

The Yak of Thailand: Folk Icons Transcending Culture, Religion, and Media

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Abstract : In the culture of Thailand, the Yak serve as a mediated icon representing strength, power, and mystical protection not only for the Buddha, but for population of worshipers. Originating from the forests of China, the Yak continue to stand guard at the gates of Buddhist temples. The Yak represents Thai culture in the hearts of Thai people. This paper presents a qualitative study regarding the curious mix of media, culture, and religion that projects the Yak of Thailand as a larger than life message throughout the political, cultural, and religious spheres. The gate guardians, or gods as they are sometimes called, appear throughout the religious temples of Asian cultures. However, the Asian cultures demonstrate differences in artistic renditions (or presentations) of such sentinels. Thailand gate guards (the Yak) stand in front of many Buddhist temples, and these iconic figures display unique features with varied symbolic significance. The temple (or wat), plays a vital role in every community; and, for many people, Thailand's temples are the country's most endearing sights. The authors applied folk-nography as a methodology to illustrate the importance of the Thai Yak in serving as meaningful icons that transcend not only time, but the culture, religion, and mass media. The Yak represent mythical, religious, artistic, cultural, and militaristic significance for the Thai people. Data collection included interviews, focus groups, and natural observations. This paper summarizes the perceptions of the Thai people concerning their gate sentries and the relationship, communication, connection, and the enduring respect that Thai people hold for their guardians of the gates.

Keywords : communication, culture, folk-nography, icon, image, media, protection, religion, yak

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