

HANUMAN IN SAK YANT : THE SIGNIFICANCE AND INFLUENCE OF HANUMAN IMAGERY  
IN NORTHERN THAI CULTURE

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ตัวละครหนุมานในเรื่องรามเกียรติ์ เป็นที่รู้จักอย่างกว้างขวางในเอเชียใต้ และเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ โดยเฉพาะในประเทศไทย งานวิจัยสมัยใหม่มุ่งศึกษาว่าหนุมานถูกมองอย่างไรในวัฒนธรรมไทยภาคกลาง เนื่องจากรามเกียรติ์ถือเป็นของส่วนกลางที่ได้รับการสนับสนุนจากรัฐ แต่อันที่จริงคนไทยในชุมชนอื่น ๆ ล้วนใช้หนุมานเพื่อแสดงค่านิยมท้องถิ่น และมีคนไทยจำนวนมากที่สักยันต์หนุมานด้วยความหวังว่าจะทำให้เกิดลักษณะทางบวกแบบคุณลักษณะของหนุมาน

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ ศึกษาว่าคนที่เป็นผู้สักและผู้ถูกสักยันต์หนุมาน ใช้ตัวละครนี้เพื่อสะท้อนค่านิยมทางวัฒนธรรมอย่างไร และลักษณะอะไรของหนุมานที่พวกเขาเห็นว่าสำคัญ นอกจากนี้งานวิจัยนี้ยังมุ่งอธิบาย ว่าคนไทยภาคเหนือได้ความรู้เรื่องหนุมานมาจากที่ใด โดยวิเคราะห์ความรู้ท้องถิ่นเกี่ยวกับหนุมาน พร้อมทั้งอิทธิพลจากไทยภาคกลางด้วย

ผู้วิจัยเก็บข้อมูลภาคสนามในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ เชียงราย และลำพูน โดยสัมภาษณ์ผู้มีอาชีพสักยันต์ และผู้ที่ได้รับการสักยันต์หนุมาน ผลการวิเคราะห์เชิงคุณภาพแสดงให้เห็นว่าคนไทยภาคเหนือได้ความรู้เรื่องหนุมานจากเรื่องเล่าในท้องถิ่น ที่สืบทอดกันมาเป็นประเพณีผสมกับเรื่องหนุมานจากไทยภาคกลาง คนไทยภาคเหนือสักยันต์หนุมานเพื่อให้เกิดความเมตตา ความปลอดภัยจากอันตราย ความมีอิทธิพล และความมั่งคั่ง โชคดี นอกจากนี้ คนไทยภาคเหนือยังใช้ตัวละครนี้เพื่อสะท้อนให้เห็นค่านิยมส่วนตัวและส่วนท้องถิ่นอีกด้วย

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
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สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา

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ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....

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ALEX ETHAN MARTIN: HANUMAN IN SAK YANT : THE SIGNIFICANCE AND INFLUENCE OF HANUMAN IMAGERY IN NORTHERN THAI CULTURE. ADVISOR: PROF. AMARA PRASITHRATHSINT, Ph.D., 84 pp.

The character Hanuman from the Ramayana is widely known across South and Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand. While modern scholarship on the character of Hanuman in Thailand is mainly focused on how he is viewed by the dominant Central Thai culture as a result of the state sponsored Ramakien, he is used by different communities to express local values. Many people get magical tattoos known as sak yant of him in hopes to emulate positive traits associated with his character.

This thesis studies how the people who administer or receive Hanuman yants use his character to reflect cultural values as well as what traits of his they consider to be important. It also explains where Northern Thais knowledge of Hanuman comes from by analyzing local knowledge of his character and the influence of Central Thai culture on the region.

Fieldwork was conducted in the Northern Thai provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Lamphun by interviewing practitioners of sak yant and people who received Hanuman yants. The result of a qualitative analysis shows that Northern Thais glean their knowledge of Hanuman from a combination of local oral traditions and the influence of the dominant Central Thai culture. Northern Thais get Hanuman yants for compassion, protection, influence and fortune. Furthermore, Northern Thais use the this character to reflect their own personal and local cultural values.

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Student's Signature .....

Advisor's Signature .....

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I was first introduced to the character of Hanuman at the age of 14 when I stumbled on an interpretation of the Indian Ramayana. From that moment on I became obsessed with learning about anything involving India. I devoured the Puranas, books on Hinduism and Buddhism, and the Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita. After a year of studying Culture and Religious Studies in the United States I felt that it would be more beneficial to go see the places I read about. As I had never left the United States, I decided to travel to Thailand to get experience before moving on to India. At the age of 19 I spent six weeks, mostly in villages, in Thailand. When I learned that Thailand had its own version of the Ramayana that had expounded the character of Hanuman, I became very excited. My enthusiasm grew stronger when I learned that people got tattoos of Hanuman believing they could inherit his powers. I eventually traveled to India multiple times, but Thailand became my home. I convinced my university to allow me to finish my studies independently while living in Thailand and traveling around Asia and have been here ever since. I've spent the last decade learning the language and culture, spending time in villages— especially in Northern Thailand, and talking with people about their beliefs and stories.

I would like to thank my wife Yotaka for her continued support, explaining the more difficult Northern Thai words in Central Thai, and her continued patience with me as I galavanted around Northern Thailand to finish my research. I would not have been able to finish this thesis without the help of my mother who spent countless hours editing my work, removing commas, asking me to clarify my ideas, and telling me to relax and take more breaks. Also, my father gave me unwavering support over the last year and a half. I would also like to thank a few friends. First, to Rachawit Photiyarach for suggesting readings and giving me his perspective on Thai culture and history. Also, I must thank Rungrawee Intasueb, my Thai language tutor for teaching me more of the Northern Thai language, checking my translations, and for having as much enthusiasm for Hanuman in sak yant as I did. I'd also like to thank Ian Ord for always being available to have a beer and eat Thai barbecue when I needed to decompress. I have had the privilege of having wonderful mentors who have supported me and helped me develop my skills and knowledge. They are Peg and Ted Hope, Charlie Ashbaugh, and Brendan LaRocque. I also want to express my gratitude to Charlie Thame. Finally, I would like to thank Pira Pewnim, Klairung Amratisha, Professor Pornrat Dahmrung, Professor Amara Prasithrathsint, and Professor Withaya Sucharithanarugse.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Rationale

Hanuman from the Thai Ramakien is one of the most celebrated characters in Thai culture. S. Singarevalu noted, “Hanuman is, indeed, the favorite character of the Thai people, who adore him as a brave, shrewd, and happy warrior. He is the embodiment of all that expresses the freer and the unrestricted aspects of life (Singaravelu 1982, 20).” His character has been localized by different communities in Thai society to represent cultural and social values. Many Thais get *yants* of Hanuman believing that a magical tattoo will give them powers associated with Hanuman’s strengths.

*Sak yant* is the Thai version of the practice of tattooing a body with Indic geometrical designs called *yantras*, various images from Buddhism, Hinduism, and Thai folklore and imbuing it with mystical powers. The practice of religious tattooing exists throughout Southeast Asia, but there is little knowledge on the history of *sak yant* in Thailand before the nineteenth century. Most mention of the practice states that religious tattooing was a common practice in the Northern regions of Thailand and it is claimed that if *sak yant* was practiced before 1860, it was only rarely seen in Central Thailand (Terwiel 1979, 162).

This study explores why out of all the characters in Thai folklore or literature, Hanuman’s image has become so widely used in the *sak yant* tradition. It also explains how Hanuman has been incorporated into the *sak yant* tradition in Northern Thailand. Secondly, this thesis will analyze which characteristics of Hanuman are considered valuable to those who tattoo his image on their skin by conducting field research with both *sak yant* practitioners and receivers of Hanuman *yants*. The goal of this field research is to show how Northern Thais view his character.

## 1.2 Problems and Significance of Study

Hanuman is often only portrayed as a servant of Rama, especially by scholars who study Rama 1's Ramakien. Often he is only portrayed through the scope of the dominant Central Thai culture. He is often lauded as a warrior, soldier, and playboy, yet these values do not always reflect local cultures in other regions of Thailand. Hanuman is much more diverse when viewed through the different versions of the Ramayana story across Thailand, especially from local people's knowledge gleaned from oral traditions. Furthermore, there is little scholarship on the character of Hanuman in Northern Thailand and even less in the English language.

This study will create understanding of how Hanuman is used to represent social values that locals consider unique to their culture. Additionally, the study of Hanuman's role in *sak yant* presents his character from the perspective of an average Thai. Through studying how Hanuman is localized into the *sak yant*, it will increase understanding of how he is used to represent social values in Thai society. There are many Thai Ramayanas, each portraying Hanuman from differing perspectives. Thais assimilate their knowledge from a myriad of mediums and as a result, each individual personalizes the character of Hanuman from their unique point of view, which then is reflected in their tattoo. This study will show Hanuman's how popularity and character traits are used to represent social values with Northern Thais.

## 1.3 Research Questions

How do Northern Thais view the character of Hanuman and where does their knowledge come from? Which of his traits do they consider valuable and reflective of Northern Thai culture?

#### 1.4 Research Objectives

The main purpose of this research is to present cultural values of Northern Thailand and how they pertain to the *sak yant* tradition, principally through the character of Hanuman. This objective will be reached by analyzing *sak yant* in Northern Thailand, explaining how Hanuman's character is preeminent in its culture, and demonstrating how those who have a Hanuman *yant* view his character.

#### 1.5 Hypothesis

The incorporation of Hanuman in *sak yant* elucidates the popularity of his character as a result of wide syndication. Additionally, it can show how a typical Northern Thai can personally identify with and emulate his character. Through studying Hanuman in *sak yant*, one can determine which of his traits are considered important to people who get a *yant* of him. This thesis proposes that Hanuman has become increasingly popular in Northern Thai *sak yant* because his character is able to represent multiple values of Northern Thai culture. Compassion is considered the most valuable trait in Hanuman *yants* for many Thais. Secondly, people get Hanuman *yants* for protection, fortune, and influence.

#### 1.6 Methodology

In this thesis, I use qualitative research to analyze the phenomenon of Hanuman in Northern Thai Sak Yant. As my research was anthropological in nature and minimally focused on the work of previous scholars, I worked with a humanistic approach.

Humanism is an intellectual tradition that traces its roots to Protagoras' (485-410 BC) famous dictum that "Man is the measure of all things," which means that truth is not absolute but is decided by individual human judgment (Bernard 2011, 21).

The research in this thesis is not meant to be authoritative, but instead strives to provide a vivid representation of the thoughts and beliefs of the people interviewed. This is because participant had their individual opinions and viewpoints on their *yants* and how Hanuman fit into the tattooing tradition. Therefore, I chose to let people's beliefs influence my approach. Analysis was based on my own interpretation of the research based on the Hermeneutic approach used in cultural anthropology:

[The Hermeneutic approach is] the search for meanings and their interconnection in the expression of culture. The method for doing this kind of analysis requires deep involvement with the culture, including an intimate familiarity with the language, so that the symbolic referents emerge during the study of those expressions (Bernard 2011, 475).

I chose this approach as a result of my background and experience living in Northern Thailand for over a decade. Based on this method, I conducted my interviews in Thai or the Northern Thai language *Khammueang* and relied on local's and their opinions and beliefs to shape my analysis. While I took into account the opinions of scholars who have conducted previous research in the fields of cultural anthropology and Southeast Asian Studies, the final assessment was ultimately based on my own interpretations of the data garnered from the field research. I recorded the interviews and often listened to them with a native speaker to clarify subject matter and make sure translations were accurate. I also translated all of the Thai sources and then had them verified by a native Thai speaker. Rungwadee Intasueb, a Thai language teacher in Chiang Mai, checked all my translations. I chose to not directly translate quotes for interviews. Directly translating Thai to English is not possible, instead I decided to interpret what was said in a format that would make sense in the English language.

### 1.6.1 Overview of Interviews and Field Research

A list of questions were compiled for the interviews, but not all were utilized in individual sessions due to the fluid nature of the conversations. This is because I chose an unstructured approach to field research, which Bernard defined:

Unstructured interviews are based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind, but are also characterized by a minimum of control over the people's responses. The idea is to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, at their own pace (Bernard 2011, 211).

I chose this method as it was not my intention to lead subjects to give me an answer for which I was looking instead many questions were open ended and general enough that subjects felt as if they could express what they felt was important to tell me. When I was told relevant information I would then ask the subject to elaborate. This also made interviewees more comfortable as they felt that I was not looking for right or wrong answers, but instead wanted to know their own personal viewpoints.

The process for interviewing and translating the information into English went as followed:

- a) Conduct interview and record it
- b) Listen to the interview again and translate into English
- c) Have a native Thai speaker listen to the interview and give notes and suggestions on translation

After compiling the data from the interviews, I found certain trends in how the interview subjects viewed Hanuman in *sak yant* as well as some variations. The data influenced how I formatted the rest of the research, which is exhibited in Chapter 5.



### 1.6.2 Location of Field Research

The field research for this thesis was conducted in the Northern Provinces of Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Chiang Rai. These locations were based because of two factors: accessibility and suggestions by locals interested in *sak yant*. To find both practitioners and those who had Hanuman *yants*, it was necessary to let the research determine the locations. Much of my research was conducted at places where *sak yant* was available and amulet markets such as *Tdalat Teepanaet and Tdalat Kamtieng* in Chiang Mai. The amulet markets were a convenient place to conduct field research as the people who frequented them were interested in the mystical practices of Thai spirituality.

### 1.6.3 Interview Subjects

To respect individual privacy I have chosen to omit the names of the people with which I conducted the interviews who had received a Hanuman *yant*. This is because those I interviewed valued their privacy. Some interview subjects explained that their tattoos were not meant to be shown to others, though they agreed to let me photograph them as long as their faces were not in the picture. The monks who practiced *sak yant* were more willing to allow me to photograph them and use their names, which I added in the appendice. Regardless, each interviewee was given a number. Participant one through four refer to practitioners of *sak yant*, while five through twelve refer to those who received *yants*.

During my field research I interviewed four monks who currently practice *sak yant* in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Lamphun. I also interviewed one retired practitioner who had also left the Sangha. Likewise, I spoke with six non practitioners of *sak yant* who either had received a Hanuman *yant* themselves or had a family member who had one tattooed.

#### 1.6.4 Primary Sources

Much of the primary sources were found in the field research portion of the thesis. As a result, literature was only used to provide background information and to explicate Northern Thai milieu today. While I used this literature to analyse Hanuman's influence in Northern Thailand to create a broader perspective, his existence in the *sak yant* tradition of the region today is a product of my field research.

#### 1.6.5 Ethics

I chose my ethical approach based on the American Anthropological Association which states:

Anthropological researchers must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities (Association 2004, 2) .

In my field research protecting the privacy of interview subjects was of major importance. For this reason I chose to give interviewees the option of being referred to by a pseudo-name. Also, upon taking photographs of subjects, I gave them the choice of hiding their face. All subjects were made aware of my research before agreeing to an interview. In conclusion, I only have included the names of the monks who practice *sak yant*.

### 1.7 Theoretical Framework

This thesis explores the religious undertones of the *sak yant* tradition and its integral influence on the practice. It builds on Tennenbaum's theory that "Buddhist and

animist practices are integrally related and are derived from a single axiomatic system structured on the existence of amoral power (Tannenbaum 1987, 693).” Though as Hanuman is a character from Hindu mythology, it would be more prudent to say *sak yant* integrates Buddhism, animism, and Hinduism. Secondly, I will present that many Thais believe that *sak yant* is used to influence a person to adhere to Buddhist precepts and be compassionate. The mix of different beliefs in Thai religious thought is often referred to as Popular Buddhism. Pattara Kitiarsa explained the term:

Popular Buddhism in Thailand is a large-scale, cross-social spectrum of beliefs and practices— incorporating the supernatural powers of spirit, deity, and magic— that have emerged out of the interplay between animism, supernaturalism, folk Brahmanism, the worship of Chinese deities, and state-sponsored Theravada Buddhism (Pattara 2012, 2).

Pattara asserted that a large part of popular Buddhism is commercialized: “Thai popular Buddhism is translocal, transreligio-cultural, and transnational. Its boundaries expand as far as its commercial influence spreads (Pattara 2012, 2),” Because of this the term cannot be used to define Northern Thai *sak yant*, which is both being studied on a local scale and by monks who are not treating it as a commercial enterprise. While the blend of belief systems Pattana drew out were similar to those encountered in Northern Thai *sak yant*, this thesis will instead refer to the practice under the umbrella of Thai religious thought which is a blend of multiple belief systems: mainly Buddhist, animist, and Hindu (Brahmanist). The religious aspect of *sak yant* alludes to how a person operates in life. Geertz explained the uses of religion:

“Whatever else religion may be, it is in part an attempt (of an implicit and directly felt rather than explicit and consciously thought-about

sort) to conserve the fund of general meanings in terms of which each individual interprets his experience and organizes his conduct (Geertz 1975, 127).”

This theory influenced me to view the beliefs associated with Hanuman in *sak yant* as the product of each individual’s worldview. This research will exhibit that many believe the tattooing tradition is a reflection of religious values.

The imagery involved in *sak yant* is a central point of importance in this thesis. As it has been determined that *sak yant* will be explored in its association to Thai religious thought, the images of the practice can be defined as religious symbols. The anthropologist Geertz explained the significance of religious symbols and how meanings can be stored in them:

“Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it. Sacred symbols thus relate an ontology and a cosmology to an aesthetics and a morality: their peculiar power comes from their presumed ability to identify fact with value at the most fundamental level, to give what is otherwise merely actual, a comprehensive normative import (Geertz 1975, 127).”

*Sak yants* are religious symbols that are used to express a wide range of beliefs and values and are reflective of a person’s local cultural context. Thus, this thesis will explore what values are often portrayed and how Hanuman is used to represent them. Thereafter, this research does not concern itself with tattooing for fashion or self-expression, but instead based on those who believe in it for religious reasons.

## 1.8 Definition of Terms

A Note on Romanization of the Thai Language

In this thesis, I used Romanization of the Thai language based on the rules of the Royal Thai Institute

- สัก (**Sak**)- To tattoo.
- ยันต์ (**Yant**)- A geometric design with magical properties derived from the Sanskrit yantra. It can also be used as a classifier for tattoos.
- สักยันต์ (**Sak Yant**)- The practice of tattooing yants or geometric designs which incorporate imagery from Buddhism, Hinduism, animism, and folklore, which are believed to imbue the wearer with magical properties. In English, this term is used as a noun. It is only used as a verb in Thai. In Thai, the practice of tattooing yantras is called การสักยันต์ (kan sak yant) and to refer to unspecified yants, ลายสักยันต์ (lai sak yant) is used.
- รามเกียรติ์ (**Ramakien**)- “The Glory of Rama”, which is a poem derived from the Indian epic generally believed to be written by Valmiki in the 4th century BCE.
- หนุมาน (**Hanuman**)- The general of Rama’s army, Hanuman the monkey god is considered to be the favorite character of many Thais. Also known as หอรัมมาน (Hawraman) in Northern Thailand.
- หนุมานยันต์ (**Hanuman Yant**) This will be used to refer to actual Hanuman tattoos in the *sak yant* tradition.
- อาจารย์ (**Ajarn**)- A title used for practicers of sak yant; means “teacher”. Also sometimes referred to as พระครู (Phrakru). Ajarn can be both monks or laymen.
- คาถา (**Khatha**)- Incantation. When an ajarn blesses the tattoo, he does so by reciting a khatha.

- **คนเมือง (Khon Muang)** The people of Northern Thailand. *Kon Muang* is often used as an ethnically ambiguous blanket term to refer to the different peoples of Northern Thailand. Locals will also refer to themselves as **คนเหนือ (Khon Neua)** which means “Northern People”.
- **ลิงลม (Ling Lom)** Ling lom is the Thai name for the slow loris primate. The word can be used to describe the actual slow loris or the character Hanuman in Northern Thailand.
- **เทพ (Thep)** A divine being in Thai mythology.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEWS

### 2.1 Overview of Literature Reviews

There is not much literature devoted to the practice of *sak yant* and virtually nothing on Hanuman in the Northern Thai traditions. Consequently, background research was pulled from sources that existed under a wide range of subjects. By disseminating information from manifold mediums such as commentary on different Ramayanas in Thailand, histories of Siam and Northern Thailand, folk studies, and tattoo culture in Thailand, I was able to fashion together a foundation of interdisciplinary material that would serve as a precedent for my field research.

### 2.2 An Analysis of Hanuman in Various Versions of the Ramakien

In *An Analysis of Hanuman in Various Versions of the Ramakien* (Patchalin 2004), Patchalin Jeennoon compared and contrasted the character of Hanuman in different versions of Central, Northern, Northeastern, and Southern Thai Ramayanas. Patchalin's study elucidated the major differences in Hanuman's character between each Thai Ramayana. In the chapter *Reasons That Make Hanuman in Each Version of the Ramakien Different*, Patchalin explained that the motivation of the writers of different versions localized the character of Hanuman to express important values. Although the study did not focus on Hanuman in *sak yant* it showed how diverse Hanuman's character is across Thailand. Therefore, this can be applied to the research of *sak yant* in determining which characteristics are deemed valuable in different parts of Thailand.

### 2.2 Origins and Behaviors of Characters in the Thai Ramakien

In the chapter *Hanuman in Origins and Behaviors of Characters in the Thai Ramakien* (Srisurang 1981), Srisurang Poolputhya analyzed the character traits of

Hanuman in Rama I's Ramakien. Srisurang explained that Hanuman's primary role was that of a servant to Rama. His motives were of service to his superiors and to showcase his abilities. Hanuman's strength as a warrior, exploits in love, and cleverness as a prankster all fell within the context of him being a subordinate of Rama. Srisurang focused on how the writers of Ramakien wanted to present Hanuman, but did not address how audiences viewed him. Regardless, as Rama I's Ramakien is considered the most known version of the story in Thailand, many Thais' knowledge of Hanuman's character will be influenced by this version. Therefore, Srisurang's characterizations of Hanuman from Rama I's Ramakien are important in the study of his character in *sak yant*.

### 2.3 Tattooing in Thailand's History

In *Tattooing in Thailand's History* (Terwiel 1979), B.J Terwiel presented a history on the different usages of tattoos in Thailand such as: tattoos to mark the passage into adulthood, administrative tattoos in Ayutthaya, and religious tattooing. Terwiel also expounded on how tattoos were used by people from rural areas and were looked down upon by the urban elite. His research in religious tattoos were put into four categories: for protection, strength, influence, and invulnerability. Religious tattooing was not recorded in central Thailand before the mid-nineteenth century but was widespread in northern regions such as Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Phrae, and Nan. Terwiel noted that people from rural communities were most likely to receive religious tattoos. As a result, there are not many written historical accounts of religious tattooing in Thailand. In this study, Terwiel did not refer to religious tattooing as *sak yant*, nor did he compile a list of *yants*. His research does set precedence for further investigation on how Hanuman *yants* could have been incorporated into the *sak yant* tradition, which will be studied more in this thesis.



## 2.4 Tattoos or Taboos for Communications, Social Meanings and Jobs in the Contemporary Thai Society

In *Tattoos or Taboos for Communications, Social Meanings, and Jobs in the Contemporary Thai Society* (Supattra and Lee 2014), Supattra Kreasakul and Yu-Hsiu Lee's presented small scale research on how tattoos were used as a form of nonverbal communication, self-expression, and how wearers used their tattoos to create their own identities. Tattoos are sometimes stigmatized by Thai society, especially in the work place. Although tattoos have been a part of Thai society for centuries and people are aware of the existence of *sak yant*, many Thais believe that men who have tattoos are drug addicts, gangsters, or criminals, while tattooed women are viewed as prostitutes. Kreasakul and Lee's research concluded that people often created their own meanings for their tattoos to reflect their personal lives. While their study did not solely focus on *sak yant*, and did not mention Hanuman *yants*, it is important to note that a *yant* is both influenced by the intended meaning given by the *ajarn*, it's commonly known mythology, and how an individual personalizes their tattoo.

## 2.5 Sak Yant: The Transition from Indic Yantras to Thai “Magical” Buddhist Tattoos

Angela Marie May researched Hanuman's character in the *sak yant* briefly in the chapter “The Ramayana” in her thesis *Sak Yant: The Transition from Indic Yantras to Thai “Magical” Buddhist Tattoos* (May 2014). May speculated that characters from the Ramakien were incorporated into the *sak yant* tradition because the Ramakien and its characters held magical powers, though much of May's conjecture was based on Ramayana rituals in Cambodia.

May analyzed two Hanuman *yants* as well: *Yant Hanuman Song Lit* and *Yant Hanuman Tua Kao*. May classified Hanuman *yants* as *yant kongkrapan*, which are often associated with immortality or something that lasts forever. She states *Yant*

*kongkrapan* tattoos are used for protection or good luck, though a more accurate translation would be tattoos for invulnerability. May also added that some Hanuman *yants* are associated with love. May's research was often inconclusive as a result of using blogs and commercial tattoo websites as sources and confusing the different usages and themes of the Ramayana story in Southeast Asia. This sets a precedent for further research on the subject of Hanuman in Thai *sak yant*.

## **2.6 The Study of Capital and Field: A Case Study of the Formation of the Five Row Sacred Tattoo in Bangkok Metropolitan**

In *The Study of Capital and Field: A Case Study of the Formation of the Five Row Sacred Tattoo in Bangkok Metropolitan* (Wannipa 2011), Wannipa Chuanchom conducted a case study in the research of why people choose to get a *Yant Ha Taew* which is a tattoo comprised of five lines that is believed to give a person multiple blessings. Wannipa asserted that the existence of capitalism in Thai society has influenced people's reasons for getting *Yant Ha Taew* in hopes of achieving financial stability. Moreover, people choose this tattoo for protection and beautification of the body. While this study does not focus on Hanuman in *sak yant*, it does shed light on the different reasons for a person wanting a *yant* and therefore is valuable to this study.

## **2.7 Women and Magical Tattooing: Fad or an Attempt at the Creation of Gender Identity**

In *Women and Magical Tattooing: Fad or an Attempt at the Creation of Gender Identity* (Pattalapon 2010), Pattalapon Puridumronggul conducted anthropological research to determine how women from lower and middle class backgrounds used *sak yant* to create their identities. While the idea of a woman getting a *yant* is still stigmatized, it has become increasingly normal in modern Thai society. The study brings into question the historically perceived idea that a man's status in society is higher than a woman's, and the stereotype that a woman with a *yant* or any type of

tattoo is a sex worker. Pattalapon concluded that some women use *sak yant* to negotiate and defy power relations with men. This is an important work because it brings into question the traditional gender roles defined in the *sak yant* tradition and how they are changing.

## **2.8 Belief in Five Columns Tattoo: A Case Study of Tattoo Group of Ajarn Noo Khanpai**

In *Belief in Five Columns Tattoo: A Case Study of Tattoo Group of Ajarn Noo Khanpai* (Wannipa 2010), Wannipa Chuanchom conducted field research on Ajarn Noo Khanpai and the *yant ha taew*, or five columns tattoo. Wannipa asserted that *sak yant* was used to give a person strength and courage in war. Furthermore, *sak yant* is used to give a person good fortune and success in business. Her research concluded that every person who gets this *yant* believes in its sanctity and gives them confidence in their lives. This reinforces what many believe to be to be the main motivation for acquiring a *yant*.

## **2.9 Tattoos: Invulnerability and Power in Shan Cosmology**

In *Tattoos: Invulnerability and Power in Shan Cosmology* (Tannenbaum 1987), Nicola Tannenbaum analyzed Shan tattoos by conducting ethnographic research in Mae Hong Son, Thailand in 1984-85. While many scholars have asserted that animism and magical belief systems exist on the periphery of Buddhism, Tannenbaum argued that they are integrally related. By analyzing Shan tattoo culture, she claimed that Buddhist and animist practices are integrally related and derived from a single axiomatic system structured on the existence of amoral power. Correspondingly, tattooing is a religious practice because the tattoos derived their power from that of the Buddhas and their teachings and from the tattooers who practice Buddhist morality.

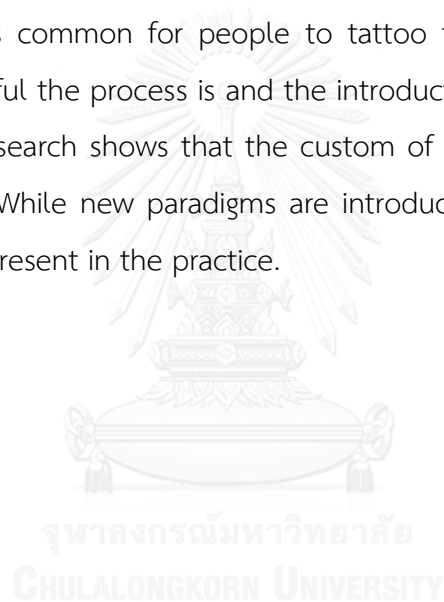
Subsequently, Tennenbaum classified and categorized the different types of tattoos administered by Shan tattooers in Mawk Tsam Pe Village in Mae Hong Son Province. The three general types of tattoos included those that caused influence on others to either like or fear the wearer, ones that made a person more skillful with words, and tattoos which protected a person from harm. Tennenbaum explained that tattoos can also be seen as a form of medicine that can cure a person of illness. In Tennenbaum's research, tattoos fit into one category or have a singular usage, which is not the case in Hanuman *yants*.

## 2.10 Temples and Elephants

The Norwegian explorer Carl Bock was one of the first Europeans to travel to Northern Thailand in 1881-82. He wrote his travelogue, *Temples and Elephants* (Bock 1985), about his experiences visiting the north and what was then considered the semi-independent Lao state. On multiple occasions Bock encountered the character of Hanuman. In Lakorn (modern day Lampang), he witnessed tattooing ceremonies and made an illustrations of a local man's tattoos which included the image of Hanuman. Bock also recounted a folktale about Lamphun where Hanuman came to the city and told its people that if danger ever befell it, they could ring a drum and he would come to protect them. The villagers sounded a drum because they wanted to see him and when Hanuman arrived and saw there was no danger he became angry and has not appeared in Lamphun since. Bock also mentioned the "Swinging Festival" in Chiang Mai which happened on the second Siamese month of every year to honor Hanuman. Finally, Bock mentioned seeing statues of Hanuman in a cave outside of Fang. Bock's travelogue proves the presence of Hanuman in tattooing tradition spanning back at least one hundred and thirty five years. Additionally, the abundance of information on Hanuman presented proves that the character of Hanuman was considered important in Northern Thailand at the time.

### 2.11 Tai Magic: Arts of the Supernatural in the Shan States and Lan Na

In *Tai Magic: Arts of the Supernatural in the Shan States and Lan Na* (Conway 2014), Susan Conway compiled information on the usage of magic in Northern Thailand and Shan States of Burma. One chapter of her book was devoted to tattooing practices. A significant aspect of Conway's research centers around the people who receive tattoos. People chose certain tattoo designs based on what powers they felt they were lacking. The fact that people would only choose one or a few tattoos and place them on different parts of the body, such as the chest or back, shows that the social conventions of tattooing is changing and is no longer seen as a sign of maturity. It is not as common for people to tattoo from the knees to the waist because of how painful the process is and the introduction of tattoos as a means for fashion. Conway's research shows that the custom of and reasons for tattooing are always in transition. While new paradigms are introduced, there is a component of tradition that is still present in the practice.



## CHAPTER THREE: THE CHARACTER HANUMAN

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the character of Hanuman and his prevalence in both Thai society and Northern Thai culture. Hanuman is presented through the scope of different versions of the Thai Ramayanas and how he fits into the Northern Thai worldview today. To gain a better understanding of his character of Northern Thailand it is necessary to explain the diversity of his character due to multiple versions of the Ramayana story and how Northern Thai society was influenced by dominant Thai culture.

### 3.2 Background of Hanuman Character

Hanuman is a character from the Thai Ramayanas, which are crystallizations of the Ramayana story written by Valmiki in the 4th century BCE. In most tellings of the story, Hanuman is a great warrior who helps Rama on his quest to save Sita from Todsakan. Hanuman completes various tasks, such as sneaking in to the island of Lanka to inform Sita that Rama is coming to save her, burning down Lanka, and building a bridge to the island so Rama's army can cross the ocean.

#### 3.2.1 Many Thai Ramayanas, Many Hanumans

The Ramayana story has been known in Thailand since at least the time of Sukhothai, based on the evidence of an engraving found at Prasart Hin Phimai depicting the god Rama (Saiwaroon 2007). While today the most popular version of the story is the Ramakien, which was commissioned by Rama I in 1797, there are multiple versions of the story. Each version of the story follows a similar plot line, but many details are different such as the personalities of characters and major themes of the story. This is because each writer of the story localized the story to reflect cultural values and what they deemed important. In each version the character of Hanuman has been altered as well.

### 3.2.2 Hanuman's Expanded Role in Thai Ramayanas

In every retelling of the Thai Ramayana, Hanuman's character was broadened and many new scenes involving him were augmented from previous foreign and domestic versions. Additionally, his character made the story more enjoyable and added levity (Patchalin 2004, 361, 441). Hanuman's character was used to express local cultural values, so his character was sometimes changed in different regions of Thailand:

ผู้แต่งบางคนอาจได้รับอิทธิพลทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรมของท้องถิ่นเข้ามาจึงนำเสนอ  
หนุมานที่สอดคล้องกับความเป็นท้องถิ่น (Patchalin 2004, 365)

*(phutaeng bang khon at dairap itthiphon thang sangkhom lae  
watthanatham khong thongthin khao ma chueng nam sanoe hanu  
man thi sot rap kap khwam pen thongthin)*

*(Writers [of the Thai Ramayanas] were influenced by their local  
societal and cultural values, therefore leading them to present the  
character of Hanuman through that scope.)*

### 3.3 Central Thai Influence on Lan Na Culture and the Propagation of The Ramakien

It was not until Northern Thailand fell under the same education curriculum of the rest of the country that people began to learn the Central Thai Ramakien story. This was around 1939 when Phibun's regime began to release cultural mandates that defined the new Thai nation. The second and third mandates affected the peoples of Lan Na. The second mandate's theme was to make all Thai people truly Thai. People of all language groups and ethnicities were pressured to speak Central Thai and act in a way that confirmed their national identity. The third mandate expressed that people would not be described as anything but Thai. The government began to remove mention of other non-Thai ethnic titles such as Shan or Lao. People were

not to be referred to as Northern or Northeastern Thai (Baker and Pasuk 2014, 132-133). Many Northerners claimed that during this time, along with the burning of different Lan Na texts and being forced to stop using the Northern Tai Tam scripts, different Northern versions of the Ramayana were also disposed of, though monks and scholars who wanted to maintain their own culture hid some which have survived today. In schools Northern Thais learn a centralized curriculum and are only taught the Central Thai Ramakien stories. People learn the local versions through family members, monks and others who wish to maintain local culture, or those who pursue higher education. Chiang Mai University has a Lan Na Studies Center that has saved and translated different Northern Thai Ramayanas into the Central Thai script. As a result, Northern Thais are both versed in the Central Thai Ramakien and localized versions which influence their understandings of Hanuman.

### 3.3.1 Rama I's Ramakien

The most syndicated version of the Thai Ramayana was commissioned by Rama I during the establishment of the Chakri Dynasty in the 18th century. This came at a time of political transition in Thailand after the tumultuous fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 and the transitory reign of King Thaksin shortly after. The Ramakien was used to express and reinforce Thai cultural values, such as the idea of the king as *deva-rajā*, or a god-king. Rama I's *Ramakien* was originally meant for his court subjects and not for the average citizen.

In this version, Hanuman was not just a warrior, but a great lover of women. Throughout the story he had multiple exploits with women, such as *Butsa Malee*, *Suppana Matcha*, and *Totsakan's* wife, *Nang Monto*. Rama even rewarded Hanuman five thousand wives for his service at the end of the story.

Srisurang Poolputhya explained that Hanuman's primary role was that of a servant to Rama in *Origins and Behaviors of Characters in the Thai Ramakien*.



Hanuman's motives were of service to his superiors and to showcase his abilities. Hanuman's strength as a warrior, exploits in love, cleverness, and wisdom all fell within the context of him being a subordinate of Rama. Srisurang elaborated Hanuman's status in *The Indian Influence on Thai Culture*, "Although Hanuman is a vanara-chief, to Ram he is a mere servant who serves his master faithfully (Srisurang 1981, 8)." Srisurang focused on how the writers of Ramakien wanted to present Hanuman, but did not address how audiences viewed him. While Rama I's Ramakien is historically reflective of Central Thai culture, the story has been propagated in Northern Thailand in the past century. It is this version that is syndicated in the media and taught in schools.

### 3.4 Lan Na Versions of Thai Ramayanas

There are a number of Lan Na versions of the Ramayana in Northern Thailand including *Hawraman*, *Longka Sip Ho*, *Ood Saparot*, *Promjakawan*, and *Brahmahien*. The Lan Na retellings often follow the same main events of the Ramakien but many details are different. In certain versions of the Lan Na telling, such as *Hawraman*, Hanuman is the main character with little mention to Rama.

#### 3.4.1 Uniqueness of Hanuman's Character in Lan Na Ramayanas

Patchalin Jennoon conducted extensive research on how Hanuman's character was represented in various versions of Thai Ramayanas in *An Analysis of Hanuman in Various Versions of the Ramakien* (Patchalin 2004).. While the storyline of the different versions were similar, details involving Hanuman's character were often different. Also there were facets of Hanuman's personality that were unique to Northern Thailand. Hanuman was generally less of a playboy in the Northern Ramayanas. In the Central Thai version, when Hanuman and the monkey army were tasked with building a bridge to Lanka, Todsakan ordered his mermaid daughter Suppana Matcha to stop them. For every rock they placed on the bridge she and her retinue removed one. When Hanuman's party realized they were not making

progress Sukreep sent him to dive into the ocean to ascertain what was happening. Hanuman caught Supanna Matcha who admitted she had been halting his progress. Instead of killing her, Hanuman made love to Suppana Matcha which led to the birth of Matchanu. In *Hawramon* and *Brahmahien*, Hanuman did not make love to anyone. An unnamed fish caught the sweat that fell off Hanuman's body during the building of the bridge and drank it, causing her to become pregnant (Patchalin 2004, 378). The authors of the Northern Thai Ramayanas did not go into detail about Hanuman's exploits in love.

#### 3.4.2 Hanuman's Relevancy in Northern Thailand

When referring to any version of the Thai Ramayana, most Thais will instantly mention the character of Hanuman. His character is considered the most likable. In Northern Thailand Hanuman's image has been syndicated for a long time. It can be seen from the writings of Carl Bock that Hanuman's character was known and celebrated in Northern Thailand since at least the late nineteenth century. He recalled seeing many carved sandstone figures of Hanuman, which he took to be of Ngiao (Shan) design in a cave outside of Fang (Bock 1985, 289). Interestingly, there is no mention of the Thai Ramayanas, nor other characters from the story in his travelogue. Additionally, in some Lan Na versions, such as *Hawramon*, main characters from Rama I's Ramakien are minor; which is the case with Rama. In *A Comparative Study of the Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai and Malay Versions of the Story of Rama with Special Reference to the Process of Acculturation in the Southeast Asian Versions*, Singaravelu mentioned a theory developed by Dineshchandra Sen that Hanuman's character might have been known in the region well before the introduction of Rama, which was added as a supplementary tale (Singaravelu 1968, 151). Rama's character would not have historically received the same reverence in the North as in Central Thailand as his character was not meant to mirror the actual king, such as was the case in Ayutthaya and other Central Thai kingdoms. The kings of Central Thailand often associated themselves with the power of Hindu gods (Baker and Pasuk 2014, 19). This was later represented when the first king of the Chakri

Dynasty took the name Rama I, linking his line to Rama of the Ramakien who was an avatar of Phra Narai.<sup>1</sup> This practice of divine kingship is not mentioned in Northern Thailand. In Lan Na, royal authority was defined as humans who should govern by the laws of kingship and not by divine mandate. Furthermore, concept of divine kingship in Lan Na was abhorrent to its ascetic Theravada Buddhist tradition (Stratton and Scott 2004, 57-58).



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<sup>1</sup> Phra Narai is the Thai name of the Hindu god Vishnu.

## CHAPTER FOUR: HANUMAN IN SAK YANT

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines how Hanuman fits into the Northern Thai tradition of *sak yant*. It addresses the Northern Thai belief in magic, the religious undertones of the practice, and what makes up a *yant* by analysing secondary sources. It also begins to elucidate why people choose to get *yants* and serves as a precursor to the field research.

### 4.2 Definition of Sak Yant

*Sak Yant* is a term used to describe tattoos that are believed to give the wearer magical powers. In Thai, *sak yant* means “to tattoo a *yant*”, whereas a specific tattoo is referred to as *yant*. The general term is called *lai sak yant*. *Yants* are geometric designs derived from the Sanskrit word *yantra*, which are believed to hold occult powers. A *yant* does not have to be tattooed on skin, but can also be woven into a clothe or drawn, but this thesis will only explore *sak yant*.

### 4.3 Sak Yant and Magic in Northern Thai Culture

An underlying trait of Thai culture is the belief in magic and other numinous forces. For many people, the existence of spirits, magical potions, horoscopes, and other occult beliefs are as a part of everyday life as paying bills or going to the doctor. In *Tai Magic: Arts of the Supernatural in the Shan States and Lan Na*, Susan Conway listed seven fundamentals of the Shan and Lan Na belief system presented by Phrakru Wimonsilapakij of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Wat Phrakaew, Chiang Rai, to which Conway added an eighth: Theravada Buddhist doctrine and practice, healing, sacred objects, spirits, astrology, Buddhist cosmology, numerology, and the power of nature (Conway 2014, 18-19). Parts of these belief systems are

used in the different practices of magic and are included in tattooing tradition. As this belief system makes up an integral part of a Northern Thai worldview, mental conviction in the presence of otherworldly forces is a fundamental antecedent for the practice of *sak yant*. Likewise, the inclusion of multifarious elements of Thai magic set precedent by influencing the beliefs in and the actual practices of *sak yant*. The images of *yant* stem from a multitude of sources, including Buddhist, Hindu, and Animist mythologies which are localized in each particular area of Thailand.

The usage of a mystical tattoo allows a person to navigate both the mundane and temporal world simultaneously by creating a syncretic relationship between the two. The images that are etched onto a person's skin represents the essence of a deeper spiritual belief and allows it to inhabit the physical realm. Moreover, a tattoo is something a person carries with them throughout their whole life, which adds a longevity to the blessing that outlasts the more ephemeral benedictions given by a monk at a *wat*. This does not infer that the powers imbued by a *yant* are necessarily static or absolute. Contrarily, the effectiveness of a *yant* must be continually cultivated by following certain rules associated with each particular tattoo. If a person feels that the power of their *yant* is fading, they can visit an *ajarn* to bless it again. Instead of expounding a *yant* as a charm that instantaneously gives a person a perpetual power, it is more pragmatic to view it as a planted seed that an individual must develop and nurture throughout his or her life. This can help shed light on why a person would choose to get a *yant*.

#### 4.4 Religious Undertones

*Sak Yant* in Northern Thailand is heavily influenced by Buddhist and Animist beliefs. Through the study of tattoos in Shan cosmology Tannenbaum concluded “Buddhist and animist practices are integrally related and are derived from a single axiomatic system structured on the existence of amoral power (Tannenbaum 1987, 693).”

Furthermore, tattooing is a religious practice because a tattoo derived its power from that of the Buddhas and their teachings and from the tattooers who practice Buddhist morality (Tannenbaum 1987, 706). Phaya Anuman mentioned that traditionally, a *yant* had to be tattooed in a Buddhist chapel and that it could not be administered without “making an obeisance to a Buddha image (Anuman 1981, 317).”

#### 4.5 What Makes Up a Hanuman Yant

The components that make up a Hanuman *yant* is the Hanuman image and *the khatha* that is relevant to him. There are two beliefs associated with the relationship between Hanuman *yants* and its corresponding *khatha*: that each Hanuman *yant* has specific *khatha* associated with the image and that any *khatha* can be used with any Hanuman tattoo.

##### 4.5.1 Incantations

Phaya Anuman explained in *Essays on Thai Folklore* that there are four different words for magical spells in Thailand: *khatha*, *akhom*, *wet*, and *mon*.

*Gatha* is a verse of a song in Sanskrit and Pali, but *khatha* in Thai, apart from its original sense, means also a spell.

*Agama* in one sense means the Vedas while in Thai *akhom* means a spell to be used magically when inscribing or tattooing certain cabalistic letters, arithmetical figures, circles, squares, etc. (Yantra) on an object or on the physical body of a person.

*Vedas*, the sacred scriptures of the Hindus, is *Wet* in Thai, which means spell or a set form of words supposed to have magical power.

*Mantra* is in Thai pronunciation *mon* and both mean spell also. The two terms *Veda* and *mantra*, though synonymous in the Thai language, have different uses. The Vedas mean spell in relation to post- Vedic Brahminism and the mantras mean mostly spells in connection with Popular Buddhism. The Thai knew the first four books of the Vedas, i.e. the Samhitas or the collection of mantras only, and called them Phra) .

If a recitation of certain selected verses from the Buddhist scriptures is applied with a purpose as a protection against danger or for the promotion of health and wealth, it is called *mon* (mantra) and if otherwise it is called *wet* (Veda). Hence the confusion of meanings of these four words with the tendency to merge into one and another in popular usage (Anuman 1981, 306).

Today, people refer to the magic associated with *sak yant* as *khatha* which is written in different localized scripts. In Northern Thailand the Tai Tham alphabet is commonly used, yet some tattooers choose to add the Kohm script as well. The *khatha* is also recited by the monk or layman during the tattoo process. Upon finishing the *yant*, the tattooer will blow on the tattoo to invoke the charm (*pow khatha*).

#### 4.5.2 Hanuman Khatha

Each monk or layman will have their own unique *khatha* for a specific tattoo based on from whom they learned the practice. In *Wicha Kong Krapan Chatree*, Thep Sareekaboot provided examples of *khatha* and *mon* a person could recite to invoke the powers of Hanuman.

พระมนต์กำลังหนุมาน

*phra mon kamlang hanu man*

*(Mantra for Hanuman's Powers)*

โอมกรวิกเกราะเพชรพระหนุมาน เจ้าผู้วสาร พระหนุมานเจ้าเข้าแบกเอาภูเขาให้  
มะอิกะวิติจิปีเสคิ โอมเพชรขงคองสวาหะ

*om korawik kro phet phra hanu man phra hanu man chao khao baek  
ao phukhao hai ma i ka wi ti chi pi se khi om phet chakhong khong  
sawaha*

พระมนต์นี้ เสกสารพัดกินทา เป็นคองทอนชาติรีดิงักแล

*Phra Mon Saek Saa Ra Phat Kin Thaa Bpen Khong Ton Chaa Dtree  
Dee Nahk Lae*

*One can use this mantra to bless various materials and give to a  
person to eat or apply to make them immortal.*

พระคาถาหนุมานคลุกฝุ่น

*(phra khatha hanu man khluk fun)*

*(Incantation Hanuman gathers dust)*

โอมผงเผ่าเจ้าธูลี คองกะพันชาติรี สวาหะ หนุมานะ คลุกคลีตีมะอะ

*(om phong phao thao thuli thuli khong ka phan chatri sawaha ha nu  
mana khlu khli ti ma a)*



พระคาถานี้ให้ใช้เสกฝุ่นทาตัว เกิดกำลังเรี่ยวแรงขึ้น ทั้งทำให้เป็นคงทนทรหดด้วย  
อยู่คงแก่อวุธสิ้นทุกประการแล

*(phra khatha ni hai chai sek fun tha tua koet kamlang riaoraeng  
khuen thang thamhai pen khongthon thorahot duai yukhong kae a  
wut sin thuk prakan lae)*

*When reciting this khatha, take dirt and apply it all over your body. It  
will make you more powerful and increase your endurance. No  
weapon will be able to kill you.*

หะนูมานะ นาสั่งสะตั้ง

*(ha nu mana na sang sa tang)*

คือกำลังพญาหนุมานจงมาเป็นกำลังแห่งตัวข้าพเจ้าในเวลา

*(khue kamlang phaya hanu man chong ma pen kamlang haeng tua  
khaphachao nai wela ni)*

*This khatha can be used to conjure Hanuman's powers to be used  
by a person (Sareekaboot 1960, 109-161).*

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The magical properties of a *yant* are not wholly dependent on the Ajarn, there are sets of rules that a person must follow to sustain the powers of each tattoo, which will be explored further in conjunction to Hanuman *yants*.

#### 4.6 Why Get a Yant

B.J Terwiel noted in *Tattooing in Thailand's History* that people would get a magical tattoo for protection, strength, influence, and invulnerability (Terwiel 1979, 160), while Phaya Anuman asserted that at the beginning of the twentieth century the main reason a person would get a tattoo was for invulnerability. Much more sporadically, people would get a tattoo to magically heal certain diseases (Anuman

1981, 317). In Mae Hong Son Province, Nicola Tennenbaum conducted ethnographic research on tattooing in Shan communities:

Shan tattoos are not decorative, they are medicine, in the broad sense. They protect their bearers by causing beings to have loving kindness toward them or by preventing harmful things like bullets or knives from entering their bodies (Tannenbaum 1987, 695).

While Tennenbaum believed tattoos historically were not meant to be decorative, there is a component of aesthetic value in them. Many males in Northern Thailand would get tattoos from their knees to their waists to mark their passage into adulthood. If a man could endure the pain that came with these tattoos, they were ready for marriage.

Tattoos have an equally important aesthetic value and are sexually attractive to women who delight in their appearance and approve of a process that in the past was termed “being made beautiful forever (Conway 2014, 195).”

In Modern Thailand, a different form of fashion and self-expression has become part of the *sak yant* practice. Conway expressed that much of this has to do with the commercialization of tattooing in cities:

Many young men now leave rural areas of the country to find jobs in cities and they choose to be tattooed there. Tattoo fashions are set by movie stars and footballers and by TV characters in soaps and horror movies, who feature on web sites and city billboards. A range of books and magazines illustrated with tattoo patterns are available, often reproduced in modern graphic designs (Conway 2014, 203).

In Thailand, *yants* were looked down upon by a large part of society, particularly the urban elite who viewed it as a practice of the rural peasantry (Terwiel 1979, 156-157). Many people who wanted a job in the government, education, or other esteemed positions would hide the fact that they had a *yant*.

The beautification of the tattoo embodies an important rationale for why a person would choose to get a *yant*. A mystical tattoo can be considered a boost of confidence for a person. Anybody who makes the decision to get a *yant* feels that there is something they are lacking in their life and believes that the powers of the tattoo will fill that void. Ornamenting the body with a *yant* can work in the same way and is reflective of a modern culture that appreciates physical beauty. Also, it would be practical for a person who has a *yant* to gain influence and make people like or even desire them to have one that is attractive.

#### 4.7 History of Hanuman in Northern Thai Tattooing Tradition

There has been no research on Hanuman in Northern Thai *sak yant*. Though, Bock did convince a person who gave tattoos in Lakon (modern day Lampang) to draw the most popular tattoos he administered to people. Most of the designs were of different animals, though a tattoo of Hanuman was included among them (Bock 1985, 173). No other characters from the Ramayana story were given as tattoo examples.

#### 4.8 Why Hanuman Was Included In Northern Thai Sak Yant

Northern Thai Hanuman *yants* emblemize a multitude of distinguishable powers. This is because in the Ramayana stories, Hanuman exhibited sundry miraculous powers, such as superhuman strength and invincibility. Additionally, Hanuman's demeanor was one of a warrior, compassionate, a trickster, and a wiseman. His character represents a diverse set of values which affords the opportunity for Hanuman to be represented in many distinctive *yants*.

#### 4.8.1 Hanuman's Powers in Northern Thailand

While across Thailand Hanuman's powers are similar, they are often embellished in Northern Thailand. To describe Hanuman's beauty in the Central Thai Ramakien, Hanuman is able to *how pen dao pen duen*, which means when he yawns, the stars come out of his mouth, which showed his beauty. The authors of Northern Thai Ramayanas instead chose to have him emit the sun to magnify the miraculousness of his powers:

พูดจาคำใดจะเป็นตะวันออกมา 7 ดวง คนทั้งหลายเรียกว่า “หอน้ำมาน” มีใบหน้า  
เหมือนวานร (Patchalin 2004, 367)

*(phut cha kam dai cha pen tawan-ok ma 7 duang khon thanglai  
riakwa ho nam man mi baina muean wanon)*

*(When [Hanuman] speaks, 7 suns come out of his mouth. People  
called him “Haw Nam Mahn” and he had a face like a monkey.*

The name *Haw Nam Mahn* has its own meaning in the Northern Thai language and tells the story of Hanuman's birth. It directly translates into *haw* (sac) *nam* (semen) *man* (pregnant). It roughly translates into “Vessel of seed that impregnates”. *Hawraman's* name alludes to the story of his birth.

#### 4.9 Hanuman as a Thep in Northern Thailand

How Hanuman received his powers is also somewhat different than the Central Thai Ramakien. In Rama I's story, Shiva gave Phra Phai half of his own strength to give to Hanuman. Phra Phai used Shiva's trident, discus, and scepter to fashion Hanuman's body. Phra Phai also gave his own powers to Hanuman. In the Northern version of *Hawraman*, Hanuman is the son of Phra Ya Toht Ra Ta, which is commonly believed to be the god Shiva. He received his powers both from Shiva and from Phra Athit, the

sun god:

วันหนึ่งหอรมานได้เหาะขึ้นไปยึดหัวรถพระอาทิตย์ เพราะเข้าใจว่า เป็นผลมะเดื่อ  
 จึงถูกรัศมีของพระอาทิตย์เผาจนเหลือเพียงเลือดหยดหนึ่งติดอยู่ที่หัวรถ พระอาทิตย์  
 คิดว่าคงเป็นผู้มีบุญมาเกิดจึงชุบชีวิตหอรมานขึ้นมาและให้มีฤทธิ์เพิ่มขึ้น จะเนรมิต  
 กายเป็นอะไรก็ได้ หอรมานในเรื่องหอรมานจึงมีฤทธิ์มาก (Patchalin 2004, 369)

*(wan nueng hon man dai ho khuen pai yuet hua rot phra athit phro  
 khaochai wa pen phon maduea chueng thuk ratsami khong phra  
 athit phao chon luea phiang lueat yot nueng tit yu thi hua rot phra  
 athit khit wa khong pen phu mi bun ma koet chueng chupchiwit hon  
 man khuen ma lae hai mi rit phoem khuen cha neramit kai pen arai  
 ko dai hon man nai rueang hon man chueng mi rit mak)*

*(One day Hawraman flew up to the head of Phra Athit's vehicle  
 because he thought it was a fig. He came under the light of Phra Athit  
 and burned till he was only but a drop of blood on the head of his  
 vehicle. Phra Athit thought that Hanuman had merit and resurrected  
 him, giving him more powers than before.)*

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Hanuman was able to fly, transform his body into different sizes, and was unparalleled in his skills in combat and war.

#### 4.9.1 Hanuman as A Thep and its Implications in Sak Yant

Hanuman's powers outshine other characters who have been represented in *sak yant*. This is because Hanuman is often portrayed as a *thep*, which is a divine being that is lesser than a god, but stronger than a mortal human. He was born on the sixteenth level of Traiphumikata, which outlines the different levels of the universe and consciousness in Thai cosmology. Thongchai explained that "in the Traiphum

cosmography, beings are classified by their merit and designated to live in particular places according to their store of merit (Thongchai 1994, 20).” Also, “Overall the thirty-one levels in the three worlds formed a qualitative classification of existence in which the human level was simply one (Thongchai 1994, 20).” The authors of the Ramakien stated that Hanuman was born on the sixteenth level to assert that he was higher than a human which exists on the fifth level of Traiphumikata. Furthermore, the sixteenth level of Traiphumikata exists on the Rupa Loka plane, which is inhabited by gods, unlike Kama Loka, the plain of humans and lesser devas. Out of all the characters in Thai folklore or mythology, it is only Hanuman and Ganesha which are of such a high merit that have been incorporated into the *sak yant* tradition. Consequently, Hanuman’s powers are considered otherworldly and above what a normal human or animal could have.

But, why could a mere human being access the miraculous powers that Hanuman represents? First, Hanuman still would exist on a level of consciousness that encompasses both body and mind. He could feel desire, pleasure, and pain. Since Traiphumikata is not only physical but psychological, he theoretically could exist in the world of humans. Also, in the Ramakien, Phra Ram, who would have been on a lower level of Traiphumikata than Hanuman, showed his strength and his ability to rule by being able to use the powers of a *thep* for his own purposes. This is shown in the Ramakien, yet not implied in Northern Thai Ramayanas.

#### 4.10 Hanuman Birth Stories in Northern Thailand

In some versions of Northern Thai Ramayanas, Hanuman is not the son of a god. Because of this, some versions do not view Hanuman as a *thep*. In Promajak, Hanuman is born to a king as his father and a *wanon* (monkey) as his mother. Other versions he is born to lesser gods instead of Shiva. This is the case in *Lanka Seep Ho* in which Hanuman’s mother was a fire goddess and his father was a wind god or *Ood Sabarot* in which his father was the wind god and his mother was a human (Patchalin 2004, 366) .

#### 4.10.1. Different Birth Stories and Its Implication on Hanuman in Northern Thai Sak Yant

Because there are many Northern Thai Ramayanas, Hanuman's character is viewed by Northern Thais dependent of a wide range of factors. Often, people will have different opinions if Hanuman is a *thep* and a divine being. Others view him as a *ling lom*, albeit a very strong one. Some view Hanuman as a *thep* who happens to be *ling lom* as well. These viewpoints based on which stories they were told about his character. The field research will reflect that even though sometimes people are unaware of the different versions of Northern Thai Ramayanas, their views on Hanuman are still influenced by them.



## CHAPTER 5: Hanuman's Inclusion in Sak Yant as a Reflection of Northern Thai Culture

### 5.1 Knowledge of the Character Hanuman in Northern Thailand

As hypothesized, a person's knowledge of Hanuman comes from a multitude of sources based on their upbringing, education, and where they reside. All interviewees understood the basic information that is gleaned from the Thai Ramakien: Hanuman was the general of Phra Ram's army and aided him in rescuing Sita from Lanka. But, subsequent knowledge of Hanuman was gathered from other sources such as oral tellings of Northern Ramayanas. Participant Five, a monk who spent most of his life in the Sangha and ordained as a novice in 1974, explained that growing up he had no knowledge of the Ramakien story. He had only heard stories of Hanuman and the *yak*<sup>2</sup> that he had battled. He was unsure of Hanuman's relationship to Phra Ram and Phra Lak or why Hanuman became a general in Phra Ram's army, but supposed that it was because Phra Ram may have taught Hanuman to fight. Coming from a small village outside of Chiang Mai he was not exposed to the Ramakien of Central Thailand.

Participant Six, who worked as messenger, explained that the older generation had little knowledge of the Ramakien and instead most of their understanding of the Hanuman character was orally transmitted. This could be due to limited access to education. He asserted that all people know Hanuman but the difference was in people's individual understanding of him. All versions of Hanuman in Thai Ramayanas came from the same source: The Ramayana of India. Each individual's knowledge of Hanuman is determined by what stories they were told by

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<sup>2</sup>*Yak* is the Thai word for "giant".



family and members of their communities. Also, people related to Hanuman based on what values were important in their own lives.

Participant One, a practitioner of *sak yant*, explained that he learned about the Northern Thai manifestations of Hanuman from manuscripts at different *wat* which contained tellings of Northern Thai Ramayanas. Subsequently, he would pass on that knowledge to others. He also mentioned that children in Northern Thailand grew up hearing their elders tell folktales about Hanuman and *ling lom*. Participant Eight, a teacher confirmed this by saying that he learned more about the Northern Thai Hanuman from Participant One who administered his Hanuman *yants*. It came as a surprise to many participants that they could visit different *wats* or read translations of Northern Thai Ramayanas at Chiang Mai University. Some were unaware that stories had been written down and were not just folktales told by elders.

Often, people would claim they had no knowledge of Hanuman or the manifestation of his character in Northern Thailand without realizing they actually did. This was the case with Participant Nine who was a competitive biking coach from Chiang Mai. He recalled his elders referred to Hanuman as *ling lom*. Participant Nine claimed that more and more, the Hanuman of the Central Thai Ramakien is syndicated in the region and the younger generations are losing their grasp on their local culture. In school, students have to learn about the Ramakien of Central Thailand and its impact on Thai culture. But, much of local culture is left to be taught by their families. Consequently, Northern Thais do not have the opportunity to learn about these tales in depth unless they study in a department such as the Lanna Studies Program at Chiang Mai University.

Two participants, participant ten and eleven, had no idea that there were even Northern Thai Ramayanas. Both of them were from Central Thailand, but grew

in Chiang Mai. Participant ten, an amulet salesman from Nakhon Pathom, said that even though he was married to a Northern Thai woman he had never heard of any localized story of Hanuman. Participant eleven, from Suphanburi, reasoned that many people, him included, did not know about localized versions of Hanuman from other Ramayanas because the Ramakien was the only version of the story worth knowing. Although Participant Ten had received a Hanuman *yant* in Northern Thailand he chose an Ajarn who hailed from Wat Bang Phra in Nakhon Pathom, meaning that he was educated on the Central Thai versions of the Hanuman character. It can be seen that regional beliefs are very important not only to Northern Thais but Central Thais who have moved outside of their region. Participant Seven explained that most knowledge of Hanuman in Northern Thailand was passed down by older family members, which would explain why Central Thais are often unaware that there are different versions of the Ramayana. Each interviewee believed that people's cognizance of Hanuman has changed as a result of the internet. Before, people would learn about characters from folklore by speaking to monks or visiting *wats*. Presently, Thais do their research on the internet which often reflects the Hanuman of the Central Thai Ramakien. Participant One mentioned that when a person visited him for a Hanuman *yant* he would often have to educate people on Hanuman's character and the benefits of different *yants*.

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#### 5.1.1 Hanuman as a Thep or Ling Lom

As previously stated, some versions of the Northern Thai Ramayanas present Hanuman as a *thep* while others show him as half monkey, half human. Because of this, some Northern Thais refer to him as *ling lom*. This was the case with participant four, a practicing monk from Chiang Rai who stressed that Hanuman was not a *thep*. Others such as participant one, explained that some people will separate the concept of *thep* and *ling lom*, meaning those who refer to Hanuman as *ling lom* believe he is not a *thep*. He believes that *ling lom* is just another way to refer to Hanuman and does not determine his status. Finally, some completely separate the concept of *ling lom* with the character of Hanuman. These disparate ways of

attributing a status to Hanuman shed light on the diversity of his character for Northern Thais and reflect the various versions of the local Ramayana stories.

### 5.1.2 Diversity of Knowledge of Hanuman

It can be determined that the knowledge of Hanuman is varied and diverse in Northern Thailand. There is no authoritative version of his character, instead he is represented in varied incarnations depending on an individual's own understanding and exposure to his character through many mediums calculated by localized versions of the Ramayana story, exposure to the state sponsored Ramakien, and personal research as a result of the internet. While the Central Thai story has integrated into Northern Thai Culture many Thais, both knowingly and unknowingly, view Hanuman through the lens of their own local culture.

## 5.2 Hanuman Yants and Their Significance from the Perspective of Northern Thais or People Living in Northern Thailand

Each interviewee had a personal opinion on how Hanuman's character fit into the tradition of *sak yant*, Hanuman's significance in the practice, why a person would choose to get a Hanuman *yant*, and what attributes were associated with his character. Personal belief is an integral part of *sak yant*. The practice is not pontifical, but flexible and varied. Ergo, it would be impractical to endeavor to index Hanuman *yants* into static and rigid categories. Instead, viewing Hanuman's place in the tradition as a whole is more conducive to this study.

The character of Hanuman is both unique and significant in the Northern Thai *sak yant* tradition. Due to the popularity of his character there are innumerable Hanuman *yants*, many more than the common ten *yants* associated with him. Also, the traits or powers that consociate with Hanuman are manifold.

Northern Thais grow up hearing stories about Hanuman in his various manifestations. Because of this he is widely known, ubiquitous, and associated with positive attributes that people want to emulate. Although Hanuman is prevalent across Thailand, Participant Six considered his character to be especially significant in Northern Thailand because Hanuman represented many values that he believed to be unique to Northern Thai culture. He mentioned that while other parts of Thailand might celebrate Hanuman as a warrior, it was his *metta* or compassion that was most relevant to him. Participant Six explained that this is because Hanuman is on the side of Dharma. He stated that southerners— Central and Southern Thais, seemed to only care about Hanuman's strength as a warrior, when it was Hanuman's compassion that offered a person with a Hanuman *yant* protection. In Participant Six's perspective Hanuman represented values that he believed to be unique to Northern Thai culture. This is because the character of Hanuman is so easily personalized and people are able to mold his character to mirror traits they find to be dear to themselves.

Participant Seven said that when he practiced *sak yant* his followers often distinguished between the Hanuman of the Thai Ramakien and Hawramon of Northern Thai culture. Participant Two also agreed that Hanuman's popularity was a reflection of Northern Thai values. He believed Hanuman's character was associated with the Northern Thai people's demeanor of being friendly and compassionate. He also mentioned that in Central Thailand Hanuman was celebrated for being a playboy and this was not a value associated with his character for traditional Northern Thai culture. It is common for many Northern Thais to take pride in the uniqueness of *sak yant* traditions and explain how their version is distinguishable from other parts of the country.

Participant One professed that Hanuman was prevalent because his image is widely syndicated across Thailand. People grow up seeing his image and learning

about his character. Hanuman is one of the few characters that, although widely popular across Thailand, different communities celebrate him and take ownership of his character to express their own localized values. Participant Six reasoned that Hanuman's popularity was being that he possessed so many different qualities that a person could relate to and want to emulate. For him there was the Hanuman of Thailand and then different versions of the character that spoke to different peoples.

### 5.3 Powers Associated With Hanuman Yants

As stated previously, Hanuman has many qualities that a person could relate to and emulate. An Ajarn might suggest or a person could choose a Hanuman *yant* for protection, fortune, confidence, or to make people attracted to them. Often, the types of Hanuman *yants* give a wearer multiple blessings. It is possible to break the *yants* into different categories but often one tattoo has multiple uses. Hanuman *yants* can have benefits including but not limited to *kong krapan* (invulnerability), *klaew klaad* (protection from accidents), *metta mahaniyom* (others will act compassionately towards a person), and *maha saneha* (people feel attracted or drawn towards the wearer). For Northern Thais all attributes fall under the blanket of having beings act more compassionately towards the wearer of a *yant*. As Hanuman *yants* have multiple properties these categories are often interconnected. Sometimes a person gets multiple Hanuman *yants*, which was the case with Participant Ten (*figure 1*).



(Figure 1)

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Participant Eleven also had more than one Hanuman *yants* and believed that because he had so many tattoos the powers were competing with each other. An Ajarn suggested that he get one more Hanuman *yant* that was powerful enough to control the rest of the tattoos. For this reason, I have chosen to not describe the attributes of Hanuman *yants* based on multiple categories, but instead will divide tattoos into two: for protection and compassion, which is how Participant Eleven distinguished between attributes of Hanuman *yants*. Though, many times these two categories are intertwined.

### 5.3.1 Hanuman *Yants* for Protection

Each Ajarn admitted that many Thais associated Hanuman *yants* with protective qualities. Regardless, they also asserted that these qualities were not only associated with the idea that a person with a Hanuman *yant* was invincible from physical attacks, but also from accidents and mistreatment by others. Participant Three, a monk practicing *sak yant* in Phan, reasoned that it was almost impossible for a Hanuman *yant* to protect somebody from something like the bullet of a gun. This is because in the modern world the rules associated with *sak yant* are almost impossible to follow. He gave an example by referring to the belief that those with *yants* could not walk under bridges, which was nearly impossible for a person to avoid as many roads in Thailand have overpass bridges that pedestrians use to cross the street. Subsequently, anybody with a *yant* who drove a car would not be able to avoid passing under a bridge. This belief displayed a reason for why a commonly believed magical power was something Participant Three had never seen. Participant Five believed that a Hanuman *yant* could protect a person from physical harm and claimed that when he received his Hanuman *yant* his Ajarn stabbed him with a knife, but it did not enter his body (*figure 2*).



(Figure 2)

Participant Four said that a Hanuman *yant* is so strong that during *Chaaasaa*, a day where Thais clean out crematoriums, he found a patch of skin that was unburned with a Hanuman *yant* on it. Participant Nine recalled a person from his childhood who had gotten a Hanuman *yant* in jail. When we got out he was known for being able to take a shot of rice whiskey and swallow the shot glass along with the liquor. Participant Nine also claimed that when the man died and was cremated the skin



with the *yant* did not burn either because the power of the *yant* stopped it from being destroyed. In Northern Thai Ramayanas Hanuman is often invincible. Participant Seven mentioned a local folktale he heard as a child where if Hanuman was injured he could cover himself in dirt and his wounds would be healed.

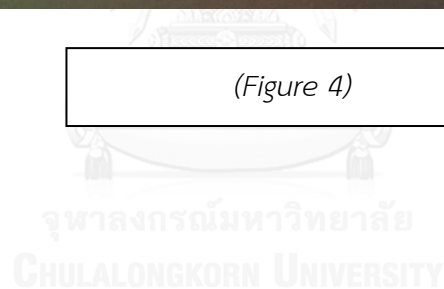
Hanuman *yants* can also be administered for protecting those who travel, which is a reason both Participant Eight and Participant Nine received a *yant* (*figure 3 and figure 4*).



(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)



This type of Hanuman *yant* allows a person to *duen tahng bawt phrai* (travel safely). Participant One said that while all types of people got Hanuman *yants*, this particular type of tattoo was quite popular with minibus drivers. Participant Nine also believed his Hanuman *yants* made him stronger and his life has become easier since getting them.

While some Thais believe in the pretense of the mystical powers of a *yant*, the protective qualities of Hanuman tattoos are not only attributed towards Hanuman's physical strength and protection. Participant One professed that Hanuman's physical strength was not important, but instead it was his cleverness that made Hanuman such a valued character. Participant Six mentioned that a

Hanuman *yant* was more powerful than that of a tiger *yant* because a tiger's strength is raw power, but it has no intellect or mind. Hanuman is both strong and intelligent. Participant Eleven stated that he would not get a Hanuman *yant* for protection because there were too many rules associated with that type of *yant*.

### 5.3.2 Hanuman Yants for Compassion

Often, Hanuman is only associated with strength and protection. For Northern Thais, this is not the case and shows how valuable people Hanuman *yants* to be. It is believed that Hanuman *yants* can improve a person's fortune because they cause others to treat the wearer well. Participant One reasoned that certain Hanuman *yants* are also popular with women who often tattooed *Hanuman Tua Kao* (figure 5).



( Figure 5)

If a woman had enough merit he would give them a similar *yant* of Hanuman riding a pig. Accordingly, these types of *yants* are believed to help a person who wanted to be successful in business. Participant Four said that women could not get Hanuman *yants*, especially *Hanuman Tua Kao*, because the *yant* is too powerful. Though Participant Three stated that anybody could get *Hanuman Tua Kao*, he personally could not tattoo women.

Men also get Hanuman *yants* in hopes that it will attract people to them. But, as Participant Two elaborated, Hanuman *yants* were not supposed to make a person sexually attracted to the wearer. Instead, the tattoos are believed to make a person more likeable. A person who is viewed as friendly, outgoing, and confident and can draw people to him or her will inherently be successful.

### 5.3.3 Hanuman Yants and the Confidence They Bestow on People

Many participants agreed that much of the benefits of Hanuman *yants* were a result of the confidence it gave the wearer. Participant Six explained that after he received his Hanuman *yants* he became more self-assured and brave. Participant Three believed that people loved the image of Hanuman, which led more people to get a Hanuman *yant*. This made people feel more secure in their selves because they had a beautiful piece of artwork on their skin. Participant Seven showed concern about the modern trend of *sak yant* for fashion, stating that the tattoos were not meant to be aesthetic. Each monk who practiced *sak yant* conceded that the desire for a *yant* to be visually pleasing was important to people and as long as that was not the only motivation to get the tattoo, it was acceptable. If a person did not believe in the tattoo at all and just wanted it for fashion Participant One suggested that they go to a regular tattoo shop instead.

## 5.4 Properties of Hanuman Yants

Each Hanuman *yant* has differential properties that when melded together, creates a tattoo that is believed to inhabit a wearer with extraordinary powers. The magic of a tattoo depends on factors such as the wearer's commitment to and his or her beliefs in the practice of *sak yant*, the skill and merit of the person administering the *yant*, the khathaa, and the actual image of the tattoo.

### 5.4.1 The Importance of Belief in Sak Yant

The powers associated with *yants* are not only based on the tattoo, khatha, or Ajarn administering it. Personal belief plays an important role as well. Each Ajarn stressed that if a person did not have faith that a *yant* would give a person a certain quality or protection they were looking for, the magic would be useless. Also, if they did not follow basic teachings of Buddhism, a person would not be able to maintain the power of their *yant*. Participant One explained that the most important rules to follow was to always show respect to one's parents and to never harm another living being.

In Northern Thailand, *sak yant* is used as a tool to influence people to follow Buddhist values. Participant Three stressed that a person who did not follow the Dharma or treat others with kindness and compassion would not benefit from the powers of a *yant*. Participant Four also believed this and mentioned that the practice of *sak yant* was a tool to help others make merit. A person does not have to be Buddhist to get a *yant* as the belief in kindness and compassion is universal and important to all humans. Participant Six believed that his tattoos, including two Hanuman *yants*, made him a better man.

Participant Two mentioned that a person should get a *yant* for peaceful reasons and that if they should not use the powers of the *yants* for the wrong things. Most of the participants agreed that the magic of a tattoo administered by a monk or ajarn who followed the Dharma would disappear if a person committed a sin.

#### 5.4.2 Practitioners of Sak Yant

Many Thais accentuate importance to the person who gives them their *yants*. This often depends on a person's culture and upbringing. Participant Ten chose to get his *yant* from a practicing Ajarn who hailed from his home province of Nakhon Pathom. He explained it was because Wat Bang Phra, a famous temple for *sak yant*, was near to his family's home. Even though he had lived in Chiang Mai most of his life, he believed that it was important to get a *yant* from a person who trained in a place that reflected the culture he came from. Accordingly, many Northern Thais believed it was important for them to get their *yants* from a person from the region. Participant Six wanted his Ajarn to understand and empathize with his own cultural values. Participant Five explained that this was because the practice of *sak yant* was a way for Northerners to preserve their culture and it was the Ajarns and monks who were able to facilitate it.

The relationship between an Ajarn and his followers is substantial in the choosing of a *yant* as it is collaborative process between the two parties. It is the Ajarn's job to advise a person on the *yant* that is best for them. This is based on a person's situation in life, what they feel like they are lacking, or what they hope to gain. An Ajarn is expected to exhibit a certain level of wisdom and compassion to build trust between him and his followers.

#### 5.4.3 Khatha in Hanuman Yants

The *khatha* in a Hanuman *yant* differs between Ajarn depending on with whom they had previously studied. Each practitioner had their own unique convictions on how a *khatha* was associated with a tattoo. Some Ajarn believed there were specific incantations that could only be used with certain Hanuman *yants* while others stated that anyone could be interchanged with all images.

Participant Two stated that if a person stated that it was acceptable to infuse a Hanuman *yant* with different *khataa* depending on what blessing his follower was

looking for. Participant One, who both knew and respected Participant Two, had a different opinion. He believed that each Hanuman image has specific *khatha* associated with it. As a result, he would not change the incantation to fit the *yant*.

Each Ajarn emphasized that a *khatha* should be written in the Northern Thai script as their beliefs, culture, and powers are a reflection of their local heritage. Participant Five recounted that his favorite parts of his *yants* were that they were in the Northern Thai script. It filled him with pride for his culture and heritage. Participant Two said that sometimes Ajarn would tattoo *khatha* in both Northern Thai and the *Kohm* script used in Central Thai *sak yant*.

Both the Ajarn and Thais who received *yants* believed that the *khatha* were the most important parts of a *yant*. Participant Twelve said that a *khatha* could have power without an image, but an image was nothing without a *khatha*. Participant Seven mentioned that the image of Hanuman was just there to represent the *khatha*.

Either while or after tattooing the *yant* the Ajarn would also recite the *khatha* associated with Hanuman then blow onto the tattoo to invoke its powers. Sometimes, before tattooing the Ajarn would recite an incantation and blow into the *khem sak*, which is the needle used for administering a *yant*.

#### 5.4.4 The Image of Hanuman in Sak Yant

While traditionally the actual imagery involved in a *yant* is not important, today many want a tattoo that is aesthetically pleasing. This is not to say that historically *yants* were purposefully made to be ugly. Before, Ajarns did not have adequate equipment and would often use sharpened bamboo for needles without templates

of the *yant*. Participant Five showed his tattoos and said that the beauty of the image did not matter (*figure 6*).



(Figure 6)

Participant Three said that a lot of people like the image of Hanuman which initially leads them to researching the powers of *yants* associated with him. Participant Eight stated that although he does not like to show off his tattoos he likes his Hanuman

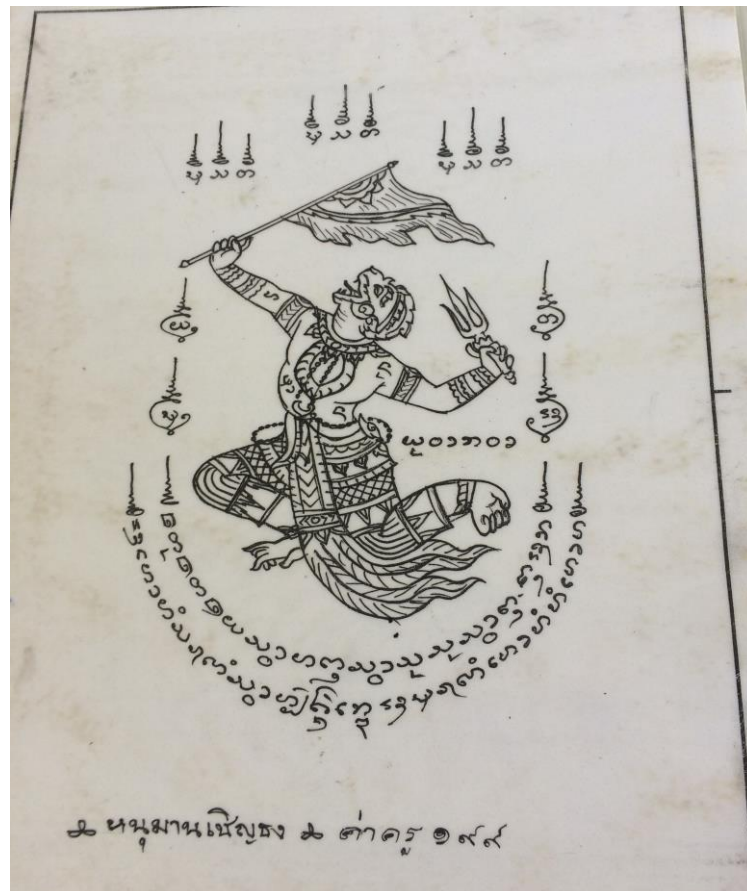


*yant* the most. The image often reminds a person of their connection to the character of Hanuman and the powers he represents.

The image of Hanuman can be seen as a vessel that holds the *khatta*. Many participants mentioned that historically a whole Hanuman *yant* would be made up of *katthaa*, meaning the actual incantations would form lines that made up Hanuman's body. Participant Seven believed that strongest Hanuman *yants* were those that were solely made up of *khatha*.

Today, there are an innumerable amount of Hanuman *yants* with different images. Participant Two said that most of the imagery of Hanuman *yants* was influenced by Central Thailand, especially the desire for people to make their *yants* aesthetically beautiful. While each Ajarn takes his own artistic liberties while designing a Hanuman *tattoo*, he is inherently influenced by the Central Thai imagery of Hanuman that exists in copious amounts in Northern Thailand. It is common to see Hanuman's image in business logos, advertisements, t-shirts, and bumperstickers on cars.

The Ajarns stated that *Hanuman Tua Ha* and *Hanuman Tua Kao* were the two most popular Hanuman *yants*, though I did not meet anybody with *Hanuman Tua Ha* (Figure 7).



(Figure 7)

As previously stated, some Ajarn believed that *Hanuman Tua Kao* was too strong for most people. Participant Three rarely ever would allow a person to tattoo that *yant* because he was worried they would not be able to control its power and risked becoming possessed by it. Participant Four asserted that the *yant* was so popular because of its strength and that people became possessed because they believe in it, not because the actual *yant* was too powerful. He explained that Hanuman does not actually enter the body of a person anymore because people do not follow all the rules of *sak yant*.

Nonetheless, many Thais believe that if they drink too much or allow their emotions to get the better of them they will become possessed by their Hanuman

*yant*. Participant Twelve recounted memories from his childhood where his father would become possessed by his Hanuman *yant*. “He would jump around and acted like a monkey if he had too much to drink.” Participant Nine believes he was possessed by Hanuman as well. He had multiple Hanuman *yants* and after drinking from a glass that wasn’t his own he went into a trance. He described his experience by saying that he forgot who he was and blacked out. His brother brought him to a *wat* and a monk who was able to take him out of the trance. He later learned from his brother that he had begun shrieking and rolling around on the ground. The monk told him it was because his different *yants* were competing with each other and he had to get one more Hanuman tattoo to balance the powers of the rest.

Participant Eight, who had *Hanuman Tua Ha Yant*, believed that it helped him gain respect from his students and protected him when he traveled. Participant One preferred to use red ink for *Hanuman Tua Hok Yants* because it was the color used for compassion. He also mentioned that red ink came from the Thai Yai people. The ingredients to make the ink were hard to find and as a result historically only wealthy people could afford it.

#### 5.4.5 The Tattooing Process

Both Participant One and Two said that a *yant* could take anywhere from ten to about forty five minutes. I had the opportunity to watch Participant One tattoo somebody and he spent roughly twenty five minutes on the tattoo. Depending on the design, an Ajarn will either use a template or tattoo the *yant* from memory. Participant One also mentioned that he liked to work quickly as the longer a person was getting tattooed, the more painful it would be.

#### 5.4.6 Location of Hanuman Yants on the Body

People receive Hanuman *yants* on many different parts of the body. Participants involved in this study had them on the arm, back, and stomach. Many of the interviewees had multiple *yants* and the location of the Hanuman tattoo could be determined by what part of the body had enough space to get a tattoo. The size of the Hanuman *yant* was determined by the body part it was tattooed on.

### 5.5 Hanuman Yants as a Reflection of Northern Thai Culture

Northern Thais use the character Hanuman and the tradition of *sak yant* as an emblem that represents their personal and cultural values. The importance of traditional culture, personal belief, and adapting to and integrating with modern and common Thai society influences how Northerners comprehensively view Hanuman and his place in tattooing tradition.

As a result of this research, it can be seen that the people of Northern Thailand have two identities: their local traditional culture and that of the Thai nation as a whole. Northerners accommodate Hanuman and Hawramon, the usage of Northern Thai and the *Kohm* script, and blend different tales, beliefs, and worldview together to reflect their own cultural paradigms.

This research has shown that compassion is of the utmost significance to Northern Thais and Hanuman's incorporation into the *sak yant* tradition is a reflection of those values. Moreover, Hanuman's character is used to reflect Buddhist values in hopes that people will follow its teachings.

Finally, it can be concluded that Thais view both Hanuman and his position in the *sak yant* tradition in many ways, proving that his character can not only be defined as how he is presented in a singular telling of the Thai Ramayana. Instead,

the multitude of Hanuman *yants*, outlook on his personality traits, and reflections by the people who have his tattoo present him as prolific and multifaceted.



## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Review of Problems of Study and Hypothesis

Through the research of this thesis it can be seen that the character of Hanuman is diverse and emblemizes many values for Northern Thais. This has presented Hanuman and *sak yant* from the perspective of typical people who live in Northern Thailand. While compassion is the most important trait in the Northern Thai *sak yant* tradition, people also get Hanuman *yants* for protection, fortune, and influence. Hanuman is very popular as a result of his syndication and because he is used to represent many values important to Northern Thais.

### 6.2 Findings and Conclusion

The people who get Hanuman *yants* use his character to reflect their own cultural values. Northern Thais view themselves— through Hanuman's character character, as peaceful, friendly, and compassionate people. They also use the tradition of *sak yant* to exemplify those values. Much of Northern Thai people's knowledge of Hanuman comes from stories told to them by their elders. Presently, Northern Thai view of Hanuman is influenced by both local stories and the influence of Central Thai culture.

Each person uses Hanuman's character to reflect what values they feel to be important. People believe that his character represents strength, cleverness, the ability to protect oneself, confidence, and charisma among other traits. A person's connection to Hanuman *yants* is determined by both the culture they are brought up in and their personal beliefs.

The perceived powers of Hanuman *yants* are based on the Ajarn who administer the tattoo, the *khatha*, the belief of the person receiving the *yant*, and the image of Hanuman. Most believe the *khatha* is the most important part of the

*yant*. Many of the interview subjects were proud that their *yants* were written in the Northern Thai script.

### 6.3 Limitations of Study

As this research was carried out in one academic semester, the findings need to be expounding on by both spending more time with Ajarn who administer *sak yant* and interviewing a wider range of people with Hanuman *yants*. Consequently, the outcome of this research is most useful if viewed as a representation of those involved in this study instead of a generalization for all people who live in Northern Thailand. This research shows a group of people's viewpoints on their own culture or one they have integrated into. Furthermore, this research relied on open ended interviews and qualitative research. Many participants chose to answer questions not based on what was asked, but what they considered to be important aspects of Hanuman and *sak yant*. Finally, as all interviews were conducted in Thai, all information was translated into English and interpreted to fit the format of the thesis. Today, Northern Thai knowledge on localized versions of Hanuman is from oral traditions. The limited resources on Northern Thai Ramayanas that have been transliterated into the Central Thai script still use an old form of Northern Thai vocabulary that is difficult to understand even for native Northern Thai speakers. Consequently, I was unable to use Northern Thai Ramayana stories in my analysis of Hanuman's character and instead focused on local knowledge.

### 6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

1: As of now, there is no research on Northern Thai Ramayanas or Hanuman/Hawramon in the English language. Much of the Northern Thai Ramayana stories have only been translated into the Thai script, whereas the vocabulary is still difficult even for Northerners to understand as it is an older version of the language.

2: To both preserve and educate people on Northern Thai traditions, it would be prudent to conduct research and compile different folktales and local stories on

Hanuman, *ling lom*, and *sak yant*. Many subjects believed that it is the older generation who know the most about these subjects and worry that when they pass, many of these stories will be lost.

3: To understand more about *sak yant* in Northern Thailand, a study of *yants* that are indigenous to the region would be helpful. While spending time with Ajarn Rung, he showed me *yants* that he claimed were only done by Northern Thais. By studying these tattoos, it will provide more information about the worldview of Northern Thais.

4: While *sak yant* is practiced in other Southeast Asian countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and Burma/Myanmar, there is little scholarship on the traditions. As each country has its own interpretations of the Hanuman character, it would be useful to research if and how his character is represented in the cultures of these countries.

## 6.6 Final Remarks

When I set out to do research on Hanuman in Northern Thailand, I did not expect people to differentiate between different versions of Thai Ramayanas or Hanuman. I assumed that many Northern Thais would be fully influenced by the Hanuman of the Central Thai Ramakien. Also, I had no idea how much cultural pride people felt for Hanuman and the tradition of *sak yant*. This research has given me a new perspective on Northern Thai culture and I am excited to continue learning more about the unique traditions of this area. I am consistently amazed by how idiomatic different aspects of Thai culture can be based on local traditions and welcome the opportunity to continue learning more about Hanuman, *sak yant*, and Thai folklore.





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## APPENDICES

### Interview Questions for Northern Thais or People Living in Northern Thailand

1. Location of Interview
2. Do you have a Hanuman *yant*? If so, which one(s)
3. Do many people get Hanuman *yants*?
4. Why is Hanuman so popular?
5. Why did you choose to get a Hanuman *yant*?
6. What is unique about the character of Hanuman/Hawraman in Northern Thailand?
7. What traits do Hanuman *yants* give to its wearer?
8. What is the most important trait associated with Hanuman *yants* in Northern Thailand.
9. Is there a particular Hanuman *yant* that is popular?
10. How is the Northern Thai practice of *sak yant* unique?
11. How does Hanuman and *sak yant* reflect Northern Thai culture?

## Interview Questions for Monks Practicing Sak Yant

1. Name
2. *Wat* and location of *Wat*
3. Do many people get Hanuman *yants*?
4. What types of people get Hanuman *yants*?
5. Why is Hanuman so popular?
6. What is unique about the character of Hanuman/Hawraman in Northern Thailand?
7. What traits do Hanuman *yants* give to its wearer?
8. What is the most important trait associated with Hanuman *yants* in Northern Thailand.
9. Is there a particular Hanuman *yant* that is popular?
10. Can women get Hanuman *yants*?
11. How is the Northern Thai practice of *sak yant* unique?
12. How does Hanuman and *sak yant* reflect Northern Thai culture?

## Notes for Interview Subjects

### Participant One:

Name: Phrakru Rung

Location: Wat Padaet, Amphoe Saraphi, Chiang Mai

Dates of Interviews: October 7, 2015, November, 22, 2015

Length of Interviews: Two hours

### Interview Notes:

People who get a Hanuman *yant* have to know him and believe in his powers before he will agree to tattoo them. His knowledge of Hanuman of Northern Thailand comes from texts and manuscripts from different *wats*. Many people learn about the localized versions of Hanuman from their elders. There are specific Hanuman *katha* that are integrally connected to the Hanuman *yants*. *Ajarn Rung believes the main purpose for Hanuman yants are to make people as clever as Hanuman.* Rung believes the strength of the *yants* come from Hanuman and *kathaa*, the *ajarn* only influences it a bit. He won't tattoo people who don't believe in it. Will not tattoo people who do it for fashion. Believes that those who are conceited should not get *yants*. To tattoo, a person must believe in *sak yant* and practice humility. Women get tattoos for compassion, empathy, and fortune.

**Participant Two**

Name: Ajarn Rachan

Location: Wat Bamuen, Lamphun

Date of Interview: October 6, 2015

Length of Interview: One hour

**Interview Notes:**

There are over a hundred different versions of *katthaa* for Hanuman. The imagery of Hanuman is unique today because before beauty was not important. Today, artists create different images to make their work aesthetically pleasing. Imagery of Hanuman has been influenced by Central Thailand. For Northern Thailand, *kathaa* is most important. The image is only secondary. Before, there was no classification of Hanuman *yants*. An artist would use the image of Hanuman and add various *katthaa* based on different values. Northern Thailand doesn't associate Hanuman with a playboy. There are no Northern *kathaas* for that. Ajarn Rachan doesn't believe a Hanuman *yant* will instantly change a person. The powers come when a person needs it. What does change is that it makes a person feel more confident. Northern culture influences why a people get *yants*: Northern Thai culture is friendly and peaceful. Compassion is the main purpose for Northern Thai *sak yant* though protection is also important.



**Participant Three**

Name: Phra Ahtikan

Location: Sankampaeng, Chiang Mai

Date: October 15, 2015

Interview Length: One hour

**Interview Notes:**

Many people want to get Hanuman tattoos, but he doesn't give them. He believes that Hanuman's powers are too strong and most people can't control them. Instead, he suggests they get tiger *yants* or anything less strong. Just the image of Hanuman is extremely strong. He'll only do it for people he deems to be extraordinary. Hanuman is too strong for women. Hanuman is stronger than humans and can overpower them. Hanuman *yants* do give protection. To handle a *yant* such as *Hanuman Tua Kao*, a person must practice meditation and self control. The usage of *sak yant* connects people to their religion and to follow the precepts of Buddhism. Makes the beliefs of Buddhism real for people. It's a tool or symbol for religion. Original reason for *sak yant* was to support religion.

**Participant Four**

Name: Tan Phrakru Weerut

Location: Wat San Ma Mao, Amphoe Phan, Chiang Rai

Interview Date: 10/20/15

Interview Length: One hour

**Interview Notes:**

Some people don't know the difference between Northern and Central Hanumans. People like *Hanuman Tua Kao* because it's the strongest. He believes anybody can get this tattoo. Hanuman *yants* give a person more confidence. You don't see the powers as much because the rules of *sak yant* are almost impossible to follow in present day. He doesn't believe Hanuman lives in the body because it's too hard to follow rules, views Hanuman as a "holy thing" like an amulet. A person must know Hanuman and believe in *sak yant* before he will tattoo them. A lot of people like the image of Hanuman and choose to get a *yant* of him based on that. Hanuman is not a *thep* in Northern Thailand. The Buddhist aspect of *sak yant* is more important than the magical. You can't use your tattoos to do things deemed unacceptable by Buddhist standards. Hanuman can only benefit those who do things in a Buddhist perspective.

### Participant Five

Job: Monk (not practicing *Sak Yant*)

Location of Interview: Wat Kiaw Man, Amphoe Sankhampaeng, Chiang Mai

Date of Interview: September 5, 2015

Length of Interview: 45 minutes

### Interview Notes:

2518: Initiate. 2521: Novice monk. 2528: Monk. First tattoo at the age of 21. He tattooed Hanuman because of his beliefs in his character told to him by his elders who had gotten the same *yants*. His knowledge of Hanuman came from local stories and he never read the Central Thai Ramakien. Only heard stories of Hanuman and his battles with *yak*. Learned about the character of Hanuman before knowing the story of the Ramakien. Still has little knowledge of other characters from the story. He is not fully sure about Hanuman's relationship to Phra Lak or Phra Ram. He doesn't know why he became there soldier and thinks maybe it was because Phra Ram taught Hanuman how to fight. Believed that Hanuman *yants* gave him powers and confidence. He likes his tattoos because they are in the Northern Thai script. Northern *sak yant* are not used for strength in hurting others, but for cultural pride, confidence, gaining respect, protecting the body, and compassion. Before, people would stab themselves with knives after receiving a Hanuman *yant* and the knife wouldn't enter the body. Details of the image is not important, what is important is that the image represents Hanuman and *khattaa*. Hanuman is the theme of the *yant*. Beauty is not traditionally important, it is just an added benefit. You have to have confidence in the Ajarn who gives a *yant* for it to work.

**Participant Six:**

Job: Messenger

Location of Interview: Panthip Plaza, Amphoe Muang, Chiang Mai

Date of Interview: 9/25/2015

Length of Interview: One and a half hours

**Interview Notes:**

In Northern Thailand, the birth story of Hanuman has him in his mothers womb for 30 months. Got his first Hanuman *yant* at the age of 42 from Phra Ajarn Rung. Received his Hanuman *yants* for compassion and so others would believe his words. After receiving the Hanuman *yant*, he felt more confidence and felt he did not have any fear. Believes Hanuman is a *thep* and that nobody is stronger than him. People get Hanuman *yants* to give and get compassion, strength, influence, and *maha saneha*. Before, a Hanuman *yant* consisted of only *kathaa*. Today, everyone knows the Ramakien, but the difference is in people's understanding. Northern Thais are influenced by how the story is told to them by their elders. All Thai Ramayanas come from the same Indian source. Each person's own experiences changes their understanding of Hanuman. Northern people choose tattoos based on values that are important to their local culture. Compassion is the most important quality. He believes Southerners (meaning Central and Southern Thais) would want a tiger because they are more aggressive. Hanuman is important everywhere, but very important in the North. Southerners only care about Hanuman's power to protect themselves. They don't think about his compassion. Hanuman's on the side of Dharma. Hanuman is stronger than a tiger because tigers are incapable of thought. You can kill a tiger, but you can't kill Hanuman. Northern Thai script is important to *sak yant*. Hanuman can make a person confident without being arrogant. The Hanuman *yant* changes his personality. Hanuman isn't the only source of power, it also comes from the *kathaa*. There are specific *kathaa* for Hanuman. Hanuman has compassion which is unique to his character. No other character has so many

strengths. Kun Paen didn't have any power, he just used black magic. Tigers only have raw power.

### **Participant Seven**

Job: Owner of Religious Statue Shop

Location of Interview: Duang Dee, Amphoe Muang, Chiang Mai.

Date of Interview: November 18, 2015

Length of Interview: 30 minutes

### **Interview Notes:**

Used to be a monk and practiced *sak yant*. Believes Hanuman and *ling lom* are inherently different. Knows folktales of Hanuman such as that when he is injured, he can cover himself in dirt and will resurrect himself. Believes the Central Thai belief in this is derived from the North. His followers and him distinguished between Hawramon and Hanuman. Now people only know the story from school and studying the Central Thai Ramakien. Northern Thais get their knowledge from word of mouth and every day life. Hanuman is an image that represents the *kathaa*, which is the most important aspect of a *yant*. If the whole image is full of *kathaa*, then it is more important. The image of Hanuman has recently become more important.

**Participant Eight:**

Job: Teacher

Location of Interview: Wat Padaet, Amphoe Saraphi, Chiang Mai

Date of Interview: October 7, 2015

Length of Interview: Twenty-five minutes

**Interview Notes:**

Believed in the teachings of Phrakru Rung, who had suggested his Hanuman *yants*. Learned most of what he knew about Hanuman from Phrakru Rung. He received *Hanuman Tua Hok* from Phrakru Rung in red ink for compassion. Said other benefits were that his students would listen to him and he would be protected when he traveled. Did not want people, especially work colleagues and his students, to know that he had tattoos. Will only get tattoos with Phrakru Rung. His favorite *yant* is his Hanuman tattoo. His family told him he could not get any *yants* till he had a family of his own.

**Participant Nine**

Job: Competitive Biking Coach

Location of Interview: *Tdalat Tdipanee*, Amphoe Muang, Chiang Mai

Date of Interview: November 18, 2015

Length of Interview: One hour

**Interview Notes:**

Has received multiple Hanuman *yants*, first one in in Lampang. Got tattoo for protection as he is an athlete. Since he rides bikes, he liked Hanuman *yants* for *deun tang bot phrai*. Had received a sesame seed Hanuman *yant* from Wat Phra Song in Petchaburi Province as well. Many rules for Hanuman *yants*: Don't drink from others glasses, don't eat food from a funeral, do not harm others. He became possessed by his Hanuman *yant* after drinking from a glass that wasn't his. He passed out and lost

it, was brought to a *wat* where the monk “cured” him. He believes in *sak yant* one hundred percent. He believes he is stronger and his life has become easier as a result of his *yants*. His different Hanuman *yants* were competing with each other, so he had to get one more that would balance the powers of the rest. His younger brother got a Hanuman *yant* and also became possessed. He new a person when he was a child who got a Hanuman *yant* in jail. He would take shots of rice whiskey and swallow the shot glass whole. When he died, his body didn’t burn. After a monk tried to “fix” the *kathaa*, the body burned but the skin where the *kathaa* was tattooed did not.

### Participant Ten

Job: Amulet Salesman

Location of Interview: *Tdalaat Tdeepanet*, Amphoe Muang, Chiang Mai

Date of Interview: November 18, 2015

Length of Interview: Twenty minutes

### Interview Notes:

Received his *yant* from Ajarn Hawn who practices in Sankampaeng. He studied at Wat Bang Phra and does Central Thai style *yants*. This is important because the participant was born in Nakhon Pathom, the same province as Wat Bang Phra. He has lived in Chiang Mai for over twenty years and is married to a Northern Thai woman. He believes Hanuman is not a part of Northern Thai *sak yant*. Is unaware that there are Northern Thai versions of Hanuman or the Ramayana and has never asked his wife. Feels like he has been possessed by his Hanuman *yant*. Believes the most important part of Hanuman *yants* is for protection.

**Participant Eleven:**

Job: Amulet Salesman

Location of Interview: *Tdalaat Tdeepanet*, Amphoe Muang, Chiang Mai

Date of Interview: November 18, 2015

Length of Interview: Twenty minutes

**Interview Notes:**

Comes from Suphanburi. Believes there are two Hanuman tattoo styles: power and protection and compassion and fortune. There are too many rules associated with Hanuman *yants* for power and protection. His family is from China and will only get *yants* in the Central Thai tradition. While he likes the weather in Northern Thailand, he does not like the people or culture. He believes Central Thais speak truthfully and Northerners are lazy. Has had problems for not listening to his Ajarn's rules for Hanuman *yants*. He got rashes for eating things his Ajarn told him not to. He can't eat cucumbers, watermelons. He believes this is because what you eat can have a bad reaction with the ink that is put in your body.

**Participant Twelve**

Job: Retired Air Force Veteran

Location: *Tdalaat Kamtieng*, Amphoe Muang, Chiang Mai

Date of Interview: November 4, 2015

Length of Interview: Thirty minutes

**Interview Notes:**

Did not feel the need to get a *yant* because he believed the most important thing was the *kathaa* which lived in a person's heart. His father had a Hanuman *yant* and recalls that when he got angry or drank too much, he would jump around and act like a monkey. He believes that a good ajarn can give out powers. Can remember *kathaa* and recites them daily.





Photographs of Subjects



Ajarn Rung  
Chiang Rai, Thailand



Tan Phrakru Weerut  
Chiang Rai, Thailand

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY



Phra Ahtikan  
Chiang Mai, Thailand



Ajarn Rachan  
Lamphun, Thailand



(Ajarn Rung administering a *yant*)

## VITA

Alex is a creative, versatile and outgoing travel educator with demonstrated leadership capabilities and ten plus years experience developing and facilitating international educational trips in various countries in Asia, working in multicultural environments, service work focused on sustainable development, and providing mentorship to students. Alex has developed study abroad trips in and worked with multiple NGOs in Thailand, India, Burma, and Bhutan. He received his BA in Experiential Cultural and Regional Studies with an emphasis on Religion and Spirituality from Prescott College by developing his own curriculum while living in Thailand and conducting field research across Asia. Alex's academic interests are Northern Thai culture and folklore and the Ramayana traditions of Asia.

