sympathetically written reflecting the deep affection the author has for her informants whose life as Buddhist female renunciants is by no means easy, as we analyse and objectify their daily struggle from comfortable chairs." *Aseasuk News* "*Making Fields of Merit* is a fascinating study of the Thai mae chiis and will undoubtedly become required reading for anyone interested in Thai Buddhism or female Buddhist asceticism." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* About the Author Monica Lindberg Falk is a research fellow at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies at Lund University in Sweden. Her work focuses on gender, religion, and social change in Thailand.