

Journal of the Siam Society

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COVER: Nang Kwak, the Beckoning Lady in the digital age © GINGA, NFT artist

*For a brief discussion of this digital artwork, see McBain's contribution in this Special Edition

EDITORIAL

As we conclude the celebration of the Siam Society's 120th anniversary, the *Journal of the Siam Society* (JSS) is proud to present a diverse collection of articles, studies, and reflections that showcase the depth and breadth of scholarship on Thailand and beyond. Following an obituary honoring the great legacy of Gérard Diffloth (1939–2023), a renowned expert on Mon–Khmer linguistics, this Special Edition features a particular focus on the fascinating and complex world of amulet culture in Thailand, alongside a series of contributions spanning a new edition and translation, archival discoveries, and event highlights.

Our special section on amulet culture draws from a conference held in June 2023 at Thammasat University, Bangkok, and offers a fresh perspective on a subject of enduring significance in Thailand, yet one that is often underexplored in broader academic circles. The issue begins with our guest editor Paul McBain's insightful overview, which lays the groundwork for understanding the historical and cultural contexts of Thai amulets. From there, Chris Baker & Pasuk Phongpaichit delve into premodern concepts and devices, drawing connections between early Siamese practices and the rise of sacred objects. The discussion extends to modern-day transformations, with Saran Suebsantiwongse's exploration of the Phra Khun Phaen amulets' shift from sacred artifacts to profane symbols in contemporary Thailand.

Thomas Bruce's article on the veneration of immortalized Sino–Thai figures Yi Koh Hong and Sian Pae Rongsi highlights the deep interconnections between Chinese and Thai cultural traditions, while Guanxiong Qi's study of Achan Meng and the Nine-Tailed Fox amulet offers another compelling case of cultural invention targeted at a Chinese audience. Chari Hamratanaphon introduces an important transnational dimension with her study on Nang Kwak's presence in Vietnam, a subject expanded further in Al Lim's examination of the gendered allure of Nang Kwak, from traditional statuettes to NFTs in the digital age. Finally, the materiality of Thai amulets is explored through John Johnston & Chaiyaporn Phayakhrut's innovative research on recycling and the notion of rebirth, showing how old amulets gain new life and meaning through physical and symbolic reconfigurations. These contributions not only reveal the multifaceted nature of amulets, but also open new avenues for understanding their roles in both spiritual and commercial realms.

In addition to these topical studies, I am pleased to introduce a fresh edition and translation of a lesser-known Pali text composed locally, "The Advantage in a Dustheap-rag", edited and translated with my colleagues, the late Peter Masefield and Jacqueline Filliozat. This work provides valuable insight into the early Buddhist ascetic practice of collecting and wearing a *parīsukūla*, i.e., a dustheap-rag robe, and the associated funerary culture, resonating with the issue's themes of transformation and impermanence.

We also present Maëlle Pennéguès' new archival discovery featuring two unpublished letters by Jean Basset, the French missionary who traveled to Siam in the late 17th century. This serves as a follow-up to the travelogue published in our previous edition. The issue concludes with a short report on two recent international symposia—one celebrating the legacy of MC Subhadradis Diskul in Bangkok and the second, held in Paris, marking the intersection of HRH Prince Damrong Rajanubhab and Prof. George Coedès, whose contributions to Thai and Southeast Asian history remain immeasurable.

Finally, a robust selection of book reviews offers critical engagements with recent publications across a range of topics—from Southeast Asian art and religious tourism in northern Thailand to political economy and agrarian transformations. As always, I extend my deepest gratitude to the contributors, reviewers, and the editorial and production teams who have made this issue possible. I hope JSS will continue to serve, for many years to come, as a platform for dialogue, discovery, and scholarly exchange in the field of Thai and Southeast Asian studies.

Nicolas Revire
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CORRIGENDUM

A technical error occurred in the last edition of JSS (June 2024). In Naomie Wang's article, "A Malay Queen's Siamese Silver Bowl at the V&A Museum", the examples of Jawi script were printed backwards. The software used for layout inadvertently reversed the right-to-left orientation, resulting in flipping the text (e.g., "Jawi" appeared as *iwaj* instead of *jawi*). We sincerely apologize to the author and our readers for this oversight and any confusion it may have caused.

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