

NAGA IMAGERY AND THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET ON NAGA WORSHIP IN THAILAND

Ya-Liang Chang *

College of Fine Arts, Huanggang Normal University, 146, 2nd Xingang Road,
438000 Hubei Province, China

E-mail: sunny.ph1971@gmail.com

Published online: 31 January 2024

To cite this article: Chang, Y. L. 2024. *Naga imagery and the impact of the Internet on naga worship in Thailand. International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 20 (1): 23–52. <https://doi.org/10.21315/ijaps2024.20.1.2>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/ijaps2024.20.1.2>

ABSTRACT

Naga, the guardian of Triratna, dominates the waters and is an important cultural image of Thailand, as well as an auspicious symbol of ordinary life. There is a large and subtle naga cultural heritage that includes folk literature and festivals in Thailand. Whether old traditions or new cultural creations, cultural heritage using the naga theme is often combined with visual art and the images and beliefs of naga are spread through the Internet via works including sculptures, murals, emoticons, animations, festivals, amulets, fabrics, and exhibition artworks. This study aims to analyse the iconography of naga images in visual art in Thailand and explore the changes that naga worship has undergone on the Internet. We found two important changes: (1) Naga images are diverse and have become part of the cultural industry; and (2) naga worship is expressed through naga images and has taken on multiple meanings different from previous religious connotations. The Internet has led to changes in the way the Buddhist doctrine is propagated, including different interpretations of naga images, through the challenges of virtual worlds.

Keywords: *Naga, iconography, Internet, Pang Nak Prok, visual art*

INTRODUCTION

Naga is a type of serpent worship that is widespread in Mainland China (Yunnan Province), India, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and Indonesia. The origin of the *naga* is related not only to the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism but also to various folk beliefs. *Nagas* have a variety of names and images in various regions and reflect different concepts in different ethnic groups according to different cultural customs. For example, Saipan conducted a survey in the Isan region of northeastern Thailand and concluded that there are five cultural meanings of *nagas* in Isan culture: creator and destroyer, ancestor of the clan, spirit of water, guard of the Buddha, and dharma practitioner (Saipan 1996). Twenty years later, another Thai scholar, Kanyarat Vechasat, interviewed the Tai ethnic groups—the Dai, Thai, Shan, and Lao—and analysed the concepts of the *naga* (มโนทัศน์ของพญานาค) through various *nagas* reflected in literary works, arts, beliefs, traditions, and rituals, finding that the concepts of the *naga* of the Tai ethnic groups can be classified into fifteen types (Vechasat 2016).¹ In addition, Chang Ya-liang concluded through text analysis that the *naga* images in Thailand’s narratives can be divided into two types: images from Buddhist stories and from indigenous stories. The main difference between the two types is the behaviour of the *naga* after conversion to Buddhism (Chang 2017a).

These studies highlight the many concepts of *naga* in different cultures. For people in Thailand, a *naga* is a serpent with a crown and is the famous guardian of Buddhism. Therefore, *naga* visual art is often used in the ordinary lives of the local people. *Naga* visual art is an important element in Buddhist temples of Thailand, especially in architectural decorations, sculptures, and murals. The positions and shapes of *naga* work in Buddhist temples have their own meanings, showing the coordinated relationships among *nagas*, the universe, religion, and water culture. However, after the Internet was introduced to Thailand in 1987 (B.E. 2530; ANET Internet 2019), *naga* images were often used in the daily lives of locals and on the Internet in addition to appearing in Buddhist temples.

This transformation process suggests, in terms of Allerton’s (2009) “spiritual landscapes” (235), that the inner landscape of how people think about *nagas* has changed. Allerton regards the “spiritual landscapes” of Southeast Asia as a living world, which highlights the links between spirit beings or potent energies and particular sites in the landscape, including trees, mountains, and rivers. She states that the “landscape” may refer neither to a

“natural” object, nor to a cultural “representation”, but to a historical process of interaction between people and the environment, in which both are shaped (Allerton 2009: 235). The transformation of the original spiritual landscapes under the influence of media represents a change in the interaction between people and their environments.

Although previous research suggests a variety of images of the *naga*, the focus has primarily revolved around the exploration of their imagery. There has been a scarcity of relevant empirical research and a lack of investigation into the online environment. *Naga* is a spiritual landscape for the people of Thailand, and they often express their *naga* worship, known as serpent worship, through visual arts. *Naga* is a kind of sign from the perspective of iconography; if we can grasp the changes in *naga* images, then we can further understand the changing relationship between the *nagas* and the environment, which also encompasses the influence of the online realm. Therefore, this study uses iconography to analyse *naga* images in Thai visual art and at the same time explores the changes in *naga* worship under the influence of the Internet. This study is thus significant as it contributes to helping readers understand the impact of the Internet on the visual perception of *naga* worship.

Prior to delving into the main text, a brief introduction to previous research is presented. The author analysed *naga* images in the narratives of nine Thai folktales, including four Tripitaka stories and five local stories, finding first that *naga* images can be divided into two types: Buddhist and indigenous. Buddhist stories portray *nagas* as beautiful, magical animals with jewels on their necks. Although the *naga*'s natural enemy is Garuda, a *naga* can escape Garuda's pursuit with the help of an ascetic. The *naga* became a follower of the Buddha, and he frequently encircles the Buddha's or ascetics' bodies seven times with its coils, standing with a great hood spread over their heads. Thus, “protection” and “jewel”, which mean guardians and wealth, respectively, are very important symbolic images for *naga* in Theravada Buddhism. In contrast to Buddhist stories, local stories emphasise that *nagas* possess human emotions, magical powers to change their appearance, and the ability to fight ghosts. Moreover, if people disrespect *nagas*, they take revenge and cause disasters (Chang 2017a). On this basis, this study will incorporate field survey data to examine issues related to *naga* imagery.

THE NAGA OF THAILAND: AN OVERVIEW

The Origin of the *Naga*

The word “*naga*” comes from Sanskrit, and it has a variety of pronunciations in various languages and dialects. For example, the pronunciations *ngan*, *ngua*, *nam ngu ak-ngu*, and *namngum* are found in Thailand and Laos (Ngaosrivathana and Ngaosrivathana 2009). *Nagas* have a variety of images, such as the water *naga* in Ahom, the crocodile in Shan, the water snake in White T'ai, the dragon in Pa-yi, and the serpent in Siamese (Davis 1984). Consequently, the names, pronunciations, and images of *nagas* vary in different areas. Since *nagas* have diverse images, an important question is, where did the *naga* of Thailand originate from? In general, there are two main opinions: Indianised discourse and local Thai discourse. Indianised discourse suggests that the *naga* came from Indian mythology, as argued by scholars such as Sasanka Sekhar Panda (2004), Sumet Jumsai (1997), Siripot Laomanajarern (2003), and Ngaosrivathana and Ngaosrivathana (2009). Several studies in various disciplines have noted Thai–Indian cultural linkages through the *naga*. Panda (2004) discusses *naga* images in Indian literature and *naga* sculptures in Indian temples as examples, and describes how *nagas* have been presented in Indian culture with a variety of forms, including snakes, half-human half-snakes, and human images. From Panda’s study, we know that the images of India’s *nagas* have the following characteristics: They are the leaders of the oceans, live under the earth, and bear a jewel on their heads, and some have odd numbers of serpent hoods above their heads (Panda 2004). Indian *nagas* are similar to those in Thailand. Since the Indian *naga* appeared earlier, the Indianised discourse argues that the prototype of Thailand’s *naga* came from India.

Conversely, the local discourse stresses the indigenous serpent worship in Southeast Asia and notes that serpent worship probably existed before Brahmanism and Theravada Buddhism entered Southeast Asia. Sujit Wongthes (2003) considers snake-wrapped graphics of archaeological artifacts, such as those at Ban Chiang, Udon Thani Province, and Ban Kao, Kanchana Buri Province, as evidence that serpent worship probably existed in prehistoric times in Southeast Asia (Wongthes 2003). Wongthes explains: “Indigenous serpent worship existed when Brahmanism and Theravada Buddhism came into Southeast Asia. Later, serpent worship combined with Indian religions and was transformed into new beliefs” (2003: 5–6). In addition, serpent stories were very popular among several ethnic groups in Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, implying that indigenous serpent worship has long

existed in Southeast Asia. For example, the *Pang Nak Prok* (ปางนาคปรก) statue might have reflected a combination of Buddhism and serpent worship at that time.

As regards to Thailand, the *Pang Nak Prok* statue portrays the Buddha seated in meditation upon a coiled *naga*, whose hood protects him from the rain (Fine Arts Department 2015). Popular in the Dvaravati period (6–11th c. AD), it is a common theme of Buddha statues in Thailand; its image is related to Mucalinda Sutta² recorded in Tripitaka and is common in Dvaravati sculpture. Dvaravati, an ancient Mon kingdom located in central Thailand, is believed to have been Buddhist. The center of the kingdom is in the Chao Phraya River Basin, covering areas such as U Thong City, Nakhon Pathom City, and Lop Buri City (Saising 2021). Dvaravati was constantly harassed by the Khmers in the ninth century and conquered by the Angkor Empire in the eleventh century. As Angkor's political power expanded westward, Khmer Hinduism spread in the Chao Phraya River basin (Song 2002), where in turn Buddhism and Hinduism were integrated, as shown in Dvaravati works.

Hiram Woodward has highlighted that early Dvaravati works reflect outside connections of two main types: one with Cambodian art, developed by the mid-seventh century, and the other with an Indian (or perhaps Sri Lankan) strain (Woodward 2005). This borrowing or mixing of artistic styles due to religious integration appeared in statues and murals during the Dvaravati period. In addition, the ancient town of Si Thep in Phetchabun Province provides evidence of religious integration during this period. Si Thep was a large, complex, and important city during the Dvaravati period. As a major religious centre, it played an important role in receiving and transferring various religious cultures, including Dvaravati Theravada Buddhism from the Upper Chao Phraya Basin and Lopburi River Valley (6–11th c. AD), and Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism from the Northeast and ancient Khmer kingdom (7–13th c. AD). This is evidenced by large Buddhist and Hindu monuments, including Khao Khlang Nai, Prang Si Thep, and Prang Song Phi Nong (UNESCO World Heritage Convention 2019).

As far as *Pang Nak Prok* is concerned, according to Jermsawatdi (1979), the *naga* was prominent in Khmer and Thai architecture during the Angkor Vat and Bayon periods; the style in which the Buddha was seated under the *naga* was adopted by the artists of the Lopburi school. The work “fragment of the Buddha with a seven-headed *naga*”, in the collection of the U Thong National Museum of Thailand, could be the oldest *Pang Nak Prok* in Thailand (Figure 1). It was a stucco work in the 9–10th centuries of the Buddhist era (approximately 4–5th c. AD). The upper half of this work has been damaged and the type of *naga* cannot be determined (U Thong National

Museum). However, another *Pang Nak Prok* statue (Buddhist era, twelfth century) preserved in Wat Uthai Makkaram in Nakhon Ratchasima Province is a fusion of Buddhist and Hindu art (Figure 2). Its *naga* shape belongs to the Dvaravati style (Saising 2021).



Figure 1: Fragment of the Buddha seated beneath a seven-headed *naga*, 9–10th century of the Buddhist era (approximately 4–5th c. AD), Suphan Buri Province, in the collection of the U Thong National Museum of Thailand.

Source: U Thong National Museum (n.d.) official website.

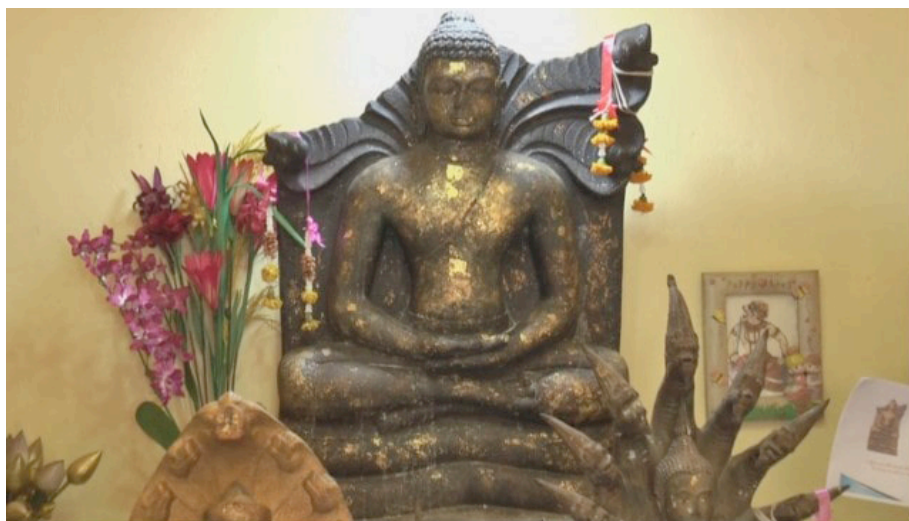


Figure 2: *Pang Nak Prok*, Buddhist era twelfth century (approximately seventh c. AD), Wat Uthai Makkaram, Nakhon Ratchasima Province.

Source: Nation TV (2020).

Pang Nak Prok are prevalent in Dvaravati, which may be related to serpent worship. Therefore, *Pang Nak Prok* became a popular Buddha statue under the influence of religious narratives in the Dvaravati period and has been passed down to this day.

As demonstrated above, Thailand's *naga* developed from multiple sources and is not fully Indianised. It must be noted that although the prototype of the Thai *naga* comes from India, indigenous serpent worship has long been present in Southeast Asia. Thus, the relationship between serpent worship and Buddhism suggests that Buddhism transformed serpent worship into *naga* belief. For instance, Virapaksa (ท้าววิรุฬหกษ), one of the four great kings in Buddhism, is the leader of the *nagas* (Ngaosrivathana and Ngaosrivathana 2009; Laomanajarern 2003).

The Importance of the *Naga*

The importance of the *naga* comes from Thai locals' concepts of sacred animals in relation to sacred animal worship, Buddhist literature, and the *naga* totem. Wongthes (2012) argues that before Indian civilisation entered Southeast Asia in the first millennium of the Buddhist era (approximately the fifth c. AD), sacred animal worship was a characteristic of ancient civilisations in Southeast Asia. As Wongthes (2012) observes:

Ancient Southeast Asians believed in the sacred animals, amphibians especially, such as frogs, toads, snakes, crocodiles and lizards, etc. The ancients believed that these animals could have the ability to call for rain and keep the water abundant. When these animals are found, it always happens to be rainy. As a result, amphibian images are used on murals or bronzes, like the frog sculpture decorated on the surface of the ancient bronze drum, which has the purpose of praying for raining. (2)

A frog sculpture on an ancient bronze drum from Indonesia is evidence of this widespread Southeast Asian belief in sacred animals (Figure 3). For Thai locals in particular, their culture has always been closely related to water. In addition, local people believe that amphibians like the *naga* have the function of maintaining water sources and conquering evil. For this reason, they produced images deifying amphibians, such as *naga* carvings placed at the entrances of Buddhist temples for religious and decorative purposes.



Figure 3: Frog sculptures on a bronze drum, paleometallic period, East Nusa, Tenggara, in the collection of the National Museum of Indonesia.

Source: Author.

Regarding the relationship between sacred animals and Buddhist literature, the concept of a sacred animal in Thailand has been intertwined with Buddhism since ancient times. An example of this connection is evident in a statue dating back to the Dvaravati period, depicting the “Buddha and the magic animal” (National Museum Bangkok n.d.). The sacred animal object extended into modern times and transformed into a type of architectural decoration in Buddhist temples, as evidenced by Nimlek’s research. Nimlek compared Thai architectural vocabularies with the names of animals or sacred animals and summarised the results into thirty-two categories. This exploration unveiled various architectural elements, such as *naga*-shaped gables and stairs, underscoring the close association between sacred animals and Buddhist temples (Nimlek 2014).

Because sacred animals are important to Buddhist temples, it is crucial to locate the origin of this concept in Buddhist literature. The three worlds (ไตรภูมิ) of Buddhist literature, the formless realm, formed realm, and realm of desire, are filled with countless small worlds. A world with Mount Sumeru at its centre is called a small world, and the universe is said to consist of countless such worlds. Buddhists believe that the Himmaman Forest (ป่าหิมพานต์) is located at the foothills of the Sumi Mountain, which is home to various magical animals (Phlainoi 2009), including the *naga*, half-man, half-lion, and elephant-headed animals with fish bodies (Figure 4). Because of the mysterious power of these sacred animals, local people are used to placing or painting images of sacred animals in Buddhist temples, such as *nagas*, to protect the Buddha and the locals. The *naga* is seen as a friend and

guardian of Buddhism, symbolising purity and fertility in Hindu and Buddhist religious cultures. On the one hand, it protects monks and temples; on the other hand, as it symbolises fertility, it can bless the fields of laymen and their agriculture (Holt 2009).



Figure 4: Thepnorasinha, Wat Phra Kaew, Bangkok, Thailand.

Source: Author.

Having discussed the sacredness and religiousness of the *naga* originating from sacred animal worship and Buddhist literature, the final section addresses the *naga* totem related to the Lao ethnic group in Thailand. Maha Sila Viravong, a Lao historian, adduced four views about the origin of the word “Lao” based on other literature and organised them as follows:

1. The word “Lao” came from La-wa, which refers to the names of a certain ethnic group that lived on this part of the land in Laos (Viravong 1964: 6–7).
2. According to the legends of Khun Borom, the Lao people came into being from two large gourds (“lawu” in Pali), hence their name (cf. Viravong 1964: 6–7; Stuart-Fox 1997: 7).
3. The earliest historical sources of the central Mekong Basin are found in Chinese dynastic records that mention a group of people inhabiting south-western China known as the *Ai-Lao* (哀牢). Among them was a woman with nine sons. When she went fishing in the Mekong River, a rough floating trunk of wood hit her legs, and she became pregnant with the ninth child. When the child grew up to a certain age, his

mother took him along with her on a fishing trip to the Mekong River. While she was fishing in the river, a *naga* came by and asked her, “Where is my son?” Perplexed, she said only one word, *Kao-Long* (九隆) before running away, leaving her son behind. The *naga* then licked his back once. Later, the nine sons of this woman were considered the ancestors of the Lao people and were termed *Ai-Lao*. The term was used subsequently by the others to refer to the Lao (cf. Viravong 1964: 6–7; Stuart-Fox 1997: 6; Fan 1965: 2,849).

4. The word Lao is the same as *Dao* because the Lao people liked to live in the highlands. *Dao* means the sky; thus, the word Lao should also mean sky. In many cases, the letter D could very well be L. (Viravong 1964).

Of the above statements, the *Kao-Long* legend is a *naga* story. Therefore, the Lao people regarded the *naga* as a “totem” and believed that the *naga* would bless their descendants. The *naga* totem has become a part of life for the Laos in contemporary society, including the Laos of Thailand, known as Thai-Lao people (ไทยลาว).

In summary, sacred animal worship, Buddhist literature, and the *naga* totem shaped the concept of sacred animals among the people of Thailand.

Local Wisdom and the Visual Image of *Naga*

As of the present millennium, “local wisdom” (ภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่น)³ has begun to attract attention in the Thai academic community. Local wisdom is the inheritance of life experiences from the ancestors and is protected by Thailand’s Promotion and Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act 2559 to support cultural diversity. Local wisdom is defined as follows:

Local wisdom of Thailand has cultural inheritance, which is a concept, life attitude and social value, such as ideas, beliefs, knowledge and lifestyle, etc. (cf. Deetes 2003: 36–47; Thai Youth Encyclopaedia Project 2012: 1)

The visual image of the *naga* is a representation of local wisdom. Many local governments regard the *naga* as a local feature and apply for the inclusion of *naga*-related cultural elements in the Thai Intangible Cultural Heritage List, such as the *naga* folktale “Phadaeng Nang-Aii” (ตำนานผาแดงนางไอ่), which was listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Thailand in 2011, and the *naga* Festival “Rocket Festival” (ประเพณีบุญบั้ง) which was

included in 2013. The *naga* image is deeply embedded in the lives of local villagers because it is closely related to the Thai people’s advocacy of their local wisdom.

***Naga* Visual Art**

Naga visual art in Thailand is mainly displayed on religious art. Tambiah analysed the *naga* symbol in Northeast Thailand and found that it had different cultural meanings and beliefs in various Buddhist rituals and the cult of the guardian spirits (Tambiah 1970). These folk beliefs are directly displayed through visual art performances. *Naga* images are widely used in the daily lives of local villagers, especially in the temple architectural ornaments of Isan, as highlighted by Sanboon (2010) and Chang (2017b). They usually appear on gable boards, murals, *hanghong* (หางหงส์), which as an ornament made in the shape of a swan’s tail installed at the bottom of the temple gable, along the tiers of temple roofs (Figure 5), and on brackets or stairs leading to the main shrine. In the famous story “Mucalinda Sutta: About Mucalinda”, the *naga* protects Buddha, which has shaped the *naga*’s image as a guardian (Mahamakut Buddhist University 2003a: 161–162). Thus, in Buddhist temples, wherever things related to the Triratna are common, *nagas* always guard them side by side, especially at entrances such as doors, windows, and stairs. These *naga* decorations are not only beautiful, but enhance the solemn atmosphere of Buddhist temples (Bovornkitti 2005).



Figure 5: *Naga* gable board, Wat Sa Kaeo, Nong Khai Province.

Source: Author.

In addition, early *naga* sculptures based on the theme of *Pang Nak Prok*, had two main artistic modes, Khmer art (ศิลปะเขมร) and Thailand art (ศิลปะไทย; Figures 6 and 7).⁴ Both art forms are based on Buddhist doctrines and myths; the artistic characteristics of the *naga* are not the point of creation and would not be highlighted. Since the *naga* forms part of traditional beliefs in Thailand, local artists love to use *naga* images as design elements in Buddhist temples, such as *Pang Nak Prok*, *naga* stairs, and sculptures. As mentioned earlier, the *naga* symbol has a religious function and can protect the Triratna and the followers. This is the traditional impression given by *naga* visual art.

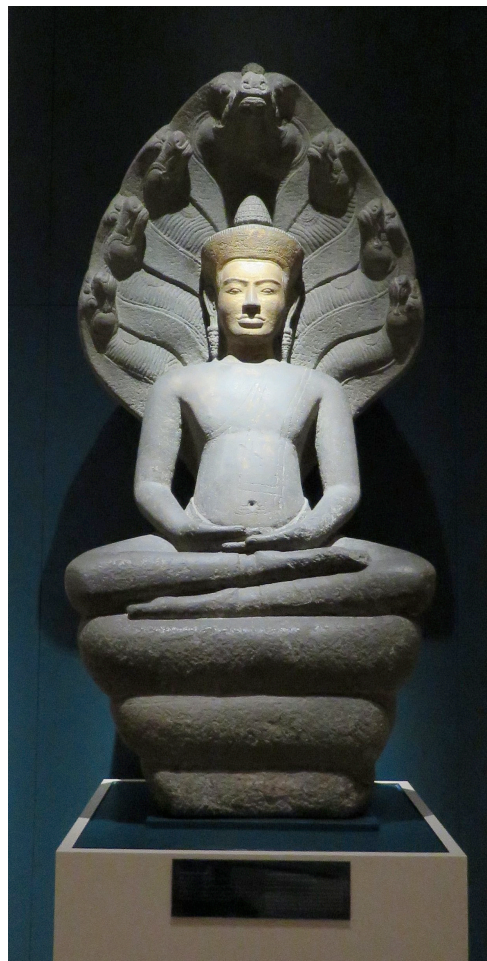


Figure 6: The mode of Khmer art of the *Pang Nak Prok*, 12–13th c. AD, National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand.

Source: Author.



Figure 7: The mode of Thailand art of the *Pang Nak Prok*, Wat Phra That Phanom, Nakhon Phanom Province.

Source: Author.

However, as times change and popular network features move rapidly, applications of *naga* visual art are no longer limited to serving religious purposes. People in Thailand believe that the *naga*, in addition to the function of protecting the Buddha, is the lord of the land and can bring wealth. Hence, guardian images of *nagas*, such as emoticons and animations, are more widely used in festival performances and on the Internet to show different cultural meanings.

Compared to the early image of the *naga*, the important change in the *naga*'s visual expression shows the transformation of the *naga* sign from having a religious to a cultural function. The *naga* gradually became an artistic subject under societal changes, and not only became the centre of product design but also began to appear with multiple changes in shape.

Currently, *naga* products have become a part of the cultural industry, which refers to various businesses that produce, distribute, market, or sell products that belong categorically to the creative arts. It is widely used in fields outside Buddhist temples and on the Internet, as in animations, costumes, and contemporary art performances. Thus, the *naga* is naturally embedded in the cultural industry and connected to the Internet in contemporary society.

During this developmental process, the religious function of the *naga* and the mode of transmission changed, leading to a change in the cultural meaning of the *naga* to something different from its previous religious connotations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study follows a systematic process involving data collection, analysis, and induction, incorporating field research. Since the *naga* is an important intangible cultural heritage in Northeast Thailand, the author went to Thailand to conduct fieldwork four times from 2016 to 2019, mainly visiting communities in Northeast Thailand, with additional trips to Chiang Mai, and Bangkok to collect *naga* art during this period.

This study aims to analyse *naga* images in Thai visual art through iconography, which will be discussed here for readers to better understand its development and definition. The construction of an art historical methodology and the reflection movements on the concept of art from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century had a profound impact on art historians and aesthetic research. For instance, the research trend of formal aesthetics represented by Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin, and R. Arnheim, alongside the iconographic research tradition established by Aby Warburg, described as “the exploration of the icon content and its meaning transformation” (Chen 2005: 77), were considerable contributions. Warburg played a leading role in directing art history research on iconography, and the study of iconography reached a peak after being proposed by Erwin Panofsky (Chen 2005).

The study of formal aesthetics in art history ignores the meaning that artists want to convey, and the interpretation constructed by the audience through various pieces of information in their art experiences. Therefore, artistic activities are limited to pure visual cognition and exchange, which is a theoretical limitation of formal research. In contrast, Warburg and others began to introduce various forms of humanistic knowledge, including Nietzsche’s philosophy, to solve the problem of the meaning of artworks and explain the artist’s creative intentions and trends. Regarding the principles of art history advocated by Wölfflin, Panofsky believes that they can only describe the style of artworks, but cannot explain the style, as the concepts put forward by Wölfflin need to be further explained. As a result, based on the foundational concepts of art science and after combining the discussion of symbolic forms

and art will, Panofsky comprehensively established an interpretation method for the contents and meaning of icons and formally proposed iconography in 1939 (Chen 2005).

Panofsky is renowned worldwide for his iconology and his work is representative of art history methodology and aesthetic research. His art theory covers three research topics, “foundational concepts of art science”, “symbolic forms”, and “art will”, among which “foundational concepts of art science” is the most prominent concern. Among the foundational concepts of art science, Panofsky developed a theory based on the intrinsic formal qualities of a work of art, in which the organising principle was the relationship of form to content. This system consisted of opposing qualities, such as optic/haptic, depth/surface, fusion/distinction, and time/space, which were thought to interlock so as to control the relationship of form to content (cf. Chen 2005; Moxey 1986). Panofsky regarded visual symbols as cultural symbols, and explored the essence of thought behind images through the process of an “act of interpretation”, containing three interrelated levels of “pre-iconographical description”, “iconographical analysis”, and “iconological interpretation” (Panofsky 1955: 40–41). Thus, when we look at images, we can analyse their symbols, structures, and connotations from deep to shallow.

Iconography is a very useful method for reading images and is mostly used in the analysis of the same types of artistic texts, such as paintings and sculptures. However, it is limited to ascertaining the intentions of the image maker or patron. Uehlinger used religious works as an example to illustrate art history and works selected by museums, which likely completely ignored popular and mass-produced imagery and objects and the host of religious practices that rely on such items. It has often reduced religious images to historical or aesthetic artifacts, failing to account for their role in the living traditions of the life of a community (Uehlinger 2015). Taking *naga* art as an example, the collection of *naga* works in museums in Thailand is limited and many *naga* images used in daily life are not included in museums.

With regard to the development of *naga* images, those hidden in folk art are equally important. To compensate for this gap, this study collected *naga* works from all over Thailand as much as possible to understand the changes in *naga* art. In this manner, the method of selecting the texts for this research is different from art history or museum research that analyses museum collections. The research texts were mainly collected in Northeast Thailand, and a variety of visual artworks were selected as samples, including sculptures, murals, emoticons, animations, festivals, amulets, fabrics, and

exhibition artworks. However, only one work from each of the various *naga* arts was selected as the analysis text to illustrate the changes that *naga* worship has undergone in different environments.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

One concern in cultural studies is the discussion of cultural phenomena and their contexts. The *naga* images in Thailand's *naga* narratives reflect two major cultural systems, Buddhism and serpent worship (Chang 2017a), which also appear in the *naga* visual arts. The *naga* is a guardian in Buddhist stories, as in the deeds of protecting the Buddha described by Mucalinda Sutta. Thus, much of the intangible cultural heritage surrounding the *naga* is represented in Buddhist temples, such as sculptures, murals, festivals, and *Bai Sri* (บายศรี), which is made from banana leaves in the form of a water lantern to contain food during sacrifices. As the *naga* has the magical power to drive away evil spirits in *naga* folktales, *naga* images are thus used on a daily basis as local villagers pray to the *naga* for peace. Thai people believe that the *naga* is a guardian of the Buddha as well as a local protector. These cultural meanings have been constructed from *naga* narratives over long periods of time and are reflected in intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, this author uses *naga* images such as sculptures, murals, emoticons, animations, festivals, amulets, fabrics, and exhibition artworks to observe changes and discuss the relationship between social phenomena and cultural context in relation to the influence of the Internet on *naga* worship.

Analysis of the Iconology





This research expands the scope of application based on iconography, focusing on the *naga* as a sign. Its visual designs, structures, and cultural significance can then be understood through an analysis of iconology. This author applied Panofsky's methodology to analyse the *naga* images listed in Table 1 and organised the three levels of iconology, "pre-iconographical description", "iconographical analysis", and "iconological interpretation", as shown in Table 2. It presents a set of thinking processes for viewing *naga* visual art from shallow to deep (Table 2) to understand its cultural context.

Table 1: *Naga* visual art

No.	Category	<i>Naga</i> visual art	Title of work	Cultural context	Location and source of figure
1	Sculpture		<i>Pang Nak Prok</i>	Buddhism	Wat Pho Si, Nakhon Phanom Province; Author
2	Sculpture		<i>Pang Nak Prok</i>	Buddhism	Wat Pa Sala Wan, Khorat Province; Author
3	Sculpture		<i>Pang Nak Prok</i>	Buddhism	Sala Keoku Park, Nongkai Province; Author
4	Mural		Oral literature	Buddhism, serpent worship	Wat Pho Chai, Nongkai Province; Author
5	Emoticon		Vishnu and <i>naga</i>	Hinduism	Reproduced courtesy of Worawit Nu Photo Book online (Nu 2016)
6	Amulet		<i>Naga</i>	Serpent worship	Cha Studio, Nongkai Province; Author
7	Fabric		<i>Naga</i>	Serpent worship	Nakhon Phanom Province; Author

(continued on next page)

Table 1: (continued)

No.	Category	Naga visual art	Title of work	Cultural context	Location and source of figure
8	Sculpture		<i>Naga</i>	Serpent worship	Nakhon Phanom Province; Author
9	Sculpture		<i>Naga</i>	Buddhism	Wat Luang, Ubon Ratchathani Province; Author
10	Sculpture		Half-human half- <i>naga</i> stairs	Buddhism	Wat Thai, Nongkai Province; Author
11	Bai Sri		<i>Naga Bai Sri</i>	Buddhism	Nakhon Phanom Province; Author
12	Festival		Fire boat	Buddhism	Nakhon Phanom Province; Author
13	Exhibition artwork		Painting with history in a room filled with people with funny names	Serpent worship	Created by Korakrit Arunanondchai in 2015 and exhibited in Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts in 2019; Author

First, pre-iconographical descriptions focused on the visual design of the *naga* sign, which is the easiest part of understanding *naga* art. There are two primary artistic modes of *naga*: Khmer art (No. 1, Table 1) and Thai art (Nos. 2 and 3, Table 1), as shown in the *naga* sculptures in Table 1. The two modes differ, as shown in the statues of *Pang Nak Prok*. This statue has

been popular since the Dvaravati period; for example, the Buddha image in Angkor Temple belongs to Khmer art. Northeast Thailand was once ruled by the Angkor Empire; therefore, Khmer art of the *naga* is still seen in Thailand. Thailand art subsequently developed, gradually replacing the Khmer-shaped *naga* and becoming the popular design in Thailand.

The major difference between the artistic modes of the *Pang Nak Prok* statues in Thailand and the Khmer lies in the shape of the *nagas*. The heads of the Khmer art *nagas* are shaped like bodhi leaves, whereas this shape changes into radiating light in Thailand art (Figure 8). The Thai *naga*, a serpent with a crest (หงอน) on its head (Phlainoi 2009), created a new look compared with the shape of the Khmer art. Additionally, as Thai craftsmen always provide the *naga* with vivid expressions, they do not look as fierce as the Khmer *naga*. These design changes have transformed the Thai *naga* into a new artistic mode.



Figure 8: The *Pang Nak Prok* modelling comparison. Left: 11–12th c. AD, Phimai Historical Park, Nakhon Ratchasima Province; right: Sala Keoku Park, Nongkai Province.

Source: Author.

Second, an iconographic analysis was conducted to explore the composition of the *naga* sign and other structural elements. *Naga* art has not long been a central issue in Buddhist or architectural studies; it usually plays only a supporting role in explaining religious or architectural issues in Southeast Asia. In ancient *naga* art in India, Khmer, and Thailand, the *naga* image always appeared with other deities, such as Buddha or Vishnu, as shown in Table 1 (Nos. 4 and 5). *Naga* images in Thailand's narratives can be divided into two types: images from Buddhist stories and from indigenous stories, which respectively reflect Buddhist culture and serpent worship (Chang 2017a).

However, since early *naga* art almost only appeared in images protecting the Buddha, people's main impressions of the *naga* are related to the protection of the Buddha (or the gods) and rarely involve serpent worship, which is not allowed by Buddhist teachings.

Since 2000, because of the increasing emphasis on the protection of intangible cultural heritage in Thailand, coupled with the use of the Internet, more people have discussed serpent worship and turned it into a kind of cultural commodity or a theme of creation, leading to changes in the structure of the *naga* image (Nos. 6 and 7, Table 1). *Nagas* have become the main character in visual art under this transformation, expressing people's different imaginations, mainly influenced by serpent worship.

For the locals, the *naga* is not only a sacred animal but also a local protector; hence, the *naga* can be made into an independent statue for worship in Thailand. The large seven-headed king *naga* statue of Nakhon Phanom (No. 8, Table 1), built in 2016 and whose structure is based on the image of a *naga* spraying water, is not attached to any Buddha statue. For the locals, the *naga*, the mythical serpent, is their guardian who lives in the Mekong River; thus, its statue is situated in the riverfront area facing the Mekong River. The *naga* shape spraying water is a sign of fertile land, indicating that it protects the local community, allowing it to develop smoothly (Karnjanatawe 2016). This is a reform of the structure of *naga* art, changing the *naga*'s visual shape through art.

As the *naga* has become the subject of art, it has been endowed with "personification", similar to the images in indigenous stories of *nagas* who have mixed feelings as people do. *Naga* dramas have recently become popular in Thailand. The *nagas* have not only become the protagonists of TV and movies but have also been included in popular songs, which are constantly viewed and listened to on the Internet. These creations were inspired by indigenous *naga* stories, emphasising the humanity of *nagas*. The most famous Thai drama is *Nakii* (เงาแม่น้ำคี), a story about the *naga* Queen, produced in 2016. In the interpretation of iconology, the *Nakii* drama displays an interactive relationship with the human world; the *naga* is the personification of humans, which differs from the traditional religious characteristics of the *naga*. When the *naga* icon became a creative element of the cultural industry, the structure of its visual image changed accordingly, differing from previous religious images (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Structural comparison of *naga* statues. Left: Wat Phra Narai, Nakhon Ratchasima Province; right: Wat Thai, Nong Khai Province.

Source: Author.

Third, an iconological interpretation explores the cultural significance of *nagas*. According to Table 1, the cultural meanings of *naga* images can be understood through iconological interpretation. For example, the stairs of a Buddhist temple are the entrance to the holy realm. It is said similarly that the *naga* is the stairway between heaven and the human realm. The Buddha once stepped on the body of the *naga* in Trayastrimsa to spread the teachings of Buddhism to his mother. Simultaneously, people believe that after death, they enter heaven through the *naga* stairs (Pritasuwan 2014); thus, the *naga* stairs are often created at the entrance to symbolise the passage to heaven (No. 9, Table 1). Among the *naga* stairs, the most distinctive is the half-human half-*naga* stair (No. 10, Table 1), which is related to the folk literature of Northeast Thailand, such as *Bhuridatta Jataka* (ภริทัตตชาดก)⁵ and *Padaeng and Nang Ai* (ผาแดง-นางไอ่).⁶ Local people believe that *nagas* with magical powers can be transformed into human form (Samphan 2010). Given this legend, local artists created a human-shaped *naga* stair that reflected the imagination of the locals.

Bai Sri (No. 11, Table 1) is an exquisite container made of banana leaves that is often used in important ceremonies. Residents in Northeastern Thailand consider the *naga* the incarnation of a holy monk, *Uppakrut* (or *Upaguta*; พระอุปกฤต), who can drive away devils (Tambiah 1970). Thus, they

often make *Bai Sri* in the *naga* style to symbolise an invitation to *Uppakrut* to guard the proceedings, praying for everything to proceed smoothly during the ceremony.

This custom is derived from one of the many legends of *Uppakrut*. According to a Lao story, the Buddha, when taunted by one of his disciples about his virility, threw his sperm into the Mekong, where it was swallowed by Nang Matsa, the fish goddess, who happened to be swimming by. Several months later, she gave birth to *Upaguta* (Strong 1992), due to which the Northeast people regard the *naga* as *Uppakrut*.

Meanwhile, the *naga* is a symbol of “power”, especially for the locals who live along the Mekong River. Since *nagas* can bless the locals, they added *naga* patterns onto their fabric as a totem of protection. Local villagers also make fire boats shaped like *nagas* to sail during the Fire Boat Festival (ประเพณีไหลเรือไฟ) to pray for *naga*’s protection (No. 12, Table 1). In addition, the emoticon and exhibition artworks shown in Table 1 (No. 13) show that *naga* images tend to be more contemporary and cartoonish because of the influence of the Internet, thereby differing from the traditional serious religious spirits.

Overall, the *naga* has multiple cultural meanings in the cultural context of Thailand that pertain to local beliefs. For example, the Theravada Tripitaka records that the *naga* has four families (Mahamakut Buddhist University 2003b),⁷ but in the Mekong River region of Thailand and Laos, it is stated in Northeastern Thailand that there are four families, versus fifteen families of *nagas* in Luang Prabang (Yomruang 2022).⁸ The classification of these *naga* family branches, in addition to reflecting the different images and cultural meanings of *nagas* in various places, represents a kind of narrative expansion. The development of the Internet has been conducive to the dissemination of local cultures and narratives.

Internet use started in Thailand in the 1980s, and its influence has been far-reaching in modern society. Intangible cultural heritage, cultural industries, tourism, art, drama, and self-media are all spread through the Internet. These various carriers, to seek innovation and change, have resulted in the image of the *naga* breaking away from the traditional image to become the theme and protagonist of narratives, thereby creating new *naga* images, commodities, and activities, and expanding the *naga*’s original narrative mode of protecting the Buddha and Indian gods.

New *naga* narratives and products are difficult to evidence for older times when the Internet was underdeveloped. Even though the legends of *naga* families in various places were popular among the people, these narratives

were limited to local beliefs and were not easily popularised more widely. However, with the development of the Internet, methods of communication, interests, and audiences have changed. Thus, the expansion of *naga* narratives has been deeply affected by the Internet.

In short, the *naga* has gradually become the subject of a new art form under the influence of cultural industry and the Internet, increasing its cultural significance. Simultaneously, the way people perceive the *naga* is no longer limited to the definitions in religion and the real world. In contrast, owing to the expansion of the *naga* narrative, people understand the new connotations of *naga* through drama, animation, contemporary art, and other presentations in the virtual world. This reflects the impact of social change through the spread of the Internet, which shows the deepest meaning expressed by the iconography of the *naga* theme.

According to the iconographic analysis in Table 2, *naga* images in Thai people's daily lives show three levels of icon, structure, and cultural meaning; it also presents the thoughts of Buddhism, Hinduism, and serpent worship in light of different needs. An investigation limited to the analysis of *naga* collections or visual art in museums would have difficulties observing the richness and variability of *naga* visual art. This study involved travelling into local communities to collect field materials, different from art history or museum research texts, to show the diversity and multicultural significance of *naga* images.

Table 2: Analysis of *naga* iconology

Act of interpretation	Panofsky's theoretical terminology	Explanation	Image from Table 1 (No.)	The essence of thought
Pre-iconographical description	Primary subject matter	The iconography related to <i>nagas</i>	1, 2, 3	Buddhism, Hinduism, and serpent worship
Iconographical analysis	Secondary subject matter	The structural analysis of <i>naga</i> iconographies	4, 5, 6, 7, 8	
Iconological interpretation	Intrinsic meaning	The cultural meanings of <i>naga</i>	9, 10, 11, 12, 13	

Source: Panofsky (1955: 40–41).

The Influence of the Internet

On the World Wide Web, it can be difficult to distinguish actual information from legend-related material; of course, the boundary between fiction and truth has always been one of the legend's most intriguing characteristics. Blurring this boundary has become a form of play. (Tucker 2012: 155)

According to the aforementioned text, *naga* images of Thailand have diversity and polysemy, which have become more obvious with the spread of the Internet. First, regarding the diversity of images, *naga* has developed into a cultural industry in step with societal changes, especially the spread of the Internet, which has strengthened the commercial features of the *naga*. To cater to commercial purposes, religious *naga* images have gradually turned to artistic and dramatic developments, including many *naga* commodities, arts, and dramas, which are parts of the *naga* cultural industry.

Second, in terms of the polysemy of images, the meanings of the *naga* have also changed with the diversity of *naga* commodities. In general, the cultural meanings of the *naga* have always followed religious interpretations. The main image of Thai *nagas* stems from Thai literature, particularly regarding the Himmapan forest. In the concept of the three worlds, Buddhists believe that a variety of magical animals reside in the Himmapan forest, including the *naga*. According to the popular concept in Thailand, the *naga*, a crested serpent, is the main guardian of the Buddha.

However, the spread of the Internet has not only made the *naga* ubiquitous in the virtual world, but has also strengthened the drama and fun of the *naga*, including *naga* movies and mobile games, which are spread through the Internet, entertaining people and affecting their cognition of the *naga*. The Internet has strengthened the virtual nature of the *naga*, especially since many audiences choose to learn about the *naga* from dramas, animations, popular songs, and works of art on the Internet, which could form cognitive biases. These cognitive risks could cause virtual *naga* images created in the online world to be deemed credible; this could obscure the religious meaning of the *naga* and lead people to ignore the importance of Buddhist scriptures in the real world. This situation arises, as folklorist Robert Glenn Howard explains, when the folk “express meaning through new communication technologies, the distinction between folk and mass is...blurred by the vernacular deployment of institutionally produced commercial technologies” (Howard 2008: 194). Howard emphasised that online media participation has caused a qualitative change in folk activities as it intermingles vernacular, commercial, and

institutional interests (Blank 2012). The same is true for *nagas* on the Internet, including *naga* programmes, songs, mobile games, and paintings, which may incorporate other non-religious purposes and are quite different from the *naga* recorded in Buddhist scriptures.

Buddhist stories and their authenticity were discussed in academic circles before the invention of the Internet. For example, Nicolas Revire (2018), Donald Stadtner (2011), and others have examined Buddhist stories from the perspectives of archaeology and history. However, the Internet has not only changed the way Buddhism is spread but has also allowed more unconstrained interpretations of Buddhist scriptures, including explanations of the *naga*.

Thus, the polysemy of *naga* has affected the original “spiritual landscape”. People’s cognition of the *naga* was constructed based on Buddhist temples, Buddhist scriptures, festivals, and folk stories in an age without the Internet. However, the traditional cognitive model has changed under the influence of the cultural industry and the Internet. In addition to the sanctified image of protecting Tripitaka, people began to pay attention to the *naga*’s worldliness, with stories centred on *naga* lust, and revenge stories were made into dramas to spread the anthropomorphic characteristics of *nagas*. This has strengthened the *naga*’s artistic and commercial characteristics, leading to changes in the cultural meanings of *nagas* via the Internet.

In conclusion, this study found through iconographic analysis that *naga* images in Thailand present three levels: the icon, structure, and cultural meaning. At the same time, the *naga* images reflected in these three levels showed two major changes after the introduction of the Internet: (1) *Naga* images are diverse and have become part of the cultural industry. The structures of its images are different from those of previous religious images; and (2) *Naga* worship is expressed in *naga* images and has multiple meanings differing from previous religious connotations. The Internet has led to changes in the way Buddhist doctrine is diffused, including different interpretations of *naga* images under the influence of virtual worlds.

CONCLUSION

Nagas are a cultural image of Thailand and an auspicious symbol of ordinary life. *Naga* visual art, which is often used in the ordinary lives of the local people, is an important element of Buddhist temples in Thailand. *Naga* visual arts can be understood through an analysis of iconology. This author used a

variety of visual arts as texts and applied Panofsky's methodology to analyse *naga* images, which presents a set of thinking processes to gaze at *naga* visual art from shallow to deep. The *naga* images of Thailand show three levels of icon, structure, and cultural meaning and simultaneously present the thought of Buddhism, Hinduism, and serpent worship in the light of different needs.

This author summarised the *naga* images reflected in these three levels and found that *naga* worship has undergone two major changes under the influence of the Internet: (1) *Naga* images are diverse and have become a part of the cultural industry. The structures of its images are different from those of previous religious images; and (2) *naga* worship is expressed in *naga* images and has multiple meanings different from previous religious connotations. The Internet has led to changes in the way Buddhist doctrine is diffused, including different interpretations of *naga* images due to the influence of the virtual world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Huanggang Normal University in China for funding this research through the PhD Research Fund under contract number 2042020038.

NOTES

- * Ya-Liang Chang is currently an Associate Professor in the College of Fine Arts, Huanggang Normal University, China, where she teaches Introduction to Art History, Introduction to Design and so on. Her research interests focus on the field of arts and humanities of Southeast Asia. She has finished three research projects involving Thailand art since 2016, and has also published several papers about *naga* culture of Thailand.
- ¹ According to Vechasat's research, he analysed the *naga* concepts of the Tai ethnic groups and classified it into fifteen types. A *naga* could be regarded as a forefather, a sacred being, a divine being, a being with magical power, a being with strength and might, a being with faith in or connection with Buddhism, a guardian of important places or cities, a large serpent, a dwelling, an existing being, a god of water and earth, a being representing agriculture and fertility, a being related to homes and living quarters, a being connected to astrology, a human helper, and physical appearance with artistic beauty.
- ² The "Mucalinda Sutta" is a story of the Buddhist Tripitaka, in which Mucalinda, the *naga* king, protects Buddha from intruders. According to the "Mucalinda Sutta", there was a great rainstorm and for seven days there were rain clouds, cold winds, and

unsettled weather while the Buddha meditated under the Bodhi tree. The storm could put the life of Buddha in danger at any time, so Mucalinda encircled the Buddha's body seven times with his coils and stood with his great hood spread over the Buddha's head to protect the Buddha from the cold and heat, from flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and the touch of creeping things.

- ³ Local wisdom is a term commonly used in Thailand which is a kind of inheritance of life experiences from the ancestors, especially to refer to cultural heritage.
- ⁴ The term “artistic model” used in this article refers to a kind of the classifications of art. The author divided the *naga* artwork collected in the study into two main artistic modes: Khmer art (ศิลปะเขมร) and Thailand art (ศิลปะไทย). Khmer style (แบบเขมร) and Thailand style (แบบไทย) are complex terms involving regions, ages, creative methods, etc. Taking Thailand art as an example, many styles could be distinguished, including Lan Na, Lao, Khmer, Shan, Burmese, Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, Srivijaya, and Dvaravati, all of which have different historical backgrounds. However, the content of this article is limited, and the author merely uses the “model” as a method to make a simple classification of *naga* art for analysis.
- ⁵ Bhuridatta Jataka is one of ten most popular Jataka stories in Thailand and describes the story of a *naga* prince, Prince Bhuridatta. Prince Bhuridatta hoped to break away from his *naga* shape and accumulated merits by keeping the precepts of Buddhism, hoping that he would someday in the future no longer crawl on his stomach. Although Prince Bhuridatta encountered many disasters, he kept the precepts and chose to be patient, and not fight back. In his belief, he would rather die than break a precept. When the catastrophes were over, Prince Bhuridatta had accumulated many merits, and was finally able to get rid of his *naga* figure, and promoted to a higher spiritual realm.
- ⁶ A summary of Padaeng and Nang Ai: The *naga* prince Suthonak had the magical power to change his own appearance. One day, he fell in love with Princess Nang Ai at first sight. *Naga* prince Suthonak became an albino squirrel and wore the ring around its neck to attract the attention of Nang Ai. When the princess saw the ring on the squirrel's neck, she was attracted by it, and ordered the hunter to shoot the squirrel and take off the ring. After the albino squirrel was shot by a poisoned arrow, the hunter gave the ring to the princess and distributed the squirrel meat among the people of the city. When the *naga* king Thao Suwan Phangkhi heard the news of the prince's death, he decided to avenge his son's death. Thus, the *naga* king led the *nagas* to kill all the people of the city. The *naga* story began to spread, and it was believed that if someone eats the meat of the *naga*, they will encounter a misfortune.
- ⁷ Theravada Tripitaka records that *naga* has four families, namely *Virupakṣa* (วิรุฬหกษ), *Erapatha* (เอราปถ), *Chabyaputta* (ฉัพพะยาปุตตะ) and *Kanhagotamaka* (กัณหาโคตมกะ).
- ⁸ It is said that there are fifteen families of *nagas* in Luang Prabang, namely *Nang Dam* (ນາງດຳ ຢູ່ຄູ່ກີທອ່ນ), *Nang Done* (ນາງດອ່ນ ຢູ່ຄູ່ກີເຮອີ), *Nang Phomfuea* (ນາງຜົມຜົວ ຢູ່ຄູ່ຫນ້າອີທາຊ້າງ), *Ai Tong Kwang* (ທ້າວຕັງກວາງ ຂວາງຢູ່ປູ່າກຄານ), *Thao Thong Chan* (ທ້າວທອງຈານ ຢູ່ຜູ່າດຽ່ວ), *Thao Khamhieo* (ທ້າວຄຳຮຽ່ວ ຢູ່ຜູ່າເສອີ), *Thao Boanyuea* (ທ້າວບຸນເຍອີ ຢູ່ກູ່ອຸ່ນກຳຢູ່ຜູ່າ), *Thao Khamla* (ທ້າວຄຳຫລຳ ຢູ່ຜູ່າບັງ), *Thao Khampang* (ທ້າວຄຳບັງ ຢູ່ຜູ່າຊ້າງ), *Thao Bounkwang* (ທ້າວບຸນກວາງ ຢູ່ຜູ່າລູ່ວງ), *Thao Bounyuang* (ທ້າວບຸນເຍອີ ຢູ່ກູ່ອຸ່ນຫມດີແອ່ນ), *Thao Khamtaen* (ທ້າວຄຳແຕ່ນ ຢູ່ຜູ່າຊະວາ), *Thao Konglua* (ທ້າວກອງເຫລອີ ຢູ່ຜູ່າສຸມເສອີ), *Thao Kaicamnong* (ທ້າວໄກກຳນັງ ຢູ່ຮູ່ກສາພຣະບາດ) and *Sisattanag* (ສຣສັດຕະນາກເຈາຢູ່ຜູ່າຈອມສຣ) (Chaiyason 2020).

REFERENCES

- Allerton, C. 2009. Introduction: Spiritual landscapes of Southeast Asia. *Anthropological Forum* 19 (3): 235–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664670903278387>
- ANET Internet. 2019. The evolution of the internet in Thailand. <https://www.anet.net.th/a/43608> (accessed 5 March 2023).
- Blank, T. J. 2012. Introduction: Pattern in the virtual folk culture of computer-mediated communication. In *Folk culture in the digital age: The emergent dynamics of human interaction*, ed. Blank, T. J., 1–24. Boulder, CO: Utah State University Press.
- Bovornkitti, L. 2005. The influence of Buddhism in historical Thai art. *Journal of the Royal Institute of Thailand* 30 (2): 355–362.
- Chaiyason, N. 2020. Visit the royal palace of Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. *Trueid*, 13 April 2020. <https://travel.trueid.net/detail/NDO66Gnxlbyq> (accessed 5 March 2023).
- Chang, Y. L. 2017a. Exploring Naga images: Textual analysis of Thailand’s narratives. *Journal of Mekong Societies* 13 (1): 19–35.
- _____. 2017b. An investigation of Naga fine art in the Buddhist temples of Northeastern Thailand. *Artistica TNNUA* 15: 51–87.
- Chen, H. E. 2005. On Panofsky’s foundational concepts of art science. *Aletheia: NHU Journal of Philosophy and Life Education* 9: 75–124.
- Davis, R. B. 1984. *Muang metaphysics: A study of Northern Thai myth and ritual*. Bangkok: Pandora.
- Deetes, T. 2003. *Proceedings of local wisdom and culture of Thailand*. Bangkok: Office of the National Culture Commission.
- Fan, Y. 1965. *Hou han shu* (=後漢書). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Fine Arts Department (ed.). 2015. *Various Buddha statues*, 4th ed. Bangkok: Fine Arts Department.
- Holt, J. C. 2009. *Spirits of the place: Buddhism and Lao religious culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824833275.001.0001>
- Howard, R. G. 2008. Electronic hybridity: The persistent processes of the vernacular web. *Journal of American Folklore* 121 (480): 192–218. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20487596>
- Jermawatdi, P. 1979. *Thai art with Indian influences*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.
- Jumsai, S. 1997. *NAGA: Cultural origins in Siam and the West Pacific*. Bangkok: Chalermnit Press.
- Karnjanatawe, K. 2016. Mekong River landmark. *Bangkok Post*, 22 September 2016. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/travel/1091977/mekong-river-landmark> (accessed 22 April 2023).
- Laomanajareern, S. 2003. Naga: The symbol study that following the Indian model. *Journal of Damrong* 2 (4): 148–158.
- Mahamakut Buddhist University (ed.). 2003a. *Tripitaka in Thai translation version, vol. 44*. Nakhon Pathom, Thailand: Mahamakut Buddhist University.
- _____. 2003b. *Tripitaka in Thai translation version, vol. 9*. Nakhon Pathom, Thailand: Mahamakut Buddhist University.
- Moxey, K. 1986. Panofsky’s concept of “Iconology” and the problem of interpretation in the history of art. *New Literary History* 17 (2): 265–274. <https://doi.org/10.2307/468893>
- Nation TV. 2020. ชาวบ้านเพิ่งทราบ “หลวงพ่อดศรีพิทักษ์ชน” อายุกว่า 1,200 ปี. 30 May 2020. <https://www.nationtv.tv/news/378778842> (accessed 5 March 2023).

- National Museum Bangkok. n.d. Dvaravati. <http://www.virtualmuseum.finearts.go.th/bangkoknationalmuseums/index.php/en/exhibitions/model-present.html> (accessed 5 March 2023).
- Ngaosrivathana, M. and Ngaosrivathana, P. 2009. *The enduring sacred landscape of the Naga*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.
- Nimlek, S. 2014. *Animals in architectures of Thailand*. Bangkok: Matichon Press.
- Nu, W. 2016. Worawit Nu photo book. <https://www.facebook.com/worawitt.nu/> (accessed 29 April 2023).
- Panda, S. S. 2004. Nagas in the sculptural decorations of early west Orissan temples. *Orissa Historical Research Journal* 47 (1) :16–37.
- Panofsky, E. 1955. *Meaning in the visual arts: Papers in and on art history*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Phlainoi, S. 2009. *Animals of Himmaphan*, 4th ed. Bangkok: Phimkham.
- Pritasuwat, P. 2014. *Naga decorate Buddhist temples in Amphoe Mueang Nan*. Chiang Mai: Thai Art Department, Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University.
- Revire, N. 2018. Facts and fiction: The myth of Suvannabhūmi through the Thai and Burmese looking glass. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6 (2): 167–205. <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.8>
- Saipan, P. 1996. “Naga worship” of the Mekong River Basin in Northeastern Thailand: Focusing on the cultural experience of contemporary rituals. MA diss., Thammasat University, Thailand.
- Saising, S. 2021. Buddha statues in Thailand. https://www.finearts.go.th/storage/contents/2021/06/detail_file/NmOBH5KF1AeeHHciRPQPP3ShJYoTWFDy2gZaUU9I.pdf (accessed 5 March 2023).
- Samphan, A. 2010. *Folktales in Thailand*. Bangkok: Creative Books.
- Sanboon, T. 2010. Identity in the decorations of local religious constructions of the Isaan region of Thailand and Lao PDR. *Academic Journal: Faculty of Architecture, Khon Kaen University* 9 (1): 45–60.
- Song, L. D. 2002. *From Indian Buddhism to Thai Buddhism*. Taipei: The Grand East Book Co. Ltd.
- Stadtner, D. M. 2011. *Sacred sites of Burma: Myths and folklore in an evolving spiritual realm*. Bangkok: River Books.
- Strong, J. S. 1992. *The legend and cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in north India and Southeast Asia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Stuart-Fox, M. 1997. *A history of Laos*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tambiah, S. J. 1970. *Buddhism and the spirit cults in northeast Thailand*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Thai Youth Encyclopaedia Project. 2012. Local wisdom in Thailand. In *Thai youth encyclopaedia*, vol. 23, no. 1, 10–29. Bangkok: Thai Youth Encyclopaedia Project by His Majesty the King. https://www.saranukromthai.or.th/Ebook/BOOK23/pdf/book23_1.pdf (accessed 1 March 2023).
- Tucker, E. 2012. From oral tradition to cyberspace: Tapeworm diet rumors and legends. In *Folk culture in the digital age: The emergent dynamics of human interaction*, ed. Blank, T. J., 150–165. Boulder, CO: Utah State University Press.

- U Thong National Museum. n.d. Fragment of the Buddha seated beneath a seven-heads Naga. <http://www.virtualmuseum.finearts.go.th/uthong/index.php/th/event/%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%95%E0%B8%96%E0%B8%B8%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%B5%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%88%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%94%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%94%E0%B8%87.html> (accessed 8 March 2023).
- Uehlinger, C. 2015. Approaches to visual culture and religion: Disciplinary trajectories, interdisciplinary connections, and some suggestions for further progress. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 27 (4–5): 384–422. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341362>
- UNESCO World Heritage Convention. 2019. Tentative list, the ancient town of Si Thep. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6402/> (accessed 1 March 2023).
- Vechasat, K. 2016. The reflection of Naga in the Tai concepts. *Veridian E-Journal, Silpakorn University: Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts* (Thai version) 9 (1): 1099–1116.
- Viravong, M. S. 1964. *History of Laos*. Trans. U.S. Joint Publications Research Service. New York: Paragon Book Reprint.
- Wongthes, S. 2012. วัฒนธรรมร่วม ของอาเซียน (อุษาคเนย์) (The shared culture in ASEAN [Southeast Asia]). A lecture in the Osaka Project, 16 August 2012, Thammasat University, Thailand. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hag0LIVgLSI&loop=0> (accessed 25 March 2023).
- _____. 2003. *Naga in history of Southeast Asia*. Bangkok: Mati Cho.
- Woodward, H. 2005. *The art and architecture of Thailand*, 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill.
- Yomruang, P. 2022. Pay homage to the 15 Naga families that symbolize the river and local beliefs at the “Boon Somma Bucha Naga” festival, KCU Art & Culture Center. <https://cac.kku.ac.th/cac2021> (accessed 29 April 2023).