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The Commercialization of Amulet in the Chinese Market Based on Buddhism: Practical Theory Approach

ลีเจิง ซุน และ พิม ชามาร่า ยารปิโรม

Lisheng Sun and Pim Samara Yarapirom

หลักสูตรศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาและวัฒนธรรม มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์

Master of Arts in Chinese Language and Culture, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand

E-mail: pimdejong2517@gmail.com

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งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความเหมือนและความแตกต่างของความหมายเชิงสัญลักษณ์ของพระเครื่องไทยในสังคมไทยและจีน ศึกษาความหมายทางศาสนา บทบาททางสังคม และปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความนิยมของพระเครื่องไทยในตลาดจีน และพฤติกรรมการบริโภคพระเครื่องไทยของผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียในตลาดจีนสมัยใหม่ การวิจัยนี้ใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญจำนวน 25 คน ซึ่งคัดเลือกด้วยวิธีการแบบเจาะจง ประกอบด้วย ผู้บริโภค 15 คน ผู้ประกอบการ 5 คน และผู้ผลิตพระเครื่อง 5 คน เครื่องมือและวิธีการเก็บข้อมูล ได้แก่ การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การสังเกตการณ์แบบไม่มีส่วนร่วมในสถานประกอบการพระเครื่อง และการวิเคราะห์เอกสาร วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา การตีความเชิงชาติพันธุ์วรรณา การเรียบเรียงเชิงประวัติศาสตร์ และการตรวจสอบข้อมูลแบบสามเส้า ผลการวิจัยพบว่า พระเครื่องไทยในบริบทไทยมีความหมายเชื่อมโยงกับความศรัทธา การคุ้มครองทางจิตวิญญาณ การสร้างบุญ และอำนาจทางศาสนาของพระสงฆ์ ขณะที่ในบริบทจีน พระเครื่องไทยได้รับการตีความใหม่เป็นทั้งวัตถุศักดิ์สิทธิ์ เครื่องประดับ แหล่งยึดเหนี่ยวทางจิตใจ สินค้าทางวัฒนธรรม และสัญลักษณ์แสดงอัตลักษณ์ส่วนบุคคล ความนิยมดังกล่าวได้รับอิทธิพลจากสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ พาณิชย์อิเล็กทรอนิกส์ข้ามพรมแดน อิทธิพลของคนดัง และการตลาดเชิงออกแบบ นอกจากนี้ ตลาดยังมีการแบ่งกลุ่มผู้บริโภคอย่างชัดเจน ได้แก่ นักสะสมระดับสูง ผู้บริโภครุ่นใหม่ ผู้บริโภคเชิงประโยชน์ และผู้สนใจวัฒนธรรม อย่างไรก็ตาม การขยายตัวเชิงพาณิชย์ก่อให้เกิดความกังวลเรื่องสินค้าปลอม การเก็งราคา การกล่าวอ้างเกินจริง และการลดทอนความศักดิ์สิทธิ์ของพระเครื่อง งานวิจัยสรุปว่า การเติบโตของพระเครื่องไทยในตลาดจีนเป็นกระบวนการปรับเปลี่ยนสัญลักษณ์ทางศาสนาในบริบทข้ามวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งสะท้อนความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างศาสนา วัฒนธรรม พฤติกรรมผู้บริโภค และกลไกตลาดร่วมสมัย

คำสำคัญ: พระเครื่อง, พุทธพาณิชย์, การสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรม, ทุนทางวัฒนธรรม, การบริโภคเชิงวัฒนธรรม



Abstract

This research aimed to study: 1) the similarities and differences in the symbolic meanings of Thai Buddhist amulets in Thai and Chinese societies; 2) the religious meanings, social functions, and factors influencing the popularity of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market; and 3) the consumption behavior of Thai Buddhist amulets among stakeholders in the modern Chinese market. This study employed a qualitative research methodology. Data were collected from 25 key informants selected through purposive sampling, consisting of 15 consumers, 5 entrepreneurs, and 5 amulet makers. The research instruments and data collection methods included in-depth interviews, non-participant observation at amulet establishments, and documentary analysis. The data were analyzed through content analysis, ethnographic interpretation, historical description, and triangulation. The findings revealed that Thai Buddhist amulets in the Thai context are associated with faith, spiritual protection, merit-making, and the religious authority of monks. In the Chinese context, however, Thai Buddhist amulets have been reinterpreted as sacred objects, accessories, sources of psychological support, cultural goods, and symbols of personal identity. Their popularity has been influenced by social media, cross-border e-commerce, celebrity influence, and design-oriented marketing. The market also shows clear consumer segmentation, including high-end collectors, young consumers, pragmatic consumers, and cultural enthusiasts. However, commercial expansion has raised concerns about counterfeit products, price speculation, exaggerated claims, and the dilution of the sacredness of Buddhist amulets. The study concludes that the growth of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market is a process of transforming religious symbols in a cross-cultural context, reflecting the relationship among religion, culture, consumer behavior, and contemporary market mechanisms.

Keywords: Buddhist Amulets, Buddhist Commercialism, Cross-cultural Communication, Cultural Capital, Cultural Consumption

Introduction

In the context of globalization, cross-cultural communication has increasingly facilitated the circulation of religious objects across different cultural settings. Thai Buddhist amulets are a notable example of this transnational popularity. As objects embedded with religious and cultural symbolism in Thai Buddhist culture, Thai Buddhist amulets have gained





considerable attention in the Chinese market in recent years. This phenomenon not only reflects cultural exchange and interaction between Thailand and China but also reveals the diversity of symbolic meanings that emerge through cross-cultural communication.

Although the popularity of Thai Buddhist amulets in Thailand and China is shaped by distinct cultural, religious, and social contexts, there remains a lack of systematic analysis of their symbolic transformation, driving factors of popularity, and consumer behavior in Chinese and Thai societies. This study therefore explores three core issues. First, it examines the similarities and differences in the cultural symbolism of Buddhist amulets in Thai and Chinese societies. By comparing Buddhist traditions in the two countries, namely Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and Mahayana Buddhism in China, as well as Buddhist rituals and cultural backgrounds, the study explores the religious meanings and social functions of Buddhist amulets in different contexts. Second, it investigates the factors driving the popularity of Thai Buddhist amulets in China, with particular attention to social and cultural acceptance, the fashionization of Buddhist symbols, commercial business models, and economic factors related to the growing demand for cultural products. Third, it analyzes the characteristics of Buddhist amulet consumption behavior in the modern Chinese market, including consumers' cognitive attitudes, purchase motivations, and market strategies influencing consumer behavior.

The commodification of Buddhist amulets in China is closely intertwined with both historical religious practices and contemporary consumer behavior. Tarocco (2011) challenges simplistic interpretations of Buddhist material culture through a market theory framework. The study argues that the spiritual “aura” of modern Buddhist-inspired goods is not eliminated by commercialization or technological mediation; rather, it is reconfigured and transformed through new forms of mediation. This perspective complicates the binary distinction between sacred authenticity and commercial exploitation and provides a critical framework for analyzing the persistence of Buddhist symbolism in China's contemporary consumer and digital contexts.

This study explores the popularity of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market and the factors contributing to their popularity. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study aims to reveal the gradual transformation of Buddhist amulets from religious symbols into cultural commodities, with particular emphasis on their symbolic transformation through cross-cultural communication. The findings are





expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural exchange and the circulation of religious beliefs between Thailand and China.

Objectives

1. To study the similarities and differences in the cultural symbolism of Buddhist amulets in Thai and Chinese societies.
2. To study the religious meanings, social functions, and driving factors contributing to the popularity of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market.
3. To study the characteristics of Buddhist amulet consumption behavior among stakeholders in the modern Chinese market, including consumer perceptions, purchase motivations, and market strategies.

Limitations

Although this study employed a qualitative research design to provide an in-depth understanding of the commercialization of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the geographical scope of the key informants may affect the transferability of the findings. Most informants were related to first- and second-tier cities in China; therefore, the findings may not fully represent consumers, sellers, and stakeholders in other regions. Second, the study relied mainly on qualitative data from 25 key informants, documentary analysis, and non-participant observation. As a result, the findings are intended to provide contextual and interpretive insights rather than statistical generalization. Future research should expand the scope of informants, include more diverse regions and stakeholder groups, and consider using mixed methods to strengthen the breadth, accuracy, and comparative value of the findings.

Literature Review

Thai amulet culture continues to thrive in the modern rationalist era by combining historical symbolism with contemporary media narratives and digital platforms (McBain, 2024). In China, live-streamed blessings and online exclusivity have accelerated the commodification of Buddhist amulets, reflecting Thailand's hybrid model in which amulets function as both spiritual icons and economic commodities (Jong, 2024). This integration of tradition and commerce attracts diverse consumers, ranging from devout believers to





collectors, and helps sustain market vitality. Ultimately, the recycling and re-narration of these objects maintain their perceived spiritual efficacy and cultural continuity within the global spiritual economy (Johnston & Phayakhrut, 2024).

The Religious and Cultural Symbolism of Fopai

1. Historical origins and symbolic significance in Thailand

The origin of Fopai, or Thai Buddhist amulets, can be traced back to the Sukhothai period in the 13th century. Buddhist amulets gradually developed alongside the spread of Buddhism in Thailand. Chirapravati (1999) pointed out that Buddhist amulets, as religious objects, were initially associated with the blessings of eminent monks in Thai temples, who were believed to confer sacred power to protect wearers from misfortune. This sacred attribute made Buddhist amulets an important part of everyday life for many Thai people. Rajadhon (1961) further noted that, over time, the symbolic meaning of Buddhist amulets in Thailand gradually expanded from a purely religious token to a symbol of social status, thereby functioning as a marker of identity in society.

Existing studies have revealed the religious and cultural symbolic status of Buddhist amulets in Thailand. However, most of them focus mainly on functional descriptions and do not deeply explore differences in the symbolic meanings of Buddhist amulets across different strata of Thai society. This paper argues that Thai Buddhist amulets are not only embodiments of religious belief but also symbols of social status and identity. Through this analysis, a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple functions of Thai Buddhist amulets can be developed, providing a background for examining their symbolic transformation after entering the Chinese context.

2. Symbolic transformation in the Chinese market

In the process of cross-cultural communication, symbols are often redefined and reinterpreted in new cultural environments. Symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969) provides important theoretical support for understanding the symbolic transformation of Fopai in the Chinese market. Wong (2019) observed that Thai Buddhist amulets undergo symbolic transformation in urban China, where they are reappropriated as fashionable status markers and personal style accessories, particularly among young consumers. This phenomenon is largely driven by social media and celebrity influence, through which Thai Buddhist amulets have been reshaped into “trend” symbols and gradually distanced from their original religious attributes.





However, the research mainly describes the phenomenon of symbolic reconstruction but does not fully examine the motivations behind this transformation or its influence on the religious meanings of Thai Buddhist amulets. Based on the perspective of symbolic interaction theory, this paper discusses changes in the symbolic meanings of Thai Buddhist amulets among different consumer groups. It further analyzes their reconstruction as fashion symbols in the Chinese market and reveals how they undergo adaptation and transformation through cross-cultural communication.

Driving Forces behind the Popularity of Thai Buddhist Amulets in the Chinese Market

1. Cultural diffusion and cross-cultural communication

According to cultural diffusion theory, cultural elements spread into different social environments through migration, trade, and media (Tylor, 1871). In the cross-cultural communication of Fopai, tourism and cross-border e-commerce platforms have become two major channels contributing to the popularity of Thai Buddhist amulets. Redding (1990) pointed out that the rapid development of tourism in Thailand has enabled more Chinese tourists to encounter Thai Buddhist amulets, and many tourists bring them back to China as souvenirs, thereby promoting the circulation of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market. Existing studies have revealed the importance of cultural diffusion in the spread of Thai Buddhist amulets. However, most studies are limited to analyzing the influence of tourism and e-commerce on their popularity and do not fully explore the process of reinterpretation and localization after Thai Buddhist amulets enter the Chinese context. This paper further argues that the essence of cultural diffusion is not only the cross-border flow of goods but also the reconstruction of symbolic meanings. In the Chinese market, Thai Buddhist amulets are redefined as symbols of personality and identity, reflecting the adaptation and transformation of cultural diffusion in a new social environment.

2. Consumerism and the commercialization of religion

The theories of material religion and religious commercialization explain how religious objects acquire multiple functions through commercialization in the market (Plate, 2015). In the Chinese market, Thai Buddhist amulets have gradually acquired commercial attributes and have become consumer goods with both religious and cultural value. Roberts (2021) argues that the commercialization of Thai Buddhism in China illustrates how modern market forces repurpose religious symbols, creating a hybrid space in which spiritual significance and brand value coexist. Driven by cross-border e-commerce and social media,





Fopai not only meets consumers' religious needs but also functions as a status symbol that attracts a wider range of consumers.

Although existing research has revealed the commercialization process of Thai Buddhist amulets, there remains a lack of discussion on how commercialization affects their religious meanings. This paper argues that the commercialization of Thai Buddhist amulets not only increases their market value but also has a profound impact on their religious symbolism. The transformation of Thai Buddhist amulets from purely religious objects into consumer goods allows them to acquire new symbolic meanings in the consumer market. This intertwining of religion and commerce is one of the key driving forces behind the popularity of Thai Buddhist amulets.

Social Psychology and Symbolic Consumption

Social exchange theory suggests that the consumption of amulets serves as a bridge for psychological satisfaction and symbolic exchange, particularly during periods of social uncertainty, when amulets provide emotional regulation and psychological reassurance. Market-oriented studies also highlight the emergence of a “religion of wealth” (Kitiarsa, 2012), in which the charisma of monks and blessing rituals grant amulets dual attributes as divine protectors and high-value collectibles. This study further identifies demographic differences: younger Chinese consumers tend to prioritize personality expression and social status, while older consumers are more likely to seek traditional protection.

Amulet culture demonstrates strong adaptability to modernity through contemporary media narratives and digital platforms, such as live-streamed blessings, which enhance perceived scarcity and symbolic value (McBain, 2024). Transnational networks, particularly those led by Singaporean dealers, use digital spaces to bypass national regulations and market Thai amulets globally (Naepimai & Chaisingkananont, 2023). Although commercialization remains debated due to concerns over “superstitious” marketing, the institutional framework continues to evolve. Ultimately, the Thai Buddhist amulet market in China reflects a complex and vibrant spiritual economy in which religious symbols, digital innovation, and diverse consumer motivations converge





Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the commercialization of Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market on the basis of Buddhism. The research focused on understanding the symbolic meanings, cultural interpretations, consumption practices, and stakeholder perspectives related to Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese context. Documentary research, in-depth interviews, and non-participant observation were used as the main methods of data collection in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Population and Key Informants

The key informants consisted of 25 individuals who were directly related to the consumption, distribution, and production of Buddhist amulets. They were selected by purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement with Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market. The key informants were divided into three groups: 15 consumers who had knowledge of or experience in purchasing Buddhist amulets, 5 sellers or entrepreneurs involved in the amulet business, and 5 amulet makers or producers. The selection of informants aimed to cover diverse perspectives, including consumer perception, commercial practices, and production-related meanings.

Research Instruments

The research instruments included a semi-structured interview guide, an observation form, and a documentary analysis form. The semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore informants' perceptions, motivations, purchasing behavior, symbolic interpretations, and experiences related to Buddhist amulets. The observation form was used to record information from amulet shops and related commercial settings, including product presentation, selling practices, customer interactions, and symbolic elements used in marketing. The documentary analysis form was used to collect and organize information from academic documents, related research, market materials, online media, and other relevant sources.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three main procedures. First, documentary research was conducted by reviewing academic literature, research studies, documents, and relevant materials concerning Buddhist amulets, Buddhist material culture, cross-cultural





communication, and the amulet market in China. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with consumers, sellers, and amulet makers to gain insight into their perceptions, motivations, experiences, and interpretations of Buddhist amulets. The interviews covered issues such as religious meaning, decorative value, purchase motivation, collection, social identity, and market strategies. Third, non-participant observation was conducted at amulet shops and related commercial spaces to examine stakeholder behavior, product display, sales communication, and consumer interaction in real market contexts.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through content analysis, ethnographic interpretation, and historical description. Content analysis was used to classify and interpret key themes related to symbolic meanings, consumption behavior, commercial practices, and cultural adaptation. Ethnographic interpretation was applied to understand the meanings and practices of stakeholders within their social and cultural contexts. Historical description was used to explain the transformation of Buddhist amulets from religious objects into cultural commodities in the Chinese market. Data triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from documents, interviews, and observations in order to enhance the validity, reliability, and credibility of the research findings.

Results

This study provides new insights for academics, market researchers, and cultural policy makers. First, the findings enrich academic understanding of the dissemination and commercialization of cross-cultural religious symbols and provide a theoretical basis for related fields. Second, the results provide useful information on consumer behavior and market trends for marketers and cultural product developers, thereby supporting the further development of cultural goods in the Chinese market. Finally, the empirical data and theoretical analysis of this study offer a reference for policy makers in balancing religious belief and commercialization when formulating cultural policies. Through an in-depth analysis of the presence of Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market and the complexity of their cross-cultural communication, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of cultural symbols in globalization, as well as their economic and social influences. It also promotes respect for and recognition of religious and cultural diversity.





1. The Religious Significance of Buddhist Amulets

According to the monks' descriptions, Buddhist amulets are not merely objects for good luck but are better understood as portable reminders of Dhamma. Luang Pu Pei described them as "portable Dhamma companions," encouraging wearers to maintain mindfulness and cultivate kindness. Luang Pu Hong also emphasized that the true meaning of Buddhist amulets is to help practitioners develop wisdom, observe moral precepts, and practice meditation, rather than simply bring material benefits.

2. The role of monks in creating religious value

The spiritual value of Buddhist amulets depends directly on the spiritual qualities of the monks who create and bless them. Through precepts, meditation, and prolonged chanting, monks transfer accumulated merit and spiritual intention into the amulets. As Venerable Luang Pu Khun pointed out, chanting for "seven days and seven nights" is not merely a symbolic ceremony but the essence of the entire process. Traditional Buddhist amulet owners also emphasized that the reputation, cultivation, and sincerity of monks are the "soul" of Buddhist amulets.

3. The transformation of meaning in the Chinese market

Many monks observed that some Chinese consumers value the "utility" of Buddhist amulets, such as the pursuit of wealth, career success, or good luck, rather than spiritual growth. Luang Pu Pei warned that one should not rely solely on the so-called "magical effects" of amulets, while Luang Pu Hong cautioned that such an attitude reflects a utilitarian mentality that contradicts the Buddhist understanding of causality. Consumer behavior also confirms this phenomenon: businesspeople tend to seek "wealth power," while some student groups regard Buddhist amulets simply as fashion accessories.

4. The Commercialization of Buddhist Amulets

4.1 The views and concerns of the Sangha. Monks acknowledged that moderate commercial circulation is a necessary condition for temple operations. However, they expressed concern that excessive commercialization may transform pious religious belief into mere commodity exchange. Luang Pu Pei described commercialization as a "double-edged sword," while Luang Pu Khun compared it to "a Mustang that needs to be properly guided."

4.2 Debate on design modification. Traditional monks and old-school shopkeepers oppose the modification of sacred images and insist on preserving their religious integrity. By contrast, some trendy Chinese sellers and internet-savvy entrepreneurs offer limited-edition





or simplified designs to attract younger consumers. Nevertheless, they also claim to respect the core religious symbolism of Buddhist amulets.

4.3 Balancing religious principles and business. In response to these concerns, the monastic community has proposed several solutions, including the establishment of authentication and authenticity verification systems, the strengthening of Dhamma education for consumers, the transparent disclosure of temple fund usage, and controllable distribution through trusted channels. These approaches are centered on one core principle: business must always serve the dissemination of Dhamma.

5. Cross-cultural Transmission and Influence

5.1 The spread of Buddhist culture. Many monks view the popularity of Buddhist amulets in China as a positive opportunity. Luang Pu Sin was moved by “the piety of Chinese believers,” while Luang Pu Chan stated that “if properly guided, this trend can benefit the spread of Buddhism.”

5.2 Differentiated consumer cognition. Business owners and senior collectors tend to regard Buddhist amulets as sacred religious objects. In contrast, students and young professionals often view them as “lucky charms” or “fashion items.” Monks regard this initial interest as a starting point for religious guidance and believe that such interest should gradually be directed toward a deeper understanding of the true meaning of Dhamma.

5.3 Cross-cultural communication strategies of the Sangha. The Sangha’s cross-cultural communication strategies include producing Chinese-language explanatory materials, establishing partnerships with Chinese temples and communities, and using online media, mobile applications, and exhibitions to explain the deeper meanings behind Buddhist amulets to the public.

6. Current Market Trends

6.1 Main consumer segmentation and behavior. The Chinese market for Buddhist amulets can be divided into four main consumer segments. First, high-end and senior collectors, such as business owners, financiers, and experienced collectors, prioritize authenticity, scarcity, and the spiritual authority of Buddhist amulets. Their purchasing behavior is usually low-profile, based on trust relationships, and involves high-value transactions. Second, young trend followers, such as students and young white-collar workers, are driven by aesthetics, social trends, and psychological comfort. They mainly purchase mid-range and visually attractive Buddhist amulets through online platforms and social media. Third, the pragmatic mass market, including ordinary office workers and





salespeople, seeks psychological comfort and practical benefits, such as safety and career success. This group relies on credible recommendations and places importance on affordability and authenticity verification. Fourth, cultural enthusiasts, including teachers, intellectuals, and cultural workers, purchase Buddhist amulets out of interest in their artistic and cultural value. They tend to acquire them through cultural channels and value the stories and symbolism behind them.

6.2 Price stratification and consumer preference. The market presents a highly hierarchical structure. The high-end market is dominated by senior collectors and established stores, with unit prices reaching tens of thousands of yuan. This segment is mainly driven by scarcity and the reputation of respected masters. The mid-range or light luxury market is the most active segment, with prices ranging from 1,000 to 10,000 yuan. It is favored by young white-collar workers and stable middle-class consumers and is mainly served by fashion-oriented shops, lifestyle art spaces, and reputable sellers. The entry-level market ranges from a few hundred yuan to 2,000 yuan. It is dominated by affordable stores and mainly targets students and budget-conscious buyers. Overall, consumer preferences are polarized: entry-level and mid-range products generate large sales volumes, while the high-end market remains stable and valuable within specific collector circles.

6.3 Core consumer priorities. Consumer priorities vary across market segments, but the overall pattern can be summarized as follows. For high-end and senior collectors, the main priorities are master prestige and authenticity, followed by temple authority, scarcity and inheritance, material and craftsmanship, and price. For the mass market and trend followers, the main priorities are design and aesthetic appeal, followed by price, master prestige or brand reputation, and religious value, which is often used as a secondary verification factor.

7. Commercialization and Marketing Strategy

7.1 Emphasis on religious values. All types of sellers recognize the importance of religious values, although their emphases differ. Traditional sellers treat religious value as the core narrative, or even the sole focus, of Buddhist amulet marketing. Modern adaptive sellers adopt a “soft” approach by emphasizing design first and then integrating religious stories into product presentation. Internet influencers regard religious value as an “additional element,” while their marketing focus remains on fashion, celebrity endorsement, and emotional connection.





7.2 Effective marketing channels. The effective marketing channels vary according to market segment. In the traditional and high-end market, the main channels include word of mouth, private circles, collector salons, and direct visits to temples. In the modern and mass market, social media, live streaming, and online marketplaces are the dominant channels. In the cultural and lifestyle market, offline cultural activities, handicraft workshops, and experiential physical spaces play an important role.

7.3 Design adaptation. As mentioned earlier, for core traditional sellers, traditional design is regarded as sacred and immutable. Design adaptation mainly occurs in peripheral areas, such as fashion-oriented packaging, matching accessories, slightly simplified designs, and limited-edition collaborative models introduced by some trendy sellers.

7.3.1 Challenges of commercialization. Counterfeit and low-quality products are common and serious challenges in the Buddhist amulet market. Stakeholders have adopted several response measures. First, they emphasize the source of the amulets by providing certificates, temple documents, and other forms of provenance verification. Second, they apply technology, such as blockchain traceability, live comparison, and scientific analysis, to support authenticity verification. Third, they build trust through transparent operations, reputation management, and reliable after-sales service.

7.3.2 Price competition and value perception. Price competition is intense at the lower end of the market. Most sellers, except those who are purely price-driven, try to avoid direct price wars and instead compete through value creation. These values include authenticity, unique design, cultural narratives, and service quality. Sellers argue that this approach not only protects the brand but also helps preserve the religious sanctity of Buddhist amulets.

7.3.3 Long-term development and harmony. Sellers are generally optimistic about the long-term development of the Buddhist amulet market, but they also emphasize the need to maintain an appropriate balance between commerce and religion. Traditionalists believe that the market will stabilize within specific segments, and that success depends on the depth of cultural dissemination and the integrity of market management. Modernist sellers see strong potential in the market and believe that the key lies in “interpreting traditional values in modern language” and achieving a harmonious condition in which “commerce is the boat and religion is the helm.” Overall, there is a shared consensus that long-term success must be based on subordinating business motives to the authentic presentation of Buddhist culture and its religious core.





8. Consumer Behavior

8.1 Purchase motivation and perception. Consumers' initial motivations for purchasing Buddhist amulets are diverse. Some consumers are influenced by recommendations regarding the "effectiveness" of amulets, while others purchase them to follow social trends, out of cultural interest, or from spiritual belief. Their core value perceptions also vary widely, ranging from viewing Buddhist amulets as sacred religious objects and sources of psychological support to regarding them as fashion accessories or cultural works of art. The order of purchasing factors further confirms the market segmentation pattern, as different consumer groups place emphasis on different value propositions.

8.2 Consumption decision-making process. Purchase channels are strongly influenced by consumer type. High-end and trust-oriented consumers tend to purchase amulets directly from temples or through trusted dealers. Ordinary young consumers rely mainly on online platforms and social recommendations, while cautious consumers often depend on referrals from acquaintances. Authenticity verification methods also vary according to the level of consumer expertise. Experts rely on personal experience, comparison with reference documents, and professional appraisal. General consumers rely on certificates, sellers' reputations, online research, and advice from friends, while beginners tend to place complete trust in intermediaries. Preferred price ranges are also related to consumer type. In general, pricing is influenced by the reputation of the master, year of production, rarity, circulation, and quality.

8.3 Views on commercialization and religious significance. Consumers hold different views on the commercialization of Buddhist amulets. Senior collectors tend to believe that commercialization has led to the emergence of counterfeit products and may be regarded as "blasphemous." Sellers generally understand commercialization as part of market circulation, while students tend to view it as a common phenomenon. Most consumers are concerned that commercialization may dilute the sanctity of Buddhist amulets, although some individuals believe that "sincerity creates spiritual power." Consumers also differ in how they distinguish sacred objects from accessories. Their perceptions range from strictly regarding amulets as sacred objects, to viewing them as personal accessories that still carry dignity, and finally to treating them purely as fashion items. Pious and traditional consumers attach great importance to the blessing process, believing that monks' blessings are closely related to the perceived "effectiveness" of amulets. Trend-following consumers, however,





tend to pay less attention to the blessing process and regard it as an added value rather than a necessity.

9. Cross-cultural Perspective and Personal Influence

9.1 Understanding of Thai Buddhist culture. Trend-following and practical consumers generally show a lower level of interest in and understanding of Thai Buddhist culture, whereas cultural enthusiasts and experienced practitioners demonstrate a higher level of understanding. Many ordinary consumers, including office workers and general staff, show respect for Thai Buddhist culture even though they do not fully understand its religious and cultural background.

9.2 Personal influence after acquiring Buddhist amulets. The most frequently reported effect of acquiring Buddhist amulets is psychological comfort and increased confidence. Some consumers also report changes in their behavior after wearing or possessing amulets. For most consumers, Buddhist amulets function as powerful positive psychological anchors.

9.3 Future development of the Chinese market. Views on the future development of the Chinese Buddhist amulet market vary. Traditionalists, cultural sellers, and experienced collectors tend to view it as a stable niche market. Some students regard it as a passing craze. Salespeople and consumers who believe that people have a basic need for luck and security tend to see it as a utility-based market with lasting potential. Overall, the market trend shows that the Fopai market is shifting from a temporary boom toward a more stable and hierarchical structure, with stable senior enthusiasts at the core and mobile, trend-sensitive consumers on the periphery.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the commercialization of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market and the transformation of their symbolic meanings. The conclusion is organized in relation to the three research objectives: cultural symbolism, religious meanings and driving factors, and consumer behavior among stakeholders in the modern Chinese market.

1. In relation to the similarities and differences in the cultural symbolism of Buddhist amulets in Thai and Chinese societies, the findings reveal that Thai Buddhist amulets originated within the Theravada Buddhist tradition as sacred objects associated with religious faith, spiritual protection, merit-making, and the authority of monks. In the Thai context, their





symbolic meanings remain closely connected to Buddhist practice, ritual consecration, moral cultivation, and social identity. However, after entering the Chinese cultural context, where Mahayana Buddhism and contemporary consumer culture shape religious reception differently, Thai Buddhist amulets have been reinterpreted as pluralistic cultural symbols. In China, they are not perceived only as religious objects but also as fashion accessories, psychological supports, cultural collectibles, and markers of personal identity. This transformation shows that the same religious object may carry different symbolic meanings when it moves across cultural and religious contexts.

2. In relation to the religious meanings, social functions, and driving factors contributing to the popularity of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market, the findings show that their religious value has not disappeared through commercialization. Rather, it has been reconfigured through new forms of mediation, circulation, and consumption. Social media, celebrity influence, online marketing, aesthetic design, and consumer-oriented presentation have played important roles in reshaping the symbolic value of Thai Buddhist amulets in China. Nevertheless, their religious background remains a key source of attraction, especially in relation to spiritual protection, luck, safety, confidence, and emotional support. This finding is consistent with Tarocco's (2011) argument that the spiritual "aura" of Buddhist-inspired goods in modern China is not simply erased by the market but is reconfigured through technological and commercial mediation. It also relates to Kitiarsa's (2008) discussion of religious commodification in Asia, which shows that religion and market forces increasingly converge while continuing to produce social and cultural meanings.

3. In relation to the characteristics of Buddhist amulet consumption behavior among stakeholders in the modern Chinese market, the findings indicate that the market has developed a clear hierarchical structure. High-end collectors emphasize authenticity, rarity, the prestige of eminent monks, temple authority, and ritual legitimacy. Urban youth and trend-following consumers tend to value aesthetic design, fashionability, emotional connection, and social visibility. Practical consumers focus on psychological comfort, luck, safety, and career-related benefits, while cultural enthusiasts value artistic, historical, and symbolic meanings. This finding corresponds with Siriwong and Khamsa-ard's (2025) study on Thai amulets in contemporary consumer culture, which shows that Thai amulets have increasingly been transformed from sacred artifacts into lifestyle products through design adaptation, branding, storytelling, celebrity influence, and digital distribution. Their study also indicates that contemporary consumers do not necessarily abandon spiritual meanings;





rather, they combine sacred value with aesthetic, identity-related, and status-related expectations. From the stakeholder perspective, monks and temples emphasize the preservation of religious integrity, while sellers and market practitioners focus on authentication, trust-building, design adaptation, responsible marketing, and the creation of appropriate consumer narratives. These findings show that the sustainability of the Thai Buddhist amulet market in China depends not only on consumer demand but also on the ability of religious and commercial actors to maintain a balance between sacred meaning and market circulation.

The discussion of these findings suggests that the commercialization of Thai Buddhist amulets should not be understood simply as the decline of religious value or as the replacement of sacredness by commercial exploitation. Instead, commercialization creates a hybrid space in which sacred value, cultural identity, social distinction, psychological comfort, and market value coexist. This supports McDaniel's (2011) view that Thai Buddhist objects and practices should be understood as part of broader religious and social life rather than as isolated commercial products. Similarly, Jackson (2022) explains that ritually empowered objects, prosperity beliefs, and market practices are interconnected within Thailand's modern religious field, where capitalism and enchantment continue to coexist. Therefore, the case of Thai Buddhist amulets in China reflects not only the commodification of religious objects but also the adaptation and continuation of religious meaning under conditions of globalization and consumer culture.

Nevertheless, the study also found that commercialization produces important challenges. The emergence of counterfeit products, price speculation, exaggerated claims of supernatural power, and superficial consumption among some consumers reflects the continuing tension between religious integrity and market demand. These problems may weaken trust in the amulet market and reduce the depth of Buddhist understanding among consumers. Therefore, authentication systems, transparent temple-related information, responsible marketing, and Dhamma education are necessary mechanisms for maintaining the balance between commercial circulation and religious meaning.

In conclusion, the spread of Thai Buddhist amulets in China provides an important case for understanding cross-cultural commercialization in the era of globalization. It demonstrates how religious symbols are adapted, reinterpreted, and absorbed into new consumer cultures while still retaining aspects of their religious core. This study contributes to academic discussions on religious commercialization, Buddhist material culture, symbolic interaction,





and cross-cultural communication. It also provides practical implications for cultural policy makers, religious communities, and market practitioners who seek to balance spiritual tradition with commercial reality in the ongoing development of cultural and religious exchange between Thailand and China.

Recommendations

Practical Recommendations

1. Establish authentication standards and responsible market practices. Relevant agencies, temples, sellers, and cultural organizations should develop certification mechanisms, authenticity verification systems, and industry standards to prevent counterfeit products, reduce price speculation, and protect consumers. These mechanisms would also help preserve the sanctity and credibility of Thai Buddhist amulets in the Chinese market.

2. Develop culturally sensitive marketing strategies for different consumer groups. Entrepreneurs and marketers should design product lines, communication strategies, and marketing narratives that correspond to different consumer segments, such as high-end collectors, cultural enthusiasts, practical consumers, and trend-driven young consumers. Marketing through social media, live streaming, and online platforms should emphasize authenticity, origin, religious background, and cultural meaning rather than focusing only on commercial appeal.

3. Promote religious and cultural understanding through cross-cultural cooperation. Thai and Chinese religious, cultural, and educational institutions should cooperate in producing public education materials, exhibitions, online content, and cultural exchange activities. These efforts would help consumers understand the Buddhist meaning, historical background, and appropriate use of Thai Buddhist amulets, while supporting respectful cultural exchange between Thailand and China.

Academic Recommendations

1. Future studies should expand the scope to other types of Thai amulets. Since many types of Thai amulets are currently circulated and sold in China, future research should examine other forms of Thai amulets beyond Buddha-image amulets. This would provide a broader understanding of how different sacred objects are interpreted, commercialized, and consumed in cross-cultural markets.





2. Future studies should examine Thai amulets as a medium of Thai cultural dissemination. Thai Buddhist amulets may be studied as a form of cultural soft power that communicates Thai Buddhist values, religious beliefs, artistic traditions, and cultural identity. Further research could explore strategies for promoting Thai culture through Buddhist amulets while maintaining religious respect and cultural integrity.

3. Future comparative studies should examine other Asian markets. As Thai Buddhist amulets are also popular in countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, future research should compare the marketing patterns, consumer behavior, religious interpretations, and cultural meanings of Thai amulets in China, Singapore, and Malaysia. Such comparative studies would help clarify the similarities and differences in the commercialization of Thai religious and cultural products across Asian markets.

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