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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

Belief in amulets and monks is deeply rooted in Thai culture and daily life, often serving as psychological tools to cope with uncertainty and stress. Although widespread, psychological studies on the underlying mechanisms of such beliefs remain scarce. This study aims to explore personal and social well-being, values, and attitudes behind these beliefs in the Thai sociocultural context, including both believers and non-believers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 participants and expanded via purposive sampling. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Insight7 were used to uncover deeper meanings. Findings indicate that psychological needs, such as the desire for reassurance, significantly influence belief in amulets. Participants showed a negotiation between traditional Buddhist values and modern societal demands, with amulets and monks acting as coping mechanisms. The study reveals complex links between psychology, religion, and culture, offering insights into belief systems across Southeast Asia.

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

Introduction

The belief in sacred amulets and the role of Buddhist monks are deeply embedded in Thai culture and everyday life. These factors act as psychological mechanisms to relieve anxiety, create importance and promote collective identity. Despite the rapid modernization of Thailand, such beliefs remain very stubborn. Although amulets act as material protective objects in times of uncertainty, monks play spiritual and social leadership roles, especially in rural communities where state services are limited. Their roles extend beyond religious rituals to include conflict institutions, education and humanitarian engagement. Despite their cultural significance, there was little research into the psychological mechanisms on which these beliefs are based. Most existing research focuses on historical, sociopolitical, or cultural aspects, overlooking the ways in which psychological theory

provides deeper insight into the sustainability and functioning of these practices. Modern psychological frameworks such as binding theory, cognitive dissonance, and semantic processes provide valuable perspectives that have yet to be properly applied to these Thai Buddhist

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phenomena. Furthermore, current research is often based on the western paradigm and may not be consistent with Thai cultural and spiritual contexts. The impact of globalization, technological changes, and marketing of sacred objects such as amulets was also not fully examined. Comparative studies of other Teravada Buddhist countries with similar practices are similarly lacking. Given these gaps, this study seeks to analyze the psychological mechanisms of faith in sacred amulets and the role of monks in today's Thai society. Based on 24 incoming interviews and surveys with 100 participants (93% reported beliefs about sacred objects), this study aims to explain how these practices can be described as psychological tools to address uncertainty and everyday challenges.

Research Questions and Objectives

This study seeks to address the gaps in previous research by examining the belief-based psychological processes of sacred objects and monks within Thai culture. The aim is to reveal cognitive and emotional factors that ensure that individuals consider sacred objects both protective or happy, and include the skeptic perspective at the same time, in order to ensure a more comprehensive understanding. This study highlights the role of monks as spiritual leaders and healers, and examines how both monks and sacred objects function in the broader social and cultural systems of Thailand. Instead of treating religious beliefs purely personally, research sees it as both a psychological resource and as a public cultural practice. This study examines how individuals emotionally avoid and support through monks, and uncover mechanisms of self-sufficiency in both spiritual and cultural aspects. The focus lies in the interaction between individual psychological needs and cultural systems, placing religious beliefs as a means of navigation of uncertainty and instability in personal and social life.

Literature Review

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: 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

Amulet practices in Thailand are rooted not only in Buddhism but also in pre-Buddhist animistic and Brahmanic traditions. Archaeological evidence, such as clay Buddha images from the Dvaravati period (6th–13th centuries), suggests the early development of portable devotional and protective objects. These amulets were often inscribed in Pali and depicted meditative Buddha figures (Phra, 2010).

During the Ayutthaya period (14th–18th centuries), amulet practices expanded significantly. Some gained royal patronage, linking religious sanctity with royal authority. In the Rattanakosin era (1782–present), amulet production became more localized to specific temples and monks, with growing urban interest during King Rama V's reign. This era marked a shift toward viewing amulets not only as religious items but also as collectible cultural artifacts (Bowie, 2014).

Today, Thai amulets vary widely in form and material ranging from Buddha and monk images to sacred herbs and yantras. Their perceived power depends on sanctity, ritual purity, and faith. Technological innovations, such as online markets and virtual communities, have transformed amulet culture, enabling its relevance in a globalized and digital age (Mackenzie, 2007).

The Role of Monks in Thai Society

Thai Buddhism and the monastic community (Sangha) have evolved over centuries, adapting to changing political and social contexts while preserving their core religious functions. Since the Sukhothai period (13th–15th centuries), Theravāda Buddhism became the national religion, shaping Thai monastic traditions. During Ayutthaya, the Sangha developed a structured relationship with the monarchy, where kings were seen as "defenders of the faith" (Sāsanupathambhōk), offering financial support in exchange for religious legitimacy.

In the Rattanakosin era, significant reforms occurred under Kings Rama IV and Rama V, including the Sangha Administration Act of 1902, which placed the Sangha under royal supervision. Despite modernization and partial secularization, the Sangha remains integral in Thai society, particularly in education, spiritual guidance, and social welfare—especially in rural areas with limited public services. Ordination continues to play a vital role in social integration for Thai men. Today, monks are also involved in community development, disaster relief, and rehabilitation services, showing their adaptability in serving both religious and civic functions (Ishii, 1986; Keyes, 1989).

Psychological Dimensions of Monastic Relationships

The relationship between monks and laypeople reflects complex psychological mechanisms across multiple dimensions. Some monks exert deep emotional influence over devotees, especially during times of distress. When such monks disrobe or pass away, followers often experience intense grief or psychological disruption. This can be explained by psychodynamic theory, which suggests that laypeople may unconsciously transfer unresolved emotional scripts from parental relationships onto monks. These transference and projection mechanisms turn monks into intermediaries who mediate and reflect unconscious psychological content (Csordas, 2002). Furthermore, the concept of spiritual direction sheds light on how monks function as long-term guides in a mentee-mentor relationship. These relationships often involve consistent meetings, personal practice recommendations, and ongoing consultations. They may continue for decades, fostering deep trust and discipleship between monks and their spiritual followers (Granqvist et al., 2010).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore participants' lived experiences and the meanings they associate with amulets and monks within their socio-cultural contexts. This method aligned well with the research objective of uncovering the psychological foundations of these embodied beliefs as expressed in everyday practices, both individually and collectively. The phenomenological framework was particularly appropriate for examining personal experiences while considering the cultural and historical contexts in which they occur. Methodologically, this approach supported the study's focus on individual psychological processes embedded within broader social and cultural systems.

Participants and Sampling

To present a full spectrum of beliefs, we selected participants who used amulets based on the monks for mental support or skeptical views using target samples. Participants were selected for context-specific experiences related to the study questions. The final sample consisted of 24 people from different backgrounds (age, gender, socioeconomic status and education) to ensure different perspectives. Additionally, a survey of 100 randomly selected people provided quantitative insight into the prevalence of amulet beliefs and monk-related experiences. The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation based on qualitative research criteria and was sufficient to grasp the depth and complexity of living experiences in phenomenological examinations.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-Structured Interviews: The main method was a semi-structured interview focused on the beliefs and practices of participants in relation to amulets and monks. The questions were consistent with theoretical frameworks such as attachment theory and semantic processes. The interview lasted 20-50 minutes, allowing participants to have flexibility and comfort. The open format allows for deeper examinations and a collection of subtle personal stories.

Field Observations: To complement the interviews, outdoor observations at the temple, amorphous markets, religious events, and an online platform were conducted. This allowed a context-related understanding of how amulet-monastery interactions work in both traditional and modern environments. The researchers observed oral and nonverbal behaviors without interference or records. Field notes documented the important psychological and social dynamics of practice.

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 study is listed in Ethical Guidelines for Ensuring the Rights, Dignity and Confidentiality of Participants. All participants received information regarding the study's purpose, benefits, risks, and right to withdraw at any time. A written declaration of consent has been obtained. We used pseudonyms to protect our identity, and the identification data was not published in transcripts or reports. The data was certainly stored and accessed by the research team. Ethical approval was given by an independent review board prior to data collection. In light of the cultural and religious sensibility of the topic, the interviews were conducted with respect and attention. Language and questions were carefully developed to avoid judgment and meet both believers and unbelievers.

Results

Prevalence of Beliefs

In a survey of 100 Thai Buddhists, 93% believe that sacred objects really work and 58% claim they have had firsthand amulet. 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.

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 believed in the sacred power of amulets often described them as sources of psychological reassurance and spiritual solace during difficult times. This central theme unfolded into several subcomponents: the ability to hope and believe amid uncertainty, the use of amulets as emotional support during crises, protection from unseen threats, and their role as a form of cultural compact.

A 36-year-old male participant shared:

“...Amulets give me hope and confidence during tough times. They are symbols of survival through the worst. Amulets are like psychological armor that help me face risks, especially while driving. They reduce my anxiety and give me emotional stability...”

This quote highlights how amulets function as psychological tools to manage anxiety and strengthen emotional resilience. Having a sacred object physically present creates a tangible sense of protection, something that cannot be achieved through belief alone.

Several participants indicated that amulets provide emotional support during periods of distress or transition. For instance, a 42-year-old female business owner stated:

“...During the economic crisis, my business almost collapsed. I gave myself the strength to keep going by carrying a Luang Pu Tuad amulet. It helped me remain emotionally stable, whether it was divine intervention or just psychological it worked...”

These accounts demonstrate the function of amulets as stability anchors during periods of intense uncertainty. They offer consistency and comfort in unfamiliar or threatening situations. Importantly, the participants recognized both spiritual and psychological interpretations of the amulets' effects, showing a nuanced understanding that blends religious belief with internal emotional support.

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

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. (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 (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 (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 (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. (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. (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 (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 (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

This study presents theoretical important findings that contribute to the expansion of knowledge through religious psychology, especially in non-Western contexts where research in this field remains limited. The research uses a variety of psychological frameworks, including cognitive theory, attachment theory, evolutionary theory, and psychoanalysis, to explain psychological mechanisms based on the religious practices of Thai people. They are understood as psychological tools to communicate common beliefs and improve mental stability as social symbols that connect with cultural media, past, present and future belief systems. Monks act as emotional anchors, consultants and life guides in a way that is deeply integrated into Thai cultural practices. This role does not contradict or improve the modern psychological health

system, but it improves the diversity of mental health options that are consistent with the context of the community. Psychologists and consultants should be aware of the role of playing sacred objects and monks in the influence of recipient mental processes in order to design therapeutic approaches that respect traditional beliefs. Furthermore, this study shows opportunities to promote the role of monks by providing training in basic skills for mental health care and simultaneously maintaining religious identity. This improves the ability to provide psychological support at the community level and effectively conclude modern psychological health practices with traditional religious approaches. Field research also demonstrates the potential for religion in the design of individual identity and psychological development. These findings can inform curriculum design in educational institutions, particularly in areas such as psychology, medicine, and social work, improve cultural understanding, and promote professionals who influence interpretation and address community contexts.

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