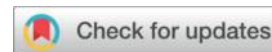


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The Psychological Underpinnings of Beliefs in Amulets and Dependence on Monks in Buddhism: An Examination of Their Social Roles in Thai Society



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: It deeply colors Thai culture and societal life, and especially the beliefs surrounding amulets (powerful religious objects) and monks, whose services serve as coping mechanisms against the uncertainties and pressures of life. But there is scant research on the psychology behind these beliefs. The study seeks to understand believers' and others' orientation toward individual and social well-being and values on which attitudes are based in the socio-cultural context of Thai society.

Methodology In-Depth Interviews: Conduct in-depth interviews with twenty-four participants using semi-structured questions to gather rich insights into their experiences and perspectives. Sample Size Expansion: Expand the sample by adding one-handed participants through purposive sampling to ensure a broader range of perspectives. Data Analysis: Apply qualitative analysis methods,

including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Insight7, to gain a more profound understanding of participants' experiences and viewpoints.

Results: From a psychological perspective, the study found that cognitive processes, such as the human need for affirmation, contribute to beliefs in the efficacy of amulets. Additionally, it revealed negotiations between long-standing religious familiarity and new societal demands, where reliance on amulets and monks serves as a means of coping with contemporary life burdens and challenges.

Discussion: This study highlights the relationship between religious beliefs and practices, social harmony, individual health, and cultural identity in Thailand. The findings have broad implications for understanding religious behavior and belief systems across Southeast Asia. The study reveals complex connections between psychology, religion, and social norms in Thai society.

Keywords: Thai Amulets, Monks, Religious Beliefs, Psychology, Buddhism, Social Harmony, Cultural Identity

Introduction

This paper investigates the intricate psychological mechanisms of two main pillars of Thai Buddhist Phenomena: belief in sacred amulets and trust of monks to protect in furtherance of spiritual realms. Using rich qualitative data, the paper shows that the practices support major psychological functions of anxiety reduction, meaning making and collective identification in Thai society as powerful psychological anchors. The results show that amulets act as tangible protective resources in times of uncertainty and monks represent resources for guidance beyond the formal boundaries of religiosity. Results from 24 in-depth interviews and surveys with 100 participants (93% of respondents report believing in sacred objects) showed the practices remain remarkably entrenched despite modernization. The study subverts simple readings of these practices as 'just superstition' showing that they involve intricate psychological mechanisms that function to cope with everyday difficulties inherent around uncertainty in Thai especially contexts. Western Reflections on Buddhism in Contemporary Thai

Buddhism is very much embedded in the culture and mentality as well as social institutions of Thai. Foundational to Thai Buddhist practices are two interrelated practices: sacred amulets (Phra Kruang)

and the monastic authority. The two not only function as religious souvenirs, but the subtle psychology behind them is designed to help you resiliently fulfill end of uncertainty and confrontations that life throws at you[1]. While the cultural significance is well established, little research has contributed insights regarding how these practices continue to exist in modern Thai society.

In Thai culture, amulet (Phra kruang) is very typical...the Phra Kruang or amulets are considered indispensable in every aspect of life. Alluding to their antiquity and heritage from old Amaravati era, these sacred belived protective items have been a syncretic mixture between indigenous animist traditions, in particular the religious elements derived from Theravada Buddhist practices. Historically amulets have originated as ceremonial items from the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods to commodities in modern times. Their ubiquity today testifies to their multi-modal function, both in the temple world as religious objects and as psychiatric resources for coping with ambiguity and stress.

Thai society also depends on a variety of monk-based functions, who play multi-faceted roles in society as community leaders. For instance, they often act as community leaders in rural areas (where services provided by the state are scarce) to mediate conflicts, fight for humanitarian causes and educate capacitate people. Temples are community centers providing essential social welfare services with spaces where religious practice meet social support. Such melding of the spiritual and practical functions likely explains why monks are still so influential in Thai society despite increasing modernization.

Research Problem and Gaps

While previous research on Buddhist practices in Thailand has mainly examined historical, sociopolitical and cultural aspects of these practices, psychological roots have not been sufficiently explored. This void is particularly poignant since we have elaborate psychological theories,

attachment styles, dissonance reduction through to meaning making processes that could potentially shed light on why people put such psychological credence into amulets and ordaining (anti)behavior.

The existing accounts have multiple limitations. First, research is very descriptive documenting the religious practices without any analysis of their psychological functions. Second studies that look at the psychological issue often reference Western paradigms which do not represent the cultural and spiritual specificity of Thailand. Third, little consideration has been given to modernization, globalization, and technological changes that may affect these practices. Fourth, the commercialization of amulets is a fertile ground for discussions that they are being commodified — i.e. unraveling from sacred to economic goods. Second, comparative viewpoints among other Theravada Buddhist countries that conduct similar practices are still limited.

Research Questions and Objectives

Through this study we aim to overcome these limitations by investigating the psychological processes that underpin belief in amulets and belief in monks within Thai culture. The research aims to answer the four main questions:

1. What cognitive and psychological factors lead to belief in amulets as protective and lucky objects?
2. What perspectives exist among those who do not believe in amulets or have no faith in monks?
3. What is the role of monks in providing counseling and spiritual support?
4. How do amulets and monks function within broader social structures and cultural systems?

It is important to note that these questions help us articulate our exploration both of individual psychological processes and collective social dynamics in how religious phenomena function simultaneously as human psychological resources and public cultural cultural practices. Research aims at complementary documentation of psychological emotional behavioral aspects concerning amulet beliefs and how monks provide psychological support as well as how these practices assist

subjects coping with stress and uncertainty; exploit the bidirectional influence between psychological needs of individual and cultural.

Theoretical and Practical Significance

This study presents substantial theoretical contributions to fill the gap in psychological research on religion, where Western traditions have been overrepresented in scholarly investigations thus far. This research is an important step towards culturally sensitive theories of psychological processes that attend to both universal mechanisms and culturally specific elements of belief and practice, focusing on Thai Buddhist tradition. The wider implications of these contributions transcend Thai Buddhism to inform general psychological functions of religion.

Practical implications across areas. This tool will allow the mental health professionals working in Thailand to have culturally-sensitive methods for investigating the psychological constructs and impacts of religion on its people; this will facilitate more effective treatment approaches that respect current support networks. This will provide for more purposeful engagement of desire in addressing the many community needs of traditional religious leader. It can help educational institutions to better understand how religious traditions help with identity development and individual psychological development.

This transdisciplinary approach fills the theoretical gap across psychology, anthropology and theological studies by testing how Buddhist competences respond to contemporary psychosocial imperatives in specific cultural contexts. The research is especially relevant in a context where Thailand is, rapidly urbanization as well as rapid technological innovation and cultural globalization technique us psychological pressure and in ways that traditional support systems must cope with.

Literature Review: Theoretical Foundations and Historical Context

Cognitive Approaches to Religious Belief

The cognitive theories offer useful templates to approach the psychological mechanisms in amulet beliefs. Barrett (2000) HADD (Hyper-active agency detection device) can help us see how the cognitive propensity to perceive agency in ambiguous figures would make an individual believe that amulets are imbued with a supernatural essence. This cognitive bias, then is an ancient relic of

evolution that functioned to increase survival since it would have reinforced adaptations for vigilance in the face of potential threats.

Boyer (2001) expanded on this realization by claiming that religious concepts are minimally counter-intuitive, intentionally breaching some obvious expectations while simultaneously respecting others. Amulets are this cognitive unit—physical objects appearing to be not unlike the world we know but with counterintuitive effects like magic power. Balancing violation of expectations: whence the continued cultural transmission of amulet beliefs, made it memorable and moving across generations due to this transmissible special-vice specialization in religious concepts.

By contrasting "special agent rituals" and "special patient rituals" McCauley & Lawson (2002), we see how material objects come to be sacred. For example, the ceremonial consecration of amulets by high ranking monks which changes everyday objects into containers for sacred power. This is a theory of why the consecration influence of a monk matters so much when it comes to the efficacy of an amulet.

Evolutionary Perspectives on Religious Behavior

Complementing cognitive theory, evolutionary approaches shed light on the continued performance of religious behavior such as amulet veneration. Wilson (2002) suggested religion evolved as a group-level trait that increased cooperation and social cohesion. Psychological conflict within the internal group structure is restrained, and solidarity between the internal members of groups is enhanced through collective religious practices (the same as sacred objects)—symbiotically. Why do amulet traditions remain in place despite these modernizing forces, such as justification attrition?

According to costly signaling theory (Sosis 2003), the financial and ritual expenditures associated with the Thai amulet practices serve as credible demonstrations of piety but also commitment to society. The considerable investments collectors engage in and the prestige symbols of amulets bought are signs of a real religious attachment and a refined social class. The specific ritual must correctly honor amulets as symbols of imitative costs or behaviors that signal true commitment.

Evolutionary mismatch theories maintain that the psychological adaptations developed under pre-modern conditions still may be poorly calibrated to modern environments. Johnson and Bering (2006) postulate that beliefs in supernatural surveillance and punishment arose from a need to promote cooperative behavior in small-scale societies. Modern Thailand now requires different psychological tasks that occur within larger social contexts, similar to the reputation-based psychological mechanisms of amulets that connect people with invisible monitors in real communities.

Psychodynamic Interpretations and Attachment Theory

Psychodynamic approaches highlight the psychological functioning behind religious items such as an amulet. The "psychic icebergs" of religious acts, Freud (1927/1961) believed, were based on collective representations of individual psychological defense mechanisms, including as a response to experienced helplessness. Although his contention that religion is an illusion has been questioned, the notion of religion healing psychological vulnerability is definitely still alive. In this light, amulets are psychological devices to regulate the anxiety from a mysterious world.

Winnicott's (1953) notion of a transitional object is that amulets connect helplessness, internal to self and imagination, with external objects grounding a person in times of distress. This model relates to how amulets contribute to psychological homeostasis in distressing life scenarios, thereby validating the adolescent attachment objects.

This will be a particularly rich perspective to understand one's relationship with religious figures (monks, etc.) in Thai Buddhism from attachment theory. Kirkpatrick (2005) 's use of attachment theory suggests revered monks saturate relationship roles whereby psychological security and guidance are obtained when one is in a state of distress.

The suggest approach of this framework gives us an insight into the affective ties between lay and monastic figures, especially in a society such as Thailand where interdependent cultures are culturally significant.

Granqvist et al. Usually, two religious attachment paths have been characterised by Granqvist et al. (2010): compensation (religious connections in response to insecure face-to-face ties) and

alignment (reflections of human behavioral models early in life). Framework provides interpretation into the amulet/monk engagement that is strongly grounded in both biological individual perspective as well as an active culturally significant religious practice.

Historical Development of Amulet Practices in Thailand

It is important to note that Amulet practices in Thailand are not confined to Buddhism but trace their ancestry to ancient animistic and Brahmanical heritage. Pre-buddhist evidence of protective objects and talismans can be seen in the archaeological record from the region. Clay Buddha images from the Dvaravati period (6th to 13th centuries) indicate a development of portable devotional and protective amulets as clayslips were introduced for these.

Amulet practices in Thailand were developed far beyond Buddhism to also contain animist and Brahmanic roots from ancient times. Preventative objects and talismans were present in the region long before Buddhism, and archaeological evidence proves it. Find here Buddha images clay tablets of dvaravati period 6th -13th century E that are object of worship and protection on the move(functioning amulets) These early Buddhist amulets were almost always meditative Buddhas and their inscriptions were Pali on one end.

The period of Ayutthaya (14th-18th centuries) is considered as the expansion phase of amulet-related practices in which Thai kingdom reached zenith. Some amulet types also gained royal patronage, creating ideological links between kingly power and Buddhist sanctity that would serve to delegitimise opposition to royal ideology in future amulet histories.

Amulet production and the distribution system soared during the Rattanakosin period (1782–present). Amulets were more temple-specific and monk lineage-related in the later part of this period than previous; less so tied to royal workshops. The era of King Rama V (1868–1910) signals significant change as Thailand meet modern Western influences that strove to preserve traditional cultural. It was during this time that the first major echelons of amulet collecting circles started

taking shape among the urban elite, ushering in a metamorphosis of amulets from religious items to favoured collectible objects with aesthetic-historical content.

The variety of contemporary amulet practices is remarkable when considering its form, function and significance. The most common are Buddha images (Phra buddha), monk images (Phra khru), coins (riang) and yantra designs (yan) Materials go as far clay, metal or wooden as to revered local herbs, herbs sweets or bodily components from highreverend monks.

A number of the different sources which can have an effect on the perceived efficacy of an amulet relate to its sanctity, the purity of materials, the accuracy of consecration rituals and the imbibed faith over time.

Innovations in technologies have enabled these old ways to have new expressings that because of security are not open to the public, Amulet markets, online social media communities that discuss whether an amulet is true or not and digital platforms to interact with monks.

These innovations are remarkable evidence of the flexibility that religious traditions can have in responding to modernization, urbanization and globalization. Contemporary amuletic practices in the digital dimension widen and deepen their social-psychological functions, creating communities within virtual affinity around one share craft on these sacral objects.

The Role of Monks in Thai Society

Thai Buddhism and the monastic community (Sangha), which has developed across centuries — essentially i.e. it evolved as a result of already radically different political, social environment; core religious functions stayed intact. National, dominant religion in Sukhothai period (13th–15th centuries) by the emergence of Theravada Buddhism shaped the Thai Monasticism and practices overall. The Sangha went through this formative era and then partnered closely with the political authorities but remained autonomously religious.

The end of Ayutthaya era gradually found a solid structure of Sangha relations to the monarchy in later period. Kings as their "defenders of the faith" (Sasanupathamphok), and emperors supported a monastery with the money. The symbiosis between the religious institution of royal Buddhism enabled both material support and political legitimation of royal power.

The period of Rattanakosin saw major monastic reforms (especially during reigns of Rama IV [King Mongkut] 1851-1867 and Rama V [King Chulalongkorn] 1868–1910). Modernizing monarchs legislated administrative reforms that relocated the Sangha under royal supervision and legitimated it by way of the Sangha Administration Act of 1902 in a more nationally bolstered present Sangha.

As Laotian comments on secularization demonstrate, the monastic community continues to play an essential foundational social role in modern Thailand. The education (some part hinders at secular institutions, but the monks still wields some power way more or less) is one of the traditional roles (although healthcare and conflict resolution,[heavily reliant...but the original content is quite bad or broken] received little to none attention from secular institutions); At the other side of the equation is a fixed ordination (buat) that acts as a dynamism for large scale number of Thai men making Buddhist commitments and solving problems between lay with monastic

Western professionals in temple school, teacher and meditation program — for Western monks, a monk (sthavir) that also for carrying out secular education circus help. Their role is culturally focused on welfare needs—helping the underprivileged, responding to disaster responses and dealing with addictions as well as facilitation rural community development; mostly when there is a lack of public services.

Psychological Dimensions of Monastic Relationships

Monk-layperson relationships are played with complex psychology at its different dimensions. Monks make some laypeople extremely emotionally involved, they are there in the time of distress; they have emotional jump when he leaves or returns. It explains the strong feelings Thais have for particular monks and gives account of why they can become so psychologically traumatized after a beloved figure dies or falls into disrepute for misconduct.

Beyond Transference and Projection: With regard to monastic relationships, psychodynamic concepts provide some additional lenses upon which to view. As Laypeople may unconsciously transfer an unfinished psychological script onto Monks stemming from past parental figures. These projective mechanisms create intricate relational dynamics where monks are intermediaries in which the unconscious psychological content of the symbolic unconscious is translated to others.

In addition, the notion of “spiritual direction” sheds a psychological light on monastic relationship. Some monks indeed manage to sustain regular mentor-mentee relationships in which they assume members for the personal help they need to develop spiritually, beyond mere moral admonitions. These types of relationships are often characterized by scheduled meeting, practice recommendations for accountability, and consultation. These relationships can last decades, forging deep trust and discipleship between monks and their spiritual heirs.

Methodology: A Phenomenological Approach

Research Design

A hermeneutic phenomenological design was used in this study (i.e. examining the lived experiences and meanings participants construct with amulets and monks in their particular social-cultural worlds. This matched well with our research goal (to investigate the psychological roots of these somatic beliefs expressed through practices as they were lived by the participants, individually/collectively).

I think the phenomenological approach was particularly useful for this research, as it aimed at closely investigating lived experiences on an individual level taking into account the cultural and historical frames in which these dimensions unfold.

The methodological aspect is in line with this study's scope focusing on both individual psychological processes and their situatedness in broader social and cultural systems.

Participants and Sampling

To capture representation from all belief spectrum we used purposive sampling with amulet users, monk-dependent humans and the skeptics. It was driven by the intention that participants were context-specific and knew something that would add rich data towards the research questions. Participant criteria were people who used amulets themselves or were dependent upon monks for spiritual guidance as well as those who had different perception or opinion over these religious practices.

In-depth interviews were completed for 24 participants in the final sample representing a heterogeneous group of demography such as age, gender, SES and educational backgrounds. This diversity allowed the study to include a wider variety of subject positions. A survey was also conducted with 100 random pick individuals to identify quantitative data regarding the spread of amulet beliefs, and monk experiences.

Final sample size was guided by the concept of data saturation to avoid situational oversampling of themes in relation to belief systems and psychological functions. This is an approach that is consistent with qualitative research and as such it is generally considered sufficient for phenomenological studies especially when trying to get at depth and complexity of personal experiences in this demographic range.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-Structured Interviews

Main instrument for data collection was semi-structured interviews to investigate participants' practices and beliefs about amulets as well as monks. Drawing from the theoretical frameworks presented in the literature review (Attachment theory and meaning-making processes), interview questions were designed to maintain congruence with the interview goals.

One interview took from approximately 20 to 50 minutes with duration adjusted per participants to have a good comfort and word expression. Being semi-structured, it gave room for probes and deeper inquiry around emerging themes based on participants' responses. Open-ended permitted richer

story, rather than leading to binary (yes/no) answers that could capture nuances of participants' experiences.

Field Observations

Field data collected through interviews alone did not account for the social or cultural field in which an amulet is used and the dynamics within said monastic setting so it was combined. Data were also collected from temple, amulet markets and religious events and observed in the virtual spaces like online amulet marketplaces. This multiplicity of observational contexts mimicked the study's deliberate engagement with both traditional and a range of contemporary (forms).

The researcher did not participate nor influence the phenomena observed by simply recording behaviors, interactions and rituals that were happening—without getting involved. Finding of Field Notes written in the first person recorded both verbal and non-verbal indicators along with salient events or actions involving psychological and social aspects of these religious practices. Roses

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and was supported by the Insight7 analytical framework. This approach focused on understanding participants' lived experiences through a systematic process of interpretation and meaning-making. The analysis proceeded through several distinct phases:

1. **Reading and reviewing transcripts:** Each interview transcript was read multiple times to develop familiarity with the content and overall narrative structure.
2. **Initial note-taking:** Preliminary notes were made, identifying significant statements and initial impressions about the content.
3. **Developing emerging patterns:** Conceptual notes were organized into emergent themes that captured the psychological essence of participants' experiences.

4. **Identifying connections between patterns:** Relationships between emerging themes were identified, developing a coherent structure that reflected the interrelated nature of participants' experiences.
5. **Moving to the next case:** This process was repeated for each participant's data, maintaining an idiographic focus on individual experiences before developing broader patterns.
6. **Finding general dynamics across cases:** Finally, patterns across different participants were identified, developing a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social dimensions of amulet beliefs and monastic dependence.

The Insight7 software facilitated this analytical process by providing tools for systematic coding, thematic development, and visualization of conceptual relationships. This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in participants' accounts while developing meaningful interpretations that addressed the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

This research abided by the ethical standards that require all participants to be respected, regarded as human beings, and provide no personal information without consent. Participants all received a study protocol, purpose and benefits as well as risks explanation prior to getting involved. Informed consent was obtained from all participants which stated the voluntariness of their participation and the fact that they can withdraw at any time without any repercussions.

Throughout the research, utmost confidentiality was maintained. No identification information was retained in transcripts or reports and pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of participants.

Access to the Data was limited to the research team and the Data was stored in Secure Institutional Repository. Independent ethics review board approval was obtained prior to data collection to ensure adherence with the local and professional standards for research involving human subjects.

Because of the cultural nature of religious beliefs among the target group, the researcher interviewed all the participants with cultural respect and sensitivity. With regards to the language to be used or

questions asked, great thoughtfulness was given so as not to come off as judgmental or disrespectful of any participant's religious dogmas whether they were a believer or not an atheist.

Reliability and Credibility

Multiple approaches are used to increase trustworthiness and credibility in the research. Data triangulation entailed multiple data sources such including interview, observation and document together to cross-examine findings and enrichment our understanding of the phenomenon.

Peer checking was used to provide members feedback on the interviews and early analyses, so that the transcripts were checked with participants to ensure appropriate accuracy/congruence with visits.

Peer debriefing also offered inductive validity, through the exchange of ideas with peers based on regular discussions that enabled assumptions and interpretations to be challenged, refined. Throughout this process, the researcher was reflexive and kept a reflective journal of reflections on personal thoughts, biases, and understandings. Because the research topic was inherently culturally embedded this practice facilitated a higher degree of transparency and self-reflexivity.

Because the qualitative nature of the study necessarily reflects an element of subjectivity, these methodological strategies enhanced the credibility and rigor of the results by providing a window into what participants experienced while supporting meaningful theorising.

Results: Beliefs, Experiences, and Social Functions

Quantitative Findings: Prevalence of Beliefs

In a survey of 100 Thai Buddhists, 93% believe that sacred objects (วัตถุมงคล) really work and 58% claim they have had first hand amulet (เครื่องราง). A wide discrepancy between what is believed in general and also reports of personal experience suggest that cultural transmission and social reinforcement can support vague claims even when direct experiential proof is sorely lacking.

The extensive incidence of such belief (93%) shows that for sacred objects is still so culturally salient in the everyday Buddhist life-world in modern Thailand. They are tangible links to spiritual beings and the claimed protection and benefits they deliver is cross-cutting demographically. The results have implications that sacred object beliefs continue mainlining to be embedded deeply in contemporary Thai Buddhist life-serving as significant markers of religious identity/affiliation.

Qualitative Themes: Psychological Functions and Social Roles

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed several key themes addressing the research questions. These themes illuminate the psychological underpinnings of amulet beliefs and monastic dependence, demonstrating their complex functions within Thai society.

Psychological Anchoring and Sacred Amulets

Participants who had trust in the efficacy of sacred amulets often described how amulets lend psychological reassurances and solace for the soul. This theme cascades into multiple components: In Turbulent Times the ability to Hope and Believe, Paracelsian Psychological Aid into Instability Exit, Protection From Invisible Menaces, Cultural Compact.

A participant (36-year-old male) shared, "Amulets provide hope and confidence in hard times as explained by amulet:

Hopeful emblem suggests survival in pitfalls inspired by a 36 old male traipsing subject.

AMULETS: SILVER BITCHES FOR HOPE AND CONFIDENCE IN HARD TIMES. Boosts confidence morale when problem signs are present. Amulets belief is just a psychological tactics to indicate guts and stamina towards risk, most special when driving But still, I am sticking a nonstick

pan on it. They are the great anchor of my mental state to decrease anxiety and give you an emotional strength.

The quote above illustrates how amulets use as a psychological coping mechanism for dealing with anxiety and enhancing resilience. Having the actual sacred objects in person invokes physical presence, where one knows he or she is immediately surrounded with what are believed to be available protective forces, something not possible through belief only.

Participants mentioned that amulets offer psychological help during times of distress or transition. Among Participants was a 42-years-old female business woman who said that "In the economic crisis, my business got a lot of difficulties to deal with and "...“Auditing my fortune left New Year to transmit voice Messages.

My biz has been experiencing a near extinction period as of late due to the economic crisis. I gave myself the strength to fight sometimes because I was holding onto Luang Pu Tuad amulet. It allowed me to be emotionally stable during an uncertain time, either by some divine intervention or just psychological effect.

In conclusion, this accounts shows the function of amulets as a stability anchor during times of extreme uncertainty bringing consistency and comfort in an unfamiliar world. The divide between “divine intervention” and "psychological effect" elicits certainty in the presenter about her amulet efficacy, while being aware of multiple modes of interpretation.

Non-Believers' Perspectives: Rationality and Alternative Worldviews

The study also explored perspectives of individuals who do not believe in the efficacy of amulets or depend on monks for guidance. These participants often emphasized rationality, scientific thinking, and alternative philosophical frameworks. A 29-year-old male engineer expressed:

"I respect others' beliefs in amulets but personally rely on logical thinking and scientific explanations. I see amulets as cultural artifacts with historical significance rather than supernatural objects. This perspective comes from my education and exposure to different worldviews."

This statement reflects how educational background and exposure to alternative epistemological frameworks shape individuals' engagement with traditional religious practices. Rather than dismissing amulets entirely, this participant reinterprets them as culturally significant objects without supernatural properties, demonstrating how non-believers often navigate traditional practices within predominantly Buddhist social contexts.

Non-believers also described how they respect these traditions as cultural heritage while maintaining psychological distance from supernatural claims. A 33-year-old female teacher noted:

"Although I don't believe in supernatural properties of amulets, I appreciate their artistic value and cultural significance. They represent important aspects of Thai heritage that should be preserved, even as society becomes more scientifically oriented."

This perspective highlights how individuals may value traditional practices for their cultural significance while rejecting supernatural interpretations. The emphasis on preservation suggests that even non-believers recognize the social importance of these traditions beyond their literal religious meanings.

Monks as Counselors: Psychological and Spiritual Support

Participants frequently described how monks function as informal counselors who provide psychological support during personal difficulties. This theme encompasses several dimensions: Guidance during Life Transitions, Emotional Support during Distress, and Integration of Spiritual and Practical Advice.

A 51-year-old female participant described seeking monastic counsel during a family crisis:

"When my son was struggling with addiction, I consulted Luang Phor at our local temple. His advice combined Buddhist principles with practical steps for helping my son. His compassionate listening and guidance gave me strength to face the situation. The meditation techniques he suggested helped manage my anxiety during this difficult period."

This account demonstrates how monks integrate religious frameworks with practical guidance, creating distinctive approaches to addressing psychological distress. The combination of compassionate listening, meditation instruction, and practical advice represents a holistic approach

to support that differs from professional psychotherapy while providing culturally congruent assistance.

Participants also described how monks help them make meaning of difficult experiences by situating personal challenges within Buddhist philosophical frameworks. A 47-year-old male civil servant explained:

"After losing my wife to cancer, I struggled with grief and confusion. The abbot helped me understand suffering through Buddhist teachings on impermanence. This perspective didn't eliminate my pain but helped me accept it as part of life's nature. His guidance provided a framework for making sense of my loss."

This statement illustrates how monks help individuals interpret personal experiences through religious frameworks that provide coherence and meaning. By situating individual suffering within broader philosophical contexts, monks help people develop narrative frameworks that facilitate psychological integration of challenging experiences.

Social Functions: Community Cohesion and Collective Identity

Beyond individual psychological functions, participants described how amulets and monks contribute to social cohesion and collective identity. This theme includes dimensions of Shared Beliefs and Values, Community Rituals and Practices, and Intergenerational Connections.

A 62-year-old female retiree explained how amulet exchange strengthens community bonds:

"In our village, amulets are often exchanged during important ceremonies or as gifts between families. These exchanges strengthen community relationships and reinforce our shared Buddhist identity. When young people leave for the city, we give them amulets as connections to their hometown and community."

This account demonstrates how amulets function as material symbols of community membership and shared values. Their exchange creates social bonds while reinforcing collective religious identity. The practice of giving amulets to those leaving the community illustrates how these objects maintain connections across geographical distances, linking individuals to their cultural and community origins.

Participants also described how monks facilitate community cohesion through organizing collective rituals and mediating social conflicts. A 56-year-old male community leader noted:

"Our temple abbot resolves disputes between families and coordinates community projects. During the annual ceremony, everyone participates regardless of social status or wealth. These activities strengthen community bonds and reinforce shared values despite other differences."

This statement highlights monks' roles in community integration and conflict resolution. By organizing inclusive rituals and mediating disputes, monks create spaces for reinforcing collective identity and resolving social tensions. These functions extend beyond individual psychological support to address community-level social cohesion.

Adaptation and Resilience: Traditional Practices in Modern Contexts

The final theme addresses how amulet beliefs and monastic dependencies adapt to contemporary contexts, including technological changes, urbanization, and globalization. This theme encompasses Digital Transformations, Generational Differences, and Integration with Modern Science and Medicine.

A 27-year-old male university student described engaging with Buddhist practices through digital platforms:

"I follow several respected monks on social media and participate in online discussion groups about Buddhist teachings. I've purchased amulets through authenticated online markets. These digital platforms make traditional practices more accessible for young people like me who live in urban areas far from their hometown temples."

This account demonstrates how digital technologies create new channels for accessing traditional religious resources, enabling continued engagement despite geographical displacement or time constraints. Rather than replacing traditional practices, digital platforms extend their reach and accessibility, particularly for younger or urbanized populations.

Participants also described how traditional practices integrate with modern approaches to health and well-being. A 39-year-old female healthcare worker explained:

"I see no contradiction between modern medicine and traditional practices. When my mother was ill, we consulted doctors for treatment while also receiving blessings from monks and keeping a protective amulet near her bed. These approaches address different aspects of healing—physical, psychological, and spiritual."

This statement reflects sophisticated navigation of multiple explanatory frameworks rather than simplistic either/or choices between tradition and modernity. By recognizing different practices as addressing complementary dimensions of human experience, individuals integrate traditional and contemporary approaches to create comprehensive systems for addressing life challenges.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings creates a comprehensive picture of amulet beliefs and monastic dependencies in contemporary Thailand. The quantitative data demonstrates the continued prevalence of these beliefs across the population, with 93% of survey respondents expressing belief in sacred objects despite modernization influences. The qualitative findings illuminate the psychological mechanisms that sustain these beliefs, revealing their functions as resources for anxiety reduction, meaning-making, and social cohesion.

The quantitative finding that 58% of participants report personal experiences with amulets, despite 93% expressing belief, suggests that direct experience is not necessary for maintaining these beliefs. The qualitative data helps explain this disparity by revealing how cultural transmission, social reinforcement, and narrative traditions sustain beliefs beyond individual experience. Participants described learning about amulets through family stories, community traditions, and media accounts, demonstrating how these beliefs are embedded within broader cultural systems that maintain their plausibility and significance.

Discussion: Psychological Mechanisms and Cultural Adaptations

Amulets as Anxiety Reduction Mechanisms

The findings confirm that amulets function as powerful anxiety reduction mechanisms, providing psychological security during periods of uncertainty. This function aligns with Kay et al.'s (2010) research demonstrating how perceived lack of control increases reliance on external systems promising order and predictability. Within this framework, amulets symbolize supernatural

protective forces, offering a compensatory sense of control even when external circumstances remain unchanged.

Langer's (1975) concept of the "illusion of control" provides further insight into the psychological function of amulets. This theory explains how people tend to overestimate their influence over outcomes, particularly in uncertain situations. Amulets facilitate this process by symbolizing influence over uncontrollable circumstances, reducing feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. This psychological mechanism operates regardless of whether amulets possess actual supernatural efficacy, explaining their continued value even for individuals who express some skepticism about their literal powers.

The embodied dimension of amulet practices—physically wearing or carrying sacred objects—strengthens their psychological impact through multisensory experiences. This finding aligns with Csordas's (1990) research on embodied religion, which emphasizes how physical engagement with religious objects creates more powerful psychological effects than abstract beliefs alone. The tactile reassurance of touching an amulet during stressful situations provides immediate comfort that activates multiple sensory pathways, potentially triggering neurobiological responses associated with security and reduced anxiety.

Meaning-Making and Narrative Integration

Amulets and monks play crucial roles in psychological meaning-making processes, helping individuals interpret random events within structured frameworks. This function aligns with Park's (2010) research on meaning-making and psychological well-being, which demonstrates how coherent interpretive frameworks contribute to psychological adjustment following challenging experiences. Narratives surrounding amulets' origins, powers, and miraculous interventions provide ready-made explanations for life's uncertainties, creating psychological coherence amid apparently random occurrences.

The study findings indicate that monks facilitate meaning-making by helping individuals situate personal experiences within Buddhist philosophical frameworks. Concepts such as impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anatta) provide interpretive resources for understanding challenging experiences. This process aligns with narrative identity theories suggesting that individuals construct meaningful life stories by integrating personal experiences into culturally

available frameworks. By offering religious interpretations of personal challenges, monks help individuals develop coherent narratives that facilitate psychological integration and resilience.

Religious attributions play an important role in reinforcing belief systems even when events might challenge their validity. When negative events occur despite amulet protection, believers often adapt their explanations—citing insufficient faith, improper ritual observance, or opposing supernatural forces—rather than abandoning their belief systems. These attribution patterns align with Spilka et al.'s (1985) research on religious attributions, demonstrating how belief systems maintain psychological coherence by accommodating apparently contradictory evidence.

Attachment Dynamics and Spiritual Relationships

The findings confirm that monks function as attachment figures who provide psychological security and guidance during periods of distress. This pattern aligns with Kirkpatrick's (2005) application of attachment theory to religious relationships, suggesting that respected religious figures fulfill attachment functions similar to primary caregivers. Participants described seeking monks' presence during difficult times, experiencing emotional responses to separation, and deriving security from these relationships—all characteristic features of attachment bonds.

The study revealed distinct attachment styles in monk-layperson relationships. Some participants demonstrated secure attachment patterns characterized by balanced engagement and healthy autonomy. Others exhibited anxious attachment styles with excessive dependency or idealization of specific monks. Granqvist et al.'s (2010) distinction between compensation and correspondence pathways to religious attachment helps explain these variations. Individuals with secure early attachments often develop similarly balanced relationships with religious figures (correspondence), while those with insecure histories may seek compensatory security through idealized religious relationships.

Physical proximity plays an important role in strengthening attachment bonds with monks. Blessing rituals involving physical contact, visual distinctiveness created by saffron robes, and formalized behaviors during interactions all contribute to powerful multisensory experiences that reinforce monks' special status. These embodied dimensions of monastic interactions create stronger

psychological impacts than would be achieved through abstract teachings alone, explaining the continued importance of in-person interactions despite increasing digital communication options.

Social Capital and Cultural Identity

The findings demonstrate that amulets and monks generate significant social capital, creating networks of trust and reciprocity that benefit both individuals and communities. This function aligns with Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. By establishing shared religious practices and moral frameworks, monks create generalized trust that reduces transaction costs in social exchanges and facilitates collective action.

Amulets function as markers of cultural identity, particularly amid pressures from globalization and cultural homogenization. This finding aligns with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, which suggests that group memberships constitute significant aspects of personal identity. By maintaining distinctive religious practices that differ from other traditions, Thai Buddhists reinforce cultural boundaries and collective identity. The persistence of amulet traditions despite modernization influences may partially reflect their function as symbolic resources for maintaining distinctive cultural identity amid globalizing pressures.

The commodification of amulets creates tension between traditional religious values and contemporary market forces. This finding reflects broader patterns of religious adaptation to modern economic systems, where sacred objects increasingly function as commodities subject to market valuation while maintaining religious significance. This dual nature creates ongoing negotiations between religious authenticity and economic value, particularly evident in debates surrounding exceptionally valuable amulets that simultaneously function as religious objects, status symbols, and investment assets.

Digital Transformation and Religious Innovation

The findings reveal significant digital transformations of traditional religious practices, including online amulet markets, social media communities discussing amulet authenticity, and digital platforms for connecting with monks. These adaptations demonstrate the remarkable flexibility of religious traditions in response to technological change, creating hybrid forms that combine

elements from both religious traditions and digital cultures. This pattern aligns with Hjarvard's (2008) concept of "mediatization," which examines how media technologies transform religious practices by creating new formats, audiences, and participation modes.

Digital platforms create new possibilities for maintaining religious engagement despite geographical displacement or time constraints. Young urban Thais described following monks on social media, participating in online discussion groups, and purchasing authenticated amulets through digital marketplaces. Rather than replacing traditional practices, these digital adaptations extend their reach and accessibility, particularly for populations that might otherwise lose connection to religious traditions due to urban migration or modern work schedules.

The development of authentication technologies represents another innovative adaptation to contemporary challenges. Concerns about counterfeit amulets have stimulated the development of sophisticated verification systems, including chemical composition analysis, laser scanning, and expert certification processes. These technological innovations simultaneously address practical concerns about authenticity while reinforcing the perceived value of genuine amulets, demonstrating how traditional practices adapt to contemporary challenges while maintaining core religious functions.

Conclusion: Implications and Future Directions

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several significant theoretical contributions to understanding the psychological dimensions of religious practices. First, it demonstrates the value of applying psychological theories to non-Western religious traditions, developing more culturally diverse understandings of how religious beliefs and practices function as psychological resources. By examining Thai Buddhist practices through multiple theoretical lenses—cognitive, evolutionary, psychodynamic, and attachment-based—the research reveals the complex psychological mechanisms that sustain these traditions.

Second, the study advances understanding of how material objects acquire psychological significance through cultural processes. The findings reveal how amulets function simultaneously as religious artifacts, psychological tools, social signals, and cultural symbols. This

multidimensional understanding moves beyond simplistic characterizations of amulet veneration as mere superstition, revealing the sophisticated psychological and social functions these objects serve within Thai cultural frameworks.

Third, the research contributes to understanding how religious authorities function as attachment figures and counselors. The findings demonstrate how monks provide culturally integrated forms of psychological support that complement formal mental health services. This understanding suggests possibilities for developing culturally sensitive mental health approaches that recognize and incorporate traditional support systems rather than viewing them as competitors or obstacles to professional care.

Practical Implications

Results have practical implications for numerous settings. The research offers mental health counselors in Thailand culturally bound understandings regarding how religious beliefs impact psychological processes. Understanding the important psychological roles that amulets and monks have will help counselors create effective therapies that respect traditional practices instead of dismissing or criticizing them.

Religious leaders can interpret the findings as indicating that there might be intact latent needs met by some traditional practices, leading toward more strategic work with community needs.

Mapping out how monks are currently providing informal counseling services could serve as a precursor to more systematic training in basic psychological first aid, which would increase their effectiveness while maintaining their spiritual responsibilities.

In the context of educational institutions, conducting fieldwork could be beneficial in understanding the significance of religious traditions in identity formation and psychological development. This information can be used to design curricular approaches that effectively balance traditional knowledge with contemporary understanding in fields such as psychology, healthcare, or social services, all areas inherently containing cultural competence, i.e., integral if you are an effective communitarian therapist.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

When evaluating the study's conclusions, a number of limitations should be taken into account. The findings of this qualitative research on Thai Buddhism might not apply to other cultural or religious contexts unless they are appropriately modified. Because self-reported experiences are used, results are subjective and do not represent objective assessments of amulet effectiveness or psychological effects. Furthermore, rather of documenting how these attitudes and behaviors change throughout the course of a person's life or over time, the cross-sectional approach records participants' viewpoints at a specific moment in time.

These limitations might be addressed in future studies in a number of ways. Studies using a longitudinal design might monitor how interest in amulets and monks evolves over time or in reaction to significant life events. Comparative research might look at comparable behaviors in other Theravada Buddhist nations, finding both culturally unique adaptations and shared psychological underpinnings. By combining psychological viewpoints with anthropological, historical, and religious studies methodologies, interdisciplinary partnerships might provide more thorough comprehensions of these intricate cultural occurrences.

Experimental research could measure changes in anxiety, attentiveness, or physiological stress reactions to examine the immediate psychological consequences of amulet use or monastery counseling. Such studies would provide quantitative assessments of psychological processes to supplement the qualitative findings, shedding further light on the ways in which these customs affect wellbeing.

Concluding Reflections

This research deconstructs simplistic oppositions between tradition/modernity, superstition/rationality, or religion/psychology. Results show how traditional Buddhist practices in contemporary Thailand still play significant roles on psychological and social levels, modifying with the time but still echoing cultural values. When you look at these practices, they are not going away because of modern pressures but show prosperous adaptability and re-inhabitation over time.

The significant durability of amulets and monks to this day in Thai society also reflects the savvy way in which these cultural features have addressed some of our most elemental needs (security, belonging, meaning, and self-understanding). These traditional practices offer empirically grounded symbols of security, ways to make sense of suffering, and communities around shared norms, providing psychological competencies that enhance, rather than compete with, modern models of well-being.

Exploring these psychological underpinnings in no way detracts from the religious nature of such practices but instead illuminates multi-tiered significance. The fact that Thai Buddhism has stayed so vibrant and active within such a fast-changing society is an example of how religious practices can adapt without losing their heritage in this globalized world.

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