

The Mystery of the Almost Disappearing Naga: On Urbanization and Cosmopolitics in Bangkok

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Abstract:

This article explores the precarious persistence of the naga, a *more-than-mythic* serpent, amidst the rapidly evolving urban landscape of Bangkok, Thailand. Drawing upon the concepts of cosmopolitics, more-than-human ecology, and urban politics, I argue that the naga's enduring presence in Bangkok serves as an ontological reflection of the city's complex interplay of forces, including rural-to-urban migration, capitalist expansion, environmental degradation, and political struggles. The article introduces the concept of the Nagacene, a hybridized framing that blends the Chthulucene's emphasis on entangled human-environment relations with the Capitalocene's critique of capitalist expansion, to illuminate the lived realities of rural-urban migrants from Thailand's Isan region in the cosmopolitan spaces of Bangkok. By examining the naga's cosmoecological significance in various urban spaces, the article highlights how the more-than-mythic naga embodies the aspirations, challenges, and transformations of Bangkok's marginalized communities. The article concludes by envisioning a cosmopolitical future for Bangkok, one that accommodates diverse modes of existence and reconfigures the city's uneven assemblages to achieve greater recognition, acceptance, and coexistence for all its inhabitants, both human and more-than-human.

Keywords: Bangkok, cosmopolitics, more-than-human ecology, *naga*, urban politics

The idea of ontological politics needs the transformative magic of tales, rituals, mode of palavers, ways of thinking-feeling with, which reworld our ruins and open them to partial connections with other worlds.

Isabelle Stengers, *The Challenge of Ontological Politics* (108)

Introduction

During my daily commute to the university, I always pass Samyan, a major intersection with a stranded traffic island in the heart of the city. Surrounded by mirage shimmering, high-rises buildings, amidst the large tree's foliage and untidy grassy bushes on the island, where sometimes homeless guys use the space as a place to sleep, I have noticed a small but distinct *naga* figure nestled within (Photo 1). The presence of this mythical serpent in such a modern urban setting initially strikes me as peculiar and out of place, prompting questions about how it came to reside in this central locale, seemingly uncanny and unconnected to its surroundings. Glimpsing the naga evokes a sense that its appearance in the modern Bangkok landscape is an anomaly, a cultural entity that feels estranged from its contemporary environment. Indeed, sightings of nagas within the city appear increasingly rare these

days. *Where have Bangkok's naga gone?* I ask. And *what might we learn from the few remaining naga amidst the urban milieu?* Their persisting presence hints at lingering practices, identities, transformation, and cosmopolitical relations that warrant further ethnographic care and conceptual explorations within the context of this rapidly evolving metropolitan space.



Photo 1: Naga at Samyan Intersection, in the city center of Bangkok
Source: Jakkrit Sangkhamanee

In this contribution, I argue that the naga's precarious persistence in the face of urban adversity holds promise for reimagining and designing Bangkok as a city where humans and many others co-exist in capitalist and environmental ruins. The practical ontology of the naga has something to say about the multiplicity and ongoing cosmoecological transformation of the city. Initially, the persistence of naga may remind us of the idea of animism and environmentalism, but it also evokes capitalism, migration, inequality, and suspension of modernist hope and post-apocalyptic desire.

Amidst the modernity unfolding in Bangkok, it may seem at first that archaic cultural beliefs like naga veneration should have long faded away and become invisible. In reality, however, the diminishing yet persistent presence of the naga in Bangkok affirms that the capital functions as an incubator and reflection of cosmopolitics—a space assembling and accommodating various dynamics

and transformations. What converges in this *more-than-mythic* ecosystem includes the city's physical development of urbanization, economic growth and industrialization especially the reliance on rural labor migration, Bangkok's centralization of political power, and environmental challenges arising from rapid development and the impacts of the Anthropocene. Within this cosmopolitical assemblage, the naga persists as a cosmological actor mediating these varied urban conditions and wider challenges.

The Cosmic Naga

Traditionally, the naga holds a deeply revered place in Thai folklore. These serpent-like beings are believed to be highly intelligent creatures with supernatural powers that dwell in various realms—underwater kingdoms, celestial domains, and even within the earth itself (Jumsai 1989, Sangkhamanee 2010). In the words of Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (2020), naga is dwelling in the realm of Anthropocene's *critical zones*.

The origins of the naga myth can be traced back to the arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism in ancient Thailand. In Hindu cosmology, nagas are depicted as serpents or dragon-like entities that possess divine capabilities. Some Hindu texts even venerate certain powerful nagas as deities worthy of worship (Strang 2023). When Buddhism became widespread in Thailand, the naga symbology was incorporated seamlessly—the naga was seen as a protector of the Buddha and his teachings (Rawlinson 1986).

In Thai folklore, nagas are closely tied to bodies of water like rivers, lakes and the rain. They are viewed as guardians and caretakers of these aquatic and atmospheric realms (Hongsuwan 2011). In addition, nagas frequently appear in Thai art, architecture, literature, and performance associated with water, symbolizing power, prosperity and protection (Jumsai 1989, Kittikong 2024, Moonkham 2008, Tambiah 1970). These days the worship of nagas transcends the spiritual realm into daily Thai life (The Nation 2022). In the rural regions prone to monsoons or river floods, nagas are considered to control these water-related events, thus seen as influencers of weather and climate (Johnson 2019). This integrates traditional beliefs with interpretations of natural events, potentially altering perceptions and responses to climate change.

While the naga legend has its roots in ancient mythology, its continued relevance in contemporary Thai culture suggests that it has the potential to serve as a powerful cultural lens through which to understand and respond to the environmental challenges. One of the most famous naga legends is that of the Naga Fireball event in Isan or the northeast Thailand. Every year during the annual Buddhist Lent period, glowing objects resembling fireballs are seen rising from the Mekong River. While scientists with their hard science attribute this to natural phenomena, many Thai Buddhists believe these are the nagas performing ritualistic acts, emerging from their underwater lairs to pay homage to the Buddha (see also Cohen 2007). In other words, this reminds us of the ontological politics in this modern worlds between those whom Isabelle Stengers (2018a) called the *agent of modernizers*, the scientists, and *the modern practitioners*, the villagers who called for cosmological diplomacy and reclaimed their animism.

But the ontological presence of the naga goes beyond the epistemological discussion of science and nonscience and the problem of reasonable politics (Blaser 2016). In the larger context of Anthropocene, the naga can be seen as an ontological reflection, and ecology of practice, of the rural people's efforts to understand and adapt to the changing environmental conditions brought about by human activities. The reverence for nagas can help foster a cultural ethos of protecting and conserving water sources, which becomes crucial in times of environmental stress and climate change. In *Mekhong Fullmoon Party*, a film by Jira Maligool (2002), the appearance or behavior of nagas is believed to indicate the health of the environment. For example, a distressed or angry naga signify polluted waters

from local factory or ecological imbalance, acting as a form of traditional ecological knowledge where changes in mythological figures reflect real-world environmental changes (see also Johnson 2022).

In this contribution, I consider naga as a more-than-mythic, cosmopolitical being within the realms of environmental and urban politics and ruinations. Following Stengers (2005: 995), the term “cosmo” here refers to “the unknown constituted by [the] multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they could eventually capable.” For Stengers, cosmopolitics suggests the political process of articulating and composing together divergent cosmos—the different ways of conceptualizing and inhabiting the world that coexist. The naga, as we shall see, embodies an understanding of nature as alive with sacred spiritual forces, and which coexists with other potencies like social migration, political movement, environmental ruptures and the spirit of capitalism. From this cosmopolitical perspective, the naga and its narratives cannot be dismissed as irrational superstition, but point to the unavoidable coexistence of multiple, sometimes incommensurable realities that must be composed together pragmatically (Jensen 2022). For the urban theorists, this could involve finding ways for the naga and other nonhumans to have a legitimate place alongside urban planning (Metzger 2016), residing in a unique social and spatial organization of contemporary urbanity of what McGrath (2003) called Bangkok similtopia, or for the urban cosmopolitics (Blok & Fariás 2016) grounded in the naga to coexist with the people struggle of democracy and ways to cope with capitalist ruins. The aim is not a unified truth or narrative about the city that the naga dwells, but cultivating practices that can negotiate a politics of living together for these divergent, irreducible beings and forces.

Bangkok Cosmopolitical Composition

To depicts Bangkok cosmoecology, we might need to slow down our assumption about what makes up urbanity and to critically examine the historical development of the city. Bangkok, as I will argue, is a product of multiplicities composition—in the sense of both Kant’s *cosmopolitanism* and Stenger’s *comopolitics*. Unlike the rural uphill in the north of Thailand where Julia Cassaniti (2021:74) suggested that “the Kantian notion of cosmopolitanism may be seen to be overtaking a cosmopolitical meaningful one,” I see Bangkok as embracing both ontologies of being where cosmopolitics coexists with, as well as shapes and being shaped by, the force of cosmopolitanism. The city, I contend, comprises of many convergent forces and phenomena, namely: the migration of rural people to the urban core, the growth and acceleration of capitalism, the sprawling physical infrastructure intruding upon former wetlands, environmental degradation from water and air pollution, as well as unequal economic opportunities that belie the unfulfilled aspirations of modernity. Under such plural ontological constellations, the naga serve as, in Stenger (2005, 2018b) called, a *cosmopolitical diplomat*, embodying all these varied elements converging to shape the modern Bangkok metropolis while “[providing] a voice for those whose practice, mode of existence, worlds, or what is often called identity may be threaten” (Stenger 2018b: 153). In the naga’s more-than-mythic form, Bangkok’s multitudinous composition finds its ontological gestalt.

Bangkok urbanity today is populated by migrant labors from the Isan, the poorest and most arid regions of the country. For generations, Isan farmers have struggled with ecological hardship and limited agricultural productivities. This drove many Isan people to leave their home villages and migrate to the booming capital of Bangkok in search of work beginning in the 1970s. What started as a trickle became a flood, as improved transportation made the journey easier. Millions of Isan migrants poured into Bangkok’s slums and working-class neighborhoods over decades (Phatharathananunth 2016). Despite discrimination and hardship, the Isan people’s strong work ethic, community bonds, and economic aspiration allowed them to carve out a vibrant existence in the capital (Keyes 1983, Elinoff 2012, Sopranzetti 2012).

The Isan region is known for its challenging ecological conditions and environmental destructions. The area is prone to frequent droughts, with limited rainfall and water resources, making agriculture a difficult and unreliable source of income for many families. Additionally, the soil in the region is generally infertile, with high salinity levels and poor nutrient content, further limiting agricultural productivity. The expansion of monoculture plantations, such as cassava, kenaf, and eucalyptus, has also led to a significant loss of biodiversity in the region, disrupting traditional farming practices and reducing the variety of crops that can be grown. These ecological limitations and environmental destruction have made it increasingly difficult for Isan farmers to sustain their livelihoods, leading to widespread poverty and economic instability in the region (Sangkhamanee 2010). As a result, many Isan people have been forced to seek opportunities elsewhere, with Bangkok serving as a primary destination for those hoping to escape the hardships of rural life and find better employment prospects in the city.

Back in their village in Isan, every year in the hot, dry months leading up to the rainy season, villagers normally celebrate the Bun Bungfai festival. People construct huge woven bamboo rockets called bungfai, intricately decorated with naga motifs. In raucous community events, the massive rockets are ritually launched into the sky amid chanting and festive music. The thunderous blasts are meant to call the naga serpents from the Mekong River and other abodes, entreating them to bring life-giving rains for the crops after a parched dry season. Families also sponsor portable nagarocket shrines, making offerings and prayers to the powerful naga spirits, requesting their favor for abundant rainfall, bountiful harvests, and fertility. The fiery rockets soaring skyward symbolize the phallic nagas delivering seeds of life and regeneration to the Mother Earth. In the present days, Bun Bungfai intertwines animist ritual with concerns over climate and economic instability in a riotous celebration seeking to renew the eternal cycle of the sacred nagas and the fertile rains (see Srisupun, Apichatvullop & Manorom 2011; see also Intisang, Sirisuk & Noiwangkhang 2023).

Ecological-induced migration of the rural to urban core led to the precarious settlement and the makeshift revival of their cultural capitals. But the phenomenon has not been caused by environmental destruction in the rural area alone. Rather it was and is still a part of shortage of labor in the capitalist urban area. Bangkok underwent rapid urbanization and economic growth beginning in the 1960s, fueled by policies promoting rapid industrialization and development of the primate capital city. However, this expansion outpaced the local labor supply. To meet the soaring capitalist demand for workers in construction, factories, services and as domestic helpers, Bangkok turned to impoverished rural provinces like those in Isan to fill the gap. A steady stream of migrants from Isan villages poured into the primate capital, providing a crucial labor force that propelled Bangkok's transformation into a modern metropolis. By 1960, around 12% of Bangkok's population consisted of in-migrants from Isan. This share increased to over 30% by 1980 as the migration flow accelerated.

The Isan migrant workers took on the arduous manual labor jobs that drove Bangkok's capitalism—constructing the city's infrastructure, staffing its factories, gas stations, working in hospitality and services, and as domestic help in households. An estimated 1.9 million nationals born in Isan were residing in Bangkok by 2022, comprising more than 32% of the capital's 6 million population. This underscores how rural labor mobility from the Isan region underwent a phase shift, fundamentally shaping and sustaining Bangkok's emergence as Thailand's urban hub by the late 20th century.

Through such economic centralization, the Isan region has long faced disadvantages and marginalization from Thailand's central government and elite power. Despite comprising around one-third of the national population, the ethnic Lao peoples indigenous to Isan have had very limited political influence and engagement historically. This disconnect stemmed from factors like geographic isolation, social prejudice, and socioeconomic status, as well as policies promoting Thai national identity over ethnic diversity. Rural Isan communities were often left out of development

policies prioritizing urban growth. Even Isan migrants providing labor in Bangkok faced discrimination and lack of political capital. Their interests went largely unaddressed in national policies set by the dominant elite from other regions (Keyes 2014, Sangkhamanee 2013).

This systemic exclusion and lack of representation perpetuated inequality and disparities affecting Isan over decades. As a result, discontent and feelings of being second-class citizens simmered among the Isan populace. The region-wide environmental movements of Assembly of the Poor in 1990s along with other farmers and Isan workers often organized street protests in Bangkok to demand for their deprived rights. In the 2000s, the discontent continued to give rise to political movements and advocacy groups demanding greater rights, resources, and autonomy for the region. The Red Shirt movement mobilized support from the Isan base, protesting the military coup that ousted elected populist leaders (Alexander 2021, Alexander & McCargo 2019, Elinoff 2012, Sopranzetti 2018). While still lacking full political integration, these movements highlighted Isan's role in national politics and its people's demands for policies reflecting their needs after decades of marginalization and an attempt to reengage with political powers and authorities whatever that be (Walker 2012; Sangkhamanee 2013, 2023).

A *Nagacene*

To truly grasp the Isan naga's positionality and interplay with an urban landscape of Bangkok, and to make it a more-than-mythic being, I would like to invoke here another recently-revival serpentine entity—*Cthulhu*. Cthulhu's presence in the so-called Chthulucene (Haraway 2016) awakens an ontological imagination that illuminates the naga's own persistence and relevance amidst Bangkok's concrete sprawl. Haraway proposed Chthulucene as an alternative to human-centric Anthropocene. In the Chthulucene, humans are not the only significant actors. Rather, it recognizes the agency and impacts of a multitude of participants—humans and nonhumans. Under the Chthulucene, the uncertainties of environmental change are not a horror to be feared like H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu, but a reality to be reckoned with through ecological awareness and collaboration across species boundaries. Haraway envisions the Chthulucene as an opportunity to craft new stories, new symbiotic projects that can help navigate precarious times. While unsettling and even monstrous at times, the Chthulucene tasks humanity with rejecting human exceptionalism and instead cultivating a sense of being humus—of becoming with other critters in an open, continually co-constituted world.

So in many ways, Haraway's evocative Chthulucene proposes a shift in perspective that is simultaneously grounded in multispecies relations and speculative practices. In applying the speculative, multi-species framing of the Chthulucene to the naga, we can envision the nagas not just as symbolic guardians, but as representing the vast interconnected entity of water systems, fluid atmosphere, and amphibious life with which human communities are inextricably entangled. The nagas become a symbolic and pragmatic cipher for waters, wetlands, rivers, rains—dynamic living forces deserving of reverence and care.

Where the wrathful aspect of angered nagas may have once inspired fear, the Chthulucene posits reframing climate impacts like droughts or floods not as vengeful punishments, but demands a perspective of radical humility. At the same time, the protection and power ascribed to nagas aligns with core Chthulucene ideas of looking to other-than-human forces and response-abilities to aid in collaborative survival and sustainable worlding. Just as Haraway highlights the crucial roles of nonhumans, the naga highlights the agential significance of aquatic and atmospheric realms and their inhabitants. In this sense, the *more-than-mythic* naga contains the seed of the kind of perspective shift the Chthulucene calls for—rejecting human exceptionalism and instead making kin across differences to navigate uncertain environmental terrain together through practical and ethical commitments of multi-species care and coexistence.

In addition to Chthulucene, the concept of the Capitalocene provides yet another useful lens to understand the dynamics of urban development and rural-to-urban migration driven by economic motives under capitalist systems. At its core, the Capitalocene highlights how the relentless pursuit of capital accumulation and economic growth, facilitated by capitalist ideologies and structures, has profoundly reshaped environments, societies, and human-nature relations (Haraway 2015; Moor 2016). This dynamic is clearly reflected in urbanization patterns and migration flows. Urban areas have become centers of capital investment, industrial production, and economic opportunity under capitalism. Cities concentrate labor, infrastructure, and proximity to labor markets—all factors crucial for capital accumulation. The drive for profit maximization incentivizes the development of urban spaces as productive hubs.

At the same time, the penetration of capitalist production into rural areas, such as through industrial agriculture, resource extraction, and land commodification, has disrupted traditional livelihoods and economies. Rural dispossession and lack of economic opportunities push people to migrate to cities in search of waged labor. From a Capitalocene perspective, this mass rural-to-urban migration is not a natural process, but one actively produced by capitalist dynamics—the need to access cheap labor reserves for industrial production and the deepening metabolic rifts between capitalist production and sustainable human-environment relations (see Tsing 2015).

Here I invoke the concept of the *Nagacene* as an intriguing lens to examine the complex interplay of forces shaping urban development and rural-urban dynamics in Thailand. I propose a hybridized framing that blends the Chthulucene's emphasis on entangled human-environment relations with the Capitalocene's critique of capitalist expansion. The Nagacene represents a haunting convergence of forces that shape the lived realities of rural-urban migrants from Thailand's Isan region in the cosmopolitan spaces of Bangkok. It is a conceptual framing that encapsulates the enduring precariousness, entanglements, and yearnings that coalesce amidst the city's cosmoecological niches (see Jensen and Sangkhamanee 2024).

I also propose the Nagacene to give voice to the ecological precariousness and agricultural hardships persistent in the rural Isan hinterlands—water scarcities, lack of rain, environmental damages, and climate changes wrought by unsustainable resource extraction, plantation, and capitalist agricultural practices. These traumas of rural environmental ruination linger as spectral forces propelling migration to Bangkok's urban terrain. Yet the Nagacene also embodies the migrants' engagement with Bangkok's cosmopolitan dynamism through their lived experiences of rural-urban mobility and immersion into the city's flows of capital, labor, and cultural interminglings. The naga spirit intertwines with the entrepreneurial hustle, representing both deep rootedness and adaptation amidst Bangkok's capitalist churn. Simultaneously, the Nagacene articulates the pervasive economic precarity faced by many rural migrants in Bangkok's labor markets—the grueling work conditions, tenuous employment, and vulnerabilities to the booms and busts of unbridled capitalist accumulation logics in the urban sphere. The naga spirit persists in the face of these alienating capitalist relations.

Crucially, the Nagacene also gestures towards a yearning for *other* worlds or the worlds-yet-to-come—ones where prosperity, security and well-being are bestowed through protective cosmological authorities, spiritual forces, and redistributive socioecological compacts. This is because, in an actual world, the Thai authorities have long been exploiting their resources and labor and deprived their chances in policy engagement. Nagacene therefore signals the perseverance of rural ontologies and world-makings amidst Bangkok's contested urban fabrics. In the crevices and interstitial spaces of Bangkok's cosmoecological assemblages, the Nagacene emerges as a spectral presence—a vibrant entanglement of rural hauntings, capitalist urbanities, and pluriversal world-weavings. It persists in withstanding the ruins and limitations that rural Isan migrants encounter, animated by yearnings for more hospitable and sustainable world-configurations to take root in the cracks of the city.

The Naga's Cosmoecology

The more-than-mythic story of *Nagacene* can be illustrated in the cosmoecological installation in many spaces found in Bangkok critical zones such as in Wat (*temple*) Thongbon. Located next to the high-rise condominiums on the bank of Chao Phraya River, Wat Thongbon provides the serene and peaceful atmosphere to the city dwellers in the metropolis (Photo 2). In every morning, many devotees arrive to pay respects to the Buddhist monks and make merits. However, in addition to venerating the monks, numerous visitors ensure to pay homage to the shrines of Lord Grandfather (*Chao pu*) Srisudtho and Lord Grandmother (*Chao ya*) Sripathumma (Photo 3), located in the temple next to the concrete riverbank under the auspices of giant tree.

Srisudtho and Sripathumma are the supreme naga rulers in Thailand. The legend says that Srisudtho is the naga king of Lord Indradhiraj, while Sripathumma is his naga queen consort, residing at the sacred Nakin Palace in Kharmchanot, Udon Thani province, northeast or Isan of Thailand. This hallowed site is deeply revered and believed in by the people of the upper Northeastern region. Srisudtho possesses an emerald, green body, and golden head, with the ability to manifest 9 naga heads. As for the esteemed Lady Sripathumma, she can manifest 5 naga heads. Both deities are renowned for their profound compassion towards those who worship and make offerings. If one sincerely prays for virtuous wishes that do not bring harm to others, their desires shall be granted. Consequently, a multitude of devotee flock to worship and make offerings at their shrines.



Photo 2 and 3: Wat Thongbon and its Naga Shrine and QR Code for Merit Making
Source: Jakkrit Sangkhamanee

The reason why Srisudtho and Sripathumma came to reside in this temple is unclear. Some said that devout believers who venerate the two naga serpents jointly donated to build this shrine not long ago, so that those in the Bangkok area who revere them, especially Isan migrants, would not have to travel all the way to Udon Thani, saving time. The enshrining of these two naga from northeast to Bangkok occurred in parallel with the migration of rural Isan people coming to the city to seek work, a trend that began in the 1970s. The construction of Isan sacred sites within Bangkok should therefore not be too surprising, as it reflects the economic and labor connections between the urban and rural areas.

Besides nagas Srisudtho and Sripathumma, Wat Thongbon is also the dwelling place of many sacred entities such as the Buddha statues of Guan Yin, Rahu, Ganesha, King of giant and wraith *Thao Wessawan* (Morgan 2024), beckoning lady *Nang Kwak* (Wilson 2008), the deity who grants boons expeditiously *Thep Thanchai* (Malangpoo 2020), and other smaller nagas among others. These deities are resided in different places in the temple, but sometimes are randomly placed together without caring much of the interference of their powers. Considering the juxtaposition of cosmo-authorities, the temple is a great example of microcosm of cosmopolitical ecology where cosmopolitics of multiplicity of ontological presence coexist.

But is it possible for these entities from diverse cosmologies, each typically having their own origins, mythologies, and distinct ritualistic practices of veneration, to cohabit harmoniously within the same shared space? I cannot say for certain, yet evidently, this commingling *does* occur.

Wat Thongbon serves as a merely example of an urban site where varied mythological actors converge to accommodate the dynamics and necessities of the city environment. These sacred figures, the naga included, fulfill different functions, though there are areas of overlap. All can bestow blessings and prosperity, albeit with varying specialties and efficacies. The offerings made or exchanges enacted during acts of reverence also differ—some prefer red drinks, certain flower types, special food oblations, and unique invocational phrases. Yet not one is averse to receiving monetary donations, and it seems each has their own QR code for convenient cashless offerings.

The naga does not only coexist with sacred entities from other cosmologies within temple grounds. As I mentioned, I spotted a naga amidst that major city main intersection, it was placed alongside other ontologically distinctive entities. And if we explore around Bangkok, we can find nagas also present at government building compounds, small neighborhood gardens and large public parks. There are even naga residing within modern middle-class housing projects in the capital.

Akin to the Isan people navigating the precarious landscape of Bangkok's capitalist metropolis, thriving necessitates coexistence with individuals from diverse cosmological and ontological backgrounds. This coexistence is a localized, cosmopolitical diplomatic process of learning to share space, time, ecology, resources, power, and the benefits and risks inherent in the capitalist regime. Isan people, in their spiritual and vernacular lives, perpetually engage with multiple resources to ensure access to economic markets and political authorities, diversifying their risks amidst the precariousness and ruins of capitalism.

Within the precarity capitalism has produced, it is possible for alternative cosmoecological reconfigurations to arise (Quintana 2022). At another temple, Wat Nakprok, located in the heart of Bangkok and surrounded by migrant communities, a beautiful naga serpent sculpture adorns and enshrouds the Buddha image in the main chapel, which is an object of great veneration. The temple has constructed a massive naga statue and reinterpreted the naga through various ontological figurations. This allows people to participate spiritually, physically, and economically through donations. One notable endeavor is the production of diverse naga amulets and talismans, primarily aimed at bestowing blessings, prosperity, and good fortune upon their bearers (see Jackson 2021). Furthermore, the temple is raising funds from devotees to construct an enormous Naga statue. They

have also created special boxes for people to metaphysically enshrine their hearts and spirits with the Naga serpent deity, at a cost of 100 baht per heart enshrined.

While such practices may seem antiquated, the exploitation and precarity wrought by capitalism opens possibilities for reviving traditions and rituals that can facilitate a profound reconfiguration of the human-nature relationship on a cosmic, ecological scale. The urban landscape necessitates the convergence of naga and disparate ontological entities within its diverse locations. While maintaining unique qualities, the lines between them blur as they collectively serve the needs of a populations negotiating modernity and its precarities. Diverse rituals and offerings intermingle, commodified yet still possessing power and meaning for those who engage with them within this contemporary bricolage of the sacred and profane. Transcendent entities once confined to separate sacred sites are now neighbors, their presences a patchwork remedy for the metropolis's existential uncertainties and yearnings for prosperities and well-beings. Bangkok is all-at-once, truly a cosmopolitan and cosmopolitical assemblage.

Precarious Naga

In exploring the cosmopolitan composition of Bangkok's urbanity, I have so far demonstrated how the city emerges as a mirage of assemblages - a convergence point where the flows of rural-urban migration, the accelerating forces of capitalism, and the practices of economic and political desires intersect and manifest. The naga, as we have seen, encapsulates these multitudinous compositions—embodying environmental impacts both harmful and benevolent, signifying human and cultural mobility, asserting political authority to protect, yearning for capitalist modernity while speculating infinite possibilities.

However, one must question whether the naga can truly thrive in modern-day Bangkok's critical zones. Why does it seem these serpent beings are disappearing from the urban landscape? Much like the Isan people of northeastern Thailand, the naga's positionality within the city is quite precarious. The mysterious possibility of the naga existing in contemporary Bangkok poses a cosmopolitical challenge, given the radical transformation of the urban landscape through gentrification and environmental degradation.

While Bangkok still retains waterways like the Chao Phraya River and various canals, rapid urbanization and physical development have significantly altered the natural habitats once conducive to the naga's presence (Thaitakoo, McGrath, Srithanyarat, & Palopakon 2013). The city's outward expansion has encroached upon rivers, canals, wetlands, and other waterways, reducing potential naga habitats. The channelization and engineering of waterways for urban and transportation purposes has disrupted the natural flows and ecosystems required for these beings to flourish. Furthermore, severe pollution—including industrial runoff, sewage, and waste contaminating the waters—poses an existential threat. The naga's traditional association with pristine aquatic environments is fundamentally incompatible with the degraded water quality endemic to urban areas like Bangkok. As evident whenever the city experiences extreme rainfall and flooding, what emerges from the atmospheric and fluid precipitation is not a majestic, happy naga, but a deluge of pollutants and detritus, sparking viral outrage across social media platforms (Sangkhamanee 2021). The Anthropocene effects in Bangkok's critical zones wrought by urbanization appears to be driving the naga out from the city.

While difficult to state definitively whether the remaining naga could still find haven in Thailand's capital, the realities of unchecked development and environmental negligence pose formidable, perhaps existential, obstacles. Some may argue the naga could persist in limited pockets—inhabiting the few remaining undisturbed waterways and spiritually significant sites across the city. Yet it is undeniable that climate change and urban transformation have thrust the naga into an increasingly precarious position, its long-term survival in Bangkok under threat from the unrelenting forces of

urban processes. The possibility of the naga coexisting with the contemporary city remains an open cosmological and ecological question.

On a reversal direction, Bangkok's susceptibility to flooding is exacerbated by a multitude of factors, including land subsidence, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, ineffective management of water resources and drainage systems, and the breakdown of critical infrastructure (Thanvisitthpon, Shrestha, & Pal 2018). These compounding issues might potentially lead to an increased manifestation of the naga in the city, an intensification of the *Nagacene*. The possibility of more frequent naga reappearing can happen, though does not solely stem from the fact that the city will experience flooding in numerous areas for extended periods. Amidst the Anthropocene and Capitolocene effects, the influx of migration to the city, particularly of Isan migratory labor, might also contribute to the heightened appearance of the naga, as the Isan people bring with them their cultural and spiritual beliefs.

Climate change is a driving force behind increased poverty worldwide (Ananta, Bauer, & Thant, 2013). On one hand, this phenomenon is likely to precipitate greater rural-to-urban migration due to mounting ecological hardships, such as droughts, floods, and crop failures, which render traditional livelihoods in rural areas increasingly untenable. On the other hand, the competitive job and labor market in cities creates further precarity, exploitation, inequality, and destruction for these migrant populations, thereby amplifying the necessity for naga worship as a means of seeking assistance and protection in their new urban environments. In whatever kinds of ruinations, naga persist as an emblematic figure portraying the urban dilemma, pluriversal world-making, and expression of uncommons (Blaser & De La Cadena 2017; De la Cadena & Blaser 2018) amidst the ruinations of the city in transition.

The aforementioned assemblage of cosmopolitan and cosmoecological factors, encompassing the intersections of climate change, urbanization, migration, capitalism, and the itinerant nature of cultural and spiritual practices, weaves a intricate tapestry of challenges that will undoubtedly necessitate long-term cosmopolitical diplomacy to navigate. The potential resurgence of the *Nagacene* – the intensification of the naga's presence and its assembling conditionalities in the city – might herald a transformation of urbanity that cannot be constrained within the bounded physicality of urban geography alone. Rather, it involves a multiplicity of itinerant peoples, climatic forces, and the ebb and flow of material and non-material entities that coalesce to form the cosmopolitical entity of Bangkok's cosmopolis. Amidst this precarity, these challenges, and the ruination that ensues, the naga beckons us to reimagine a cosmopolitical future that cannot be reduced to a singular set of standards in urban design and cohabitation.

Imagining a Cosmopolitical Future

But ruins may also be alive with partial connections, connections that ...
demand a capacity to learn from and learn with, and to care for what has
been learned from.

Isabelle Stengers, *The Challenge of Ontological Politics* (108)

As I have illustrated, the naga gestures towards the persistent precarity and discontent simmering beneath Bangkok's urban panorama. The marginalization and inequality long endured by the Isan peoples finds voice through movements demanding political recognition and social acceptance. Within this mirage city, the naga contains both the ontological gestalt of Bangkok's delirious multiplicities and the aspiration to reconfigure its uneven assemblages.

The naga's vanishing presence and its potential resurgence hold profound implications for Bangkok's cosmopolitics. Its reappearance would signal a transformation in the city's urbanity, one that transcends the confines of physical geography and embraces the multiplicity of peoples, climatic forces, and material and non-material flows that constitute the cosmopolitan entity of Bangkok. In this light, the naga's struggle serves as a clarion call to inform urban planning and design, urging us to learn from its marginalization and its efforts to navigate the precarious terrains of the city.

Reimagining Bangkok as an abode not just for humans but for a multitude of entities demands envisioning a city that accommodates diverse modes of existence. Acknowledging and incorporating more-than-human entities in urban development becomes paramount, as we confront the capitalist ruins and the looming specter of environmental catastrophe. In these uncertain times, the naga emerges as a speculative experiment for the life-yet-to-come, inviting us to explore more inclusive and cosmo-democratic approaches to city worlds-making. Bangkok needs cosmopolitics where naga serve as a cosmopolitical diplomat (Stengers 2005) in this ongoing, precarious city assemblage. Under the Nagacene, naga-cosmo "protects against the premature closing" of urban politics, and naga-politics "against the premature closure of cosmos" (Latour 2004: 454). The diplomacy under the Nagacene therefore allows urban cosmopolitical openings to emerge.

In this article, I have shown that the naga's enigmatic presence in Bangkok's urban landscape can serve as a powerful testament to the city's complex cosmopolitical composition. As a symbol of the entangled forces shaping the metropolis-rural-urban migration, capitalist expansion, environmental degradation, and political struggles—the naga embodies the aspirations, challenges, and transformations of Bangkok's marginalized communities, particularly those from the Isan region. The concept of the Nagacene, a hybridized framing that blends the Chthulucene's emphasis on multispecies entanglements with the Capitalocene's critique of capitalist ruins, illuminates the lived realities and precarious persistence of these rural migrants amidst Bangkok's cosmopolitan dynamism.

The naga's vanishing presence in the city, threatened by rapid urbanization and environmental degradation, mirrors the struggles of the Isan people to navigate the uneven terrain of Bangkok's capitalist assemblages. Yet, the potential resurgence of the Nagacene, intensified by climate change and the influx of Isan migrants with their economic and spiritual yearnings, holds profound implications for reimagining Bangkok's cosmopolitical future. The naga's enduring spirit beckons us to envision a city that accommodates diverse modes of existence, reconfiguring its urban cosmoecology to achieve greater recognition, acceptance, and coexistence for all its inhabitants, both human and more-than-human.

As Bangkok's mirage shimmers, the naga emerges as a cosmopolitical diplomat, inviting us to explore more inclusive and democratic approaches to city-making. By learning from the naga's precariousness and its efforts to persist amidst the fluctuating and fluid urban landscape, we can connect urban imagining and design to embrace the delirious multiplicities of the capital while striving for more equitable compositions. The naga's sinuous figure weaves through Bangkok's mythic *and* material layers, proposing alternate arrangements of the city's uneven assemblages—a syncretic cipher that calls for reconfiguring urban politics to accommodate the vibrant spectrum of beings, forces, and aspirations that converge in this cosmopolitan space. In the face of capitalist ruins and impending environmental catastrophe, the naga's cosmopolitical potential offers a glimmer of hope for cultivating a more just and sustainable urban future, one that celebrates the rich tapestry of Bangkok's cosmoecological diversity.

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