

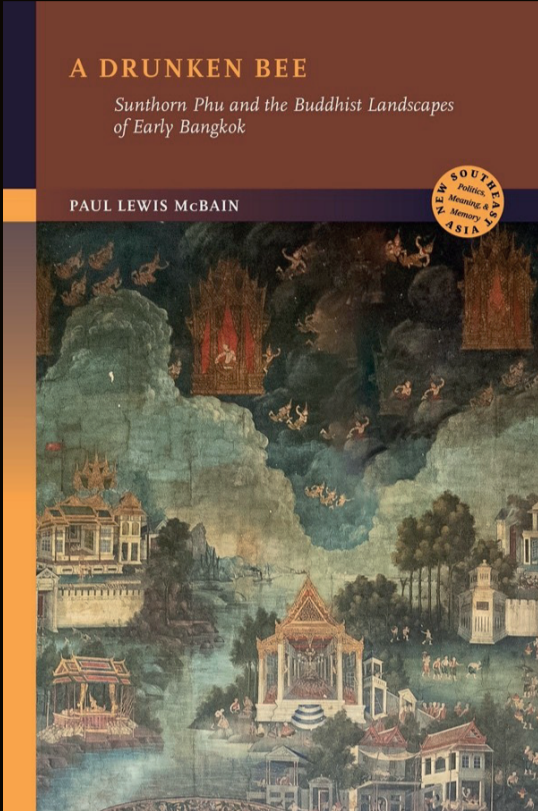


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**Dr. Paul Lewis McBain**

Assistant Professor, PBIC Thammasat University

# A Drunken Bee

## Sunthorn Phu and the Buddhist landscapes of early Bangkok

**13 ottobre 2025, 16.00 - 17.30**

Sala 23, San Sebastiano

Sunthorn Phu (1786–1855) is an unlikely figure through which to understand nineteenth-century Buddhism in Siam. Despite being described as a “drunken writer” by the court astrologer after his death, he is now the national poet of Thailand. In this talk, Paul Lewis McBain shall explain how his newly-published book *A Drunken Bee* argues that the irreverent, rebellious, and parodic voice of Sunthorn Phu is an invaluable resource for understanding the Buddhism of early Bangkok. A wealth of information about the conflicts and contradictions of the religious thought of this period can be found in the ways in which the poet describes his local landscape. Following Sunthorn Phu on his journeys, readers encounter cities of celebration and rivers of sadness; kingly processions, railways,

and unruly pilgrims on their way to the Saraburi Buddha Footprint; forests of spirit-guardians; and life-prolonging alchemical materials as well as the semimythical oceans of Buddhist cosmology. All are employed by the poet to make sense of the new, more varied world opening up to Siam in the nineteenth century.

**Biography:** Dr. Paul Lewis McBain is Assistant Professor in Thai Studies at Pridi Banomyong International College, Thammasat University. Originally from Scotland, he completed his graduate education at the Universities of Chicago and Pennsylvania and has published widely on Buddhism’s expressions in Thai art and literature.

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