



# Thai Magic Tattoos: The Art and Influence of Sak Yant

*Isabel Azevedo Drouyer*

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## **HOW A BELIEF MAY CHANGE YOUR LIFE**

During the last twenty years, tattooing has experienced a real renaissance in modern societies. For hundreds of years before this, however, Buddhist monks, using magical incantations and spells, have been covering people's bodies with indelible ink in the belief that the markings will bring luck, wealth, and blessings. People remain convinced that tattoos provide protection against evil spirits and can render the bearer invulnerable, even to stab wounds and bullets. Known in Thailand as Sak Yant, these ancient tattoos are today experiencing a revival in popularity, both in their countries of origin and beyond. Fashion or social phenomenon, the demand for magical tattoos keeps rising. Hollywood stars, Singaporean businessmen, people from all walks of life flock to Thai Sak Yant Masters to have these powerful designs inked onto their bodies. At the same time, these tattooists are regularly invited to practice their art abroad, thus increasing the popularity of Sak Yant worldwide. Why do these sacred tattoos provoke such passion? Who are these men who perform Sak Yant, and who are those who get tattooed? Do these tattoos really have magical powers? These questions raise the issue of the influence not only of tattoos but also of amulets, cultural and religious beliefs and rituals, on the mind and health of the individual. Although, formerly regarded as irrational, today's scientific studies show how these beliefs influence a person's life and how tattoos and other symbols can work as placebos. Drawing on a wide range of contributions and from research fields as diverse as anthropology, religion, history, medicine and psychology, *Thai Magic Tattoos - The Art and Influence of Sak Yant* attempts to provide some understanding of the mechanisms by which a tattoo may actually change the life of the bearer.

The book is based on extensive fieldwork over a period of three years in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. Using their own photographs, field notes and in-depth interviews of Masters and Sak Yant believers, the authors provide a unique insight into the world of sacred tattoos and in doing so illustrate one of the last living examples of authentic traditional tattooing.

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