

## Thailand Magic Amulets and Their Multimillion Baht Demand

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**ABSTRACT—**: This paper seeks to explore and understand the making of Thai magic amulets and whether they are worth the value that makes their believers sometimes pay millions of baht for them, especially when there are many counterfeits. Looking at some of the most sought-after amulets, we learn why these magic amulets have an especially strong following among the Thai and even from visitors overseas. For the collectors of these amulets, there is this innate belief that they are made by powerful monks, who bless them and give the amulets magical powers, which are then transferred to the owner, thus giving them supernatural power, good fortune and protecting them from harm. This is what makes the amulets so desirable, but it is this same desire that make them so highly sought after and results in a huge commercial market where there is a great demand for the genuine amulets, which, in turn, creates opportunities for counterfeiters, who capitalise on this same demand. It is often difficult to identify the genuine from the counterfeit and this paper also seeks to evaluate why this is something that must be addressed, as magic amulets are possibly something innately Thai and have cultural value.

Finally the paper will evaluate whether the genuine amulets could be protected and authenticated, and by this process, with the legitimisation of the genuine amulet industry, it may be an area that may serve to contribute positively to the Thai economy, which is currently facing a difficult reset in these challenging post Covid-19 times.

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as fundamental principles for delivering efficient services. The study also finds that administrative decentralization and the establishment of performance legitimacy within the Chinese political and governance system have played crucial roles in facilitating such a transformation. The study concludes with a discussion of the success factors and challenges associated with the ongoing reform efforts.

Keywords : Thai amulets, Religious commercialisation, Thai Buddhism, Thailand

## **Introduction**

Thai magic amulets are small, mystically charged objects that are carried to provide the bearer with good fortune and/or protection from harm. They are carried by members of many Buddhist cultures, most prominently in the Theravada countries of mainland Southeast Asia, Burma, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia (Buswell 2004). Increasingly, they may now be found in countries in the European Union, the United States of America as well as China.

The majority of people who carry amulets are those who believe in the power and protection that they bring, despite the fact that the amulets were originally meant to be a reminder of Buddha and to live life in the same way as Buddha. They are sometimes also known as (Krueang Rang) in Thai, amulets bearing the likeness of Buddha, famous monks and Thai Kings among others.

## **How did they come about?**

According to Buswell, amulets derive their power from the blessings of monks with reputations for being exceptionally holy or mystically powerful. The amulets are small objects in which the power of the sacred is crystallised, as with holy relics. Once

crystallised, this power can be used by ordinary people who are not themselves holy or powerful. The power comes from both the words, Pali or Sanskrit blessings, and the personal power of the monks who chant them. The right words must be spoken by the right person for the transfer of power to be effective and monks acquire this power after years of meditation, which is demonstrated by their ability to perform miracles.



Picture of Thai amulets (Thailand Amulets 2019).

### Why are they worn?

The belief in the power of the amulet frequently starts from a very early age and becomes even more prominent as one gets older (Terwiel 2012). Due to this reason, owners of amulets have strong beliefs in their magical powers and as they progress in life and in their search to achieve success, these items play an even bigger role as they become more ingrained into their social and cultural beliefs.

Amulets are most commonly worn for general protection and often have very specific protective properties. A given amulet for instance may protect against puncture wounds, such as, from bullets or knives but not from crushing wounds from truncheons. An amulet is more valuable if it is known, for example, to have saved someone from a terrible car wreck (Buswell 2004). The belief in the power of the amulet is frequently what drives the owner to

gain possession of amulets they believe to possess great power and to keep the amulet on them at all times. Some owners are said to not leave home without their precious amulets and purposely return home if they realise they have left without them.

## **Pride in Possession**

Owners of amulets are also proud to keep them and show them off. It could be compared to a treasured possession, much like a car or a house or an expensive watch. When adult males gather together, one of the topics frequently discussed might be the recent acquisition of a powerful amulet. For example, whenever a group of men are together and there is a lull in the conversation, one of the group only has to ask someone to show his amulet, and the conversation is likely to centre upon these for a long period. Everyone is willing to explain in detail from where a prized amulet hails, how rare it is and what powers it possesses (Terwiel 2012). This is similar to other cultures where one may display the same attitude toward a new purchase, like a new watch, as it is a treasured possession and shown to peers for reasons of pride.

## **How are they made?**

Also known as (Devarupa), Buddha image, amulets and charms, can be made more powerful, or empowered, by rites performed according to magical knowledge. It may also be done through the chanting of a special Buddhist mantra using a special text or by fierce concentration to draw power into the objects in question, like amulets. The words in Thai are (sek) (from abhiseka) and (pluk sek) (pluk meaning to wake something up). When consecrating a Buddha image, the ritual is called (buddhabhisek). If amulets and charms are empowered, they are usually put into an oil casket used for lighting in a temple, so that when the monks chant, the power of the chants will be fixed into the amulets (Assavavirulhakarn 2010). Amulets may be composed of many different types of material, though generally they may be made of

flowers, sand or gravel or clay, holy powder, herbs or medicines or in metal form such as copper, silver or gold.

Nowadays however, they are often made depicting the face of a Buddhist monk, one who is famous for his magical power. These medallions are made by commercial firms, usually to order from the organising committee of a fund-raising committee of a monastery or temple (Terwiel 2012).

### **Does the association with Buddha add to its value?**

Most amulets are made by Buddhist monks, many in the impression and image of the Lord Buddha and used by devotees who call themselves Buddhists. They were in the early days also found in Buddhist relics and Stupas. Certainly, a case could be made that the amulets are seen by a portion of believers as part of the Buddhist religion.

Swearer (1993) shares his view on Buddha images which is used to draw a comparison with amulets. In Theravada Buddhist cultures, the Buddha images installed in assembly halls must be formally consecrated. Until that act takes place, the statue can be considered merely decorative. The consecration ceremony figuratively brings the image to life or empowers it, thereby transforming the image from its decorative and inconsequential status to one of spiritual and religious significance, which the same could be said for Buddha amulets. He goes on to say that Buddha symbols operative in various ritual contexts are most often associated with Buddha himself and includes Buddha images, his relics enshrined in reliquary mounds, and Buddha amulets. Symbols associated with individual monks are an important extension of these objects and the power ascribed to the individual monks derives in part from the power represented by the Buddha because monks follow his Dharma (Swearer 1993).

The amulet cult serves as a function of normative beliefs and practices, circumstantial to forest monks but integral to religious religiosity (Taylor 1993). Taylor goes on to say amulets are

officially frowned upon, in the Thalaengkaan Khansong (1952), and serve in the same cultural category as sacred relics, functioning as reminders of the pure sanctity of the virtuoso and attributed with mystical powers.

Some of the most famous ones are known collectively as the (Benjapakee), meaning five types of members or grouping. Popular belief is that a group of well-known collectors in the early 1950s had proposed as a guide for Thai people the best choice of amulets to be worn. This is an excellent example of when amulets bore all the perceived powers of bringing good fortune, protection and charm to the owners.



Picture of Benjapakee (Old Thai Amulets 2019).

Mr B.T. Ng, a Singaporean, a collector with more than 20 years' experience collecting amulets, explained that the (Phra Somdej Wat Rakang) is the most sought after Thai Amulet of the five Benjapakee and is sometimes known as the King of amulets. This is corroborated by nearly all of the internet sites selling amulets, such as, <http://www.thailandamulet.net> and <http://www.oldthaiamulets.com>.

It has been said that the materials consist of shell lime, holy powder, flowers, rice, ashes, honey, banana and oil. The amulet was believed to be first made around B.E. 2409 and that a total of 84,000 amulets were made at the time. It is believed to bring fortune to the owner of the amulet and enhance their personal power. A piece in good condition could be worth more than 20 million baht. There are five notable (Pim) (mould or face), (Pim Yai), (Pim Jaydee), (Pim Tansam), (Pim Kratebuatoom) and (Pim Prokboh).



Picture of Phra Somdej Wat Rakang (Old Thai Amulets 2021).

(Phra Nang Phaya) was discovered sometime around B.E. 2444 at the temple of Wat Nang Phaya in Phitsanulok Province. Wat Nang Phaya was built in commemoration of the Queen at the time and so the Phra Nang Phaya is also sometimes called the Queen of the Thai Amulet. Made out of flower petals, rock gravel

and sand and in three styles, (Din Pao) or burnt clay, (Phong Bailarn) or ash from leaf and (Phong Hin) or ash from rock, the owner of the amulet would be blessed with personal power, attractiveness, charm and be safe from dangers. It is pyramid in shape and portrays a Buddha image in the subduing Mara posture, left hand rests on the lap and palm facing up, right hand bends over the knees and facing the ground, representing enlightenment. The amulets were made at the temple of Queen (Visutkatsatri), wife of King (Mahardharmaraja), father of King (Naresuan), during the Ayutthaya era and given out to soldiers for protection. The amulet had eight different Pim, (Pim Yai Kaokhong), (Pim Yai Kaothong), (Pim Sukathi), (Pim Aokfab), (Pim Aokthong), (Pim Aoknoon), (Pim Khanaonsukothai) and (Pim Khanonayuttaya) (Naresuan 2019).



Picture of Phra Nang Phaya (Top Amulet 2021).

(Phra Rod Wat Phra Singha) was first discovered during the reign of King Rama V inside a stupa at Wat Mahawan in Lamphun province and is also known as a Buddha of Escape. The amulet

is made from four types of clay from different places, medicines, herbs and many flowers and consecrated by 108 chanting monks and found in smooth clay of red, white, green and brown clay colours. Made by hermit (Narata Rorsee) or (Narod), it is believed to convey protection, avoidance of misfortune and safety in day to day activities. Some can be dated back 1,000 years and also said to give the owner power and safety from all dangers, disasters and misfortunes. There are five pim for Phra Rod, (Pim Yai), (Pim Grang), (Pim Lek), (Pim Tearn) and (Pim Tor).



Picture of Phra Rod (Chai Amulet 2021).

(Phra Phong Suphan) from (Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat) in Suphanburi Province is believed to be the strongest amulet ever created. A style some believe to be from the U Thong art style, some of the amulets are made out of gold, though most are made out of material like sand or gravel, flowers and medicinal herbs. It

typically comes in four colours of black, red, yellow and green. The uniqueness is the fingerprint of the master monk maker found at the back of the amulet, bringing protective power against weapons, good luck, and enhancement to the attractiveness of the owner. It is believed to be first found with a golden scripture that showed the relation between the amulet and its creator, (Phra Mahathera Piyathassi Saribut) during the period of King (Borommarachathirat) II. It has three notable pims, (Pim Na Noom) or young face, (Pim Na Klang) or mature face and (Pim Na Kae) or old face.



Picture of Phra Phong Suphan (Ahaina 2021).

(Phra Som Kor) was discovered around B.E. 2392 at (Wat Phra Borumathat) at Kamphaeng Phet province. The oldest of these amulets are around 500 years old and are extremely rare. Made by 11 (Phra Lersi), hermits using special materials like flowers, herbs, spell and water. It is said that whoever has it will never be poor. Additionally, one special characteristic of the amulet is it feels especially soft in texture.



Picture of Phra Somkor (Ahaina 2021).

### **Other types of amulet**

(Phra Khun Phaen), (Jatukham Rammathep) and (Phra Kring) are examples of other types of popular amulets highly sought after by collectors and amulet enthusiasts. Also commonly collected are amulets with Indian deities, love charms, (Kuman Thong), dark arts or lockets with the face of famous monks. (Po-kae lersi), (Phra Kru) and (Phra Rian) as seen in the image below from Thailand-amulet.com.



Khun Phaen (24)



Look Om (4)



Pokae Lersi (2)



Pra Kru (2)



Pra Rian (9)



Gambling Amulets (30)



Power Amulets (17)



Protection Amulets (54)

Picture of different amulet types (Thailand Amulet 2019).

### **Famous amulet makers**

Other very famous monks and amulet makers include (Luang Pu Thuad) of (Wat Chang Hai), (Luang Phor Ngern) of (Wat Bangklan), (Luang Phor Parn) of (Wat Bangnomko), (Luang Phor Derm) of (Wat Nong Pho), (Luang Phor Suk) of (Wat Makham Tao), (Luang Phor Pae) of (Wat Pikulthong), (Luang Phor Toh) of (Wat Pradoothimilee) and (Luang Phor Koon) of (Wat Ban Rai) and amulets made by them are extremely valuable. Another famous maker of amulets who added to the mystique and legend of the amulets was (Luang Phor Sodh). He was famous for making amulets and charging them with power derived from high level Dharmmakaaya meditation. There are numerous miraculous stories attributed to these amulets, and they are sought after by Thailand's many amulet buyers and traders (Bowers 1996).

In an article on a survey by Suan Dusit Poll, the argument

is that the most popular amulets are those bearing the likeness of Luang Pu Thuad of Wat Chang Hai and (Phra Somdej Toh) (47 and 21.9 per cent of all amulets worn, respectively). The survey was conducted on 1,126 people nationwide from 11-15 September. Results indicate that 12.9 per cent wore (Luang Por Sothorn) amulets, 9.4 per cent wore (Luang Phu Toh)'s (Phra Pidta) (Closed Eyes) amulets and 8 per cent wore (Luang Por Ngern) of (Wat Bang Klan) (The Nation 2018).

According to Taylor, in Thailand it is considered fortunate and prestigious to have in one's possession an amulet blessed by a forest monk. Famous forest monks such as (Ajaans Phaang, Sii, Fan, Khao, Juan and Waen) are known to have dispersed amulet-medallions at one time or another. Due to associations with arahanship and related mystical powers attributed to relics of forest monks in the line of (Ajaan Man), popular interest has grown in recent years and these monks have been actively sought over in the past twenty years for sacralising amulets.

### **How commercialised is amulet trading?**

Amulets have been a business and a hobby for only half a century. Amulet markets in Bangkok's old town attract tourists and this industry is worth over 40 billion baht – that's 1.25 billion dollars. Traded at about 10,000 stalls, shops, fairs, markets, magazines, websites, and a whole floor of Pantip Plaza computer mall at Ngamwongwan, they can fetch huge prices (Cornwell-Smith and Goss 2011).

A counter argument could be that amulets are made only as gifts and souvenirs and should not be deemed to be anything other than that. This is seen in the reply from the temple who claimed their amulets were made merely as a souvenir, as seen in the picture of amulets made with the symbol of Doraemon, a famous Japanese manga or cartoon character.



Picture of Doraemon amulet (Bangkok Post 2012).

Amulets are like gold, since it could contain perceived value and serve as a guard against inflation and political instability. Many traders of amulets claim it is a livelihood and explain that there is no mention within Buddhist teachings that trading in Buddha images should not be allowed.

Vendors bristle at accusations of 'trade' in, or commercialisation of amulets. They claim to 'rent' amulets, and use a similar analogy of why monks should not handle money, but graciously accept donations for amulets that may technically be sold. Another term they use is worship fee (Cornwell-Smith and Goss 2013).

Amulets are big business and some can cost upwards of two million dollars. Phra Somdej amulets at Wat Rakhang and Wat Indrawihan by Somdej Toh have consistently been some of the most valuable in the country. His amulets have attained the most privileged place among the five highest ranking amulets of the nation, the Benjapakee. This commodification of Somdej Toh and other monks, nuns, deities, monarchs, and historical figures has generally been approached by scholars as a reflection of the growing crisis in Thai Buddhism and of the rise of religious commercialism (McDaniel 2011).

## **How did they gain their tremendous value?**

Amulets embody personal beliefs and emotions, and are thought to increase the possessor's psycho-physical strength. The enormous consumption of amulets by men during the 1970s was motivated by the anxiety to boost male aggressiveness in a period of increased social instability and gender related violence (Tambiah 1984).

Since then, amulets continue to be bought in order to enhance the fortune of the owner or add personal power. Acquiring an amulet made by a famous monk is said to also mean receiving a transfer of power from the monk to the owner. Hence, it is normal that when the monks pass away, as more years go by, the more valuable their amulets become.

To understand what makes up the value of an amulet, one should consider who made the amulet, the temple's prominence or reputation, how many actual amulets were made, how well preserved the amulets are, how old the amulets are, the demand and supply of the amulets and on occasion the substance of the amulet. An example being that amulets made of gold are very valuable as they are very rare and hence priced many times above others.

A comparison could be made of large Buddha images or statues which get their name from their power, their appearance and style, their fabrication techniques and the materials from which they are made (Lagirarde and Koanantakool 2006).

Another amulet is the (Chatukham Rammathep), which had its height of popularity from 2006-2007 and originated from Nakhon Sri Thammarat. The amulet depicts the expression of a frustrated society desperate for spiritual assurance and of a collective desire for wealth and political stability among the Thai public. Amulet cults, such as, the Chatukham Rammathep and Luang Pho Khun reveal a shift away from devotional tradition based on community and family aligned with life cycles toward a new drive for personal material wealth, success and luck and this illustrates the commodification and marketisation of religious symbols and

charisma by the capitalists (Kitiarsa 2012).

History and myth are deeply entwined in the stories behind most famous amulets (Kitiarsa 2012). The plots of these stories are more about miracles than proven historical facts. However, history and myth are never completely separate because the mythical stories of amulets need to be grounded in known ancient history.

There are hundreds of miracle stories in amulet collector's magazines and shared between friends in the amulet markets or while relaxing at the monasteries. Occasionally a monk is heard telling these stories over loudspeakers during monastery festivals (McDaniel 2011).

### **Has trading amulets reached the point of illegality?**

A Reuters report discusses a Thai temple being reprimanded by religious authorities for selling amulets containing the ashes of cremated infants to raise money for a plot of land and a crematorium. A government official who was interviewed said it is not illegal, but is inappropriate (Reuters 2007).

Looking at some of Thailand's laws, The Royal Thai Customs Department regulate exports of Buddha images out of Thailand under the Customs Act BE 2469(1926) as consolidated in 2005 and strictly prohibits the export of any and all Buddha images without written permission or a license to do so. It also does not allow counterfeit goods.

Exploring the Intellectual Property laws in Thailand, the Trademark Act (No 3) B.E. 2559 (2016) would require the maker of the amulet or owner of the trademark to have registered the trademark for there to be an offence to be revealed for counterfeiting. Historically, trademark registration would not have happened since these laws are also too modern for when the early amulets were made.

The attractiveness of amulets has surpassed any discussion of legality and is seen as an asset of worth, and despite the fact that

it is discouraged, it is viewed to be able to hold and retain value. An example could be seen in an article in the Bangkok Post, where the National Anti-Corruption Commission or NACC accepted declarations of worth and included cash, houses and buildings, gold bars, high-end watches and cars from the Top Police General. He also declared 12 Buddha amulets, the value of which could not be apprised (Bangkok Post 2021).

### **The counterfeiting of amulets**

With the perception of value comes the possibility of counterfeit. Taan Tha Prachan, an amulet master and writer for Khaosod newspaper's amulet section shares that amulet forgery has been around for a long time but that in the present day, the forgery has become really advanced. Sometimes they can be 98% or 99% identical to the real antiques, especially with the help of printing and scanning technology. All the defects can be scanned and reproduced. It is still challenging, however, to forge amulets with 100% accuracy (Baumann 2014).

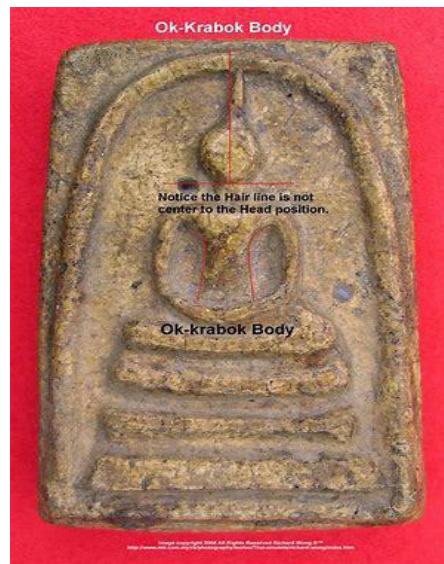
Technology today has, unfortunately, changed the counterfeiting landscape and made the task of creating a counterfeit much easier, which explains their proliferation. The ability to share knowledge and improve the know-how among counterfeiters, caused by the Internet is an example. Visitors to the dark web will get all the lessons a counterfeiter would require on how to manufacture counterfeits, including a step-by-step guide and even the supply of the materials in some instances. Shams (2017) mentions that on the Internet, sites for file sharing are common, such as, The Pirate Bay, which is known for giving access to pirated goods and even has specific sections, for instance, one called Physibles where people share digital files for printing objects.

The second bane of technology as previously mentioned is the image capture processing and reproduction technologies which have significantly advanced. Within the hands of most people are their mobile devices, with their advanced cameras and the ability to capture high-definition images and hence every single known

image and angle the amulets will have, allowing for precise details in the reproduction of counterfeit.

This is then made worse due to the technology of modern-day reproduction. 3D printing or three dimensional printing is explained by Park B.J et al, (2019) as a method to produce 3D objects from digital models by fusing or depositing materials in successive layers, which allows the fabrication of objects with various geometries in a layer by layer process. Shams (2017) wrote that to copy an object, one only need two things: an electronic schematic of the product and a 3D printer, which means anyone can reproduce any available design or objects such as Buddha amulets to an exacting similarity.

With both perfect image capturing and perfect reproduction, this will negate one of the main tests in looking for differences in the appearance of the amulet as a means to differentiate the genuine from the counterfeit. For example, looking out for a minor flaw in the original caused by a dent in the original mould may no longer be viable as this flaw can now be replicated to perfection.



Example of a minor flaw in the moulds used by experts to identify a genuine amulet (Wong 2021).



Picture of Benjapakee (Ebay 2019).

### **Should something be done and why?**

There is a tremendous opportunity for Thailand to benefit from protecting the genuine amulet industry. Magic amulets are something uniquely Thai, and should be regulated and protected, allowed to grow and bring more recognition, more visibility and even act as a boost to the Thai economy, like K pop or K drama, which has brought increased visitors to Korea and revenue to its economy. It is now commonplace to see in many countries in the region like Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong websites, shops and people which offer verification, trading, certification and other related services for amulets. If nurtured in the right way, people would come to Thailand not only to visit temples, visit the beautiful places, eat the delicious food but also participate in the magic and mysticism of amulets. Even more so, a case could be made that magic amulets are Thai intellectual property, made in Thailand and carry the history and culture of the Thai people with some of these amulets being more than 500 years old. It would not be a far stretch that this could be an area where the Thai Government could consider registering Thai magic amulets as an intangible cultural heritage.

## **How regulation could help?**

To be effective in the regulation and control of the amulet industry, the Thai government could start by promulgating legislation that it is illegal to trade in uncertified magic amulets. As earlier discussed, it would be difficult at the initial stage to enforce under trademark laws as the majority of the amulets have never been registered as trademarks and it is also likely their makers have passed on, making registration now impossible. Hence a more practical step would be to use certification as the measure for legality, with future new amulets made registered and enforced under the Trademark Act. With the technology today, registering a trademark is also something quite easily done on the internet and reduces the costs to a reasonable level, which the Government could take on.

Second would be the setting up of a new Government department to regulate this industry. Given that it is an industry already estimated to be valued in the billions, it is an area the Thai government should not ignore further and it is a critical step to take. Within this new department, there would be several divisions to take charge of the different areas, including certification, verification, registration and enforcement. Starting with the most valuable of the amulets and making their way down, a small registration and certification fee could even be charged to offset any costs concerned. Owners of these amulets would be willing to have their precious amulets certified as it would add value for them and give them some certainty and perhaps bragging rights, certainly eliminating future doubts of authenticity.

A team of experts could be co-opted into the area of verification. This could be a gathering of the foremost experts with the most experience and they would form the start of skills gathering for identification, with training helping to inculcate these skills into the department for the future.

Controlling the conditions of sale is also important. Regulations should be enforced on how magic amulets may be sold, where they may be sold and even the way they are sold would go

a long way to cleaning up the industry, to name a few.

### **So how to assess an authentic amulet?**

It is therefore important also to look into how one identifies an amulet today. Though not an exhaustive list, one could consider some of the steps as follows;

- One, to bring a trusted expert to help verify these expensive amulets.
- Two, to buy amulets that have taken part in official competitions.

• Three, send the amulet for carbon testing, or the C14 test. For example, a Phra Somdej that is more than 140 years old is typically considered genuine. However it is unlikely any owner would consent to a part of their prized amulet being removed and tested.

• Four, to have knowledge of the amulet one intends to purchase if they must engage in trade for it. This includes knowing what material the amulet is made of, the colour, the age of the amulet, the distinct look of the amulet and any significant points to take note of which may have occurred during the moulding process will all help point to a genuine amulet.

### **How technology is able to help**

Iansiti and Lakhani (2017) shared, in an article in the Harvard business review, that the technology at the heart of block-chain is an open, distributed ledger that can record transactions between two parties efficiently and in a verifiable and permanent way. In a blockchain system, the ledger will be replicated in a large number of identical databases, each hosted and maintained by an interested party. When changes are entered in one copy, all the other copies are simultaneously updated. Therefore, as transactions occur, records of the exchange are permanently entered in all ledgers. It is common knowledge that the most valuable amulets are held in the hands of the rich or the elite and when

there is a change of ownership, in current practice, the information is quickly circulated through word of mouth. Ergo, trades that are not announced through this normal channel of information could be deemed counterfeit. This is a perfect illustration of the advantage in the use of the blockchain technology to capture the transferral of the buying and selling of the amulet pieces in order to properly authenticate the amulet.

The blockchain technology, when applied to the amulet, would create an unalterable digital ledger to record all transactions from the moment of their creation, which for the amulet means even a hundred years later, someone could still check the records. This would solve the current problem of authenticating genuine amulets with so many of the records having been lost and hence easily counterfeited.

A fine illustration of technology impacting not only the differentiation of counterfeiting, is even in the amulets themselves. In an article on Channel News Asia, a group of enthusiasts have already led the way in blockchain adoption. They continue to discuss the value that an amulet brings to the buyer of the amulet, which was blessed by (Luang Pu Heng) who had several lucky experiences such as winning lottery prizes or being promoted on the job (Voanews, 2012). What this truly represents is that it makes out the case that the belief in the power of the amulet is so strong that it could even be a crypto and hence virtual token and people would still carry the same belief.



Pictures of crypto amulets of Luang Po Heng (Crypto Amulets 2021).

## **These measures are still not 100%**

However, for the moment, there is still no way to tell whether an amulet is indeed authentic, which may be defined as an amulet which has the efficacy that the owners desire. After an examination of academic and commercial writings, it could be concluded that there exists no scientific or otherwise way to determine whether the amulets have the efficacy that the owners' seek. This means that an amulet collector engages in trade mainly due to their perception, and true authenticity of an amulet depends primarily on the owners' personal belief.

## **Conclusion**

In a country like Thailand, with the respect given by the majority of the people to Buddhism, along with the mysticism and stories of power that an amulet brings, it is natural that the practice of collecting amulets would grow to the proportions of today. In addition, the commercial value that trading in certain amulets brings, provides a confirmation as to why these amulets are worth millions.

From an authentication and counterfeiting perspective, technology has made it easy to manufacture counterfeits, thus making it more difficult to identify genuine from counterfeit in terms of originality and even legality standpoint.

Finally, from the believers' viewpoint, while there is no way to completely verify an amulet, as long as a believer truly believes that the amulet has the power it is deemed to contain, no matter genuine or counterfeit or how it was acquired, to the owner, it would be seen as authentic and valuable, which begs the question, does anything else really matter?

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