



Buddha Amulets and the Reflection of Political Ideologies of Thai Elites from 1864-1988 *

Suphachai Suphaphol ^a

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Abstract

This article, considering the Buddha amulets as a tool reflecting Thai political elites' ideologies in each period, aims to point out that Thai elites propagated their political ideologies through various means, including the utilization of Buddha amulets as a tool to discreetly propagate their ideologies. The main question of this article is how Buddha amulets received ideologies from Thai political elites in each period and how they helped display and propagate those ideologies. The time period of this paper is from the 1864 to 1988. The study found that although the presence of Buddha amulets seems to be common in the everyday life and is so closely connected with religion that it is hard to realize how they are related to politics, Buddha amulets also have the political function as a tool for Thai political elites, who created them in each particular period, to communicate their propaganda to the common. This function of Buddha amulets is apparent throughout Thai history. It may also be said that Buddha amulets, especially medallions, emerged almost at the same time they were utilized in politics. One of the reasons is that the communication system in the past did not have the technology enabling political contact or propagation. Therefore, everyday life things such as Buddha amulets have been utilized as a tool to send political messages or spread ideologies of the elites who were in the position of power in each period. Furthermore, it seems that Buddha amulets were a highly effective tool for propagating and planting political ideologies. This is because those possessing Buddha amulets usually carry them all the time or otherwise place them on the altar for worshiping, and when people strongly believe in something, they tend to believe in other aspects attached to those things as well. Moreover, the production cost for Buddha amulets is extremely low, and they can be produced in a large number compared with other ways of propagation which cost more and are not as effective as embedding the ideologies into Buddha amulets and let people wear or carry them around. As a result, Buddha amulets become an extremely effective tool for propagating ideologies.

^a Assoc. Prof. Dr., Faculty of Political Sciences, Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok 10240, Thailand.
Email: Suphachai31@hotmail.com

1. Introduction

Amulets and talismans have been integral to Thai society since ancient times. Traditionally, these have manifested in various forms, such as 'ទະກຸດ', a type of rolled metal sheet inscribed with incantations, and 'ພິສມຣ' a triangle or square-shaped talisman often interlaced with ទະກຸດ. Some people carry objects like the teeth or bones of ancestors, edges of a mother's skirt or loincloth, as well as animal fangs or other mystical items, believing these will offer protection against dangers. There is also a belief that these items can bring happiness or help fulfill one's desires. These ideas have never disappeared from Thailand, even in the modern era where people are influenced by science. However, although the forms of talismans from the past may appear as mentioned, the most popular talisman today that everyone recognizes is "พระเครื่อง," or more fully, "พระเครื่องร่าง" (Buddha Amulets). This evolved from the ancient practice of mold pressing images of the Buddha in various postures or different Buddha statues as a means of spreading or upholding Buddhist teachings. Later, they came to be used for purposes related to luck and omens. Contemporary, พระเครื่อง are crafted by using the images of the Buddha, as well as the images of some respected monk masters. Ordinary people believed that they possess supernatural powers and magic. Those who have faith in talismans or believe in miracles and supernatural powers often carry or wear them around their necks. It is well-known that the primary function of พระเครื่อง is to protect against harm from weapons or attacks, to avert bad occurrences or accidents, and it is believed that they might enhance fortunes or help the wearer achieve their desires according to the Buddhist virtues. Additionally, there is a belief in the benefits of supernatural aspects embedded within the amulets by knowledgeable master. (Chanabawornwat, 2017, pp. 12-13.)

It can be said that the primary purpose of possessing the amulets is that the buyers hope for the spiritual protection infused by respected monk masters, or that they can be served as assets instead of cash, or as assets for speculation. However, from a political perspective, amulets have always undergone changes and emerged according to political and social contexts. This is because the purpose of creating each series of amulets is influenced by the political context of each period and by the monks or masters performing the crafting process. For example, amulets crafted by various masters often aim for great protection (มหาอุตม์), invincibility (อัญญาคังกระพัน), and evasion from dangers (แคล้วคลาด). This is because amulets crafted before 1957 mainly served the purpose of providing soldiers, polices, or the general public officers in war or dangerous situations with a spiritual anchor. In contrast, amulets crafted after 1957, when fear of war was diminished, and people became more concerned with economic issues and livelihood, had a clear purpose: if wearing them around the neck or carrying them, they help for well-being, good fortune, and luck in trade.

Besides social contexts, another interesting aspect of amulets is that they reflect the ideologies of incumbent rulers during each period. Amulets are also used to reproduce various core beliefs existing in Thai society. There have been numerous studies on amulets from a political perspective in the past. For example, the research by Buangsuang (2019)

on "Religious Objects and Royalist Ideology in Thailand from 1867 to 1997, which indicates that amulets are objects reflecting the royalist ideology that the researcher views as a core ideology of Thai society, examines amulets in terms of the relationship between political ideology. Additionally, there are other studies suggesting that, aside from religious aspects, amulets are inextricably linked to socio-political contexts, such as the research by Yurungruangsak (2011) on "History of amulets: beliefs and Buddhist commerce."

Regardless of the topic concerning the relationship between amulets and politics, it does not seem to be beyond expectations. This is because, in political theory, there are several renowned thinkers in the study of ideological control in the Western world, such as Antonio Gramsci, the Italian philosopher who lived during 1891-1937. He explained that for whoever holds the state power, in order to maintain that power, he or she must control the citizens through various means. Initially, this control can be exerted through laws or enforcement by violence via state mechanisms such as the police, military, courts, and prisons. Besides, the act of indoctrinating the populace to accept the power of the state without coercion or force can also be applied.¹ This indoctrination may appear in the form of media such as television dramas, novels, religion, or reflections from various cultural aspects. Amulets themselves are inevitably part of the culture, and no one can deny that amulets are a deeply rooted part of Thai culture.

Consequently, not only do amulets function as reflections of existing political ideologies of a particular period or serve as messages that the elites wish to convey, but they also play a role in political socialization or the inculcation of certain ideologies that the elites of the given time desire to instill in citizens according to their perspectives. However, in Thai political history, it is apparent that in each era, the political elites have rotated to rule the country and, certainly, each elite group has had differing ideologies, or at the very least, the ideologies or political concepts they wish to express are related to the political or social contexts of each era. Amulets have always served as tools for elites to express ideologies. Yet, the culture of wearing or hanging these sacred objects, believed to offer protection, was a new development in Thai society after Bangkok became the capital city (ยุครัตนโกสินทร์ /Rattanakosin Era) because, traditionally, the creation of small Buddhist images from various materials existed for thousands of years as amulets, yet people did not commonly carry them, as they were considered too sacred to be kept at home or carried on by a person. Instead, Thais typically carried other talismans, such as ตะกรุด, เชี้ยวเสือ (tiger fang), ครัง (resin from a type of insect), or anything people believed to have protective holy powers. Nonetheless, the practice of carrying Buddhist images began as early as King Rama IV's reign, referred to as "พระเครื่องร่าง" (Buddha amulets), often abbreviated as "พระเครื่อง" (amulets). This culture seemingly grew in popularity, alongside the advances in technology, especially in coin-making. Consequently, amulets have evolved significantly into medal-like forms and continue to be popular to the present. (Komchadluek, 2011; Silpawattanatham, 2024; Yurungruangsak, 2011, p. 18; Vallibhotama, 1994, pp. 13-15)

¹ A detailed in Thai language can be found in the work of Buddharaksa, W. (2013). *bot samrūat khwāmkhit thāngkān mūang khōng ‘antō ni ‘ō kram sī*. [A survey of Antonio Gramsci's political thought] Bangkok: Sommut.

Although amulets are seemingly created primarily for worship or religious purposes, they have also been used politically to indoctrinate state ideologies. This notion may sound rather peculiar: how can amulets have political implications, particularly in terms of ideological indoctrination? However, this article attempts to briefly present that amulets were a key tool used by the Thai political elite to disseminate their ideologies to the populace during certain periods. In other words, amulets served as crucial communication tools containing hidden messages or particular messages that the creators intended to convey to the public. The crucial question is why amulets can effectively perform this role. Hypothetically, it is primarily because those who wear amulets must, first and foremost, have faith. In other words, the wearers already believe in what they are wearing. As a result, the messages or ideologies embedded within the amulets can easily be embedded in the people's mind.

2. Materials and Methods

Purposes

1. To study and to explore the ideologies of Thai political elites that are reflected in amulets gradually from 1864 to 1988.
2. To understand the indoctrination of ideology through amulets by Thai political elites gradually from 1864 to 1988.
3. To analyze the relationships between the socio-political context and the creation of amulets by Thai political elites gradually from 1864 to 1988.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research method, specifically documentary research. The approach will include interpretative analysis and descriptive analytic techniques. The documents to be used in this study are:

1. Primary Sources including writings, newspapers, books on amulets, various literature, lecture notes, and government documents relevant to the study.
2. Secondary Sources including writings, articles, journals, theses, and research studies related to the topic.

3. Research Findings

The origin of wearing amulets, particularly amulet medals, as personal protective talismans may have started with the production of coins during the reign of King Mongkut or King Rama IV (1851 – 1868). The creation of such coins was prompted by the emergence of a new cultural trend among the Siamese: people in provinces and in Bangkok began wearing foreign silver coins as necklaces or accessories, perceiving them as rare items. This trend concerned King Rama IV because these foreign coins bore the images of foreign monarchs, and wearing them seemed to signify an acceptance of the power of those foreign kings. In other words, wearing these coins with foreign kings' images appeared as though the wearer was a subject of foreign influence. Consequently, in 1850's, King Rama IV issued a royal decree prohibiting the use of foreign coins as body adornments. (Yurungruangsak, 2011, p.99; The Treasury Department, n.d.; Khaosod, 2018)

When the prohibition on using foreign coins was enacted, King Rama IV commissioned the creation of commemorative coins made of gold and silver, featuring the royal crown emitting radiant rays at the summit, flanked by two umbrellas, with a background of floral patterns and stars indicating the value around the edge, comprising 32 stars, each star representing a value of 1 เพี้ยง. The edge is adorned with a two-tiered floral pattern, and the reverse side features an intricate design called "แก้วชิงดวง" pattern with the words "กรุงสยาม" in the center. Surrounding the design, there are four Chinese characters pronounced "แต้ เม้ง ทรง ป้อ" where "แต้มេង" refers to the Chinese rendition of King Mongkut's royal name and "ทรงป้อ" means currency. Thus, the coin was referred to as "เหรียญแต้มេងทรงป้อ." The purpose of creating these coins was to commemorate the king's Golden Jubilee celebration in 1864, and to serve as gifts for the royal family and government officials to wear as the royal medals. The mint was also established during King Rama IV's reign, and coin production commenced in 1858. (Khaosod, 2018)

From the inception of commemorative medal production in Thailand, it had a tremendous impact on the development of amulets. This is because during the reign of King Rama V, commemorative medals were popularly produced. During the era of King Rama V, beliefs about using images or photographs on coin began to change. Thus, the emergence of commemorative medal bearing the royal effigy on the occasion of his 18th birthday was created in 1871. This was the first time in Thai history when the image of the king appeared on a commemorative medal. This medal was called the "เหรียญหลักแจว" because the front features a royal portrait with a មហាក្សត្រ hairstyle, also known as the "เหรียญหลักแจว" style. In addition to this coin, during King Rama V, many commemorative medals were also produced, such as the medal for his second coronation in 1873, the medal commemorating the construction of Aisawan throne-hall in 1876, and the medal celebrating the King's Cremation Pavilion in 1890. There were also medals made for funerals of various individuals and to commemorate events or constructions. However, one medal with special features resembling amulets was the "เหรียญทรงเสมา" displaying the abbreviation of King Rama V's name "จป.ร." created in 1901. The top of the coin had a tube-like opening or a hole in the middle for stringing and wearing around the neck. King Rama V distributed these medals to the general public, especially to children, when he visited towns or traveled during his official campaigns. Upon receiving them, people would have their children wear the medal around their necks, hoping that it would offer protection similar to an amulet. (Jantayod, n.d.)

However, from the second half of 1907 onwards, the style of creating sacred amulets has changed completely. This is because a new type of amulet, the pressed metal medal, was introduced. The transformation in the creation of amulets became evident from 1907 because of coin minting technology from foreign countries that had entered Thailand since the reign of King Rama IV, and had been continuously developed. This led to the creation of a new style of amulet, made by pressing metal coins with machines, instead of the traditional methods of hand-engraving on natural materials or casting with various metals. This machine pressing ensured that details were clear, allowing for letters and holy

symbols to be printed distinctly on the objects, and enabling mass production. These features made this method of creating amulets highly popular. Furthermore, amulets began to evolve and become more notably intertwined with politics in the following time, especially during the revolution of 1932, when amulets became conspicuously associated with politics. (BACKbone MCOT, 2020)

A study found that, in 1932, the People's Party (คณะราษฎร) created a medal that clearly reflected their ideals in changing the political regime. This included the "ເທິ່ງໝູນ ພຣະຣາຊທານລູ້ຮຽນນູ້ໝູນ 2475" (Commemorative Medal of the Constitution Grant of 1932), made by the naval faction of the People's Party, which featured Thai letters and numbers stating "Souvenir of the People Receiving the Constitution 27.3.75" This commemorated the Thai people receiving the provisional constitution granted by King Prajadhipok on June 27, 1932. Here, "27" stands for the 27th day, "3" represents the third month of the old Thai year, when April was considered the first month, thus making June the third month, and "75" refers to the year 2475 B.E. (1932). The medal's reverse side depicted an anchor and plow, encircled by rice stalks. The anchor likely symbolized the "Navy," while the plow represented the "citizen, especially farmers, who were the majority of the population at that time." There was a book below the anchor, symbolizing knowledge and science. The imagery on this medal attempted to convey that the constitution was a means to bring progress to the country, akin to civilized nations. It was because the People's Party wanted to change because of the aspiration to imitate the Western countries, believing that having a constitution was the pathway to becoming a civilized nation. (Assumption Museum, n.d.; Komchadluek, 2020)



Figure 1 Commemorative Medal of the Constitution Grant of 1932 (Assumption Museum, n.d.; Komchadluek, 2020)

In addition, there were other versions created by the People's Party, such as the "ເທິ່ງໝູນປະບາບກົງ 1933," made after quelling the rebellion. ເທິ່ງໝູນພິທັກເຈົ້າລູ້ຮຽນນູ້ໝູນ was created to honor and reward both military and civilian officials who assisted in suppressing the Boworadej rebellion. The medal is made of black-smoked copper. The front features the Constitution resting on ພານແວນຟ້າ (Pan). The back depicts Phra Siam Devadhiraj holding a sword in a stance ready to vanquish adversaries, with the inscription "ປະບາບກົງ 1933"

beneath. The top of the medal has the words "ພິທັກໝັ້ນຮ້າຮ່າມນູ້ນູ້" inscribed on the loop. This medal is likely one of the first to use the representation of the Constitution pan as a symbol of government change. A medal similar to this is the "ວັນແບກພານຮ້າຮ່າມນູ້ນູ້ (ox carrying the Constitution Tray)" of 1937, crafted to celebrate the Constitution event in ສຸຣິນທົ່ງ province in 1936. The medal features the inscription "ພິທັກໝັ້ນຮ້າຮ່າມນູ້ນູ້."



Figure 2 "Constitution Protection" New Year's Card Medal of 1937, featuring an ox carrying the Constitution pan. (Matichon, 2020)

Another significant medal recognized as an amulet is the "ເທົ່ານີ້ສ່າງປາຕີ" (Nation Building Medal) of 1939 by the People's Party. This medal was produced to celebrate National Day alongside the inauguration of the Democracy Monument. The government issued the ເທົ່ານີ້ສ່າງປາຕີ, with the front depicting the Democracy Monument and the back inscribed with the words "ສ່າງປາຕີ" (nation building). The People's Party aimed to widely propagate their ideology through this medal. It produced 2 million pieces of the medal and distributed them nationwide through civil servants, military personnel, students, public schools, private schools, municipal schools, provincial council members, municipal council members, village headmen, and district doctors. The medal underwent a blessing ceremony conducted by numerous revered monks, led by Chao Khun Srisajyanamuni (ເຈົ້າຄຸນສັຈັນມຸນິ or ເຈົ້າຄຸນສົ່ງ (ສົນທີ)) (Chao Khun Sri (Sonthi)) with Sangkhrach Phae (ສັງພຣະພ່) presiding over the ceremony. Many renowned monks were invited to participate in the blessing, such as Luang Pho Derm (ຫລວງພ່ອເດີມ) of Nong Pho temple, Luang Pho Jard (ຫລວງພ່ອຈາດ) of Bangkabao temple, Luang Pho YI (ຫລວງພ່ອອື່ງ) of Sattahip temple, Luang Pho Jong (ຫລວງພ່ອຈົງ) of Natang Nok temple, Luang Pho Kong (ຫລວງພ່ອຄົງ) of Bangkaprom temple, Luang Pho Cham (ຫລວງພ່ອແໜ່ງ) of Tar Kong temple, Luang Pho Luea (ຫລວງພ່ອເໜືອ) of Sao Cha ngok temple, Luang Pho Rung (ຫລວງພ່ອຮູ້ງ) of Tar Krabue temple, Luang Phoo Pueak (ຫລວງປູ້ເຜື້ອກ) of Kingkeaw temple, Luang Pho Jai (ຫລວງພ່ອໄຈ) of Sadej temple, Luang Pho Pleuan (ຫລວງພ່ອເປົ່າຍິນ) of Tai temple, Luang Pho Pruink (ຫລວງພ່ອພັງ) of Bangprakok temple, Luang Pho Suk (ຫລວງພ່ອທອນສູງ) of Tanod Luang temple etc. (Delinews, 2020)

Furthermore, the significance of the aforementioned ເທົ່ານີ້ສ່າງປາຕີ (Nation Building Medal) holds a deeply hidden meaning, namely that this nation-building is clearly related to the construction of the Democracy Monument. The reason for this is according to a commemorative document from the National Day celebration and the Democracy

Monument construction in 1940, titled "Thailand Today: Commemorating the National Day 1940." At first glance, this book appears to be a commemorative book compiling various evidence and details about the monument's construction. However, when considering it politically, this book is the propaganda of the People's Party from the time of revolution to the Monument's construction in 1940. The government tried to present the idea that since the regime change, the nation has been progressing in all aspects. This is because there are a few pages of the content for the monument's construction, while the majority of the content consists of the People's Party's policies on national administration, such as the government's commitment to implement the six main principles of the People's Party promised during the governmental change, which are: independence, internal peace, economy, equality, freedom, and education. Moreover, the government also presented the various advancements it had made, including the rectification of 13 unjust treaties imposed by foreign countries since 1938. The People's Party viewed that previously, Siam was forced into unfair treaties, which rendered the country as lacking full sovereignty. Once the treaties were amended, Siam gained complete independence. Thus, the nation-building coin was created for this reason. (Thai nai patčhuban thīralūk chalōng wan chāt Phō. Sō. sōngphansīrōipāētsipsām, 1940)



Figure 3 National Building Medal of 1939²

Nonetheless, it can be observed that these medals have unique characteristics that distinguish them from others. Their purpose was not for adorning the uniforms of civil servants and civilians or for decoration in other ceremonies. Instead, these medals were made in the form of amulets that the clergy consecrated, and people wore them. The individuals who wore or received these medals would be aware of the creation and the various rituals involved. Furthermore, the messages inscribed on the medals reflected the ideologies or propaganda that the People's Party intended to convey. In addition to this, amulets like พระพุทธชินราช (Phra Buddha Chinnarat), created during the Indochina War in 1942, are significant Thai amulets that prominently displayed Thai ideology. During the

² Medal owns by Researcher.

Indochina War, Thai elites wanted to create amulets to distribute to Thai soldiers who went to the battle. Thus, Phra Buddha Chinnarat was chosen to be distributed for this purpose. The reason lied in the longstanding view that Phra Buddha Chinnarat best reflects Thai identity. It is regarded as the most beautiful Buddha statue in the eyes of Thais and was created by Thais, not brought from other nations. Additionally, Phra Buddha Chinnarat demonstrates the civilization of Siam which could create the most beautiful Buddha image, reflecting the enduring and rich history of the Thai nation. Thai history has been intertwined with Phra Buddha Chinnarat for hundreds of years. These reasons align the creation of Phra Buddha Chinnarat with the nationalist ideas during the Indochina War, which sought to express the utmost Thai identity or Thai nationalism, especially during wartime when soldiers would confront foreign adversaries. Creating an amulet that reflected Thai identity was exemplified by creating Phra Buddha Chinnarat. This can be seen in the poem regarding the creation of พระพุทธชินราชอินโดจีน (Phra Buddha Chinnarat Indochina) that “พระพุทธชินราชเสริกรไสร ปฏิมา งามเจื่องตามสมญา ยิ่งแท้ พุทธคุณกว่าไครกำหนด.” (Siamrath, 2020) From this poem, it can be inferred that the primary reason for choosing Phra Buddha Chinnarat was that Phra Buddha Chinnarat is considered the most beautiful Buddha statue. This notion at least dates back to the reign of King Rama IV, which was a period related to the emergence of a modern state due to colonial expansion. Hence, King Rama IV established a history portraying Siam as possessing civilization and cultural sophistication to demonstrate to the Western nations that Siam was not barbaric. (Prakitnonthakan, 2008, p.96; Prakitnonthakan, 2018. P. 10, 123)



Figure 4 พระพุทธชินราชอินโดจีน (Phra Buddha Chinnarat Indochina), made by casting in 1942 ³ and as a medal by using stamping techniques ⁴

³ Julinthon, 2013, p.38

⁴ Medal owns by Researcher



Figure 5 พระวัดท้ายตลาด พิมพ์สมาร์กนกข้าง (Thai Talat Amulet), one of the amulets that Pibul requested for distributing to soldiers who were fighting in Indochina War.⁵

In addition to creating amulets, the government also issued announcements to various renowned temples requesting amulets from temple repositories to distribute to soldiers and the general public. For example, during 1942, Thai Talat Temple or Molilokkayaram Ratchawarawihan Temple in Bangkok received a request for assistance from the Ministry of Defense to excavate amulets from the temple's repository for distribution to soldiers and police participating in the war. ท้ายตลาด Temple had been famous for making amulets since the reign of King Rama V, around 1888, by Phra Wichianmuni (พระวิเชียรมนูนี), the former abbot, Than Chao Khun Sanit (ท่านเจ้าคุณสนิท) along with Luang Pho Yam (หลวงพ่อแย้ม) and Luang Pho Khlin (หลวงพ่อกลิน), the meditation masters of the monastery. Consequently, during that time, Phra Prasit Silakhun (พระประสิทธิ์ศิลคุณ), the abbot, permitted the excavation of the pagodas at the temple and discovered a large number of amulets. Additionally, another set of amulets was found stored in containers on the ceiling of the ordination hall and the ceiling of the Supreme Patriarch's Hall. The temple thus gave some portion to the government for distribution to the soldiers at war. (Siamrath, 2019)

After the era of the People's Party, it was not the fighting between the people's party, the representation of the new ideology and the old elites anymore. It was after 1957 when the political context of Thailand shifted as the country entered the Cold War era. The struggle to establish the ideology of the People's Party thus came to an end. Amulets also underwent changes according to the new circumstances. One of the first battles that Thailand participated in during the Cold War was the Korean War. During that time, Thailand was considered as a key ally of the United States, and thus sent supplies and military forces to aid South Korea. It can be said that Thailand, under the government of Pibul, was the first Asian nation to officially participate in Korean War on September 22, 1950. Throughout the Korean War, more than 11,776 Thai soldiers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force were deployed. During this period, the government of Pibul created Phra Buddha Chinnarat amulets to distribute to soldiers. The reason for choosing Phra Buddha Chinnarat was that it was seen by the elites as the most reflective of Thai identity as aforesaid. This rationale

⁵ Medal owned by Researcher

was likely the same for making amulets during the Korean War. When the government decided to send troops and supplies to Korean War, they followed the same tradition as in earlier conflicts, creating half-body Phra Buddha Chinnarat amulets. The Korean War Phra Buddha Chinnarat has connections to the Indochina War version, created by Chao Khun Sri (Sonthi) of Temple and patronized by Prince ChalermBholtikambhorn, made from the remnants of the Indochina War version. Furthermore, the masters who participated in consecrating the Indochina War version also joined the ceremony for the Korean War version as well. พระพุทธชินราชเกาหลี(Phra Buddha Chinnarat Korea) images are all marked with the number 21, signifying the 21st Infantry Regiment. Approximately 4,000 pieces were made, with the purpose of distributing them to soldiers who went to war. The faith and popularity of the Phra Buddha Chinnarat among the elite of that period is further exemplified by the fact that beyond the government's expedited creation of Phra Buddha Chinnarat Korea to be given to soldiers, other elites also created Phra Buddha Chinnarat. For example, Luang Phrom Yothi (มังกร พระหมอยอธี), an important figure in the People's Party responsible for the 1932 revolution and a key military leader during the Indochina War and a minister who served several terms, had the idea to create amulets for soldiers when Thailand sent troops to the Korean War in 1950. The Buddha image chosen was the same Phra Buddha Chinnarat as the government's, but the ones created by Luang Phrom Yothi were made at Phra Sri Rattana Mahathat Temple in Phitsanulok Province. Chao Khun Sri (Sonthi) from Suthat Thepwararam Temple provided the metal materials and conducted rituals, inviting various revered monks of the era to bless the amulets. The creation of these Phra Buddha Chinnarat amulets by Luang Phrom Yothi was completed around the same time as the government's Phra Buddha Chinnarat Korea, and they were also distributed to soldiers participating the war. (Thaprachan, n.d.) (Komchadluek, 2011)

Obviously, there is a conceptual connection from the Phra Buddha Chinnarat Indochina medal to Phra Buddha Chinnarat Indochina Korea medal and Phra Buddha Chinnarat Luang Phrom Yothi medal. This ideology is similar to the creation of Phra Buddha Chinnarat Indochina medal, which aims to reflect Thai identity or to reflect the civility of Thailand according to the thoughts of Thai elites. Aside from Phra Buddha Chinnarat Korea, which was created under the Cold War, King Rama IX also made commemorative medals distributed to soldiers who went to war. These medals had the royal cipher "ก.ร." on the front and the back inscribed as "Presented to those who went to the Korean War, 1950." King Rama IX bestowed these medals to all Thai volunteered soldiers in the Korean War. This medal is considered one of the earliest minted by the King. However, these medals were not consecrated amulets typically blessed by monks, but rather, they were intended to boost the morale of the soldiers who went to war. (Komchadluek, 2011) Besides the amulets created during that time, as mentioned earlier, there were also amulets made by various respected monks to be distributed to soldiers. An example of this is Phra Somdej Songnam (พระสมเด็จสองน้ำ) medal, the Korean War Edition from เทพศิรินทร์ Temple, created in 1950. This amulet originated from the first creation of Phra Somdej Songnam medal in 1941 by Phra Dhammadhachamuni (พระรัมขัชมุนี) during

the bathing ceremony of Somdej Phra Buddhakosajarn (Charoen) Yanwara Thera (สมเด็จพระพุทธโฆษาจารย์ (เจริญ) ญาณวาระ), and later, during 1950, the Korean War occurred. Prince ChalermBholtikambhorn participated in the Korean War as a front-line soldier in the 21st Integrated Regiment. Prince ChalermBholtikambhorn requested the sacred powder of the สมเด็จสรงน้ำ edition to distribute to soldiers heading to the Korean war front. However, the first batch of Phra Somdej Songnam had long been depleted, so a new set was created using the same materials and mixture as before, such as the sacred powder from Somdet Phutthachan (To) สมเด็จพุฒาจารย์ (โต) ,Sam Pleum Temple. The mixture was given to Chit Napasap (ชิต นาฏรพ), the owner of Ya Nat Mhor Mhee (yanatthumom), to grind finely using a medicine grinder, and the original mold was used for pressing. Chao Khun Nor (ท่านเจ้าคุณนรฯ) was invited to be the spiritual teacher involved in the consecration ceremony. The amulets created were of a seated Buddha in the meditation posture on a lotus base within an arch of glass. The back featured the gourd yantra with the letters อ ุ မ ะ symbolizing the Triple Gem: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The last line of letters, พ ะ ง ะ อ ะ, were the initials of Somdet Phra Buddhakosajarn (Charoen Yanwaro) (สมเด็จพระพุทธโฆษาจารย์ (เจริญ ญาณวาระ)). Upon closer examination, these amulets resemble the พระพุทธชินราช as well. (ThaPrachan, 2023)

Nevertheless, it is notable that in the Korean War, the creation of amulets followed the same tradition as the Indochina War, where the Phra Buddha Chinnarat was produced for similar reasons—because the Buddha Chinnarat best represents Thai identity. However, after the Korean War, even though there were many series of Phra Buddha Chinnarat amulets, they were never again made with such prominence under the political context like this.

Furthermore, I would like to discuss another amulet that Pibul created, which significantly reflects Thai politics. The creation of this amulet is considered one of the greatest amulet-crafting events in Thai history. Pibul himself organized this event with the aim to preserve the religion from the belief that after five thousand years, the religion would decline, and that there would be turmoil during the mid-Buddhist era. It was also a celebration of Buddhism having existed for 2,500 years. At the same time, communism was spreading worldwide, especially in the Southeast Asian region, with the belief that communism would eradicate all religions. Thus, the government held this grand event to declare that Buddhism would continue to exist in Thailand. However, one of the objectives of Pibul's government was to establish a new culture in Thailand, based on the belief that if Thailand became a culturally rich country, it would be on par with other great powers. Pibul also viewed that the core of Thai cultural development was Buddhism. As such, he attempted to establish himself as a patron of the religion, as evidenced by the creation of Phra Si Mahathat Wora Maha Viharn Temple, the establishment of the Monks' Hospital, and declared major Buddhist holidays as public holidays. Before his second term, Pibul, as head of the government, also made several amulets, such as the creation of the พระพุทธชิน

ราช amulet during the Indochina and Korean wars. The purpose of this was to distribute them to soldiers who went to the war. In 1957, a significant year marking 2,500 years of Buddhism, Pibul planned to organize a grand celebration for this occasion. (Meechuen, 1990, pp.8-9,11.)

However, the significant implication of the halfway mark to the 5,000-year anniversary since the establishment of Buddhism is marked by criticisms against the government, asserting that dire events may occur, based on the belief that the religion would deteriorate until its eventual downfall at the 5,000-year mark. Therefore, there is a hidden meaning suggesting that the religion will decline, and in 1957, it was perceived that Buddhism had only half its lifespan remaining. Some believed that calamities would occur in Thailand, and politically, this notion was leveraged to criticize the government, claiming it was a dark era with a bad economy, full of hooligans and corrupted politicians. Consequently, the government sought to promote the idea that the approaching halfway era was a positive event for Thailand, as one of the most devout Buddhist countries in the world, and should be celebrated since Buddhism had endured for 2,500 years. The government attempted to highlight this as a positive occasion rather than a negative one. Furthermore, regarding the concept of the five disappearances (ปัญจ อันตรธาน), the government sought to clarify that such an idea did not exist in the Tripitaka, but was instead written later and urged the public not to believe it. The government also campaigned against using the term "halfway to the Buddhist era" by advocating for "25th Buddhist Century" instead. Therefore, the government planned to organize a grand celebration of the Buddhist religion to reinforce that this was a positive event for Thailand. On this occasion, Pibul also had the idea of making numerous sacred amulets and Buddha images to distribute to the general public. There were 2,500 gold amulets, 2,421,250 lead ones, and 2,421,250 clay ones (mixed with pollen). The making of these amulets was special as they were crafted using clay from in front of the ordination halls of various temples across the country, mixed with pollen from 108 kinds of auspicious flowers. For the metal ones, renowned monks from all over the country inscribed various metal sheets, which were then melted together. The consecration ceremonies were held in two phases. The first phase took place on February 8, 1957, at the ordination hall of Suthat Thepwararam Temple, where all the sacred materials were brought together for blessing, with 108 revered monks participating in the ceremony. The second phase was held on May 2, 1957, where all the amulets were again consecrated in the ordination hall of Suthat Thepwararam Temple. His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch Krom Luang Vajirayanawong (สมเด็จพระสังฆราชเจ้า กรมหลวงวชิรญาณวงศ์) of Bowaniwet Wihan Ratchaworawihan Temple, the Supreme Patriarch, presided over the religious side, and Pibul presided over the secular side. Additionally, 25 senior monks chanted Buddhist scriptures, and 108 renowned monks from across the nation participated in these two phases, spanning a total of 6 days and 6 nights. (2500th Buddha Jayanti Celebration Committees, 1957)



Figure 6 The Buddha amulet commemorating the 25th Buddhist century made of metal and powder⁶

The political implication of the creation of this Buddha can be seen in Pibul's attempt to establish himself as the religious leader of the nation. The creation of the 25th-century Buddha medals is considered the grandest ceremony the country has ever organized and may be regarded as the most significant event ever held in Thailand. Pibul viewed the event and the creation of the amulets for the celebration of the 25th Buddhist century as a key nationalistic policy. (Meechuen, 1990, p.13) This policy was among several crucial policies of the government at the time, such as road construction, irrigation development, the building of schools and hospitals, all aimed at integrating Buddhist teachings into Thai culture. The government disseminated these ideas through state-controlled media, like government-supported radio programs. Hence, it is evident that religion was a central priority for Pibul and a major policy that he implemented earnestly, as seen in the construction of religious buildings and clearly from the 25th Buddhist century celebration. It shows that Pibul was highly committed to positioning himself as a leader who leveraged religion for political governance. Another important context is the political environment during the period when the government of Pibul faced severe criticism from the opposition and extra-parliamentary politics, focusing on issues like extended power retention, government members' privileges, nepotism, lack of democracy, and inflation. Thus, his reputation had been poor for a long time. (Yimprasert, 2010, p. 337)

However, the attempt to establish himself as a religious leader of Thailand led to accusations that Pibul was trying to replace the King, who, by his status, was already the main supporter and preserver of the religion in Thailand. This issue became particularly evident when King Rama IX did not attend the events as scheduled because of his cold. His absence sparked intense rumors of conflicts between King Rama IX and the government. According to the schedule, the King was supposed to preside over the opening ceremony of the 2500th Buddhist Era celebrations on May 12, 1957, and on May 14, 1957, he was to proceed to Vasukri pier to view the Royal Barge Procession in the morning and attend the Buddhist Lantern Ceremony at night. On the following day, the King was expected to view the museum exhibitions and displays related to Buddhism. Finally, he was supposed to preside over the closing ceremony on May 18, 1957. However, on May 9, 1957, the Royal

⁶ Kitchaiyaporn, 2018, pp. 163-164.

Household Bureau informed the Director-General of the Fine Arts Department that King Rama IX had been suffering from a cold for several days. The royal physician opined that His Majesty's condition had not improved, and therefore, he could not attend and perform royal duties. Thus, His Majesty graciously appointed Nivat, the Prince Bidyalabh Bridhyakon, the Chairperson of the Privy Council, to perform the royal duties on his behalf. As King Rama IX did not attend the scheduled event as invited by the government, it stirred rumors which significantly harmed the government. There was widespread speculation of conflict between the monarchy and the government because the King's inability to attend had an impact on the government, as the celebration of the 25th Buddhist century was considered a major event which the government regarded the event as its crowning achievement. The grandeur was not just in the creation of votive tablets or the celebration itself, but Pibul made this occasion exceedingly grand, along with other activities organized by the government to further enhance the celebration such as granting amnesty to a large number of politicians, inviting leaders from various countries to attend the event, and inviting a significant number of monks from several countries. However, since the King did not attend the event, there was a speculation that a conflict had arisen between the King and the Prime Minister. (Yimaprasert, 2010, p. 376; Meechuen, 1990, p. 113) The mentioned rumor was acknowledged by the government. Therefore, there were efforts to refute the news that the government was not in conflict with the King, but the King was indeed unwell. The reason for such rumors is that in the past, it seemed that the government, particularly Pibul, had frequent conflicts with King Rama IX. This was evident from King Rama IX's speech in 1956 on the occasion of the Army Day, January 25, 1956, where he remarked, "*Because the military receives honor and privileges as the holders of the country's weapons and armed forces, respected and feared among the general public, soldiers must conduct themselves appropriately to the trust placed in them. They should not involve themselves in activities outside their specific duties, such as engaging in politics. Such behavior would lead to a loss of public trust in the military, as it would be perceived that influence is used for personal benefit...*" (Silpawattanatham, 2023) This statement directly affected Pibul's government since he came to power through a coup d'état. Nevertheless, the government tried to react to the speech, for example, Yoot Saeng-Uthai, an important legal figure in the government, argued that the monarchy in a democratic regime "should not speak on issues or stories related to the country's economic, political, or social matters without ministers in the government cabinet being the ones to respond to the royal command." The principle that Yoot Saeng-Uthaiproposed was "The King can do no wrong," meaning that the King cannot make mistakes because any actions taken must have someone responsible for the royal command. Nevertheless, this response from the government also caused it to be viewed as further insulting the royal prerogative. (Yimaprasert, 2010, p. 377)

Then, Sarit, the prime minister after Pibul, prioritized the fight against communism in neighboring countries, such as the Vietnam War, the conflicts in Laos and Cambodia, as well as the anti-communist war in Thailand. Consequently, amulet crafting of this period underwent changes again. The purpose of it was to promote the ideology of the temple and

the palace. Most amulets from this era were created to be distributed to soldiers, police officers, and government officials to perform their duties in dangerous areas both inside and outside the country. Due to this, amulet production during the Cold War had very distinctive characteristics, featuring nationalist messages irrespective of whether they were made by state agencies or renowned monks of the time. Messages such as "Sacrifice for the nation, better to die than the nation perishes," "We fight, fight right here, fight until we die," "Thailand will remain Thai," and "Thais drive out enemies, fight without retreat" were embedded. These messages were almost nonexistent on amulets of revered monks before and after the Cold War era. It can be observed that these messages are full of nationalist ideology, highlighting the importance of safeguarding Thailand, which both officials and citizens were expected to protect from the communist threat looming over the nation at the time. (Yurungruangsak, 2011, pp. 118-119)

Another example of an amulet that is considered to reflect the political ideology of Thai elite during that era very well is Phra Somdej Chitlada medal, also known as Phra Kamlang Pan Din (พระกำลังแผ่นดิน), made by King Rama IX himself. It was created during 1965-1970. This particular amulet has a very unique characteristic compared to all previous amulets. It can be observed that since the beginning of Thais wearing ancient Buddha amulets or those blessed by revered monks, most amulets were consecrated by monks, or even when created by laypeople, at least one monk would be invited to bless them. Yet, Phra Somdej Chitlada medal is an amulet that was not consecrated by any monk. Moreover, it is evident that Phra Somdej Chitlada medal does not have any inscriptions or yantra on it at all. This is notable because the tradition or practice of creating amulets in modern times often includes inscribing symbols or mantras on them. However, the back of Phra Somdej Chitlada medal is completely smooth with no inscriptions whatsoever. There could be two reasons for this: firstly, the intention of the creator might have been not to emphasize sanctity from other sources, such as the blessing by a revered monk or the inscribing by any school, but instead to focus on the auspicious material derived from the King himself. Secondly, King Rama IX might want to leave the back blank for people to gild as the King once told close aides when he bestowed the amulet that "*...to have the amulet gilded but only at the back before being enshrined, as a reminder that doing good deeds does not require public display or announcement. Carry out duties for the sake of duty itself and consider the success in performing those duties as the ultimate reward...*," as quoted by Police General Wasit Dechkunchorn. (Springnews, 2007)



Figure 7 Phra Somdej Chitlada 1966 (Kitchaiyaporn, 2018, p. 203)

This Phra Somdej Chitlada medal of King Rama IX is special due to the materials used in its creation, referred to in the amulet community as “sacred substances,” most of which are almost entirely associated with King Rama IX. These include dried flowers from garlands presented to him by the public during the ceremony of changing the attire of the Emerald Buddha, strands of his own hair, dried flowers from garlands hung on the Great White Umbrella of State and the handle of the Victory Sword in the Royal Coronation ceremony, paint scraped from the canvas on which he painted, resin and oil paint scraped from the Micro Mod sailboat or the royal sailboat when he was decorating it for the Southeast Asian Peninsula Games in 1967. These substances are all closely associated with the King. Additionally, there is another set of sacred materials collected nationwide, including flowers and incense powder from worshiping the Emerald Buddha at Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram Temple, พระพุทธชินสีห์ (Phra Buddha Chinnasi) at Bowaniwet Wihan Ratchaworawihan Temple, Phra Buddha Chinnarat at Phra Sri Rattana Mahathat Temple in Phitsanulok, as well as important royal monasteries nationwide. Soil and dried moss from boundary markers at holy sites in India and Sri Lanka, preserved by clerical envoys in the stupa at Sadej Temple in Pathumthani Province. Soil and dried moss from boundary markers in every province of Thailand, such as Phra That Phanom in Nakorn Phanom Province, Phra Borom That Temple in Nakorn Sri Thammarat Province, Phra That Doi Suthep Temple in Chiang Mai Province. Water from sacred wells used for holy water (น้ำสรงมุรธาภิเชษฐ) in coronation ceremonies, all of which were respectfully presented by the Ministry of Interior. (Silpawattanatham, 2022)

Based on the mentioned list of materials, it can be seen that the materials can be roughly divided into two categories. The first category includes items associated with sacred objects throughout the country, such as flowers used for worshiping significant Buddha statues. This aspect is common, as the creators of amulets, particularly those made of powder, typically source materials considered sacred, with some monks creating powder from scraping and writing protective symbols. However, the second set of materials is special and unique to this particular series of amulets because they are directly related to King Rama IX. These include colored powder from the King's paintings, resin from the sailboats created by the King, and the King's hair, among others. This is likely the first time

an amulet has been made from materials personally connected to the King, signifying his intention. The researcher hypothesizes that King Rama IX intended these amulets to symbolize a close connection between the monarchy and the recipients because the incorporated items were all favored by the King, such as painting and components from the royal sailboat. Simultaneously, among these materials are those that reflect the King's merit and virtue, such as flowers hung on royal regalia, whether the sword or the royal umbrella. These items are related to the divine essence of the monarchy, an attribute not previously utilized, or at least not since 1932, in the creation of amulets. Thus, it is evident that the materials of Phra Somdej Chitlada amulet are special, as they reflect the monarch's political ideology and singular grandiosity, embodying the divine power to take these elements and fashion them into a protective charm. (Yurungruangsak, 2011 pp. 157-158)

Moreover, the naming of these revered amulets is also intriguing. Initially, there was no official naming as there is no mention of any amulet names in the royal certificates. Only photographs of the amulets and their respective names and numbers are mentioned. Therefore, it can be inferred that the names, whether "Phra Somdej Chitlada," "Phra Kamlang Pan Din" or others, are likely originated informally. For instance, the name "Phra Kamlang Pan Din" was coined by Kukrit Pramoj, inspired by the meaning of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's name. The word "Bhumibol" translates to "power of the land," leading to the amulet's moniker, "Phra Kamlang Pan Din" (Komchadluek, 2016) The name "Phra Somdej Chitlada" is speculated that it was assigned by the public or amulet enthusiasts. This naming stemmed from the fact that King Rama IX personally crafted these amulets at the จิตราลดา Palace. The researcher believes that the public's naming of these royal amulets reflects the notion of the monarchy's sacredness. In the amulet circle, the term "สมเด็จ" typically refers to amulets resembling that of Somdet Phra Buddhacarya (To Brahmarangsi) (สมเด็จพระพุฒาจารย์ (โต พุธุมรัศี)). Usually, these names include a suffix indicating the creator's name or the temple of creation, such as Somdej Luang Pho Thongsuk (สมเด็จหลวงพ่อทองสุข) of Tanod Luang Temple, Somdej Luang Pho Daeng (สมเด็จหลวงพ่อแดง) of Khao Bandai It Temple, Somdej Luang Pho Sood (สมเด็จหลวงพ่อสุด) of Kalong Temple, and Somdej Pao Sriyanon (สมเด็จผ่าศรีyanon). Thus, the naming of "Phra Somdej Chitlada" is exceptionally significant, highlighting the sacred nature of the monarchy, who is viewed as possessing extraordinary abilities, needing no ritual empowerment from prominent monks. This act undeniably reflects the concept of "divine grace," as evidenced by the use of the royal palace, traditionally a temple, in the amulet's name. As previously noted, a temple typically signifies the resemblance of an amulet to those of Somdet Phra Phutthachan To (สมเด็จพระพุฒาจารย์โต) of Rakang Temple. However, the amulets of King Rama IX originate from Chitlada Palace, the royal residence, not a temple. Nonetheless, people adopted this naming convention similarly to other revered amulets, emphasizing their sacredness. (Yurungruangsak, 2011, p. 157)

Furthermore, it can be observed that when amulets, such as the Phra Somdej Chitlada, reflect the ideology of royalism or heroism quite clearly. However, the ideology reflected in these amulets would not function at all if they were not distributed to the target

groups. Historically, amulets have always had their target groups. For example, the Phra Buddha Chinnarat Indochina amulets were created to be distributed to soldiers going to war, or amulets and medals made during the change of government were distributed to the general public. As for Phra Somdej Chitlada amulets, the target groups were markedly different from other amulets because it was distributed in a very limited circle. It is estimated that no more than 2,500 pieces were distributed, mostly to soldiers and military police fighting communist forces, whether in the "Red Zone" areas in Thailand or soldiers deployed to Vietnam. (Matichonweekly, 2023) For instance, Chetta Thanajaro, one of the volunteer division three, part one soldiers, received the amulet from King Rama IX, who granted an audience to this group of soldiers before they went on duty in Vietnam. Besides primarily distributing the amulets to soldiers fighting communists, well-known individuals and officers in Thai society also received them, such as Kukrit Pramoj, Thanom Kittikachorn, Wasit Dechkunchorn, Thanin Kraivichien, Suwat Liptapanlop and Jongchai Thiangtham. (Silpawattanatham, 2022) Regarding this matter, if viewed superficially, it might appear that the distribution was only to soldiers going to war.

Nonetheless, when considering it in a broader Thai political context, the distribution of those sacred amulets is a way of network building for the monarchy. In this case, Kampa's research, "The Era of Ascending Hegemony: The Expansion and Development of King Rama IX's Networks through Thai Elite Interactions from the 1940s to 1990s," provides an overview of how King Rama IX became a unifying factor in the minds of Thai people. In Thailand, the King is considered a crucial mechanism that propelled the nation forward. However, before achieving this status, King Rama IX built his influence by establishing networks across various elite circles. These included civil servants, royal court officials, military and police officers, as well as leaders in the private sector such as tycoons and key businessmen, with all these networks. Moreover, ခာစာ's work elaborates that the creation of such networks by King Rama IX allowed him to forge a consensus among the Thai elite on national development. The King's method of network-building was varied. For instance, within the royal court officials circle, which could include those with royal lineage or close ties with the monarchy, the study highlights that a distinct reflection of this network-building is the granting of royal decorations. Normally, civil servants receive decorations based on their rank, with the highest being the "The Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant (มหาปรมาภรณ์ช้างเผือก)" However, "ຈຸລຈອມເກລົາ" Insignia is granted by the King's discretion and is limited in number, not all high-ranking officials receive it. Recipients of the ຈຸລຈອມເກລົາ Insignia are viewed as an "informal network within the formal network" of the bureaucratic system. Besides the court officials, King Rama IX also established networks among key Thai business leaders by bestowing the Garuda Emblem to certain companies. (Kampa, 2021, pp. 140-142)

According to Kampa's research, it can be seen that King Rama IX had various mechanisms to build networks for social and political groups through different methods. This is similar to the creation and distribution of the Phra Somdej Chitlada amulets since these amulets were distributed in a very limited circle, with a very specific focus on soldiers sent to the Vietnam War and officials on dangerous missions threatened by communism,

as well as significant political elites at that time. Additionally, each distribution event was accompanied by an announcement from the Royal Household Bureau indicating the recipient's name, similar to the presentation of royal decorations. Therefore, it can be viewed that the distribution of the Phra Somdej Chitlada amulets was a way of building networks with fighters combating what the nation's elites perceived as threats. Furthermore, it served as communication with society and the country's elites in order to indicate what was considered a threat to the nation as well. Asa Kampa also explained about the role of King Rama IX in being a leader of networks that he established by building consensus among the Thai elite from post-1957 onwards, especially during the Cold War period. This included standing against the communist world, adopting Western liberal development ideas, and being a close ally of the United States. However, it is undeniable that the consideration of the distribution of these amulets by King Rama IX also reflects two political contexts: First, the Cold War context that expanded into Thailand as well as the neighboring countries, specifically Vietnam. The communist ideology was seen as a clear adversary to the monarchy. Therefore, it is apparent that the monarchy made significant efforts to combat the communist threat during that period. (Kampa, 2021, pp. 140-142)

Apart from attempting to convey political ideology through the direct messages on amulets, it can also involve using historical figures on amulets to foster a sense of Thai nationalism. This serves as a morale booster for military officers, police, or the public. Selected historical figures are often chosen based on their past heroic deeds of fighting against enemies or aiding Siam or Bangkok in resisting external threats. Those who create amulets reinterpret these heroic acts in the context of the political climate at the time of the amulet's creation. The most popular cultural hero is King พระศรี the Great, followed by King ตากสิน the Great. Both kings are often depicted as having saved the nation or fought against adversaries threatening the country. Similarly, during the Cold War, both kings were used to represent their protective power against communist threats. Notably, the creation of medallions of these cultural heroes frequently involves a consecration ceremony conducted by revered monks for almost every medallion, including commemorative ones, before distribution. This is a distinctive characteristic of Thailand. As in the Western culture, commemorative coins or medallions created to remember certain events typically have nothing to do with religious rituals. However, the connection with religion is inevitable in Thailand.

The methods of dissemination of the political ideology of the Thai elite during the Cold War era were varied. One such method was through amulets that appeared to be created by individual revered monks. However, these types of amulets had a special feature: they bore a royal insignia on the back, the monogram "ก. บ. ร." (the abbreviation name of King Bhumibol Adulyadej). Not every monk can use this royal insignia because monks who were allowed to use the "ก. บ. ร." insignia had to be considered renowned in their communities, respected by the public, and revered by the King himself. The selection, thus, certainly reflected the elite's political ideology of the time. From 1967 onwards, King Rama IX visited rural areas extensively. Beyond observing the living conditions of people in remote areas, he sought to pay respects to local monks. These visits were akin to venerating

what the local populace revered and helped foster goodwill with the local communities. Additionally, when the King frequently visited renowned local monks, a close relationship developed with some of them. Consequently, when these monks made a new amulet, the King would bestow his “*ន.ւ.៥.*” monogram on it, further linking the monks to the King. Such associations strengthened the perceived connection between the monks and King Rama IX, which influenced the faith and loyalty of local communities towards the central government in Bangkok to some extent. (Kitchaiyaporn, 2018, p. 291)

This study found that the mechanisms of instilling various political ideologies in the populace involve the creators and the elites who craft amulets related to politics. They can communicate and instill these ideologies in various ways. The creators can send their messages through rituals evident in the creation process, which are tied to the context of each time period. For instance, sometimes the creator is a significant figure in the country who relies on their own reputation to produce these items. Sometimes, they use materials related to themselves in the production, as seen in the creation of the "Phra Somdej Chitlada" amulet by King Rama IX. The King made these amulets from materials closely related to himself, such as his hair and paint chips from his personal sailboat. These materials can create a profound sense of closeness to the royal creator in the minds of the recipients. Additionally, the elements depicted on such amulets can also reflect various ideologies to some extent. However, these ideologies continually change, depending on the political and social contexts and the elite holding state power at different times. This paper presents an analysis of these phenomena from the past up until the 1990s, when the making of Amulets became not as politicized as the studied period.

In sum, although amulets seem to be a part of the daily lives of Thai Buddhist people and appear to be closely related to religion rather than politics, this study presents the idea that amulets are also politically connected as tools for communication by the political elites who created them during each specific period. This has been evident throughout Thai history. It may be said that amulets, particularly medals, emerged almost simultaneously with their use in political contexts. One reason is the lack of technological communication to aid political contact or advertisement. Consequently, everyday objects like amulets were used as tools to convey the messages or ideologies of the ruling class. It appears that amulets served well in transmitting and instilling political ideology, primarily because users would carry them at all times or worship them on an altar. Therefore, anything inherently trusted by people often leads them to believe in all aspects of it. Furthermore, the cost of creating amulets is low, and they can be produced in large quantities compared to other methods of propaganda, which may be more expensive and less effective than embedding ideology into amulets for people to wear and carry. In this context, amulets have been able to effectively convey ideologies. However, as contexts have changed, the transmission of ideologies through amulets declined, which was clearly visible around 1990. This was because Thai society and politics was not as risky as those in the previous times, and they placed a strong emphasis on economic development instead. Consequently, amulets have been transformed into items that provide encouragement to business people or motivation to make a living. As such, there are many aspects to study regarding amulets in Thai society. In another

sense, amulets can still act to inculcate acceptance of the messages that the elites wish to convey. At the very least, those who carry amulets must believe in them, and these amulets often inculcate certain beliefs, be it the purpose of their consecration, the name of the amulet, the stories or experiences associated with them, or written messages on their front or back. All of this broadly summarizes what researchers wish to study: how amulets serve as instruments for diffusing ideologies from the Thai elite in each era and how they express and convey these ideologies.

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