

The Spiritual Faithfulness of Naga Serpents, from Legend to Beliefs: Udon Thani, Mukdahan, and Nakhon Phanom Provinces

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Abstract

The academic article's objectives aim to present 1) the meaning of the legend and beliefs of the Naga Serpent 2) the influence of Spiritual Faithfulness beliefs of the Naga Serpent in Thai society 3) the types of Naga Serpents. Udon Thani, Mukdahan, and Nakhon Phanom contain a diversity of tourist attractions, namely, Naga City, its unique cultures, fascinating natural destinations, and well-prepared facilities. The New Normal tourism must focus on domestic tourism, it could be a crucial opportunity for the province. In addition, some spiritual tourism is also soft power and a main spiritual tourist destination for 3 main provinces.

Keywords: Spiritual Faithfulness, Naga Serpent, Legend, Beliefs

Introduction

If we take a look at everything in this world as an illusion, we are humans to create a world of meaning, which has become the real world followed by thoughts legacy of the German philosopher (Immanuel Kant). An epistemology characterized by phenomenism may help in understanding the story of human beliefs. Some groups have a clearer relationship with the Naga without trying to find out whether the story is

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true or not because of the physical world or the real world. It is a complex world far beyond the reach of humans. This world will have no meaning until humans learn the real world through an intermediary until it becomes after the experience, the meaning of things arises. The intermediary mentioned here refers to various social institutions such as family, school, religion, state, and mass media that have served to create meaning for various things, whether events, objects, or even dreams. These are all realities that make up the social or symbolic world which is a world that humans can explain, to give meaning or perceive meaning (Kanchana, 2017) just like the story of the Naga Serpent may be the truth of one group of people, while it may be the imagination of another group of people. The strong belief and faith of the people of the Mekong River Basin make the story of the Naga reflected empirically from human imagination transmitted through various fields of art and culture such as architecture, sculpture, painting, ritual, literature, etc. (Sudarat & Patthamavadi, 2019). Moreover, in the present time, there is a trend of Naga Serpent's popularity to create a variety of viewpoints in society. It is not viewed as a superstitious story, but it can be viewed as the dynamic relationship between humans and Nagas Between the human way of life and nature conservation through symbols in the dimension of belief (Suchart Buschayanon, 2021), making tourist attractions that have stories related to the Naga Serpent has people flocking to visit to pay homage. Some come to pray for wealth, luck, good fortune, and good work, such as at Wat Pho Chai Temple, Phra That Bang Phuan, and Phra That La Nong in Nong Khai Province (Wattanaphan, 2014). If we look at the corner of tourism, this phenomenon has a positive effect on the economy of the community and spreads to the economy of the region and country. It is also consistent with the 20-year national strategy for tourism that promotes tourism marketing. Travel by presenting the uniqueness of Thailand and each locality to be understood on the world stage through media, creativity, and innovation in various media, including promoting the communication of stories that are unique to each region and various provinces through brand development and creative communication of

stories through well-known marketing channels among the target group (Office of the Secretary of the National Strategy Committee Office of the Development Commission National Economy and Society, 2019).

The above information indicates the importance of the Naga Serpent's belief that has influenced Thailand in the past and even now to understand more clearly the beliefs about the Naga Serpent in the context of Thai society, especially in the three main upper Northeastern Provinces: Udon Thani, Makdahan and Nakhon Phanom Province. The author would like to present the meaning of belief Types of beliefs in the Thai social context Belief in the Naga in the context of Thai society and the influence of the belief in the Naga that is evident in Thailand. The information presented was documents related to the Naga Serpent's beliefs, including an interview with an expert on Naga Serpent's beliefs. Then the data was synthesized according to the guidelines of John Scott (John Scott), which consists of (1) Authenticity (2) Credibility (3) Representativeness, and (4) Meaning (Scott, 2006).

Naga Serpent's Belief in the Context of Thai Society

Etymologically, the word "Naga" is derived from the Hindustani language, written and pronounced as "Nag" meaning "hill tribe", in Assamese it is written as "Naga", pronounced, "Nog", meaning "naked" (Jit Phumisak, 2019). The Department of Cultural Promotion defined the meaning "Naga" as a large snake with a crest that lives in a deep underwater city (Mueang Badan) and can transform into a human. The Naga Serpent is the greatest leader and is called "Phaya Naga" or "Nagaraj", female Nagas are called "Nagi" and male Nagas are called "naga" (Thepkampanat, 2021). The superstition of Nagas that appears in Thai society overall is that the Naga Serpent is a demi-god with supernatural powers, and can transform into humans or other animals according to conditions. It is a symbol of water and abundance (Wichian, 2011). Furthermore, the Naga Serpent is also an animal that serves to preserve and protect Buddhism, including being the creator of Mekong River and the city or important communities on both-side land of Mekong River,

such as Nong Kham Saen, Nong Krasae Yan, Nong Kok, Bueng Khong Long, and Kham Chanod (Khampui Phonluecha, 2000).

The characteristics of the Naga Serpent can be specified into 9 characteristics as follows: (1) naga has a crest (2) Naga has scales (3) Naga has a tail (4) naga has a long body (5) Naga looks like a big snake (6) Naga looks like a semi-divine animal (7) Naga looks like a god (8) Naga looks like an Opapatika (9) Naga can transform shapeshifter. An example of the description of the Naga Serpent's characteristics in the book named "The Legend of the Naga and Khamcha Nod, the Entrance to a Deep Underwater City" describes the characteristics of the Naga as follows:

"The Naga Serpent is a large snake with a crest and extremely poisonous. It is considered a god with the power and power to create itself into its form Anything" (Chote & Krirk, 2017).

In addition, many noble monks have told many stories about the characteristics of the Naga Serpent, for example, Luang Pu Chob Thansamo (Abbot named Chob) of Wat Pa Sammanusorn Temple, Ban Khok Mon Village, Pha Noi Subdistrict, Wang Saphung District, Loei Province, described the characteristics of the Naga. When he was alone at Doi Phra Phutthabat Si Roi, he said:

"This Naga when he raised his head to the meditation path, he put his tail over another mountain for him to see. It feels big and long. He said that this Naga had come to show himself to you as a full-fledged Naga. It has a red crest and a panel. It is like that of a horse. The body is large and long. The scales are black and shiny" (Suriphan, 2009).

Luang Pu Kham Khaning Chulmanee (Abbot named Kham) Wat of Tham Khuha Sawan Temple, Khong Chiam Subdistrict, Khong Chiam District, Ubon Ratchathani Province had told regarding the characteristics of the Nagas Serpent when they invaded the city of Nagas, it is stated that

"The Naga Serpent is a mysterious creature, is half beast and half god, very powerful, also able to transform the body from young man and a beautiful young woman. Naga Serpent also likes to make merit in Buddhism" (Siddha, 1983).

Get to know "Naga" according to Buddhist beliefs

The belief in the Naga has existed since the Sukhothai period because it appears in famous religious literature such as Tribhum Phra Loi, stating that the Naga resembles a large snake but has a crest, red eyes, and multi-colored scales. They are divided into two types: Talcha, a Naga Serpent born on land, and Cholcha, a Naga born in water. According to legend, The serpent is a beast that cannot attain dharma. It is classified in the Sukhthipum faction, dwelling in the heavenly Jatu Maharashika. The highest dwelling is only the Jatu Maharashika Heaven, which is considered to be the first heaven.

The family tree of the Naga Serpent

According to legend, different forms of the Naga serpents are mentioned, but most of them are categorized into 4 species as follows:

1. **Virupak family** Nagas with golden body skin is the highest class of Nagas, born in

the form of Oppatika, that is, spontaneous and mature with power and merit. The family tree is "Thao Virupak", one of the four great kings who ruled the Jatu Maharashika heaven on the west side. The serpents of this family are well known, such as Phaya Suwannagaraj. Payamujlintnagraj

2. **Erapatha family** The Naga family has a green body skin. The noble serpent is born

in the form of Oppatika or testicles, that is, born from an egg bubble, similar in size to the golden family of serpents, living in the bowels of the earth not very deeply, is the most common family and closest to humans, likes to travel on the human world, resulting in many love legends with humans. It can also become a ruling-class serpent. The best-known serpent of this family is Phaya Sri Sutthonagaraj of Wang Nakin Kamchanod.

3. **Chappayaputta family** Naga family with iridescent body skin or scales. Most of

them are born in the Chalapush style, that is, born from the womb, living in the bowels or deep forests.

4. **Kanhakotama clan** The Naga Serpent family, whose body skin or scales are black

onyx, are born in the Sangsethcha style, i.e. born from sweat and various fermentations, or the testicles are born from eggs, often with a burly body, responsible for guarding the treasures of the bowels. But if you persevere to a great extent, you can also become a ruling serpent. The best-known serpent of this family is the Black Lord Sansiri Chandranagaraj, the warrior king of the bowels of the city.

In addition, the serpent has been divided into 1,024 sub-families, namely snake-type reptiles king cobra All snakes, pythons, and snakes are considered descendants of the serpent.

The Nine Naga Serpent kings, rulers of the earth

As for the Naga serpent in the bowels of the earth, According to legend, nine Naga kings ruled as follows:

1. Phaya **Anantanagaraj** is the lord of the bowels with 1,000 heads, the king of all

Nagas in the Samut Retirement, often transformed into a human form, beautiful shape, always according to King Vishnu also known as Raga or Rag Naga, it is a serpent that curls up into a throne platform for Lord Vishnu to be the origin of "Vishnu Bantamsin".

2. Phaya **Mujlntnagraj** is a very powerful serpent living at Bok Khorani Pond near the

Mujlint tree.

3. Lord **Visut** Deva is the royal serpent of Lord Shiva or Shiva belonging to the

Chappaya Putta family.

4. **Phaya Sri Sutthonagaraj** He has emerald green body skin and 9 golden heads, the

ruler of Nong Lai is on the Thai side and has 5,000 servants. Later, there was a seven-year battle over the unfair division of food. Indra ended the war by having the two serpents build rivers against each other. Phaya Sri Sutthonagaraj then escorted his servants to evacuate from Nong Lai. Build a river heading east of the swamp stream. When you

reach a mountainous place, you can bend along the mountain, or you may pass through the mountain depending on the difficulty. In creation, Paya Sri Suddhanagaraj was impatient. This river is therefore crooked. It is called the "Mekong River".

5. **Phaya Si Sattanagaraj** It is believed to be the king of the Mekong serpent on the Lao side with seven heads. It is close to Buddha and Buddhism and is considered to be the family tree of all serpents. There are 5,000 servants, a serpent who likes to keep the precepts of meditation and always comes to Wat Phra That Phanom (Temple of The Holy Relics of Nakhon Phanom).

6. **Phaya Phet Phatra Nakraj** or Phaya Klet Kaewnakraj is a serpent with a silver body skin like glass. It has a red crest and head, one head, and is the son of Lord Anantanagaraj.

7. **The black serpent Sansiri Chandra Nagaraj** is the black serpent of the Kanhakotma family. It has a black body surface, ninety thousand years old.

8. **Phaya Yasmannagaraj or Phaya Yasman** Rayanagaraj is the son of Phaya Anantanagaraj and Princess Saroesangiri. Phayapakin Nagaraj and Phaya Narubdinnakraj Phaya Yasman Nagaraj It was given by the sea god, thus making him a major in battle.

9. **Payagarta Sri Devanagaraj** He was one of the great army, beautiful, insightful, and able to stand out. He was a man of the warrior nation, brilliant and possessing the greatest wisdom. His body is all golden, with nine heads, a huge bouncing body, great strength, and a penchant for hibernation. Vivek loves solitude and adheres to the truth.

The Beliefs of Floating Fire Boat Festival (Lai Rua Fai) Nakhon Phanom Province

The Lai Rua Fai tradition is a tradition that the Nakhon Phanom people are proud of because their ancestors have practiced it since

ancient times. It is believed in tradition that it is due to the worship of Lord Buddha Footprint (Roy). Lord Buddha's footprint, worship of Thao Paka Brahma, worship of Chulamani relics, and commemoration of Goddess Ganga's grace, asking for rain, burning fire to suffering, and worshipping Buddha.

Some fire boat flow traditions are called "fire boats", "floating fire boats", or "launching fire boats", which is how fire boats move continuously. A fireboat or fire boat refers to a boat made of banana logs, bamboo, or floating material, there are structures in various shapes as needed. When a structure is set on fire, the flame takes shape according to that structure. The fireboat tradition is commonly practiced during Buddhist Lent on the 15th day of the 11th month or the 1st evening of the 11th month.

Regarding beliefs about Roy's worship (Lord Buddha's Footprint), the Lord Buddha stamped the Putthabat on the banks of the Nammatanti River. In the Indian, Thaksina Chapter believes that when the Naga Serpent asked Aradhana Buddha to perform Dharma in the Naga world. When he returned, the serpent asked him, stamping his footprints on the banks of the Nammatantee River, he placed them according to the will of the naga serpent. This footprint is revered by human angels and animals who need charity. For this reason, the flow of the fire boat is considered to be to worship the footprints of the Buddha, which is worshiped as *"A Hang Inima Pathipena Nammagaya Natiya Puleni Patavaanchan Abhipushemi Ayang Pathipena Munino Patavaanchang Pusha Maihang Teekarattang Hi Taya Suzaya Sangvatkutu"*

It means that I worship the footprints of Lord Muni who are enshrined on the sandy beach of The Nammatan River is overflowing with this lamp. May the worship of His Majesty the King with a lamp. This time, be it for the benefit and happiness of all of us for a long time. (www.finearts.go.th)

The Beliefs of Naga Serpents in Mukdahan Province

Mukdahan Province is a border province with a border adjacent to the Mekong River. (Mukdahan Provincial Office, 2018) in which people

living in the Mekong River Basin believe and believe in the Naga Serpents. This can be seen from the Naga appearing in Sacred places through various symbols It can be found in the architecture of Buddhist temples. Source Tourist attractions or important places in the province include:

- 1) The Naga Shrine was established at the 2nd Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in Amphur Mueang
- 2) Phraya Sri Mukda Mahamunini Nipala Nakharaj at Wat Roy Phra Phutthabat Phu Manorom (Phu Manorom Lord Buddha's Footprints, Amphur Mueang
- 3) Phaya Sri Phuchong Mukdanakaraj, Wan Yai District
- 4) Pu (Grandfather) Ong Nakaraj at Wat Dan Phra In, Nikhom Kha Soi District
- 5) Pu (Grandfather) and Ong Ya (Grandmother) Nakharaj, Lan Na Kee and Naka, Wat Pa Phu Hang, Nikhom Kha Soi District
- 6) Pu (Grandfather) Phet Phattana Nakaraj Buddha image, Nikhom Kham Soi District
- 7) Ong Pu (Grandfather) Nakathibodi, Wat Wen Chai Temple, Don Tan District.

In this article, Wat Roy Phra Phutthabat Phu Manorom (Temple of The Holy Relics of Lord Buddha of Phu Manorom), due to history and belief that there were the Naga Serpents who believed in Buddhism but could not be ordained, so Phaxa Nagaraj was created to provide care and care for the Big Buddha. Therefore, it was made to be a representative of the Naga Serpents' belief. Buddhist way and the Naga Shrine, Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge No. 2 because Vishnu and various deities are worshiped together with worshiping the Naga Serpent. Therefore, it was made to represent the belief in the Naga Serpents in the Brahman way.

The birth of the Naga Serpents has many characteristics as shown in the guidelines of Buddhism, there are 4 characteristics as follows:

1. Oppatika type: born and grows up at the same time
2. Sangsetcha type: born from sweat and accumulated things
3. Chalapucha form: born from the womb
4. Testacha form: born from egg foam

In the Naga Serpents' belief in Buddhism, there is a Naga Serpent worship ceremony along with various traditions such as The End of Buddhist Lent, which is the end of the Buddhist Lent period or leaving the

living place during the rainy season, which falls on the 15th day of the waxing moon of the month 11, is also called “Mahapavarana Day” is known as “Pavarana” meaning “permit” or “allow”, meaning the day when an opportunity for monks to correct and admonish one another in terms of mistakes and harassment during the Buddhist Lent together on the day. At this end of Buddhist Lent, villagers often do the following: Charitable acts such as making merit by offering alms to monks, arranging flowers, incense sticks, and candles to worship for monks at the temple, and listening to sermons. The favorite items that the people like to give alms mostly are steamed sticky rice, matai, and Khao Tom Luk Yon, and to participate in charity committee “Tak Bat Devo” is called “Devo” which is an abbreviation of “Devolahana” meaning to depart from the world of giving. Tak Bat Devolahana therefore commemorates the day when the Lord Buddha returned from Tavatimsa Heaven from his visit to the mother (Dhamma Pitaka, 2008).

The Origin and Beliefs of Naga Serpents in Udon Thani Province

Belief in the Naga Serpent is another one of the outstanding basic beliefs of the Isan people. It is believed that the Naga Serpent is in the world's sacred underground and can cause rain to fall in the entire universe consisting of the oceans, the earth, and Himmaphan forests. Nagas therefore often symbolically appear in sacred places. It can be found in the architecture of temples in Buddhism and important Khmer civilization castles spread out in the northeast such as Phanom Rung Sanctuary Castle in Buriram Province (Temple of The Great Mountain), Phimai Sanctuary Stone Castle, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. There is also an image of the Naga stretching along the railing (Jittakorn, 2002).

Rituals are symbolic media that express reality, most of the rituals are related to the daily way of life. It is a belief of local people who often claim to have beliefs that are held and practiced through generations and in the northeastern region, it can be seen that there is a variety of beliefs and worship of sacred things and another thing that Isan people respect and worship is beliefs and ceremonies related to the Naga Serpents

(Sumet Methawitthayanukul, 1989), especially beliefs and ceremonies in the community Khamchanot.

Khamchanot has the appearance of an island, located in Baan Non-Mueang area, Baan Mueang Subdistrict, Baan Dung District, Udon Thani Province, the last year 2016, a phenomenon that became famous around the world occurred because the Khamchanot area taken up with the legend about the Naga Serpent. The drama scene is called “Nakee Khamchanot” a place where people are interested and has become a tourist attraction that is a city of legends abound in stories of divinity and miracles. In addition, people who believe in the Naga Serpents also come, not just for vows. If you still wish to bring the holy water at Khamchanot to treat the disease, some bring it to worship at home. These things have increased our confidence and faith in holiness even more.

The community in Khamchanot has beliefs related to Buddhism beyond supernatural things and the Naga, there is still belief in ghosts and mysterious things, although it has begun to decrease a lot. It may be that these things cannot meet human needs or respond but do not get enough to meet the needs Therefore, Buddhism provides mental stability and is like the purpose of life is a matter of Dhamma principles. It has an important connection with abundance, but for the story, the Naga Serpent is considered to still have dense beliefs. and think that the Naga Serpent has the power to grant both benefit and harm but how do also believe that the Naga Serpent can also bring good fortune and can respond to people's wishes. “Phaya Srisuttho” plays an important role in tradition and society which is a role in the real way of life of the Khamchanot community that believes, is a Naga Serpent who resides in the Nakarin Palace (Khamchanot). He can transform into humans and other animals and has the power of inspiration. The abundance of human cities from the community's belief in Lord Naga Srisuttho is a ritual in the style of Buddhism, the Brahman style, the spirit and angel style. The community therefore practices its beliefs through rituals to express faith ritual regarding the Naga Serpent in Khamchanot during the year there will be traditions that the community wants to communicate nature and sacred

things because it is believed that Phaya Srisuttho is the one who controls the rain and nature. Therefore, offerings were made to Phaya Naga Sri Sutho every year for the good fortune of the village and people in the community.

Conclusion

Beliefs about the Naga Serpent in Khamchanot is a study of stories of beliefs. People's faith in the Naga Serpent in Khamchanot is considered a famous sacred place in Udon Thani Province and the Northeastern region people believe that the Naga Serpent can inspire auspicious and inspiring success in various things, which is in line with Chitkorn, (2002). The story of the Naga Serpent is one of the outstanding basic beliefs of the Isan people. It is believed that the Naga Serpent is in the deep underground world. Holy, can cause rain to fall on the entire universe, The Naga Serpents often appear symbolically in sacred places from the architecture of Buddhist temples and important Khmer civilization castles scattered in the northeast.

Ritual regarding the Naga Serpent in Khamchanot is a combination of rituals, namely the Buddhist style. Brahman, spirit, and angel type because the people who performed the ritual believed that the Naga Si Suttho was the ruler of the city of Khamchanot. He can give villages, villagers, and people peace and tranquility. Performing the ritual is, therefore, a tradition of sacrifice and feasting, Phraya Naga Srisuttho continuing regularly every year for good fortune both for yourself and your family. In making that vow, it is believed that if a person does not make an offering to the Grandfather as he has prayed or vowed, that person may be punished in conflict. No matter what you do, there will be conflicts. and may not succeed as intended, which is consistent with the theory of symbolic relations. Mead said that society is a coordinated pattern of human activities which maintains.

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