

## **From Meditation Hamlet to the Kowitharam Buddhist Temple for Heritage Tourism**

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### **Introduction**

After the coronavirus, Thai government emphasizes the “soft power, which includes heritage for Tourism. This article aims to highlight how the meditation hamlet of abbot Naga, Buddhist monk of Mahawanaram Temple of Ubon Ratchathani province during 1950-1970 had become the Mongkolkowitharam Buddhist Temple as a part of the invention of Naga for Heritage Tourism.

People, who live along Mekong river believe in giant serpents or naga. However, Tales of serpents or giant snakes is a part of Ancient wisdom, such as, India and North Africa consider snakes as fertilize of agricultural ritual. Thai Buddhist has Naga legend, which originated in Ehai lake at Dali city of Yunnan province, People’s Republic of China (PRC). There are 5 clan of Naga. Later on, they quarrel to each other’s and left their homeland. The Mun river, which is a tributary of the Mekong river at Ubon Ratchathani province is home of Dhamunnaga, who is stubborn. On the other hand, Buddhist legend mentions the Naga to protect the Lord Buddha from rain during his meditation until reaching enlightenment. Thai Buddhist also believes that Naga is “the Buddhist protector.”

Professor Herman Oldenburg studies toward Nagas, which were demoniacal beings, were -wolves and centaur (Fergusson, 1873:2). Ancient civilizations narrate relationship between human and snakes at Niles, Mesopotamia and Sindhu. Ancient Egyptians symbol snakes as healer. (Retief,2005:190) During 1,500-600 B.C., India continent is the first place to have serpent cult. (Oldham,1905; Vogel,2015) Native people of Northern India called themselves as: Naga.”

As the sample of syncretism, present abbot of the Mongkolkowitharam Buddhist Temple invents the Naga to guard the temple and to please “the

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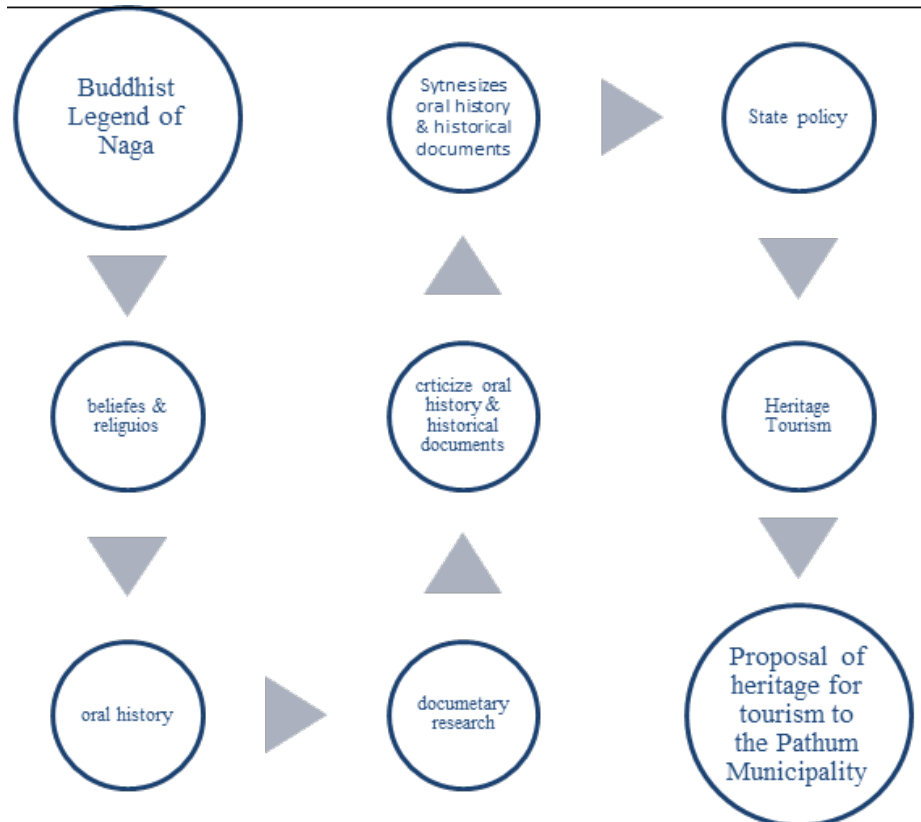
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Thai soft power”. (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (Public Organization,2022). This explains how the Buddhist monk links Buddhist Naga into heritage for Tourism.

### Methodology

Conceptual framework



### Research methodologies

The researchers use historical methodologies to explore the study, which synthesize documentary researches and oral history. Historical methodologies have 4 stages. Firstly, team research gathers historical documents related to topic. Secondly, team research classifies historical document toward topic studies. Then, team research analyses, and synthesizes historical document and writes research. Lastly, team research presents the outcome in this paper.

### Results and Discussion

Researchers discover 4 results that firstly, the Naga Buddhist monk was born in Champassak province of French Lao colony. He is novice and is

a monk, who is very famous. During World War II to late Vietnam War, he is an abbot of Mahawanaram temple at Tambon Naimueang, Amphurmueang of Ubon Ratchathani province. He is a pioneer to do meditate at the east of Mueang Ubon Ratchathani nearby Hueysai canal or Hueywongnong (Wongnong creek) at Hueywongnong village. (Saichalee, 2022)

Abbot Naga took the novices to do meditation and slept at the meditation Hamlet. He taught them to grow vegetables and to do the paddies fields. His goal is be self-sufficient because during that time temple cannot raises funds to take care of monks, novices and monk's attendants. The laymen's of both the Sighapradab and the Oncsa donate land to build the future temple. (Saichalee, 2022) This meditation hamlet had developed to be a Buddhist Temple and the center of village in 1969.

Secondly, in 1960, the US Airforce Base army stationed in Ubon Ratchathani Province, which built the Hueysai canal to be a small agricultural irrigation, which called Hueywongnong. In fact, it served a waste pawn for the American army base. In the post-Cold War Period, Ubon Ratchathani Municipality office declared Hueywongnong as the second relaxation hub of the city, which promoted green environmental.

Thirdly, present abbot dreams that Hueywongnong is a home of Naga. He reconstructed the temple and raise charity to build the Nagas.

Fourthly, Thai government policy promote "soft power", which stems from heritage tourism. From here, the local politicians endeavor to invent the Hueywongnong as being heritage for tourism.

## **Conclusion**

In the nutshell, Buddhist meditation spot has been developed along the cold war policy and global economy, which highlight toward heritage for tourism. Researchers suggest the next project can explore the role of Buddhist monk and the development of Hueywangnong village and the collection of legends of Hueuywangnong.

**Keywords:** Heritage Tourism, Invention of Naga and Shifting of Meditation Hamlet, Mongkolkowittharam, Buddhist Temple

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