

***When the Religion Meets the Internet:
Focusing on Naga Images Used by Visual Art in Thailand***

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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 it is an old tradition or a new cultural creation, many cultural heritages using the Naga theme are combined with visual art, while spreading the images and beliefs of Naga through the Internet, including sculptures, murals, emoticons, animations, festivals, amulets, fabrics, exhibition artworks, and so forth. This article aims to use iconography to analyze Naga images in visual art in Thailand, and to explore the changes that Naga worship have undergone on the Internet. Research results show two important changes: (1) in terms of cultural context, the cultural meaning of Naga images has changed on the Internet, making it part of the cultural industry, which is different from previous religious connotations; and (2), in terms of the spread of Buddhism, the Internet has led to changes in the way the Buddhist doctrine is diffused, including different interpretations of Naga images, which is challenged by virtual worlds.

Keywords: Naga, Visual Art, Internet, Iconography

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Introduction

Naga is a kind of serpent worship that is widely spread in Mainland China (Yunnan Province), India, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and Indonesia. The origin of the Naga is related to not only the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism, but also various folk beliefs. Nagas have a variety of names and images in various regions. According to Thais' concept, the Naga, a serpent with a crest, is the main guardian of the Buddha (Phlainoi, 2009, p.202). Because the Naga is the famous guardian of Buddhism, Naga images are often used in the ordinary lives of Thais to pray for protection. The Naga art is an important element in the Buddhist temples of Thailand, especially in architectural decorations, sculptures, and murals. The positions and shapes of Naga works in Buddhist temples have their own meanings, which show the coordinated relationship among Naga, the universe, the religion, and water culture. In addition, Naga images often appear in the daily lives of Thais, such as using it in Internet designs or in cultural and creative industries. Since the Naga image is an important element in Thai visual art, this study uses iconography to analyze Naga images in Thai visual art to explore the changes of Naga worship under the influence of the Internet.

Literature Review

This introductory section provides a brief overview of the origin, importance, and visual images of Naga.

1. The Origin of the Naga of Thailand

The word "Naga" comes from Sanskrit and different dialects led to changes in the pronunciation of "Naga." For example, the pronunciations *Ngan*, *Ngua*, *Nam Ngu Ak-ngu*, and *Namngum* can be found in Thailand and Laos (Ngaosrivathana & Ngaosrivathana, 2009: 6). Nagas have a variety of images, such as the water Naga in Ahom, crocodile in Shan, water snake in White T'ai, dragon in Pa-yi, and serpent in Siamese (Davis, 1984, p.212). Consequently, the names, pronunciations, and images of Nagas vary in different areas. Since the Naga has diverse images, the important question is where did the Naga of Thailand originate? Generally speaking, there are two schools of thought about the origin of the Naga: the Indianized School and the Local School. The Indianized School suggests that the Naga came from Indian mythology, as argued by the following scholars: 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 through diverse forms, including the snake, half-human half-snake, and human images. From Panda's study, we know that the images of India's Nagas have the following characteristics: Nagas are the leaders of the oceans, live under the earth, bear a jewel on their heads, and some have odd-numbered serpent hoods above their heads (Panda, 2004, pp.17-18). The Indian Nagas are similar to those in Thailand. Since the Indian Naga appeared earlier, the Indianized School indicates that the prototype of Thailand's Naga came from India.

Conversely, the Local School stresses indigenous serpent worship of Southeast Asia and notes that serpent worship likely existed before Brahmanism and Theravada Buddhism came into Southeast Asia. Wongthes (2003, p.1) takes as evidence snake-wrapped graphics of archaeological artifacts, such as those at Ban Chiang, Udon Thani Province and Ban Kao,

Kanchana Buri Province, which are used as evidence that serpent worship probably existed in prehistoric times in Southeast Asia. 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." (Wongthes, 2003, pp.5-6) Another proponent of the Local School is Phan Anh Tu who observed that serpent stories were very popular among several ethnic groups in Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, which implies that indigenous serpent worship has long existed in Southeast Asia. As a result, Phan indicated that Buddhism peacefully fused with indigenous animism, integrated serpent worship and transformed it into Naga beliefs (Phan, 2016). Chih-Hung Yen (2005, pp. 17-18) also commented that Dvaravati (สมัยทวารวดี) was possibly the first area where Buddha appears in Southeast Asia in the mudra of *Pang Nak Prok* (ปางนาคปรก) where Buddha is seated in meditation upon a coiled Naga whose hood protects him from the rain. This posture could relate to serpent worship at that time.

As demonstrated above, Thailand's Naga developed out of multiple sources, and is not fully Indianized. 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. Simply stated, Buddhism integrated serpent worship and transformed it into Naga belief. For example, Virapaksa (ท้าววิรุฬหก), one of the four great kings in Buddhism, is the leader of Nagas (Ngaosrivathana & Ngaosrivathana, 2009, p.1; Brahmaganabhorn, 2014, p.199; Laomanajarern, 2003, p.152).

2. The Importance of the Naga

The importance of the Naga comes from Thai locals' concepts about sacred animals, which are related to three aspects: sacred animal worship, Buddhist literature, and the Naga totem. Sacred animal worship is a characteristic of ancient civilizations in Southeast Asia. The following passage by Wongted is helpful to understand how ancient Southeast Asians viewed sacred animal worship:

"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." (Wongted, 2013, p.2)

As illustrated previously, Southeast Asian countries generally believed in sacred animals; a frog sculpture on an ancient bronze drum from Indonesia is evidence of this. For Thai locals in particular, their culture has always been closely related to the element of water. In addition, Thais believe that amphibians have the functions of maintaining water sources and conquering evils. For that reason, they produce the deification of amphibians, carve their images, and place them at the entrances of Buddhist temples for the purposes of religion and decoration.

Regarding the relationship between sacred animals and Buddhist literature, the concept of a sacred animal in Thailand has been linked to Buddhism since ancient times, such as the statue of Dvaravati (6–11 AD), which consists of the subject of "Buddha and the magic animal." (The National Museum Bangkok; Yen, 2005, pp.19-20) The sacred animal object extends to

modern times and transforms into a kind of architectural decoration in Buddhist temples, as noted in evidence found in Nimlek's research. Nimlek compared Thai architectural vocabularies with the names of animals or sacred animals, and summarized the results into 32 categories. These architectural vocabularies are sufficient to show that animals and sacred animals are indeed closely related to the architecture of Buddhist temples in the cultural context of Thailand (Nimlek, 2014).

Since the sacred animal is important to Buddhist temples, where does the concept originate? The answer is in Buddhist literature. In the three worlds (ไตรภูมิ) of Buddhism, Buddhists believe that the Himmapan Forest (ป่าหิมพานต์) is located at the foothills of the Sumi Mountain. A variety of magic animals reside there, such as animals that are half-man, half-lion, elephant-headed animals with fish bodies, and so forth. Due to the mysterious power of these sacred animals, Thais are used to placing or painting the images of sacred animals in Buddhist temples to protect the Buddha and the locals.

Having discussed the sacredness and religiousness of Naga, the final section addresses the Naga totem related to the Lao ethnic group in Thailand. Maha Sila Viravong, a famous Lao historian, has discussed the origin of the Lao ethnic group. One of the views is that Lao people were descendants of the Naga, and 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 Lao ethnic group. The aforementioned three factors, namely, sacred animal worship, Buddhist literature, and the Naga totem, shaped the concept of the sacred animals of Thais, which are all related to Naga and also underscores the importance of Naga.

3. Local Wisdom and the Visual Image of Naga

As of the present millennium, "local wisdom" has begun to attract attention in the Thai academic community. So-called local wisdom is a kind of inheritance of life experiences from the ancestors. Local wisdom has underlined the need for protection and promotion in The Preservation and Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act 2559 of Thailand 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.” (Deetes, 2003: 36-47; Prajongsant, 2006: 127; Thai Youth Encyclopedia Project, 2012, p. 1)

The use of the visual image of Naga is the representation of local wisdom; Naga belongs to local wisdom. Many local governments regard the Naga as a local feature and report it to be included in the Thai Intangible Cultural Heritage List, such as the Naga folktale “Phadaeng Nang-Aii” (ตำนานผาแดงนางไอ่) which was listed as an intangible cultural heritage of Thailand in 2011, and the Nanga Festival “Rocket Festival” (ประเพณีบุญบั้ง) which was included in 2013. The reason why the Naga image is so deeply embedded in the lives of Thais is closely related to the Thai people's advocacy of their local wisdom.

Research Methodology

The research method of this study is qualitative research, using iconography to analyze Naga images in Thai visual art. This study collected diversified artworks as the analytical text, including sculptures, murals, emoticons, animations, festivals, amulets, fabrics, exhibition artworks, and so forth. The research purpose is to explore the changes of Naga worship under

the influence of the Internet.

Discussion and Results

One of the concerns of cultural studies is the discussion of cultural phenomena and context. The Naga images in the Naga narratives of Thailand reflect two major cultural systems, namely, Buddhism and serpent worship (Chang, 2017), which also appear in Naga visual arts. The Naga is the guardian in Buddhist stories; thus, much of Naga intangible cultural heritage is embodied in Buddhist temples, such as sculptures, murals, festivals, and Bai Sri. In Naga folktales, because Naga has the magical power to drive away evil spirits, Naga images are often used in Thais' daily necessities to pray for peace. Thai people believe that 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, the author uses Naga images, such as sculptures, murals, emoticons, animations, festivals, amulets, fabrics, and exhibition artworks, to observe the changes produced by them, and discuss the relationship between social phenomena and cultural context, especially the influence of the Internet on the culture. Various Naga visual arts were collected in this study, as shown in Table 1.

1. Naga Visual Art

According to Table 1, Naga images are widely used in the daily lives of Thais, especially in Thai temple architectural ornaments, where they usually appear on gable boards, murals, *hanghong* (หางหงส์), along the tiers of temple roofs, and on brackets or stairs leading to the main shrine. In the famous story, *Muscalinda Sutta: About Muccalinda*, Naga protects Buddha, and this has shaped Naga's image as a guardian. Because of this, in Buddhist temples, as long as things related to Triratna are common, Nagas always guard them side by side, especially at entrances, such as doors, windows, stairs, and so forth. These Naga decorations are not only beautiful, but enhance the solemn atmosphere of Buddhist temples (Bovornkitti, 2005).

Naga worship has many meanings in the Thai cultural context. Tambiah analyzed the Naga symbol in Northeast Thailand, and found that the Naga had different cultural meanings and beliefs in various Buddhist rituals and the cult of the guardian spirits (Tambiah, 1970, pp. 300-301). These folk beliefs are directly displayed in the performance of visual art. According to Sanboon's survey, in which he investigated the Buddhist temple works along the Mekong River basin on the border of Thailand and Laos, he found that the Naga was often used in the decoration of Buddhist temples (Sanboon, 2010). This phenomenon originates in serpent worship; since the Naga forms part of local traditional belief, local artists love to use Naga images as design elements in Buddhist temples, such as *Pang Nak Prok* (ปางนาคปรก, the image of the Buddha in the posture of being protected by the Naga), Naga stairs and sculptures, and so forth. As mentioned above, the Naga symbol has a religious function and could protect Triratna and followers. This is the traditional impression given by Naga visual art.



However, due to the network feature which is popular and moves rapidly, applications of Naga visual art are no longer limited to serving religious purposes. Thais believe that the Naga, in addition to the image of the Naga protecting Buddha, is also the lord of the land and can bring wealth. Hence, the guardian images of the Naga are more widely used in festival performances and on the Internet, such as in emoticons and animations, to show different










cultural contexts and meanings.

As noted in Table 1, compared with the early image of the Naga, the important change of the Naga's visual expression shows the transformation of Naga art from having a religious function to a cultural function. This means that Naga has become an art form. Although early Naga sculptures had two styles, namely Khmer style (แบบเขมร) and Thai style (or Thai painting pattern, ลายไทย), its artistic characteristics would not be highlighted. When Naga's art form is stressed, Naga art is still based on Buddhist doctrines and myths; however, it pursues multiple changes in shape. For example, the sculptures in Table 1 (see No. 2, No. 3, and No. 11) are obviously different from traditional Naga models; the former pays more attention to the creation of expressions, lines, and color.

It should be noted that Naga became a kind of art, and in the process the religious function of Naga and the mode of transmission also changed. The Naga sign has become part of the cultural industry, and was widely used in fields outside Buddhist temples, as well as on the Internet, such as in emoticons (see No. 8), animations (see No. 9), costumes (see No. 12), or in the performance of contemporary art (see No. 13). Simply put, in terms of cultural context, once Naga became a kind of art embedded in the cultural industry, it was naturally connected to the Internet. This leads to a change in the cultural meaning of Naga, which is different from previous religious connotations.

Table 1. Naga Visual Art

No.	Category	Naga Visual Art	Cultural Context	Source of Figure
1	Sculpture		Buddhism	Photo by the author, Wat Pho Si, Nakhon Phanom Province
2	Sculpture		Buddhism	Photo by the author, Wat Pa Sala Wan, Khorat Province
3	Sculpture		Buddhism	Photo by the author, Sala Keoku Park, Nongkai Province
4	Sculpture		Buddhism	Photo by the author, Wat Thai, Nongkai Province

5	Sculpture		Buddhism	Photo by the author, Wat Luang, Ubon Ratchathani Province
6	Sculpture		Buddhism	Photo by the author, Wat Thung Sawang, Nongkai Province
7	Mural		Buddhism, Serpent worship	Photo by the author, Wat Pho Chai, Nongkai Province
8	Emoticon		Hinduism	Worawit Nu Photo Book https://www.facebook.com/worawitt.nu/
9	Animation		Buddhism	https://www.youtube.com/c/iDream945/videos
10	Festival		Buddhism	Photo by the author, Nakhon Phanom Province
11	Amulet		Serpent worship	Photo by the author, Cha studio, Nongkai Province
12	Fabric		Serpent worship	Photo by the author, Nakhon Phanom Province
13	Exhibition Artwork		Serpent worship	Photo by the author, Korakrit Arunanondchai, created in 2015, exhibited in Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts in 2019

2. The Analysis of Iconology

Focusing on "Naga" as a sign, its visual designs, structures, and cultural significance can be understood through the analysis of iconology. Panofsky regards visual symbols as cultural symbols and explores the essence of thought behind iconography through a process "act of interpretation." It contains three levels of "pre-iconographical description," "iconographical analysis," and "iconological interpretation," which are related to each other. In this study, the author applied Panofsky's methodology to analyze the Naga images of Table 1 and organized the three levels of iconology as shown in Table 2. It presents a set of thinking processes to view Naga visual art from shallow to deep (as shown in Table 2) to understand its cultural context. The points are as follows.

2.1. Pre-iconographical Description

This part focuses on the visual designs of the Naga sign, which are also the easiest part of understanding Naga art. There are primarily two styles of Naga, Thai style and Khmer style, as shown in the Naga sculptures (No. 1 to No. 6) in Table 1. Both styles are different as shown in the statues of *Pang Nak Prok*. The *Pang Nak Prok* statue has been popular since the Dvaravati period (6–11 centuries AD); for example, the Buddha image in the Angkor Temple belongs to the Khmer style. Northeast Thailand was once ruled by the Angkor Empire; therefore, the Khmer style of the Naga is still seen in Thailand. Thai-style was subsequently developed, which gradually replaced the Khmer-shaped Naga and became the mainstream design in Thailand.

The main difference between the Thai and Khmer styles of the *Pang Nak Prok* statues lie in the shapes of the Nagas. The heads of the Khmer style Nagas were shaped as a bodhi leaf, while in the Thai style the shape of the bodhi leaf changes into a radiating light (Fig. 1, Fig. 2). Thai Naga, a serpent with a crest (หงอน) on its head, created a new look compared with the shape of the Khmer style. In addition, Thai craftsmen always give Naga vivid expressions, and thus they do not look as fierce as the Khmer Naga. These design changes have evolved the Thai Naga into a new style.

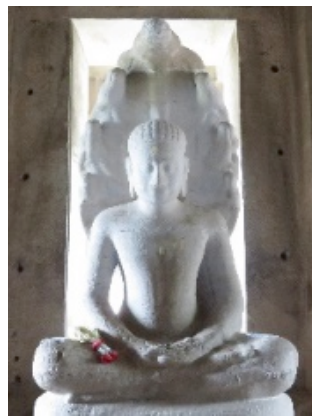


Figure 1: Khmer Style of the *Pang Nak Prok*
Source: Photo by the Author



Figure 2: Thai Style of the *Pang Nak Prok*
Source: Photo by the Author

2.2. Iconographic Analysis

The second part is to explore the composition of the Naga sign and other structural elements. For ancient Naga arts, including in India, Khmer, and Thailand, the Naga image always

appeared with other deities, such as Buddha or Vishnu, as shown in Table 1 (No. 7, No. 8). However, the Naga images of Thailand are influenced by serpent worship; consequently, the Naga images of Thailand's narratives can be divided into two types: images from Buddhist stories, and those from indigenous stories. The main difference between the two types is the Naga's behavior after converting to Buddhism (Chang, 2017, p.19). For the locals, Naga is not only a sacred animal, but also a local protector; hence, the Naga could be made into an independent statue for worship in Thailand.

The large seven-headed King Naga statue of Nakhon Phanom (Fig. 3), built in 2016, whose structure is based on the image of Naga spraying water, is not attached to any Buddha statues. For the locals, Naga, the mythical serpent, is their guardian who lives in the Mekong River; thus, the Naga statue is situated at the riverfront area, facing the Mekong River. The Naga shape of spraying water is the sign of fertile land to symbolize that the Naga protects the local community to develop smoothly (Karnjanatawe, 2016). It is a reform of the structure of Naga art, changing the visual shape of Naga through art.

While the Naga has become the subject of art, it has been endowed with "humanism," just like the Naga images of indigenous stories with mixed feelings as people. In recent years, Naga drama has been popular in Thailand. The Naga has not only become the protagonist of TV and movies, but has also been included in popular songs, which are constantly viewed and listened to on the Internet. These creations are inspired by the Naga indigenous stories, emphasizing the humanity of Nagas. The most famous Thai drama is "Nakii" (เจ้าแม่นาจี), a story about the Naga Queen, produced in 2016 (Fig. 4). In the interpretation of the iconology, the Nakii drama displayed the interactive relationship with the human world, representing the humanism of Naga, which is different from traditional religious characteristics of the Naga.



Figure 3: Seven-Headed Naga King
Source: Photo by the Author



Figure 4: Nakii Sstill

Source: <https://www.sanook.com/news/>

2.3. Iconological Interpretation

After discussing how to view the visual designs and structures of the Naga sign, the next step is to explore the cultural significance of Nagas. As far as the deep meaning of the Naga image is concerned, due to the influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and folk beliefs, the Naga contains multiple cultural meanings under the cultural contexts of Buddhism and serpent worship. Saipan divided the cultural meaning of Naga into five categories when he researched Naga in Northeast Thailand: a creator and destroyer, an ancestor of the clan, a lord of water, a guard of Buddha, and a spiritual cultivator (Phan, 2016, p.155, 164). A variety of cultural meanings can be found in the Naga of Thailand based on Saphan's analysis, all of which are related to the two cultural contexts of Buddhism and serpent worship.

According to Table 1, the cultural meanings behind Naga images could be understood by iconological interpretation. For example, the stairs of the Buddhist temple are the entrance to the holy realm. It is said that Naga is the stair between heaven and the human realm. The Buddha once stepped on the body of Naga to Trayastrimsa to spread the teachings of Buddhism to his mother. At the same time, people believe that after death, they can go to heaven through the Naga stair (Pritasuwan, 2014, p. 5); for the reason, the Naga stair is often created at the entrance to symbolize the passage to heaven (No. 5, Table 1). Among Naga stairs, the most distinctive is the half-human half-Naga stair (see No. 4, Table 1), which is related to the folk literature of Northeast Thailand. Thais believe Nagas with magical powers could be transformed into human form. Given this legend, local artists created the human-shaped Naga stair, reflecting the imagination of the locals (Fig. 5).

Bai Sri (บายศรี, No. 5, Table 1) is an exquisite container made of banana leaves. It is often used in important ceremonies. Residents in Northeastern Thailand believe the Naga is the incarnation of a holy monk Uppakrut (พระอุปกต) who can drive away devils (Tambiah, 1970, p.170); therefore, they often make Bai Sri in the Naga style to symbolize an invitation to Uppakrut to guard the proceedings, praying that everything proceeds smoothly during ceremonies. Meanwhile, Naga is a symbol of "power," especially for the locals that live along the Mekong River basin. Since Nagas could bless the locals, they added the Naga patterns on the fabric as a totem of protection. Thais also make fire boats shaped like Nagas to sail during the Fire Boat Festival (ประเพณีไหลเรือไฟ) to pray for Naga's protection. In addition, the emoticon and exhibition artworks shown in Table 1 (No. 8, No. 13) show that Naga images

tend to be more contemporary and cartoonish due to the influence of the Internet, which differs from the traditional serious religious spirits.

Overall, the Naga has multiple cultural meanings in the cultural context of Thailand; however, Naga has gradually become a work of art under the influence of the cultural industry and the Internet, which makes its cultural significance richer than before. At the same time, the way people perceive it is no longer limited to the definition of religion and the real world. Instead, they learn about the Naga through dramas, animations, contemporary arts, or the virtual world.



Figure 5: Half-Human Half-Naga Stair, Wat Thai, Thailand

Source: Photo by the Author

Table 2. The Analysis of Naga Iconology

Act of Interpretation	Panofsky's theoretical terminology	Explanation
Pre-iconographical description	Primary subject matter	The iconography related to Nagas
Iconographical analysis	Secondary subject matter	The structural analysis of Naga iconographies
Iconological interpretation	Intrinsic meaning	The cultural meanings of Naga

Reference source: Panofsky (1955, pp.40-41)

3. 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, p.155)

According to the aforementioned, the cultural meanings of Naga have always followed religious interpretations. The main image of Thai Nagas stems from Thai literature, especially the Himmapan forest. In the concept of the three worlds, Buddhists believe that a variety of magical animals reside in Himmapan forest, and the Naga is one of them. For Thais, the Naga is the main guardian of the Buddha, however, as society changes, the Naga has become part of the cultural industry. In order to cater to commercial purposes, the religious Naga gradually turned to artistic and dramatic development, which made people feel cordial and

affected people's cognition of the Naga. The Internet strengthened the virtual nature of the Naga, especially since many audiences now choose to learn about Naga from dramas, animations, popular songs, and works of art on the Internet, which could form some cognitive biases. These cognitive risks could cause the virtual Naga images created in the online world to be deemed believable; it could obscure the religious meaning of Naga and ignore the importance of Buddhist scriptures in the real world.

This situation is 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, 2008a: 194) Howard emphasized that online media participated in and has caused a qualitative change in folk activities, because it intermingles vernacular, commercial, and institutional interests (Blank, 2012, p. 3).

In the age before the invention of the Internet, Buddhist stories and their authenticity were discussed in academic circles, and different opinions exist. For example, Nicolas Revire (2018), Donald Stadtner (2011), and others have examined Buddhist stories from the perspectives of archaeology or history. However, in the online world, the Internet has not only changed the way Buddhism is spread, but also allowed more unconstrained interpretations of Buddhist scriptures. As the Naga case discussed in this study shows, for the Naga, the Naga images are indeed influenced by the cultural industry and the Internet, making it less and less religious and more artistic, which also leads to the cultural meanings of Naga being changed on the Internet.

Conclusion

Naga is a cultural image of Thailand, as well as an auspicious symbol of ordinary life. Naga visual art is an important element in the Buddhist temples of Thailand, and is also often used in the ordinary lives of Thais. Naga visual arts could be understood through the analysis of iconology. The author used a variety of visual arts as texts to explore images of the Naga, and applied Panofsky's methodology to analyze the Naga images, which presents a set of thinking processes to gaze at Naga visual art from shallow to deep. This article aims to use iconography to analyze Naga images of visual art in Thailand, and to explore the changes that Naga worship has undergone under the influence of the Internet. Research results show two important changes: (1) in terms of cultural context, the cultural meaning of Naga images has changed on the Internet, making it part of the cultural industry, which is differs from previous religious connotations; and (2) in the spread of Buddhism, the Internet has led to changes in the way the Buddhist doctrine is diffused, including different interpretations of Naga images, which is challenged by virtual worlds.

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