

Talismans: Forms and Processes of Creating New Meanings in The Lower Isaan Region

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Abstract

This study aims to 1) study the historical background of talismans in the Lower Northeast, 2) study the forms of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region, and 3) study the processes of creating new meanings for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region. The population and sample for this study are the Lower Isaan Region. Data collection tools included a survey, observation form, and interview form. The study employed the concept of mythology and the integration of beliefs, folklore theory, cultural diffusion theory, aesthetics theory, and semiotics theory as analytical frameworks. From the study, talismans in the Lower Isaan Region can be classified into two types: natural talismans, such as elephant tusks, python fangs, Lek Lai, Kod, and boar tusks; and human-made talismans, such as Takrud, beeswax, exorcist's knives, Nang Gwok, and Bia Kae. These beliefs are fundamentally rooted in faith in supernatural powers, which have been deeply embedded in the way of life since ancient times, linked to Animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Currently, these beliefs continue to strongly influence the way of life in the Lower Isaan Region, adapting to modern times. New meanings are created through storytelling, media promotion, rituals, interpretation by outsiders, and economic exchange, integrating various forms of beliefs in terms of shapes, materials, creation processes, and functions. The changes and creation of new meanings reflect efforts to adapt to contemporary demands. Nevertheless, preserving the original meanings of these talismans remains crucial to ensure the continuation of this valuable cultural heritage.

Keywords: *talismans, forms, processes of creating new meanings.*

Introduction

The Isaan region of Thailand is exceptionally diverse in terms of language, ethnicity, and culture, making it a significant historical site. The majority of the population practices Theravada Buddhism, which is blended with traditional local beliefs, influenced by Chenla culture, Dvaravati culture, and the culture of the Khmer Angkor Empire, significantly influencing the lifestyle and livelihood of the people in this region (Wongthes, 2002). The Lower Isaan Region has undergone cultural evolution for an extended period dating back to prehistoric times due to its proximity to neighboring countries, such as Laos and Cambodia, contributing to its ethnic diversity, with groups such as Thai, Lao, Chinese, Khmer, Thai-Korat, Kui, Kha, and Yuan. The majority of the population practices Buddhism, with temples serving as the community's center for religious activities and rituals, as well as functioning as centers for learning and communal activities. Therefore, the Lower Isaan Region is considered an area of significant social and cultural importance (Wongphut et al., 2016). The cultural integration of people in the Lower Isaan Region is reflected in various aspects of their way of life, such as consumption, housing, and clothing. However, integrating beliefs regarding sacred entities is more challenging, as traditional Buddhist beliefs and rituals remain deeply rooted in society and among the various ethnic groups in the region (Boonchai, 1998). The provinces of Surin, Si Sa Ket, Buriram, and Nakhon Ratchasima are part of the Lower Isaan Region. The majority of the population in these areas belongs to the Khmer or Thai-Khmer ethnic groups who continue to strictly preserve their language, customs, and traditions. The cultural blending of Thai, Lao, and Khmer in this region is also reflected in local folklore, which often contains similar social and cultural elements (Ngamsaprang, 2000). The belief in supernatural powers has been the foundation of human traditional beliefs, found in all societies, and still exists to this day.

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These beliefs led to various forms of mystical practices, such as beliefs in magic, incantations, and talismans. In ancient civilizations with historical and archaeological evidence. The beliefs surrounding talismans have long played a significant role in Thai society. The beliefs in magic and incantations were influenced by Brahmanism-Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism, particularly the Mantrayana school, which promotes beliefs in magic and incantations and talismans (Mungthanee, 2013).

A study of research related to talismans reveals evidence of their existence in ancient military strategy texts, recorded in written form in the past. Some texts were inscribed on palm leaves using ancient scripts and covered a wide range of knowledge, including magic and incantations, medicinal formulas, and various yantras (Phra Maha Montree Walulapho (Pom Suk), 1999). The creation of talismans often involves specific methods and materials believed to possess special qualities, such as creating Bia Kae, Hanuman, or Takrud. Although Thai society has entered into the age of globalization, beliefs in talismans persist and have expanded in various forms. Public relations and social trends have contributed to the popularity of talismans, such as movie stars or artists wearing them as fashion accessories. Advertisements often portray talismans as possessing sacred powers that can protect their owners. As a result, talismans have become a rapidly growing business tied to current market trends. Entrepreneurs often use local cultures and beliefs to add economic value and to align with government policies (Kaewthep, 1998). In a capitalist society, talismans are no different from products made for consumption. Cultural traditions that were once used as spiritual anchors have been transformed into commodities in the free market by using different symbols to create new talismans to meet diverse consumer demands, with marketing communication playing a key role in promoting these beliefs (Praiwanrat & Pangkesorn, 2024).

From the background and significance, the researcher perceives that talismans are sacred objects that profoundly affect the minds of believers. They are also a cultural heritage passed down through generations, particularly in the Lower Isaan Region, which comprises Surin, Sisaket, and Buriram provinces. This is an ancient land with traditional beliefs and recounted legends concerning incantations from Khmer, Khmer culture, and Hinduism, which worship spirits, blended with original beliefs, and faith in spirits and nature. This serves as the motivation for this study on "Talismans: Forms and Processes of Creating New Meanings in the Lower Isaan Region," with the aim of strengthening social immunity, reducing superstition, and helping to connect knowledge about talismans to other areas of society.

Objectives

1. To study the historical background of talismans in the Lower Northeast
2. To study the forms of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region
3. To study the processes of creating new meanings for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region.

Literature Review and Related Research

The research study on Talismans: Forms and Processes of Creating New Meanings in the Lower Isaan Region aims to study the historical background, forms, and processes of creating new meanings for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region. The researchers have reviewed the following relevant literature and research to be used in this study.

Historical Background of Talismans in the Lower Isaan Region

The Isaan region is characterized by its high plateau landscape, facing issues of soil salination and drought, which impact agriculture, particularly rice production (Theerasaswat, 2007)). The region contain cultural diversity with up to 10 ethnic groups, such as Thai Korat, Thai Lao, Thai Khmer, and Thai Kuy. These cultures present opportunities for community tourism development. Furthermore, this region hosts important historical sites like Phanom Rung Historical Park, Phimai Sanctuary, and Ta Muean Temple. Evidence of ancient community settlements in the Isaan region indicates the flourishing of civilizations, which can be divided into 4 significant cultural groups, including the Ban Chiang cultural group settled in the Songkhram River basin and Sakon Nakhon Basin. Communities here engaged in rice cultivation, used iron and bronze metals, and produced pottery, reflecting continuous civilizational development. The Upper Chi River group dispersed across the upper Chi River basin and Korat Basin. Agricultural communities here cultivated rice and produced bronze metals, with evidence found of contact with external societies, such as beads made from seashells. The Lower Chi River and Lower Mun River groups settled in the lowland plains across several provinces, including Maha Sarakham,

Roi Et, and Sisaket. Evidence of salt production, iron smelting, and Thung Kula Rong Hai-style pottery was found. The Upper Mun River Basin group showed dense settlement at the headwaters of the Mun River in Nakhon Ratchasima and Buriram provinces. This community developed into an exchange hub and created Pottery with a flared rim. Vallibhotama, (1997) stated that the Isaan region received external cultural influences along main contact routes: Dvaravati culture from the Central region and Brahman-Hindu culture from Chenla, transmitted via the Mekong River. The important cultures during this period are divided into the 4 following main groups. Chenla culture, centered at Wat Phu in Champasak Province, is characterized by the erection of stone boundary markers (sema) and inscriptions showing the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Dvaravati culture spread into the Isaan region around the 12th Buddhist century, reflected through the construction of religious sites and sema stones related to Buddhism. Khmer culture of the Angkorian period showed evidence of the construction of Brahman-Hindu religious sites and barays (reservoirs) in the areas of Phanom Rung and Phimai Sanctuaries. Tai-Lao culture expanded into the Isaan region after the decline of the Khmer Empire, involving a blend of Tai-Lao culture with Lankawong Buddhism (Vallibhotama, 1997). The context of the Lower Isaan region encompasses geographical characteristics, cultural capital, natural resource, and significant historical and archaeological capital related to traditional beliefs, religious beliefs, and beliefs concerning talismans.

Forms of Talismans in the Lower Isaan Region

Form refers to a pattern established as a principle or guideline, which is accepted as representing that particular thing, such as a house style (Royal Institute, 2003). The things created or developed help illustrate the key components of a story in a simple way that is easy to understand, serving as a guideline for future operations (Sudtae, 2010). A structure demonstrates the relationship between various components or variables. A form can be used to explain the relationships between different components or variables present in natural phenomena or in various systems, describing the sequence of components or activities within a system (Srisa-ard, 2011) There are two characteristics to the forms, a model of something concrete, such as a system of function, and a model of something abstract, such as a computer. Forms can express relationships using connecting lines shown in diagrams, written in mathematical equations, predictive equations, or written as text, numbers, images, charts, or three-dimensional figures (Suebkrasae, 2009). The things created or developed has important components used to create related forms and shapes, specifically, the characteristics of talismans in the Lower Isaan area, which include their shapes, the materials used in their creation, and the creation processes. The functions of the talismans are mysterious, tied to ancient beliefs that have been passed down over a long period of time, not only in Thailand but also in many countries worldwide. These talismans are divided into different types according to their creation and functions.

Natural Talismans

This category of talismans comprises objects found in nature that possess distinctive characteristics, believed to imbue them with special properties such as bringing good fortune, charm, or providing protection against various dangers. Naturally occurring talismans can be classified into several types, including hollow tiger fangs, gnarled deer antlers, copper rosewood seeds, Lek Lai, and "rat-eye diamonds," as referenced by Udomsap (1996) and Khun Phantharak Ratchadet (1986). Additionally, Chitprasong (1986) summarized important natural talismans, such as Lek Lai, boar tusks, and various types of fangs (Tantayakoon, 1998).



Figure 1 Talismans of the fang type, such as tiger fangs, bear fangs, and boar tusks.

Human-made talismans

This category refers to the talismans made by humans, which exhibit diverse forms. These can include bas-reliefs, three-dimensional sculptures, or miniature replicas of sacred objects believed to possess spiritual power. Their creation often involves specific rituals and consecration ceremonies to imbue the talismans with efficacy, such as Pisamorn Takrud, amulet balls, or figures of deities like Garuda and Naga, as referenced in Siam Mongkol Amulet Online. (2015)



Figure 2 Pisamorn Takrud



Figure 3 Garuda

The Process of Creating New Meanings for Talismans in the Lower Isaan Region

The construction of meaning for talismans must begin with a fundamental understanding of the meaning-making process. Jittakasem (2015) proposed that meanings are created through three primary processes, consisting of communication through public relations media, meaning creation through rituals, and meaning creation through individuals. The meaning-making process through public relations media is crucial in a consumerist society that emphasizes the value of objects and involves complex interpretations. Koanantakool (2008) discussed contemporary consumption, noting that it extends beyond mere utility to establishing an image of success and social taste. From Saussure (cited in Prachakul, 2001) perspective, signification is the relationship between a sign and its referential system, demonstrating that meaning results from social consensus. For instance, the word 'buffalo' can denote both an animal and a characteristic used to describe a person. Meanings can be divided into the following elements. Denotation refers to the objective meaning that everyone understands universally, without evaluation. For example, rain denotes water falling from the sky. Connotation refers to the meanings based on individual experiences and cultural contexts, leading to varied interpretations. For instance, a farmer might see rain as a symbol of abundance, while an urban dweller might perceive it as a symbol of chaos and flooding. The meaning-making process in advertising and consumption significantly impacts consumer behavior. The presentation of objects within consumer culture helps to create an appealing image for products, making consumers feel valued and more confident in the goods (Kaewthep & Netrabukkana, 2003). In the current era, technological advancements allows for an easier creation of virtual worlds for consumers. Pennington (2001) indicated that these virtual worlds serve as

signs representing objects, enabling consumers to create a world according to their desires. Ultimately, the various symbols expressed in advertisements are tools that create differentiation in consumer culture and values (Khan et al., 2020). From studies in mass communication, it is evident that understanding the meaning-making process allows us to utilize symbolic communication effectively and avoid becoming instruments for those who seek to profit from such communication.

Taussig's perspectives on anthropologists and talismans from his study in Colombia revealed that culture and magical beliefs still influence the economic system, with talismans possessing both economic and spiritual value (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993; Meyer and Allen, 1997). Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988) explained that talismans are objects that help people receive protection and create a sense of existence. Gell (1998) stated that talismans function as protective shields and provide stability in people's lives. Graeber (2005) viewed talismans as tools for creating social relationships, while Latour (2010) proposed that these objects possess their own agency, not necessarily needing to be solely controlled by humans. As several scholars have discussed talismans as material objects in their lives, noting their economic and spiritual value, including the belief that they bring good fortune and success in life, they have been fashioned into jewelry, starting with bracelets and fashion Takrud worn by artists and public figures for aesthetic appeal and as good luck charms. The researchers applied this body of knowledge and analyzed the meaning-making processes through public relations media, rituals, and outsiders.

Methods

The research study entitled *Talismans: Forms and Processes of Creating New Meanings in the Lower Isaan Region* aims to investigate the historical background, forms, and processes of creating new meanings for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region. This study employs a qualitative research methodology, with the following details.

Research Participants

Research participants are a crucial component contributing to the depth and reliability of the data obtained, as they possess direct experience or are directly involved with cultural changes and the interpretation of new meanings emerging within their community contexts. However, conducting research with participants necessitates strict adherence to ethical research principles, particularly regarding respecting the rights, voluntary participation, and dignity of informants. The researcher employed purposive sampling to obtain a diverse representative group, encompassing variations in age, gender, occupation, and social roles, consisting of community leaders, elders, local wisdom teachers, youth, cultural activists, and individuals from ethnic groups. Such diversity facilitates access to varied perspectives and enables a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of new meaning-making across multiple dimensions. The researchers strictly adhered to ethical research principles, beginning with obtaining formal consent forms from participants. This involved explaining the research objectives, the scope of questions, the duration of participation, confidentiality measures, and the exclusive use of data for academic purposes. Participants were able to decide whether to participate or withdraw at any time without coercion or loss of any rights, reflecting respect for the rights, freedom, and dignity of the informants, as well as a respect for their culture, customs, and beliefs of each local community by using appropriate language, avoiding intrusive questions that could violate privacy or cause psychological discomfort, and maintaining data confidentiality. Names or personally identifiable information were not disclosed to protect informants from potential risks arising from data interpretation or public presentation. The participants in this study consists of 30 individuals with knowledge and expertise in the forms and processes of creating new meanings for talismans, including 1) Six key informants, comprising experts from the government and private sectors, talisman collectors with direct knowledge of various types of talismans. This group of participants also involves individuals who lease or offer talismans for worship in the area, 2) 18 casual informants, consisting of those directly involved in the creation of talismans, including artisans, monks, skilled individuals in magic and incantations, and those who perform rituals for creating talismans, and 3) 18 general informants including buyers, sellers, tourists, and local people living in areas surrounding talisman-related sites and those who have interacted with talismans.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data that aligns with the research objectives to effectively answer the research questions. The data collection was conducted using two methods:

The data collection from documents involved studying recorded materials related to the research topics. The documents were from government agencies, academic institutions, books, textbooks, theses, the internet, the general public, and various individuals, for example, the Office of Khon Kaen University Library, Mahasarakham University, and Srinakharinwirot University Prasarnmit.

Field data collection was conducted according to the following steps:

1. Conducting field surveys by examining physical, social, cultural aspects, lifestyles, and information access.
2. Using a non-participant observation form to observe the environment, society, culture, and activities of the casual informant group. This method involved recording images, audio, and note-taking.
3. A structured interview form was used as a formal interview tool to categorize and analyze data. It covered various topics including general information about the informants, the general context of the area, the environment, society, culture, the historical background, the forms, and the processes of creating new meanings for talismans. This tool will be used with the group of casual informants and general informants.
4. Using unstructured interviews to conduct in-depth interviews without limiting responses to gather broad and diverse data covering topics such as the environment, society, culture, history, forms, and processes of creating new meanings for talismans. This tool was used with key informants.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed two methods of data analysis: document analysis and field data analysis with the following detail.

1) Document analysis was conducted using the Method of Agreement, which involved verifying the accuracy of concepts and theories by examining documents from multiple sources to ensure the reliability of the data.

2) Field data analysis involved analyzing data collected using all research tools to form conclusions by using three types of analysis.

2.1) Inductive analysis, which interprets conclusions from concrete data or observable phenomena.

2.2) Data analysis through classification by using theories as a framework for categorization, as well as non-theoretical analysis depending on the appropriateness of the data.

2.3) Comparative analysis, which involves comparing data based on events or phenomena.

Research Results and Discussions

Research Results

The research entitled Talismans: Forms and Processes of Creating New Meanings in the Lower Isaan Region aimed to study the historical background of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region, the forms of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region, and the processes of creating new meanings for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region, the findings can be summarized and discussed as follows.

Research results from the history of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region

Talismans originated from the belief in supernatural powers, which have existed since ancient times. Beliefs in deities, spirits, and magic are present in the traditions of the Lower Isaan Region. There is a need for spiritual anchors as a stronghold to ensure safe survival in life. In the past, the Lower Isaan Region was once under the rule of the Khmer Empire, as evidenced by traces of Khmer or ancient Cambodian civilization visible throughout the area, such as Khmer ruins and various ancient sites, which were influenced by Hindu or Brahmanism religious beliefs. After the introduction of Buddhism, Brahmanism beliefs were integrated. Archaeological evidence indicates that ancient talismans in the Lower Isaan Region influenced the way of life, communication among community groups, the phenomena of objects and their meanings, as well as the instinctual behaviors of villagers in the past. These were interconnected with the environment, their settlements, and the surrounding plants and animals. Beliefs thus arose from shapes and forms related to animals, plants, and supernatural objects according to these beliefs, and have continued to be passed down to the present era.

Under the increasingly changing and complex social context, people in the Lower Isaan Region continue to hold beliefs in talismans across more dimensions than before, including beliefs for success, love, finances, luck, health, lottery, and charm. Beliefs and spiritual anchors have long been intertwined with the people of the Lower Isaan Region. Regardless of social, political, or economic situations, or whether there is an outbreak of disease, things related to faith or various disciplines never fade away.

Ultimately, the beliefs and faith in talismans as sacred objects have been incorporated into narratives within exchange processes to create value for these talismans. This has led to their creation, reproduction, transfer, and change of ownership among those who believe and respectfully worship them, following the evolution of social mechanisms. The diverse phenomena of belief today reflect faith and expectations arising from fear, suffering, and survival, forming a deeply rooted part of people's minds. There are numerous beliefs, whether associated with Animism, Buddhism, or Brahmanism. Therefore, the talismans found in the Lower Isaan Region are highly sought after and desired by people.

Research conclusion of the form of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region

The forms of talismans found in the Lower Isaan Region based on the beliefs of the local people who follow Animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism consist of the following materials used in their creation, shapes and forms, the processes of creation, and functions. Natural materials used to create talismans in the Lower Isaan Region include elephant tusks, elephant tails, elephant bones, snake fangs, boar tusks, seashells, mercury, Lek Lai, jackfruit thorns, cotton tree branches, Siamese rosewood, Black Diospyros, Tamarind Core, *Argyreia Splendens*, 108 types of herbs, sesame oil, and Homalomena. Materials used to create talismans in the Lower Isaan Region that are human-made include gold, silver, bronze, mixed metals, stainless steel, mercury, brass, copper, silver sheets, lead pellets, and resin.

The shapes of talismans found in the Lower Isaan Region have three-dimensional forms, including spherical, cylindrical, and flat two-dimensional forms such as oval, circular, and free-form shapes.



Figure 4 Spherical and cylindrical talisman



Figure 5 Beeswax, silver Takrud (oval shape)



Figure 6 Elephant tusks (spherical shape)



Figure 5 Elephant tusk in the shape of a complete Garuda (free form)

The process of creating talismans found in the Lower Isaan Region that occur naturally such as Lek Lai and Kod involves no alteration. Items like elephant tusks, wild boar tusks, and python fangs are mostly made into jewelry, carved, or framed, and then consecrated by practitioners or monks before use. Talismans created by humans include Takrud, beeswax, exorcist's knife, Nang Gwok, and shells, all of which undergo a creation process according to the methods of specific monks. This process involves preparing the materials, designing shapes and forms, and crafting by hand or inscribing with tools until the desired talisman is formed. Some talismans are consecrated with sacred inscriptions

during the creation process, while others are consecrated after completion through Buddhist rituals or monks chanting incantations according to the tradition of each school.

The function of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region is associated with beliefs in great power, protection and safety, invulnerability, great success, benevolence, good fortune, and protection against black magic and evil spirits.

Research results for the process of creating new meanings of the talismans in the Lower Isaan Region

The process of creating new meanings through the transmission of messages to generate perception includes 1) The meaning-making process through media promotion, 2) The meaning-making process through rituals, and 3) The meaning-making process through outsiders. These serve as information leading to the study of the new meaning-making process of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region.

The meaning-making process through media promotion of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region in the initially stage began with public relations conducted through temple promotions or via sacred object books, talisman journals, and billboards at various locations. Subsequently, advertisements and invitations appeared on various media platforms, such as Facebook pages, specific Facebook group pages, buy-sell-rent-worship talisman group pages, LINE, and YouTube clips featuring interviews with famous revered monks or disciples who have experience owning talismans.

The meaning-making process through rituals for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region for naturally occurring talismans are believed to possess inherent sacred properties and supernatural power, requiring no consecration to be potent. However, most talisman owners prefer those that have undergone a consecration process to enhance their power. This consecration is performed by individuals with mystical knowledge, revered monks, practitioners of incantations, or famous spiritual masters who chant spells and inscribe sacred characters onto the talismans for increased sanctity. As for human-made talismans, their efficacy is believed to stem from incantations performed by credible revered monks who conduct consecration ceremonies using mystical objects. Methods of consecration include hand-inscription, machine-inscription, code stamping, Yantra engraving, burying with sacred leaves, brass and copper minerals, and auspicious minerals from renowned practitioners. The consecration rituals performed by mystical practitioners and revered monks vary among different traditions.

The meaning-making process through outsiders for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region for both naturally occurring and human-made talismans derive their meaning from the beliefs of devotees, who learn from legends, stories, and the miracles attributed to talismans. These beliefs stem from the narratives shared by villagers, those who venture into the forest to gather resources, and the accounts of elders, wandering monks, traditional healers, and individuals with mystical knowledge. Beliefs are also formed through word-of-mouth experiences from villagers in one's own community and through personal encounters with miracles, from the past to the present day.

Discussion

Discussion of results from the research entitled *Talismans: Forms and Processes of Creating New Meanings in the Lower Isaan Region*, the researcher discusses according to the objectives of the study.

The history of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region originated from ancient beliefs in supernatural powers, including deities, spirits, and magic. These beliefs are deeply rooted in the culture of the region. Therefore, local people needed spiritual anchors as a stronghold to ensure safe survival in life. In the past, the Lower Isaan Region was once under the prosperous rule of the Khmer Empire, as evidenced by the remains of Khmer or ancient Khmer civilization found throughout the area, such as stone castles and various sites. These remnants reflect the influence of Hinduism or Brahmanism. Later, when Buddhism was introduced, Brahmanism beliefs began to blend with Buddhist. Archaeological evidence indicates that ancient talismans in the Lower Isaan Region originated from forms and shapes related to animals, plants, and supernatural objects according to their beliefs, as well as the instinctual behaviors of people in the past. This has resulted in a relationship and connection with the environment and living spaces, as well as the plants and animals surrounding them. Therefore, the visible shape of an object inevitably affects the villagers in different ways. Under the social context, changes have occurred and have become more complex. The people in the Lower Isaan Region still hold beliefs regarding talismans in more dimensions than before. These include beliefs in success, love, finances,

fortune, health, lottery predictions, and charms. Especially currently, people are more disappointed during economic downturns and must rely on sacred objects. Belief and psychological anchors have been a part of the lives of the people in the Lower Isaan Region for a long time, regardless of the social, political, or economic situation, or the occurrence of disease outbreaks. Matters related to faith and various arts have never faded away, but have developed in many more forms. This has led to the market for talismans being used as a tool or a clever strategy to create and design talismans in various business sectors, including emphasizing their spiritual value. Ultimately, the stories of belief and faith in talismans as sacred objects have been incorporated into narratives within the exchange process to create value for those talismans. This has led to their creation, reproduction, transfer, and change of ownership by those who believe and respectfully worship them, following the evolution of social mechanisms. However, the relationship between talismans and beliefs in the minds of the Lower Isaan people has not changed much from the past. This can be seen from the status and forms of the talismans, which explain the diverse phenomena of belief in the present. Their shapes mirror the beliefs and expectations stemming from fear, suffering, and survival, which are deeply ingrained in the people's minds. There are a lot of talismans based on beliefs in Animism, Buddhism, or Brahmanism. Therefore, the talismans found in this area are highly sought after by people wishing to possess them. This phenomenon can be explained using folklore theory, which is the study of knowledge about the way of life of a particular group of people, focusing on the processes of transmission and transformation of stories based on beliefs. Attagara (1977) defined folklore theory as the study of folklore or the cultural products of a community, and these cultural products are a legacy passed down both within the same group and spread to different groups. Folklore, or the cultural products of a community, and these products, are a legacy that has been continuously transmitted, both within the same group and disseminated to different groups. Franz Boas (1940) emphasized that cultural diffusion theory is a process in which significant characteristics of one culture spread to another, adapting to align with the new culture. This is consistent with Sriburi and Sriburi (1987) who found that people in the Central Region still maintain a connection to supernatural beliefs, including protection from various dangers, and beliefs in good fortune, longevity, beauty, and charm, which are held similarly by both rural and urban dwellers. Similarly, Wongphut et al. (2016) found that Thais, Laos, and Cambodians all share fundamental beliefs about talismans. These include beliefs concerning talisman types such as fangs, tusks, horns, as well as talismans derived from other animals, including those made from medicinal herbs, minerals, and talismans used as tools for livelihood. Additionally, there are talismans related to local beliefs integrated with religious faith. In border town trade markets, these talismans exist in an overlapping status between being spiritual objects and souvenirs, closely linked to narratives about their origins, similar to other souvenirs. These narratives often emphasize the area's rich natural resources, pristine forests, and traditional ways of life. This also aligns with Everett Roger's cultural diffusion theory (1995), where talismans in the Lower Isaan Region have been influenced by the diffusion of culture, ideas, behaviors, and values. Social and cultural changes have emerged from the dissemination of new elements from neighboring countries. This is consistent with Mungthane (2013), who studied Yantra Cloth: Forms and Beliefs in Isaan. The research found that in its early period, Isaan yantra cloth was influenced by Mahayana Buddhism, Brahmanism-Hinduism, and traditional beliefs in magic and incantations, which is traditionally an Isaan belief. Later, it was influenced by Theravada Buddhism of the Sri Lankan tradition but still integrated with local traditional beliefs. Yantra cloth found in Isaan was originally made from old monk robes but later transitioned to more readily available fabrics, with cotton being the most popular choice. The characters inscribed on Isaan yantra cloth are mostly ancient Khmer script and Isaan Buddhist script. Some pieces include both scripts. The incantations inscribed were derived from Buddhist beliefs, blended with local traditional beliefs.

The forms of the talismans in the Lower Isaan Region

According to the beliefs of villagers who adhere to animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, talismans consist of the materials used in their creation, their shapes and forms, the creation process, and their usage. The forms of talismans found in the Lower Isaan region that occur naturally include: elephant tusk, elephant tail, elephant bone, cobra-headed snake spur, python skin, solid boar tusk, deer hide, jewel beetle, cicada, seashell, mercury, royal honeycomb, pure wild beeswax, Lek Lai, Lek Nam Phi, jade, gemstone, jackfruit wood, Siamese cassia wood, rosewood, black Ngiu wood, tamarind core wood, Prueksa wood, Duu wood, mistletoe, rattan, crown flower, khrua sao long, 108 types of sacred herbs (wan), sesame oil, and Chanthra charm herbs. Materials used in the creation of human-made talismans found in the Lower Isaan region include: gold, silver metal, bronze metal, alloys, stainless steel, mercury, brass, copper, copper sheet, brass sheet, silver sheet, gold leaf, lead sheet, lead bullets, bullet casings, resin, plastic, rubber tubing, rope, fishing line, candles, sealing wax, incense sticks, and

monk robes. This aligns with Daengpradub (1996), who studied the use of animals as presenters in advertising. This is a form of advertising creativity that utilizes meaning-making through denotation, connotative meaning, and myths derived from the animals themselves to concisely and imaginatively communicate meaning to the audience in each advertisement. Animals serve as presenters through direct meaning, connotative meaning, and presentations linked to myths. The use of animals as symbols, the comparison of animals to product characteristics, their representation of place and time, their use as contrasting comparisons, the decomposition of meaning, and the use of animals to attract attention to products and services are all part of the study of meaning-making in print media advertising. Symbolic meaning can be linked to myths and connected to product characteristics. The study of symbols and the process of communication focuses on how various symbols, whether spoken language, written language, images, or gestures, communicate meaning. Semiotics theory views that everything around us can be a symbol, and the interpretation of that symbol depends on the context and experience of the recipient. Barthes' concept has explained the process of myth as a system of signification where each sign communicates meaning by itself. The materials for creating a discourse of myth, such as paintings, photographs, language, posters, rituals, and objects, no matter how diverse they may initially be, once grasped by myth, are always stripped down to merely a sign-form to convey something else (Angkasirisap, 2008). Semiotics theory helps in understanding how language and various media function, analyzing the meaning of various symbols of talismans in society, and helps in understanding how culture and context influence the interpretation of symbols. It can be applied in communication, marketing, and media analysis, which will be beneficial for belief and understanding the forms and meanings of talismans. This is consistent with Mangthanee (2013), who studied Yantra Cloth: Forms and Beliefs in Isaan. The research found that the characters inscribed on Isaan yantra cloth are mostly ancient Khmer script and Isaan Buddhist script. Some pieces include both ancient Khmer script and Isaan Buddhist script. The incantations inscribed are derived from Buddhist beliefs, blended with local traditional beliefs.

The shapes and forms of talismans found in the Lower Isaan Region consist of three-dimensional forms, such as spheres and cylinders, and two-dimensional forms, such as ovals, circles, and freeform shapes. These can be explained through the concept of aesthetics, which encompasses two types of aesthetic experiences: the experience of beauty and the experience of the sublime. Both experiences are underpinned by pure pleasure. It can be further explained that "Satisfaction in beauty is a pleasure that comes with a pure experience of an object, which implies that the experience of beauty precedes aesthetic emotions. Beauty is not determined by any conceptual framework but rather exists in the manifestation of aesthetic emotion. Moreover, when we affirm the beauty of an object, we are simultaneously affirming that every human being can directly experience the satisfaction of beauty if they engage freely with the object." Beauty does not mean that the role of an aesthetician is limited to finding beauty only from the meaning of human-made art, but also extends to the beauty of nature. Other aspects of the aesthetic experience include the concepts of distance and detachment. The integration of beliefs surrounding talismans reflects a fusion of religious that continue to significantly shape the mindset and beliefs of people, especially regarding talismans, a belief rooted in ancient traditions. Even today, this belief remains unchanged. Talismans are a part of art that reflects aesthetic value, life, society, as well as the beauty and exquisite experiences of nature. Currently, they continue to reflect these unchanging values. This finding aligns with Mungthanee, (2013), who conducted research entitled *Pha Yant: Forms and Beliefs in Isaan*. The research found that the patterns of inscribing characters and numbers on the Yantra in Isaan can be categorized into simple and complex forms. The simple forms include the Anulom inscription, the Anulom and Patilom inscription, and the Eight Directions inscription. The complex forms include the Yantra Grid inscription, the Chessboard inscription, the Itipiso Trueng Tri Phop or Narai Trueng Tri Phop inscription, and the Vichira Song Kruang Thong inscription found in the Sam Bhutte Yantra. The character inscriptions in the form of Buddha images and symbolic characters derived from sacred incantations. The symbols that are characters derived from incantations can be categorized as follows, 1) Various Heart Mantras, 2) Those from Paritta (protective chants), 3) Those from Buddhist prayers and general Buddhist beliefs, and 4) Those from Brahmanism. The pictorial symbols on Isaan yantra cloth consist of: 1) Buddha images, 2) Images of Arahant disciples, 3) Images of sacred religious sites, 4) Images of various deities, 5) Images of hermits (Ruesi), 6) Images of revered monks, 7) Images of important individuals, 8) Images of handprints and footprints, 9) Images of various sacred animals, 10) Images of lotus flowers, and 11) Images of auspicious objects such as money bags (gold and silver). align with the research by Sriburi and Sriburi (1987) who studied tattoo patterns found in the central region of Thailand and discovered that tattooing among people in this region remains closely tied to supernatural beliefs. These beliefs include protection from various dangers, beliefs in fate, longevity, beauty, and attractiveness. Both

people in the rural and urban areas share similar beliefs regarding these aspects without significant differences.

The creations of the talismans found in the Lower Isaan Region are crafted following traditional methods established by spiritual masters, beginning with the preparation of materials, designing shapes and forms, and crafting or engraving by hand or machine. Some talismans are consecrated and inscribed with sacred symbols during the creation process, ensuring their efficacy and spiritual significance. Some talismans are consecrated and inscribed with sacred scripts during the creation process, while others are completed first and later undergo a Buddhist consecration ceremony or are blessed with incantations by spiritual masters according to the traditions of each school. Research by Jaihan (1995) entitled *The Cultural Integration of Thai Yo and Lao People, the case study of Ban Hua Mu in Kampu subdistrict, Phayakkhaphum Phisai district, Maha Sarakham province*, demonstrates that various aspects of daily life are largely integrated, especially the adherence to traditional ancient beliefs, which are still practiced collectively. However, the research also indicates that some practices remain exclusive to specific groups. This aligns with Woodroffe (1994), who explained that mantra is a form of thought expressed as a sacred sound, used in conjunction with talismans, which are forms of sacred shapes. Mantra serves diverse purposes: to obtain power from sacred or supernatural entities, to make offerings to ancestral spirits, to communicate with ghosts and demons, to protect against various evil powers, to exorcise ghosts or evil spirits, to heal illnesses, to remove toxins from the body, to purify the body and mind, to create holy water or sacred water, to influence the thoughts of others, and to control humans, animals, and demons. Chanting prayers and various melodies of prayers create mental tranquility. The sound of chanting can produce vibrations that fully awaken human potential.

The functions of talismans found in the Lower Isaan Region are rooted in beliefs associated with great power, protection from harm, invincibility, impenetrability, charm and popularity, good fortune, and safeguarding against black magic and Aminism. This aligns with the findings of Pongsakornrunsilp & Pusaksrikit (2012), who observed that cultural factors greatly influence the worship of sacred objects. Consumers hold beliefs and desire to possess talismans and sacred objects for purposes such as wealth, prosperity, charm, attraction, and protection to ensure safety. Most consumers believe in protection and safety, trusting that talismans and sacred objects can grant safety to their owners and worshippers, protecting them from harm. Many consumers have possessed sacred objects since childhood, often receiving them from their parents or guardians. As they grow older and can acquire sacred objects on their own, they seek items that fulfill additional needs or desires. According to Likhithammarot and Kietthubthew (2002), the reasons for the popularity of talismans are as follows: 1) To serve as a mental anchor, 2) To provide protection against various dangers, 3) To bring good fortune, 4) To be a part of religious preservation, 5) To study Buddhist art, culture, and craftsmanship, 6) To collect for trading or exchange, and 7) To display social status. This finding aligns with Klangboonklong (1991), who found that the inspiration for Isaan men to get tattoos includes to gain power and special abilities, to enhance their appearance and attract attention, especially from the opposite sex, to fulfill a desire for prominence, fame, and social acceptance as a man of masculinity, to improve their personality, and to enhance qualities that are beneficial and supportive of their humanity.

The process of creating new meanings of the talismans in the Lower Isaan Region

The process of creating new meanings through the transmission of messages to generate perception includes: 1) The meaning-making process through media promotion, 2) The meaning-making process through rituals, and 3) The meaning-making process through outsiders. These serve as information leading to the study of the new meaning-making process of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region. The meaning-making process through media promotion of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region: Initially, public relations were conducted through temple promotions or via sacred object books, talisman journals, and billboards at various locations. Subsequently, advertisements and invitations appeared on various media platforms, such as Facebook pages, specific Facebook group pages, buy-sell-rent-worship talisman group pages, LINE, and YouTube clips featuring interviews with famous revered monks or disciples who have experience owning talismans. Currently, middlemen promote talismans through media in the form of products with novel, diverse, and modern appearances, making talismans accessible to all age groups. This aligns with Koanantakool (2008), who stated that meaning creation through advertising and promotional media is a process found in consumer societies that emphasize the value of external objects. Consumption in this context is not merely about how the products are being used but how they also convey specific meanings to consumers, making them feel modern, successful, tasteful, and so forth within the logic of consumption. At present, it can be observed that efforts have been made to create the image of products and objects through "advertising media".

Over time, advertising has become an important tool of communication, allowing individuals to send signals to others through the consumption of goods. The impact of advertising in a materialistic society has become increasingly significant. According to Wongthamakul (2018), the majority of the sample group most frequently accessed media through Facebook and held positive attitudes toward talismans in the form of jewelry. It was also found that media exposure is connected to attitudes, and attitudes regarding the product, price, and marketing promotion were related to consumer behavior. However, attitudes regarding distribution channels were not associated with consumption. Additionally, it was found that attitudes were related to the tendency of consumer behavior toward talismans in the form of jewelry. This is consistent with Daengpradub (1996), who found that using animals as a medium in advertisements is a form of creative advertising. This involves utilizing the process of meaning creation through direct meanings, connotative meanings, and myths associated with animals to convey concise messages in each advertisement while creating imagination or emotions in the audience. The presentation connects with myths, using animals as symbols, comparing animals to product attributes, representing specific places and times, serving as contrasts, and fragmenting meanings. Animals are used as a tool to capture attention and draw consumers toward products and services. The study of the process of meaning creation in print media advertising revealed similarities to the method of using animals as the central element in delivering messages. This phenomenon aligns with (Kaewthep & Netrabukkana, 2002) who stated that advancements in communication technology have made promotional media appear more realistic to consumers, as they now integrate visuals, sound, and imagination. Additionally, technological systems enable instant communication, replication, and the presentation of various images. This has turned technology into a marketing tool capable of segmenting consumers more effectively than the products themselves. This concept can be explained using Roland Barthes' (1972) idea of myth. Barthes defines myth as a mode of communication that conveys information about "a particular meaning" through cultural beliefs, which are masked and presented as natural. It creates a perception within a society or culture where people become so accustomed to the meaning of certain things that they fail to notice or question that such meanings are culturally constructed. Instead, they collectively agree that the values upheld by society are "natural" or aligned with common sense. Talismans have long been deeply embedded in the culture of the Lower Isaan Region, closely related to natural phenomena. Particularly, objects with unusual or unnatural characteristics. Therefore, people in the Lower Isaan Region often connect mystical meanings to supernatural powers and the process of meaning creation through rituals. Naturally occurring talismans are believed to possess inherent sacred power and supernatural qualities, requiring no consecration to be regarded as sacred and holy. However, for the most part, those who possess talismans prefer ones that have undergone consecration rituals to enhance their potency. These rituals are performed by individuals with mystical knowledge, such as monks, spiritual teachers, ascetics, or renowned practitioners who perform incantations, chant spells, and inscribe sacred characters onto the talismans to increase their sanctity. Talismans created by humans often originate from the chanting of incantations by highly respected monks. This process involves visiting temples and observing the meditation practices of these revered monks. Consecration ceremonies involve mystical objects and are performed using various methods, such as hand-engraving, machine etching, stamping codes, inscribing yantras, embedding elements, or using materials like brass, copper, or sacred minerals provided by well-known individuals. If the purpose of the talismans is pre-determined, it typically begins with a plan, followed by combining materials, such as metals associated with revered masters, in a factory. The items are then consecrated, with auspicious days and times chosen, and revered masters are invited to chant and perform the consecration rituals. Some perform the consecration themselves, while others hold grand Buddhaphisek ceremonies by inviting revered monks to sit in meditation and chant Buddha Mantras. The rituals performed by individuals skilled in mystical arts or revered masters vary by tradition. These talismans undergo consecration rituals infused with mystical incantations and storytelling from those involved, leading to a syncretism of beliefs. By integrating concepts from traditional philosophy and customs, a shared understanding can be formed through an inclusive approach that encompasses both supernatural powers and social attitudes. Simultaneously, examining the processes of creating meanings for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region through a semiotic perspective reveals that their significance is not limited to practical utility, content, or initial meanings perceived through common sense. Instead, the focus is on cultural meanings that support and reinforce the foundational meanings. Semiotics provides a clearer understanding that objects in society—whether they are consumer goods, fashion, collectibles, or works of art—possess not only "use value" and "exchange value" but also a "signifying value." In today's society filled with materialistic values, the perceived value of such meanings seems to outweigh any other form of value. This aligns with Wongbiasaj (2001), who stated that the process of creating meaning (signification) results from the combination of experiences in the

material world and cognitive processes working together. These three components form interconnected relationships, where one component can independently shift into the role of another depending on the circumstance. One sign transforms into another, triggering subsequent signs, creating a continuous flow of interconnected symbols that never ends.

The meaning-making process through outsiders for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region: Naturally occurring and human-made talismans both derive their meaning from devotees who listen to legends, stories, and the miracles of talismans, and from beliefs passed down by villagers who ventured into the forest to gather resources. The meaning-making process occurs through respected individuals, newly ordained monks, famous revered monks, and through the accounts of elders, wandering monks, traditional healers, and individuals with mystical knowledge. Belief also comes from word-of-mouth experiences from villagers in one's own community and from personal encounters with miracles, from the past to the present day. This aligns with Wongphut, T. et al. (2016), whose research aimed to study shared beliefs about talismans in the border towns of Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, focusing on two aspects: their existence within the context of contemporary culture and traditional cultural beliefs. The study found that Thais, Laotians, and Cambodians all share fundamental beliefs about talismans, specifically those made from fangs, tusks, horns, as well as talismans from other animals, including those made from medicinal herbs, minerals, and talismans used as tools for livelihood. Additionally, there are talismans related to local beliefs integrated with religious faith. In the border town trade markets, these talismans exist in an overlapping status between being talismans and souvenirs, which is linked to discourses about their origins, similar to other souvenirs, especially discourses about the region's continued abundance of forests and traditional Lao ways of life, and the expertise in magic of the Khmer.

Research Conclusion

The research entitled *Talismans: Forms and Processes of Meaning Creation in the Lower Isaan Region* aims to study the history, forms, and processes of creating new meanings for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region. The findings reveal the following significant points: 1) The history of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region is linked to supernatural powers and religion, arising from beliefs in deities, spirits, and witchcraft deeply embedded in community culture. The livelihood of the villagers often relies on psychological anchors for safety and well-being. These beliefs have been passed down continuously from the past, especially the reverence for spirits that have influenced settlement patterns and self-protection. Today, talismans in the Lower Isaan Region are multi-dimensional, involving beliefs, luck, finances, and health, reflecting the quest for psychological stability in a rapidly changing society, 2) The forms of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region have distinct characteristics related to the materials, shapes, and processes of creation. The materials used include both natural ones, such as elephant tusks, animal hides, and precious stones, as well as those created by humans, such as metals, silver, gold, and resin. The shapes of talismans can be three-dimensional, such as spherical or cylindrical, and two-dimensional, such as circles and ovals. The processes of creation include both naturally formed and man-made talismans. Most of them are consecrated by monks or practitioners of magic to enhance their sacredness. After creation, the usage of talismans in the Lower Isaan Region is associated with beliefs in great power, protection from danger, invincibility, prosperity, charm, luck, and protection from black magic and evil spirits, and 3) The process of creating new meanings for talismans in the Lower Isaan Region consists of three dimensions: the process of meaning creation through media promotion, the process of meaning creation through rituals, and the process of meaning creation through outsiders. This shows the relationship between talismans and the beliefs in the minds of people in the Lower Isaan Region, which still play an important role in daily life despite ongoing social changes.

Research Limitation and Suggestions

Limitation

The research on the forms and processes of creating new meanings in the context of the Lower Isaan region is a study deeply involving cultural dimensions, traditions, local beliefs, and community identity. This inherently carries sensitivities regarding social and psychological values. For this reason, this research places importance on ethical conduct, which presents the following ethical limitations that must be carefully considered: 1) Limitations regarding the interpretation of cultural meanings, which have specific contexts. The researcher's interpretation, even if they are from the area, may differ from the informants' perspectives, potentially leading to inaccuracies or interpretations that do not align with the community's intentions, as this could result in presenting information that is not factual or causing public misunderstanding, 2) Limitations regarding the consent of informants. Even if informants

voluntarily consent to participate in the research, the nature of the information, which relates to traditions, beliefs, or certain personal matters, might cause them to feel insecure or worried later about the use of that data. Therefore, the researcher is careful to avoid coercion or inappropriate guidance of thought, even unintentionally, 3) Limitations regarding the presentation and dissemination of data. Presenting data obtained from the community might affect the community's image or internal relationships if not carefully filtered, especially when issues involve changes, conflicts, or the creation of new meanings that might contradict traditional values, 4) Limitations regarding discursive and ideological bias. The study of new meaning-making processes may involve critiquing cultural discursive orders, state power, or mechanisms of social change. The researcher controls themselves to avoid injecting personal biases or ideologies that might distort facts or lean too heavily towards their own beliefs, as this would cause the research results to lack neutrality and not align with the community's context, and 5) Limitations regarding the continuity of relationships with the community. Since cultural research relies on trust from the community, collecting data without building relationships or continuing engagement after the research process might make the community feel they were merely sources of information rather than academic partners, which is an ethical limitation affecting the long-term sustainability of the research.

Suggestions for future research

The history and background of talismans can be used as information for learning about history, society, and culture.

There should be a transmission of knowledge about the history and changes of talismans and an openness to using it as important information for further study in this area of history.

Knowledge about the forms and processes of creating new meanings for talismans should be passed on, as it can be used as a reference for the creation of new meanings in various works across the country.

Suggestions at the policy level

Value should be created for talismans by conserving and maintaining their value, promoting their utilization, generating added value or returns from their value, and providing education to foster learning about the value of talismans, which are considered cultural heritage.

Knowledge should be promoted in both qualitative and quantitative terms, fostering learning, understanding, skills, and the cultural transmission of talismans to various sectors, especially the public. Furthermore, continuous support for the care and preservation of cultural heritage should be provided.

Support, promotion, and incentive measures should be established to enable the public and various sectors to participate in the conservation and development of cultural heritage, as well as providing channels for access to express open opinions and receive support from the public, local scholars, and relevant sectors

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