

# Protection and Power in Siam: From *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* to the Buddha Amulet

Chris Baker\* and Pasuk Phongpaichit\*\*

The main purpose of this article is to argue for the importance of *protection* as a concept for understanding religion, power, and social structuring in Thai tradition. Protection is a prominent motif in the Thai folk epic, *The Tale of Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, and the work describes a range of practices and devices sought to provide protection against various sources of danger. The article traces the origins of this “knowledge” and its modern adaptation into the Buddha amulet.

**Keywords:** Siam, Thailand, protection, power, amulet, supernaturalism

Today in Thailand the wearing of an amulet (พระเครื่อง *phra khrueng*), a small image of the Buddha or of a famous monk usually enclosed in some form of casing and attached to a cord or chain worn around the neck, is among the most widespread of religious practices.<sup>1)</sup> The principal benefit of such amulets is protection from dangers of various kinds, verging into a more positive desire for good fortune. In *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* (*KCKP*), a massive folk epic dating back to the late Ayutthaya era, the demand for protection against dangers is a dominant theme, and many devices are used for this purpose.

In the study of religion, power, and social ordering in Thai society, the key concepts have been merit and power, prowess, patron-client ties, kingship, and so on.<sup>2)</sup> All these concepts betray a top-down view, a focus on explaining why certain people are powerful. The concept of protection comes into play when the angle of vision switches to bottom-up and concentrates on what people seek from religion, power, and social institutions. In historical study, the nature of the few sources available (chronicles, laws) has favored

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- 1) The term “amulet” is sometimes used to describe protective devices of all kinds. In this article, the term refers to this specific type.
- 2) Some of the most important works defining the field have been Akin (1996), Tambiah (1976), Hanks (1962), Wolters (2008), and Ishii (1986).

the top-down view. However, literary sources that emerged from a popular tradition offer the possibility of moving outside this straitjacket. Similarly, in contemporary study, the concept of protection or security has emerged with increasing attention to the analysis of popular religious practice. In his recent pathbreaking work, Justin McDaniel argues that besides the well-known Buddhist qualities of non-attachment, compassion, and enlightenment, everyday practice points to “the importance of security and protection (*khwam plotphai, kan pongkan*), abundance . . . , graciousness . . . , and heritage” (McDaniel 2011, 219).

In this article, we trace the concept of protection from the late Ayutthaya era to the present. The early sections analyze the meaning and prominence of protection in *KCKP*, and the range of devices and practices deployed in its pursuit. The later sections trace the emergence of the modern amulet and the changing role of the Buddha in the business of protection.

### *Khun Chang Khun Phaen as a Source*

*KCKP* is a long folk epic that developed in an oral tradition of storytelling for local audiences. The plot, set in the provincial urban society of central Siam, is a love triangle ending in tragedy. Khun Phaen is handsome and dashing but his family was ruined after his father was executed by the king for an error on royal service. Khun Chang is the richest man in the local town but fat, ugly, and crass. The two compete for the lovely Wanthong. Khun Phaen woos and weds her, but Khun Chang then uses his wealth and court connections to take her away. The rivalry continues through two pitched battles, two court cases, trial by ordeal, jail, treachery, abduction, and other mayhem. Tiring of this disorder, the king summons the three and commands that Wanthong be executed for failing to choose between the two men.

Probably the tale originated around 1600 and developed in an oral tradition of storytelling for local audiences, becoming hugely popular by the eighteenth century, and very long (21,000 lines excluding late sequels). It was then adopted by the court, converted to written form, extended with new episodes and sequels, and embellished with fancier poetry. The first printed edition appeared in 1872, but the work is known today through an edition published in 1916–17 by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, half-brother of King Chulalongkorn.<sup>3)</sup>

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3) Today there are many printed versions of the same text; the best known is published by Khurusa-pha, a government textbook printer, in three volumes.

Works like *KCKP* that develop through repeated interaction between performers and audiences over a long period, as did many of the classics of world literature, come to reflect the tastes and values of their society. While the court revisions greatly changed the surface of *KCKP*, the plot, tone, structure, and rhythm of the work retained much of their original character. The epic is a rare document that reflects the society and mind-set of premodern Siam.

### Protection in *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*

Throughout the tale, characters seek protection (คุ้มครอง *khum-khrong*, ป้องกัน *pong-kan*) against risks, dangers, and threats (เสี่ยง *siang*, ภัย *phai*, อันตราย *antarai*, คุกคาม *khuk-kham*) in order to ward off sorrowful hardship (ทุกข์ *thuk*) and achieve peaceful contentment (สุข *suk*). They look for someone whom they can depend on (พึ่ง *phueng*), and who will feed or support them (เลี้ยง *liang*). When the father of a main character dies, his servants lament “We have lost our protector,” and fear harassment by local officials (p. 47).<sup>4</sup> When news arrives that the hero, Khun Phaen, has died on a military campaign, his mother-in-law’s first thought is “Who’ll protect us?” (p. 228). When a father announces he will give his daughter to Khun Phaen, she protests, “My lord and master, do you no longer protect your child?” (p. 207). To gain admittance to a bandit gang, a man begs the chief, “I want to live in your lair and shelter under your protection from now on” (p. 1178). On the eve of a marriage, a father orders, “Protect and enjoy her, my son” (p. 1247). When Khun Phaen comes under attack by his rival, Khun Chang, he asks himself, “How can I protect myself?” (p. 316) and goes off to acquire the tools to extract his revenge—a powerful sword, horse, and personal spirit.

The three main sources of danger are defined in the second chapter recounting the deaths of the three main characters’ fathers. The first source is nature, especially the wild forest; the father of the heroine, Wanthong, dies from a forest fever contracted on a trading expedition. The second is human wickedness; Khun Chang’s father is killed by a professional bandit gang. The third is authority; Khun Phaen’s father is executed by the king.

Finding protection from the third source of danger, authority, is the key organizing principle of the social structure known as *sakdina*, at least when seen from below, the angle of vision of the key characters in *KCKP*. Men donate some or all of their labor to a patron in return for protection from various forms of authority. In the classic form of

4) All page references to *KCKP* refer to Baker and Pasuk (2010).

*sakdina*, men become dependents (ไพร่ *phrai*, ทาส *that*) in the service of a *khun nang* noble. Khun Phaen's father is an effective patron in the provincial town of Suphanburi because he has an official post as a soldier and recognition from the king. As a result, local officials "shook their heads [and] knew never to cross him" (p. 8). After the father is killed, his servants lament that, "nobody dared bully us, because everyone feared Khun Krai. But now they'll all come and push us around" (p. 35). But this classic form of patronage is not the only one. The same principles apply in many other circumstances. After being branded as an outlaw, Khun Phaen places himself under the patronage of a provincial governor who plans to employ him as a guard. The chief of a bandit lair gives shelter to fugitives who in turn must work as robbers. An abbot urges Khun Phaen to stay in the monkhood because the robe is protection against the dangers of conscription.

The model for the role of protector is a parent's custodianship of children, and especially the male in the combined role of father, husband, and householder. Good parents protect their children from all dangers, even the menace of sun, wind, and insects. Husbands shelter their wives like the spreading branches of a bo tree ("Oh, little bo tree shelter of your darling wife . . .," p. 748). Women cannot usually take the role of protector as wives (and children) are legally the property of the husband. Marriage is a transfer of the daughter from the protection of the father to that of the husband. The usual word for marriage seen from the male side is คู่ครอง *khru-khron*, "partner-rule-protect."<sup>5)</sup>

The paternal role is a metaphor for other relations of protection. In *KCKP*, the word for father, *pho*, is used as a pronoun between ward and protector. Wives address their husbands as *pho*. Khun Phaen addresses his official patrons, Phramuen Si and Phra Phichit, as *pho*, and they reciprocate by addressing him as a child. After Khun Phaen secures the release of 35 convicts from jail to serve as soldiers, they address Khun Phaen as *pho*.

The ability to serve as a protector depends on personal qualities, wealth, and political connections. Wanthong's mother prefers Khun Chang over Khun Phaen as a suitor-protector because Khun Chang has wealth and connections in the Ayutthaya court while Khun Phaen is poor and fatherless. Later, after Khun Phaen has won a military victory, a village headman in the north presents Khun Phaen with his daughter in anticipation that Khun Phaen will win royal favor and social advancement.

The king is at the apex of this official pyramid of protection. Two of the main items of royal regalia, the sword and multi-tiered umbrellas, are symbols of protection. In the invocations that preface the king's appearances in *KCKP*, he "protects the mass of the

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5) Today คู่ครอง *khron* has acquired a broader and softer meaning, but the definition in Pallegoix's early nineteenth-century dictionary is "to rule, to govern, to repress."

populace and soldiery so they are joyful” (p. 506) and “offers protection to the great and small throughout the world” (p. 402) so well that other territories eagerly seek the same shelter. In court formalities the king is addressed as “lord protector,” “divine protector,” or “paramount protector.” The young Khun Chang is taken to be presented as a royal page so that he will enjoy royal protection.

But political power is double-edged. It contains the ability to protect, but also the potential to threaten. This is true at all levels of the social structure, but as the summit of the political order, the king is both the most effective protector and the most terrible threat. Khun Phaen’s father has status in his home town because he is a soldier in royal service, but when he commits an error, the king orders his execution and the seizure of his property and family. All the major character in the tale, and many of the minor ones, lose life, liberty, property, rank, spouse, or kin at the hands of the king. Although the monarch is also a giver of rank and property, particularly to those who bring him victory in war, this aspect receives much less emphasis in *KCKP* than his capacity to deprive.<sup>6)</sup>

## Education

Patronage is only one way to seek protection and is not wholly effective. To combat all three sources of danger (nature, human wickedness, and authority), skills and devices also come into play. Before undertaking any risky exploit (a journey, marriage, war), characters in *KCKP* seek protection for themselves in various ways. They use methods of divination in order to locate dangers in time and space so they may be avoided. They adorn themselves with protective devices and recite formulas that have supernatural power to avert various forms of threat including weapons, fierce animals, and the malicious intentions of enemies.

Around the age of 14, Phlai Kaeo (the future Khun Phaen) enters the *wat* as a novice to gain education in these skills and devices. He is intent upon following in his late father’s footsteps as a soldier. The skills and devices are primarily for use in war, but also have application in everyday life.

His primary training is at Wat Som Yai in Kanburi:<sup>7)</sup>

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6) Late Ayutthayan history is strewn with stories of great nobles who lose position, possessions, and life in succession disputes and court intrigue.

7) Kanburi is the name used in *KCKP* for the old site of Kanchanaburi, 17 kilometers west of the modern town. This frontier outpost was abandoned in the wars of the late eighteenth century and never reoccupied.

The novice studied to read and write. With diligence, he soon mastered Khmer, Thai, arithmetic, the main scriptures, calculating the sun and moon, and translation of texts. (p. 58)

Even this basic course of reading, writing, arithmetic, and languages includes some astrology. When the abbot discovers that he has a bright pupil, he adds some fundamentals of supernaturalism:

The abbot had nothing left to tell him. He patted Kaeo on the back and the head and said, “That’s the end of my gut, my dear Novice Kaeo.

There’s only the big treatise with the heart formulas<sup>8)</sup> and mantras. I’ve been collecting them since I was a youth. Until now in my old age, I haven’t shared them with anyone.

This is the extent of my knowledge. Because I’m fond of you, Kaeo, I’ll pass it on to you. There’s everything—inulnerability, robbery, raising spirits—something for every occasion.” (pp. 58–59)

Phlai Kaeo absorbs the abbot’s treatise but knows there is more to learn. After all, Kanburi is a border outpost, and the abbot had collected his knowledge on his own. Phlai Kaeo moves to Suphanburi, his old family home, which is a long-established religious center. There he studies with two renowned abbots who had earlier taught his own father. In this secondary stage, he first attends Wat Palelai, where the emphasis is on scriptures and pedagogy.

Novice Kaeo had an agile mind beyond compare, and was diligent without being told. After three months of practice, he had sermons down by heart.

Whether it was the Mahachat, sermons on the teachings, or anything else, he spoke beautifully with a peerless choice of words, and a voice as charming as a cicada. Wherever he gave sermons, people loved to come and listen. (p. 61)

As a talented student, he also takes evening classes in intermediate supernaturalism.

In the evenings he went to the main kuti to pay his respects, attend to the abbot, and take instruction: how to make a sword for war; how to transform a thorny branch into a buffalo charm; how to enchant dummy soldiers; how to charm a woman so that once their eyes had met, her heart would be captivated and she would never forget.

His master laughed. “Young Kaeo, I know you’re interested in the stuff about being a lover. Don’t do damage to people’s wives but old maids and widows, take them!

I’ll teach you everything about sacred mantras and formulas. You’ll be a real gem.” He spat out the betel he was chewing and passed it to Novice Kaeo to eat the remains. Then the master hit him with a pestle, almost chipping his skull. “There! It didn’t crack or bruise. Like hitting a stone.” The master rolled about with laughter. (p. 61)

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8) A form of mantra abbreviated for easy memorization and quick application.

Shortly after, Phlai Kaeo moves to Wat Khae where Abbot Khong takes his studies to the tertiary stage.

The abbot promptly began to instruct him on everything:  
 putting an army to sleep and capturing its men; summoning spirits; making dummies with power to fight courageously; writing *pathamang*;<sup>9)</sup> concealment; invulnerability; undoing locks and chains;  
 all the arts of victorious warfare; all knowledge for overcoming enemies with no hope of resistance; calculating auspicious times for any action; enchanting tamarind leaves to become wasps; expertise in all covert war tactics; commanding troops in hundreds of thousands; defeating whole territories; the Great Beguiler mantra to induce strong love;  
 stunning people; invisibility; gaining the strength of a lion; withdrawing *athan*<sup>10)</sup> protective powers and preventing their replacement; and keeping spirits to act as spies.  
 He studied all branches of knowledge, reciting both old and new repeatedly to commit to memory. (pp. 124–125)

In the course of this education, Phlai Kaeo has learned the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, and languages, then more advanced courses on divining and manipulating the supernatural forces which operate in this world. He makes only limited use of these skills in his early career: he summons up a spirit when he needs a quick ride through the air; he uses love mantras to seduce women; in his first military campaign, he is aided by his body's ability to resist weapons. Supernaturalism plays a very minor role in this stage of the story, but that changes dramatically when his rival, Khun Chang, gains advantage by using the power of his money and his political connections at court. Khun Phaen then turns to supernaturalism to protect himself against these powerful forces.

The skills that Khun Phaen learns and deploys can be roughly divided into two types: divination of supernatural forces, and manipulation of these forces.

## Divination

The main technique for divination depends on astrology, signs read from the position of celestial bodies. In Siam, the royal court imported the Indian system of astrology known as Jyotisha, meaning "light, heavenly body," probably via Sri Lanka (see Fig. 1).<sup>11)</sup> It also

9) The first letter of a mantra or formula, usually in Pali or old Khmer. This is basic training for making yantra (see below).

10) See below.

11) The standard modern work with details of two methods of calculation is Wisandarunakon ([1965] 1997). This manual was originally prepared for the court in 1923 using new methods of calculation. It was republished in 1965 and presented to the king.

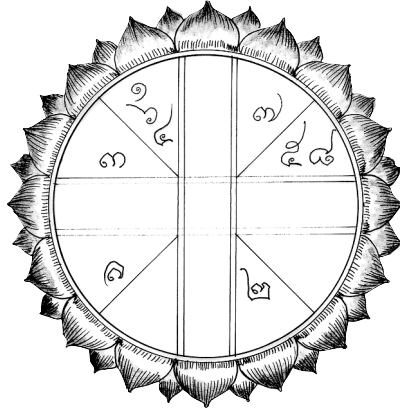


Fig. 1 Jyotisha Diagram

imported Brahmins to use the technique, and rewarded them with high posts in the nobility. The Jyotisha system plots the path of nine heavenly bodies (sun, moon, five planets, and two imaginary planets) against a map of the sky divided into 12 houses named after constellations. Each house represents a certain mental aspect (stability, tolerance, love, judgment, etc.), and each heavenly body represents a certain aspect of life (ego, wealth, mind, etc.). A reading taken at birth determines which of the heavenly bodies will influence which aspects of that life. Reading of the position of these influential bodies at a future time can then be used to divine events.

This technique can be applied to individuals, cities, kingdoms, anything for which a “birth” time can be identified. But the calculations are extremely taxing, and the court practitioners had made the system infinitely complex by giving meaning to subdivisions of measurement and to various interactions between the heavenly bodies in play.<sup>12)</sup>

The divinations made by Khun Phaen and his teachers and battle foes do not use fully fledged Jyotisha, but other systems which are based on the same principle of locating heavenly bodies within a map but which require much simpler forms of calculation. Several of their predictions seem to use the method known as *mahathaksa* (มหาทักษา), meaning “great skill.” To construct the birth chart, all that needs to be known is the *lagna*, the celestial body rising on the eastern horizon at the time of birth or, in an even simpler variant, the day of the week. The other bodies are assigned to their spheres of

12) In Siam in 1687–88, Simon de La Loubère acquired a document describing the calculations for the sun and moon. He had it translated into French and examined by M. Cassini of the Royal Academy of Sciences, who pronounced the technique “ingenious.” The calculations appear similar to those used in Thai astrology today. The document is not found in the English translation of La Loubère, but in Jacq-Hergoualc’h (1987, 488–503).



influence in simple sequence. To examine the forces acting at any future point, another chart can be made in the same way. In alternative versions, the calculation of which bodies are influential at any time is made through a simple arithmetical progression from the birth chart.

Astrology is only one of many systems of divination used in *KCKP*. Two others also focus on identifying auspicious and inauspicious times. The Circles method depends on the intersections between lunar and solar calendars. The conjunction of certain days in the week and certain dates in the (lunar) month are prescribed as auspicious, and others as inauspicious (Baker and Pasuk 2010, 319, note 23). The Three-Tiered Umbrella uses the birth-year and age to locate a certain position on a chart where each segment is associated with a legendary episode (mostly from the *Ramakian*) with metaphorical meaning (*ibid.*, 208, note 4). Nowadays, charts setting out the results of these and similar methods are published in manuals such as *Phrommachat*.<sup>13)</sup> Possibly something similar is indicated when manuals are mentioned in *KCKP*. In the 1680s, La Loubère wrote that an “Almanac which he [the king] causes Annually to be made by a *Brame* [Brahman] Astrologer, denotes to him and his Subjects the lucky or unlucky days for most of the things they used to do” (La Loubère 1793, 66).

Besides these divinations based on aspects of time, Khun Phaen and other characters in *KCKP* gather many different omens from nature. They look at the clouds for shapes that predict success or failure. They examine the breath through their nostrils to gauge the chances of success in any endeavor and to determine what direction to head when starting out. They listen to sounds made by insects and animals, which are categorized as propitious or unpropitious in manuals. They study the brightness of the stars and the halo of the moon to predict the outcome of warfare or other exploits. They tease meanings out of dreams that foretell events not only in the immediate future but over decades ahead. They interpret omens that come from visual oddities (seeing someone without a head) or unusual events (a staircase breaking). Many of these omens and signs are documented in old manuals, including various versions of the *Manual on Victorious Warfare* (ตำราพิชัยสงคราม *tamra phichai songkhram*), a military treatise.<sup>14)</sup> What is striking is the sheer *variety* of these predictive methods. At decisive moments, the characters in *KCKP* will use not one but several.

13) There are several compendia of astrology and other predictive techniques published under this title. See for example Hora Burajan (2006).

14) The most extensive and accessible edition is *Tamra phichai songkhram chabap ratchakan thi 1* (2002). Parts of a manual are reproduced in facsimile and French translation in Pattaratorn (2011).

## Manipulation

Khun Phaen is also educated in methods to manipulate the hidden forces in the world. These methods can be classified into three types: formulas; powerful devices found in nature; constructed devices.

The formulas may be spoken out loud or chanted under the breath (often several times) and then blown. Phlai Kaeo is specifically trained in using *hua jai* (หัวใจ) or heart formulas, an abbreviated form made by using the initials of words in the original formula, or the initial letter of several formulas (see Fig. 2). These have the advantage of being easier to memorize and quick to use.

These formulas seem to influence events through two pairs of forces: *repulsion*, warding off danger or, in its most complete form, providing invulnerability; and *attraction*, inducing love, sympathy, or good fortune; *constraint*, preventing an event or action; and *release*, removing constraints, such as undoing locks and chains, or ensuring a smooth delivery at birth. The four formulas which appear most often in *KCKP* are for these four actions respectively. The Great Prescription (मुखใหญ่ *muk yai*) formula provides protection or invulnerability. The Great Beguiler (มหาละลวย *mahalaluai*) induces love and is used not only to charm women but to win sympathy from those in authority. The Subduer (สะกด *sakot*) is principally used to immobilize enemies during battle. The Great Loosener (มหาสะเดาะ *mahasado*) opens locks and chains, induces a smooth childbirth, and removes other blockages.<sup>15)</sup>

The second method uses substances that are found in nature and believed to be intrinsically powerful (ขลัง *khlang*) because of some unusual property that defies the laws of nature. A prominent example is mercury, a metal that acts like a liquid, which conveys protection by flowing to any part of the body threatened by penetration. Other examples are: cat's eye, a semi-precious stone which looks like an animal's organ; hard, stone-like cores found in plants or animal's eggs; and splinters of tusk that are lodged in trees or



Fig. 2 *Hua jai* Heart Formula

15) There are several compilations of formulas and yantra today, often extracted from the works of Thep Sarikabut. As they tend to be geared towards achieving success in business, they are rather different from the selection in *KCKP*, but still enshrine the principles of repulsion-attraction and constraint-release.

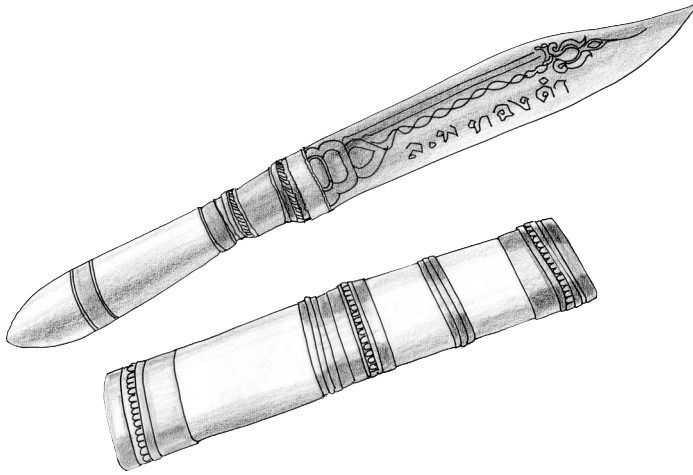


Fig. 3 Adept's Knife

ant-heaps by charging elephants in musth. Mostly these objects are carried to convey protection or invulnerability.

A variant of this method consists of precious or powerful objects inserted under the skin, and believed to be capable of moving to block the intrusion of a blade or bullet. The Chiang Mai military commander, Saentri Phetkla, makes extensive use of these devices:

He had a jet gem embedded in his head,  
golden needles in each shoulder, a large diamond in the middle of his forehead, a lump of fluid metal in his chest, and herbal amber and cat's eye in his back.

His whole body was a mass of lumps and bumps in ranks and rows. Since birth he had never been touched by a weapon, and did not carry even the scratch from a thorn. (p. 631)

The third method uses constructed devices. Simple forms mentioned in *KCKP* include water, betelnut, or powdered clay that have been sacralized by reciting formulas; spirit oil extracted from a corpse; beads made with sacralized powder and powerful herbs; and lip wax, especially a variant made from the face mask of a corpse. Among more complex forms, two prominent examples are an adept's knife and yantra. These devices serve as media for transferring the power of an adept to somebody else.

An adept's knife (มีดหมอ *mit mo*, see Fig. 3) has to be made by an adept using special materials and observing strict practices, and "activated" through a ritual, often convoking many different spirits and deities to endorse the knife's power. Other people can then use the knife and tap the adept's own powers which have been instilled in the article. These knives are kept at home to ward off danger; carried into battle where they convey

invulnerability; steeped in water to make medicine; and placed on the subject's head during ceremonies to overcome spirit possession. Among the four forces, the knife has the force of protection, but can also be used to defeat the protective forces of enemies. Khun Phaen uses an adept's knife to neutralize the spirits and other protective devices before invading Khun Chang's house. Skystorm (ฟ้าฟัน *fa fuen*), the sword that Khun Phaen has specially made, is a superlative version of an adept's knife. The manufacture begins with the collection of an array of metals with connotations of power and protection:

Metal from the peaks of a relic stupa, a palace, and a gateway. Metal fastening for the corpse of a woman who died while with child. Metal binding from a used coffin. Fixing for a gable board. Diamond bolt.

Bronze pike. Copper kris. Broken regal sword. Metal goad. Bolt from a gateway. Mushroom nail. Five-colored smart metal. Household metal. All genuine articles.

Fluid metal. Ore cast at the Phrasaeng mine. Iron ore and metal from Kamphaeng and Namphi. Gold. Bronze. Nak from Aceh. Genuine silver. Forest copper. (pp.317–318)

In some modern manuals for making an adept's knife, the recipe has been adapted from this passage in *KCKP*.

The constructed device that appears most often in *KCKP* is the yantra (ยันตร์ *yan*, เลขยันตร์ *lek yan*). These diagrams probably began in the Indic tradition of asceticism as visual aids for meditation. One of the simplest is a pair of interlocking triangles to aid concentration on duality (see Fig. 4). The device then spread widely, particularly within Buddhist traditions, but was adapted in very different ways in various regions. Tibetan *tanka* paintings are one such variant. Another are designs found on Japanese armor. The *mandala* used in architecture and statecraft is a specific form.

In the Southeast Asian tradition, these devices have been developed by the addition of several other visual elements. The geometrical shapes have acquired symbolic meaning; for example, a circle or oval signifies the Buddha. Pictures of powerful figures have been added, including Hindu deities, legendary figures such as Hanuman, imaginary creatures from the Himaphan Forest, and fierce animals such as lion, tiger, and snake. Written formulas are also included, usually in Pali language in Khom script,<sup>16)</sup> and often in abbreviated form. Sequences of numbers may be added, again in Khom script, with individual numbers signifying a deity or a formula, and longer sequences having supernatural significance (see Fig. 5). As McDaniel (2011, 103) notes, these various elements constitute “an algebraic system that seeks to manipulate a series of knowns in order to

16) Khom is a script adapted from Khmer and used in religious and historical texts. Several other scripts are also used in yantra, but Khom is the most common. The formulas may also be in Thai or other languages but Pali is more common.

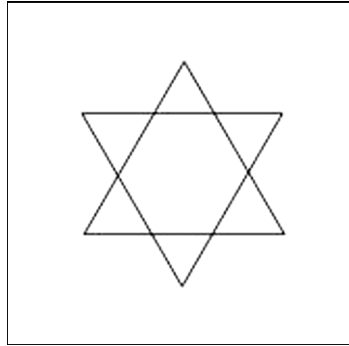


Fig. 4 Duality Graphic

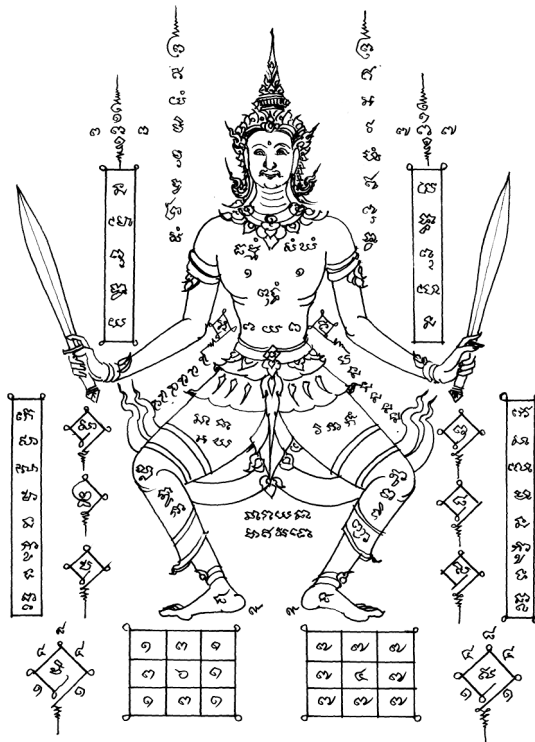


Fig. 5 Narai Transforming Yantra

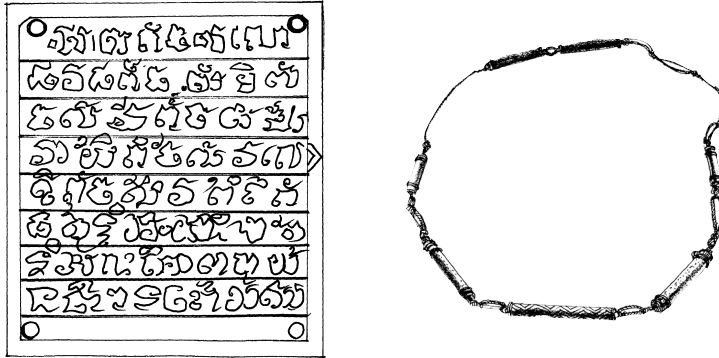


Fig. 6 *Takrut*, Unrolled and Rolled

control or uncover a wide array of unknowns.”

Yantra thus bring together devices from several traditions including ascetic mastery, the Hindu pantheon, Buddhist cosmology, spirit beliefs, and numerology. They must be made by an adept under very strict conditions, and activated by pronouncing formulas. Their primary function is to provide protection, but they can also attract, constrain, and release. They are a means of transferring the intrinsic power of the adept to another person, animal, or thing by using a wide array of media. They can be tattooed on the skin; drawn on wearable articles such as shirts, bandanas, or cloth fashioned into belts and rings; inscribed on metal and strung round the arm, neck or waist; or written with powder that is then daubed on the forehead or poured into the haft of a weapon (Bizot 1988; Yanchot 1995; Becchetti 1991; Bunce 2001; Thep Sarikabut n.d., esp. Vol. 1).

The single most common form of these yantra devices found in *KCKP* is the *takrut* (តាក្រុត), a sheet of thin, pliable metal such as tin or gold, which is inscribed with the yantra then rolled around a cord and tied around the neck, waist, or upper arm (see Fig. 6). Complex designs may extend across several sheets strung on a single cord.

## Roots

These methods have roots in several traditions, some of which originated in India but have been adapted and rearranged over many centuries in Southeast Asia.

The first of these roots goes back to the Vedas, the great texts of Hinduism. Besides three volumes of philosophical texts, there is a fourth volume with a long inventory of beliefs and practices about threats to man and how to resist them. This inventory includes ways to influence natural forces in the world, particularly to achieve protection against

threats from disease, natural disasters, and the perfidies of fellow man.<sup>17)</sup> The methods include natural substances with supernatural powers, formulas for recitation, and devices constructed by adepts—the same three methods found in *KCKP*. They also utilize the same two pairs of forces: repulsion and attraction, constraint and release. The title of the compilation as *Atharva Veda* survives in Thai as อถรรพณ์, *athan* (sometimes *athap*, *athanpawet*). In *KCKP*, *athan* means protection, particularly the convoking of supernatural forces to protect a city, palace, or other location. The term's modern usage has broadened to mean supernaturalism in general.<sup>18)</sup> The historical connection between the *Atharva Veda* and the Thai concept of *athan* is tantalizingly unknown.<sup>19)</sup>

The second of these roots, also from Indic tradition, is a belief that mastery over oneself conveys mastery over natural processes; through mental control and ascetic practices, a rishi or yogi attains supernatural abilities. In life stories of the Buddha, he was schooled in ascetic practice and acquired extraordinary powers such as flying through the air, multiplying his body, and recalling previous lives. Samuel (2008) argues that the Buddha adopted the ascetic practices of local shaman cults. Buddhist schools that are wary of such supernaturalism have argued that the Buddha forbade his followers to use such practices on grounds of danger, but after his death, some followers continued to use them and pass them on by teaching (Fic 2003, 42–44).

In India from the sixth to twelfth century, this idea of mastery through asceticism was combined with other folk practices and spirit beliefs to become the core of a distinct strand of Buddhism later dubbed as tantric or esoteric (Samuel 2008; Davidson 2002). According to one theory, this strand emerged in the context of an era of vicious warfare, and spread because the metaphor of individual power through mastery was appealing to warrior princes. Davidson (2002, 114) suggests that this appeal for warrior rulers was behind the spread of this strain of Buddhism to East and Southeast Asia, but his evidence is very scanty. The passage of the idea of mastery from Indic tradition to Southeast Asia is uncharted, and probably took multiple routes. The main point is that the concept of

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17) Two main recensions of the *Atharva Veda* have survived. This inventory forms the first of four parts in the Shaunakiya or northern recension. Dating is difficult and controversial but may be around the eleventh or twelfth century BC. Some scholars have speculated that this inventory is a record of local belief and practice in north India at the time the *Vedas* were composed. Others argue that the inventory may have earlier origins, perhaps in Central Asia (Witney 1905; Whitaker 2004; Michaels 2004).

18) The Royal Institute dictionary defines *athan* as follows: “Rites following *saiyasat* manuals to create auspiciousness and protect against danger, or to cause danger to others . . . recondite power believed to cause effects.”

19) However the Royal Institute dictionary insists on a connection by starting the definition cited in the previous note with “Something passed down from the *Atharva Veda*.”

mastery was present at the core of Buddhist teaching—in the life story of the Buddha—and was thus available for adoption and adaptation in different ways in various local Buddhist cultures (on which more below).

The third of these roots lies in the belief, found throughout Southeast Asia and indeed in much of the world, in the pervasive presence of spirits and deities that determine processes in the natural world. Khun Phaen has the skill to raise and direct spirits. He has a personal team of spirits and adds a particularly powerful one made from the fetus of an unborn child. These spirits provide him with personal protection, and also are able to attack and remove similar protection from opponents. In addition, Khun Phaen has the ability to summon up spirits in the surrounding area for special uses ranging from emergency transport to attacking his enemies. Finally he has the ability to convert grass into spirit warriors—considered one of the most difficult skills in the repertoire.<sup>20</sup>

In the Siamese tradition, the methods of *athan*, the idea of mastery, and the belief in spirits have become closely intertwined. Mastery of oneself gives the adept the ability to control spirits and activate natural forces using *athan*'s repertoire of formulas, unusual substances, and other devices. In the manufacture of his sword, Khun Phaen draws on all three of these techniques. He first collects an array of unusual metal substances, then combines them to the accompaniment of many incantations, and finally convokes the spirits and deities to instill the weapon with exceptional power.

In modern Thai, this complex of practices to influence the hidden forces in nature is called *sai* or *saiyasat* (ไสยศาสตร์), derived possibly from Sanskrit *saya*, dark, or from a Khmer word meaning excellence or expertise. But in *KCKP*, this word appears only twice.<sup>21</sup> Instead, *KCKP* uses two other vocabularies. The first is disarmingly simple. An adept is *khon di* (คนดี), a “good person,” and the practice as a whole is *thang nai* (ทางใน), the “inner ways,” a phrase which nicely captures the depth of the knowledge, its arcane origins, and its reliance on the innate talent of the practitioner. What is striking about this vocabulary, which appears in the older passages of the tale, is its use of simple, everyday words. This simplicity portrays the practice as familiar, normal, universal.<sup>22</sup>

20) According to Thep Sarikabut (n.d., Vol. 2, 24–25), making dummy soldiers by enchanting grass is the most advanced department of lore and very difficult to master. He had never seen a successful example and reported that Phrakhrū Wimonkhunakon (Suk) of Wat Makhām Thao, Chainat, a most famous practitioner who had studied the art, managed to transform only the legs and feet.

21) Both in passages which were probably added in the nineteenth century.

22) Today in Thailand these practices are associated with the Khmer. In the nineteenth century they were associated with the “Lao” (McDaniel 2011, 34–43). These associations are absent in *KCKP*. It seems that Thai modernity requires that the origin of these practices be found outside Siam, but not too far away, in countries sharing the same cultural history but deemed less modern.



The second vocabulary uses words of Indic origin: มนต์ร์, *mon* is the Thai rendering of mantra, meaning a Buddhist prayer or formula; คาถา, *khatha* is a verse in a Buddhist Pali text; อาคม, *akhom*, from Sanskrit *agama* meaning “that which has come down,” is used among other things for the inventory of prescriptions found in the *Atharva Veda* (Sharma 1979, xviii); เวท, *wet* derives from Veda, the Hindu scriptures. In *KCKP*, these individual words are used almost interchangeably for a specific exercise of skill, such as intoning a formula. They are also used in various conjoined forms (*wet mon*, *khatha akhom*, etc.) to refer to the practice of these skills in general. Alternatively, these skills are called วิชา, *wicha*, from Sanskrit meaning knowledge. This is the same word which, via Indo-European, gives us “witch” and the fashionable modern version, “wican.” This vocabulary suggests exceptional forms of knowledge authenticated by age, exotic origins, and textual recording—lore.

In Siam, this tradition of lore is closely integrated with the everyday practice of the Buddhist monkhood. Khun Phaen’s teachers are all abbots. Buddhist scriptures are taught alongside astrology and the formulas and mantras of lore with no sense of incompatibility.

In some Buddhist cultures, these practices have been isolated as a specific tradition. François Bizot has argued that this was the case in Cambodia where practices which he calls “tantric” became mainstream at the height of the Angkorian era, but subsequently continued as a distinct, heretical, and covert sect (Bizot 1976; 1981).<sup>23</sup> In Siam, however, practices of self-mastery seem always to have been part of the mainstream Buddhist tradition, particularly (but not exclusively) among the “forest” rather than “town-dwelling” lineages. Ascetics with miraculous powers have prominent roles in old legends and chronicles, and are integrated into the iconography of *wat* decoration. The introduction of a purer form of Buddhism from Sri Lanka in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries failed to displace old practices. King Mongkut’s reforms in the mid nineteenth century and, more importantly, the bureaucratization of the *sangha* by his successor, have since shifted the balance, but far from completely. To this day, monks carry out *athan* rites for house building, and bless amulets which are the modern-day equivalent of yantra. “Forest” monks imitate the Buddha’s life, including extreme forms of asceticism, and are accredited with supernatural powers (Tambiah 1970, 49–51; 1984, 45, 315). Royalty, politicians, generals, and senior police officers endeavor to associate themselves with these figures in order to draw on their power.

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23) McDaniel (2011, 106–108) counter-argues that terms such as “tantric” and “esoteric” are misleading in the Southeast Asian context, and that this “stratum” of Buddhism has always been part of the mainstream.

In *KCKP*, the practice of lore is almost entirely a male preserve. The skills are learnt so a male can fulfill his role as protector. All the adepts are male. All the teachers are male.<sup>24</sup> Only men are present at ritual events such as making Khun Phaen's sword or convoking the spirits before a battle or other risky exploit. Women are not only excluded from the practice, but sometimes figure as a threat to the power of lore. Khun Phaen takes off all his protective devices before making love to Wanthong. When they steal into the Chiang Mai palace, Khun Phaen warns his son against fondling palace women as that might weaken the lore that has enabled them to put everyone to sleep and enter the palace unseen:

Seeing his son fondling, Khun Phaen clenched his fist and thumped his son's back. "This is royal property! Don't touch! If you get carried away, we'll fail.

We shouldn't do this, you see, we're phrai. These are ladies who are forbidden to others. What's more, to be expert in warfare, you shouldn't dally with women." (p. 662)

### From Yantra to Amulet

The amulet is the lineal descendant and modern equivalent of the yantra. Like yantra, amulets can be carried on the body; their principal benefit is protection;<sup>25</sup> they incorporate exotic materials believed to have intrinsic power; they are crafted under strict conditions by a teacher, preferably from the ascetic tradition, known to have exceptional powers; they serve as a means of transferring the adept's powers to other people; they are largely a male preserve; and they are immensely popular.<sup>26</sup>

The emergence of the amulet is a long story, only partially glimpsed.<sup>27</sup> In *KCKP*, the amulet in its modern form does not figure at all among the vast range of protective devices mentioned. Indeed, images of the Buddha are not part of the lore in *KCKP*. In some yantra today, the Buddha is depicted symbolically by a circle or collection of circles. However, in the yantra named in *KCKP* and identifiable today, only one has such a symbol—the *chakra* or wheel yantra, which is inscribed on the stock of the Skystorm

24) There is one partial exception, and it is controversial. After Khun Phaen is put in jail, his mother takes over the education of her grandson, using Khun Phaen's library. Some critics see this as a blemish in the plotting of *KCKP*. Others point out that the grandmother, after being widowed, takes on some of the "male" attributes of a household head.

25) Amulets also have the benefit of attraction, winning love and favor.

26) On the modern process of creating amulets, see especially Tambiah (1984), Cook (2012), Swearer (2004), and Turton (1991). Stengs (1998) emphasizes the male bias but also notes the emergence of equivalent devices for female use.

27) This discussion draws heavily on Chalong Soontravanich (2005; 2013).

sword (see Fig. 7)—and only in a stylized form.<sup>28</sup> In *KCKP*, the Buddhism of sermons, Jatakas, and scriptures on the one hand, and the lore for divining and manipulating the supernatural forces in the world on the other, are closely associated through the *wat*, yet still delicately separate.

The one device in *KCKP* that partially resembles a modern amulet is a *phakhawam* (พระกัคว่ำ), a word collapsed from Phra Gavampati, an early disciple of the Buddha.<sup>29</sup> A *phakhawam* is usually a small, almost spherical metallic image, showing the monk with hands over eyes, and sometimes extra pairs of arms for covering other orifices (see Fig. 8). In *KCKP*, these images are placed in the mouth to give power to speech, carried into battle for protection, and steeped in water used to induce invulnerability.

The form of the modern amulet seems to have developed from votive tablets, *phra phim*, small images of the Buddha made by pressing clay into a mold (Pattaratorn 1997). The earliest examples of these tablets may have been brought to Siam by itinerant monks from South Asia and have been found at many early archeological sites. Later, these images were often made in large quantities to be placed inside stupas or affixed in rows on the walls of *wat* buildings to enhance the religiosity of these sites. Such votive tablets, retrieved from a ruined *wat* or stupa, and known as “broken-wall Buddhas,” later became popular as protective devices. A few amulets today are believed to have originated in this way (Srisakra Vallibhotama 1994, 81–82, cited by Chalong 2013).

In the early to mid nineteenth century, some monks manufactured amulets with a

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28) The Thepnimit mantra comes in several different designs, some with and some without Buddha symbols.

29) In the canonical literature and early commentaries from Sri Lanka, Gavampati is mentioned among the second group of disciples of the Buddha, associates of Yasa, but with no detail. Probably on account of his name meaning “Lord of Cattle,” other early texts gave him a background as an ox herder, and a quirky trait of chewing the cud. He also displayed supernatural ability to hold back a river that threatened to swamp the Buddha and a group of disciples. From around the fourteenth century onwards, texts appeared in Southeast Asia that celebrated 80 early disciples, including Gavampati, and gave several of them substantial biographies. He is described as so beautiful in appearance that he was often mistaken for the Buddha, and as a result used special powers to make himself ugly—hunched, potbellied, flat-faced. When he was approaching death, he set himself the task of converting Somphon (Sanskrit Sambala), a Brahman who stubbornly rejected Buddhism, by delivering a series of sermons on impermanence in which he stated that the human body was a “public place” because its nine orifices (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, urethra, anus) served only to emit impure excretions, and to admit impurities from the outside. Somphon was converted instantly, and went on to achieve nirvana. Gavampati subsequently also achieved nirvana, underwent a magnificent funeral ceremony presided over by the Buddha himself, and became an *arahant*. Since the Sukhothai era, Gavampati has been depicted in statuary as a potbellied monk, often known as Sangkachai or Mahakaccayana. In lore, images of Gavampati are credited with strong powers to convey invulnerability. See Lagirarde (2000, 57–78; 2003); Strong (2005); Kanchanaphan and Nai Tamra na Mueang Tai ([1961] 2002, 682); Yanchot (1995, 31–39).

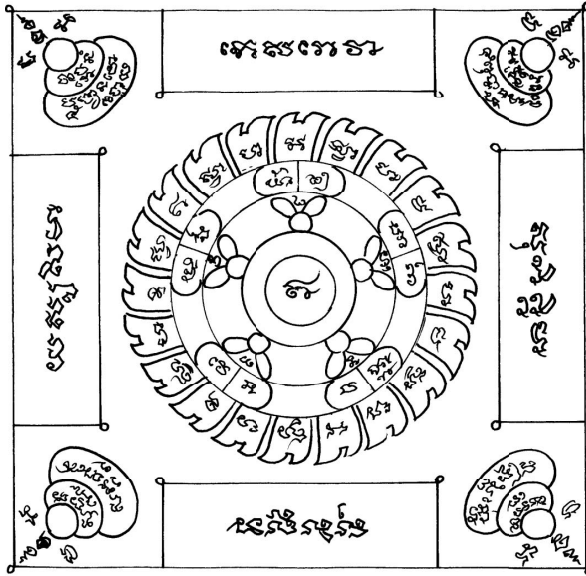


Fig. 7 Wheel Yantra



Fig. 8 Phakhawam

Buddha image. We cannot be sure the practice was not present earlier, but older amulets known today all seem to be of the “broken-wall” type (see above). The modern form of the amulet seems to combine the Buddha image of the votive tablet with the convenient portability of a *takrut*. This form was possibly inspired by the popularity in the mid-nineteenth century of small Buddha images with a hollow cavity containing a ball, which had been imported from China and dubbed *phra kring*, “bell Buddhas.” Today the most famous of the early amulet-makers is Somdet To (สมเด็จพระโต, also known as Phra Phutthachan), a monk who lived from around 1788 to 1872. According to one of the many versions of his life, he was a son of King Rama I, sired on a northern peasant girl. He was appointed abbot of Wat Rakhang in Bangkok, had a close relationship with King Rama IV, and became famous for his ascetic practice and supernatural powers (McDaniel, 2011, ch.1). He made several types of protective device, including yantra, but also Buddha amulets which are the most desired and most expensive in the market today.

Somdet To also wrote a manual on amulet making which shows the close similarity to the creation of yantra. In Somdet To’s description, the amulet is made from powerful materials (enchanted powder, precious metals, herbs used in lore) following strict rules, including the recitation of mantra, and finally is “activated” by ritual (*ibid.*, especially 189–219). Also like yantra, an amulet is effective only if made by a monk or adept famous for supernatural power (like Somdet To). In addition, most Buddha amulets have a small yantra inscribed on the reverse side.

Over the nineteenth century, some other famous monks produced amulets which are now highly valued, and the acquisition of these amulets became popular among the high elite. King Chulalongkorn sought them out during his upcountry tours. By the early twentieth century, amulets were being produced by monks famous for asceticism and supernatural power in many parts of the country, and the habit of acquisition spread more widely as mobility increased with the coming of roads and railways. Nobles and members of the emerging commoner middle class made pilgrimages to honor famous monks and brought back their amulets as mementos.

But only slowly did the amulet become the dominant protective device. Official patronage played a role. Since the Ayutthaya era, military leaders have distributed protective devices to their troops, mostly yantra in various forms. Troops sent to engage with the French in Cambodia in 1940 were given amulets but only senior officers and only an amulet with the image of a monk rather than the Buddha (Textor 1960, 526; Ruth 2011, 131–132). During the scares caused by bombing of Bangkok during World War II, the devices sought for protection were still mainly yantra and sacred water (Lawan Chotamara 1984, 228–229, cited by Chalong 2013). In the 1950s, Robert B. Textor drew up an inventory of supernatural devices found in a village outside Bangkok. He listed

118 objects as well as Buddha-image amulets. Simple amulets made from plaster were being manufactured by monks in the village, and Textor's informants estimated that 90 to 100 percent of households had one. But another 20 devices were owned by the same percentage (Textor 1960; 1973). Amulets were popular but not yet dominant. Writing in the 1960s and looking back to the recent past, W. A. R. Wood (1965, 88) placed the Buddha amulet as just one among many protective devices in everyday use:

There are dozens of different kinds—tattoo marks, written formulas, knotted strings, tiny images of the Buddha, precious stones, dried seeds, needles in the body, and others too numerous to mention.

Chalong Soontravanich traces the final rise to dominance of the modern amulet in two phases. The first took place in the era of lawlessness, banditry, and gangsterism after World War II. A small amulet market appeared in Bangkok. Experts authored two weighty biographies of Somdet To, compiled a compendium of known amulets, and identified a "League of Five" amulets of highest value. Businessmen sponsored the production of amulets by famous monks in batches of several thousand. Official patronage now focused on the amulet. The prime minister, Phibun Songkhram, distributed amulets to troops sent to Korea, and to constituents at the 1957 election (Textor 1960, 526). Soldiers who volunteered to fight in Vietnam in 1967 were given Buddha amulets by their commanding officers, by monks at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, and by the prime minister (Ruth 2011, 45, 48, 67, 131–132). When Barend Terwiel surveyed supernatural practices in a Ratchaburi village in 1967, he found people wearing various protective devices including tattoos, yantra designs, sacred thread, and splinters of wood, but

Undoubtedly the most popular [protective] object which is worn on a cord or chain around a man's neck is the image of the Buddha. These images can be cast from metal, or carved out of piece of wood, ivory or resin, but the most common traditional ones are those manufactured from a mixture of many ingredients, pressed in a mould and baked. (Terwiel 1975, 62)

The second phase, according to Chalong, took place against the background of the war against communist insurgency in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the spread of mass media including newspapers, magazines, and television. By the 1980s, amulets had become prominent enough to warrant a major study by a leading international anthropologist (Tambiah 1984). In this era, businessmen and generals made merit by sponsoring the production and distribution of amulets to soldiers and villagers in the affected areas. Enterprising monks began manufacturing amulets on a large scale to raise funds for constructing *wat* buildings and schools. Among the most popular were amulets produced by Luang Phor Khoon, who was emerging as the most famous forest monk of the

era. The price of his amulets soared in 1993 when survivors of two disasters, a factory fire and a hotel collapse, publicly attributed their fortune to their Luang Phor Khoon amulets (Pattana 2012, ch.5; Jackson 1999). The popularity of amulets reached another stage in 2006–7 when a particular physical form, known as Jatukam-Ramathep, was no longer tied to a particular origin but effectively “franchised”<sup>30</sup> for production at many different places which competed by adding value in production materials and methods and by price-cutting, creating a brief marketing frenzy (Pattana 2012, ch.7; Reynolds 2011).

### Conclusion: Protection, Power, and the Buddha

In premodern Siam, seeking protection against danger was a key organizing principle of belief, ritual, education, and social structure. Protection was the main (though not sole) benefit of a vast range of devices and techniques culled from various traditions and described collectively as “knowledge.” The exchange of labor (or other services) for protection lay at the basis of the *sakdina* hierarchy and other forms of patronage. The ability to provide protection was partly a function of ascribed status, but also a skill gained through education and asceticism. The provision of protection was very much a male preserve.

The development of the lore of protection has a long but largely invisible history. There is some connection back to early Indic tradition, particularly that represented by the *Atharva Veda*, evident in the survival of the term *athan* as well as the similarity between the principles and devices found in that text and in Thai lore. The belief in supernatural power developed by ascetic practice, as well as belief in the role of spirits as the moving forces behind natural processes, are two other key elements of lore. What is striking is the way that these three elements are combined. An adept who practices self-mastery can convoke the spirits and activate the latent power of special substances. Yantra are the most prominent device in *KCKP* perhaps because of their ability to accommodate a range of techniques of power—the use of special substances in manufacture; the depiction of divine beings, powerful animals, magic numbers, and verbal formulas in the designs; the ascetic discipline required for manufacture; and the use of ritual for “activation.” Yantra are assemblies of power.

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30) An earlier and more limited form of such “franchising” emerged around amulets named after Khun Phaen (although they depict a Buddha in the usual way, not Khun Phaen). The originals were first named after the Suphanburi *wat* where they were made but later enterprisingly renamed as “Khun Phaen amulets,” after which other production sites appropriated the same branding tactic. The Suphanburi National Museum has an extensive display.

Between the era of *KCKP* and the present, this wide range of devices has largely been replaced by one form, the Buddha amulet.<sup>31)</sup> In part this is because other forms have suffered a decline in popularity. A businessman can wear several amulets concealed under his shirt or in his pockets, but would probably feel ill-at-ease sporting a shirt dyed with yantra, a *phrajiat* bandanna round his neck, a *phirot* ring of plaited cotton on his finger, a *palat khik* wooden phallus dangling from his belt, a tattoo visible over his collar, a small buffalo charm or *phakhawam* carried in his mouth, and his lips smeared with beeswax.<sup>32)</sup>

The form of the modern amulet seems to have evolved as a marriage between the votive tablet and the *takrut*, a yantra strung on a cord. It grew in popularity very gradually over a century and a half. The amulet incorporates many elements of earlier devices, particularly the use of powder made from powerful substances, and the need to be made by a powerful adept and “activated” by ritual.

The rise of the amulet at a time when other devices were falling out of favor attests to the continuing importance of protection. But there is another important aspect of the story.

None of the protective devices found in *KCKP* feature an image of the Buddha. Excerpts from Buddhist texts were used in the composition of yantra and in the ritual of activation, and some disciples of the Buddha also feature in the imagery of yantra, but this explicitly Buddhist contribution is a rather small part of the lore in *KCKP*. Of course, “seeking the refuge of the Triple Gem” is a fundamental concept of the liturgy. The Buddha is invoked as a source of protection in early Buddhist texts, and has probably always been prominent in protective rituals of the court. But in the popular practice portrayed in *KCKP*, the Buddha as image or voice is noticeably absent. With the rise of the amulet, the Buddha has been transformed into the primary force of the protection once sought from many other sources in popular tradition. Production of amulets is now virtually monopolized by the *wat* and is a major part of the laity’s interaction with the *wat*. The process of producing amulets has been elaborated with the ritual paraphernalia of Buddhism—sacred threads, *sutta* chants, holy water—to a far greater extent than the production of protective devices described in *KCKP*. The chants which finally “activate”

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31) Some modern amulets contain the same kind of unusual substances found in *KCKP*, such as mercury, cat’s eye, or splinters of ivory, rather than the Buddha. Some feature famous monks, Hindu gods, or royal figures. Yet the vast majority have an image of the Buddha.

32) These items have not disappeared, but their usage is now much more limited than the Buddha amulet. *Phrajiat* bandanas are often distributed to soldiers along with amulets, and are worn by boxers. *Palat khik* are often carried discreetly. A few adepts still use a wide range of the devices found in *KCKP*; see for example the famous policeman, Khun Phan, brilliantly analyzed by Craig Reynolds (2011).



a modern amulet invoke the power of the Buddha alone, whereas the parallel ceremonies in *KCKP* call on every possible variant of spirit and every known deity of the Indic tradition.

Some “reformists” decry amulets as antithetical to the Buddhist emphasis on the individual’s progress towards spiritual perfection “because protection and good fortune result from power developed through meditative and moral discipline” (Cook 2012, 37). But as Cook demonstrates, others argue that most people are only a small way along the path to perfection and can be helped in the short term by wearing devices which are instilled with the power of an adept further along the path. Besides, amulets and other protective devices are often believed to be only effective or more effective if the wearer observes good moral practice—an idea not found in *KCKP*. In this modern rationalization, the inner power of the seeker and the instilled power of the device are not contradictory but complementary, based on a single ideology of protection and power.

In short, compared to the era of *KCKP*, in ritual and ideology the Buddha now has a much larger role in the provision of protection, and the provision of protection has a much larger role in popular Buddhism.

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