

## Saving the Chinese Ghosts Overseas: A Study of the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha Ritual in Thailand

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### Abstract:

Currently, the most common methods of preserving spiritual practices related to supernatural beings from foreign lands involve conducting religious ceremonies and invoking nearby spiritual entities. This study aims to explore the spiritual significance and function of the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ceremony in redeeming Chinese spirits residing abroad. The research design employs a phenomenological methodology, involving nine monks in Thailand as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation, followed by thematic analysis to identify the challenges and deeper meanings associated with performing the ritual. The study reveals three key findings: first, the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual embodies the concept of Buddhist compassion and the duty to rescue wandering souls seeking peace; second, it addresses the adaptation and challenges of maintaining tradition and cultural heritage in a modern context; and third, it highlights the power of intention and prayer in transcending spatial and temporal boundaries. These findings are further elaborated upon in the conclusion. Furthermore, the study suggests the development of a ritual adaptation model that incorporates technology to enhance the participation of overseas Chinese communities in preserving their spiritual traditions.

**Keywords:** Chinese Ghosts; Ghosts overseas; Yogacara Ulkā-mukha Ritual.

### Introduction

Yogacara Ulkā-mukha is a Buddhist ritual that originated in the Yogacara school of the Mahayana tradition. Its primary objective is to rescue wandering ghosts. The ritual consists of a series of ceremonial acts and devotional prayers that monks perform to alleviate the suffering of these souls and assist them in achieving enlightenment. The ceremony, which reflects the intricate relationship between the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist tradition and Thailand's predominate Theravada Buddhist culture, was adopted and refined by the Chinese population residing abroad. Gunawan (2020) argues that the research on Yogacara Ulkā-mukha offers a unique

perspective on the dual functions of this religious ritual as a spiritual practice and a method of preserving cultural and religious identity in a diverse society.

In the past, research has concentrated on Chinese rituals' economic, social, and cultural aspects. Nevertheless, research on specific aspects of religious traditions, such as Yogacara Ulkā-mukha, is highly restricted. For example, Tan's (2012) research prioritizes the economic function of Chinese communities but neglects to investigate their religious components. Lim (2014) also investigates cultural acculturation but refrains from addressing the adaptation of religious rituals, including Yogacara Ulkā-mukha. Wong (2018) examines the identity of Chinese ethnicity in Thailand, emphasizing social and political aspects and a disregard for the relevance of religious rituals.

Meanwhile, Nai's (2015) research concentrates on historical aspects and disregards religious rituals. Chiu's (2017) research examines the relationship between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist traditions in Thailand but does not explicitly address Yogacara Ulkā-mukha. Therefore, there is still a significant demand for research focusing on religious rites. Conversely, the ritual of saving ghosts overseas that has been established thus far has been limited to prayer activities and ascending requests to spiritual entities, all of which need a comprehensive comprehension of the fundamental cultural and spiritual context. Lee (2015) emphasizes this practice's ritualistic and religious features in many studies but needs to investigate how this ritual adjusts to contemporary social and cultural dynamics, neglecting its adaptive nature. Most studies, including Chen (2018), have focused on the historical and traditional aspects of the ritual of the saving of spirits, completely disregarding the impact of globalization and changing times on the ritual's implementation and significance in the contemporary context. This research assumes that ritual practices remain stagnant even though their ability to adapt to social and cultural change significantly influences rituals' continuity.

In addition, the current rituals are limited to the local context, whereas Chinese Ghosts Overseas poses more intricate difficulties (Perera, 2001; Li, 2017; Chen, 2018; Li, 2020; Leong, 2022). The Chinese diaspora encounters challenges in preserving cultural customs and conducting communal ceremonies. Prior research, like the works of Chen (2018) and Li (2020), primarily examined the execution of rituals within the country or the Chinese community residing in the local area. According to Chen's (2018) study, traditional rituals like Yogamah Ulkā-Mukha help bring peace to the wandering soul within the local community. Nevertheless, this study does not investigate the potential modifications of the ritual to accommodate Chinese Ghosts residing in foreign countries. Li (2020) also emphasized the significance of rituals in preserving cultural identity in the face of modernization. However, she did not offer guidance to communities dispersed globally. This research is crucial for comprehensively examining the role of rituals, specifically in the context of the "Saving Chinese Ghosts Overseas" initiative.

Although prior research on Yogamah Ulkā-Mukha ceremonies and Chinese Ghosts Overseas has provided valuable insights, there are still numerous significant limitations. Tan (2012) examines the commercial influence of the Chinese population in Thailand; however, he neglects to consider their religious and spiritual aspects. Lim (2014) focused on the interaction between the Chinese and Thai groups and their cultural assimilation; it did not particularly mention the modification of

religious ceremonies like Yogamah Ulkā-Mukha. Wong (2018) examines the social and political aspects of Chinese ethnic identities in Thailand; however, the contribution of religious rituals to the preservation of cultural identity is not extensively investigated. Although Nai (2015) provides a historical view of the influence of the Chinese in Thailand and migration, this research is retroactive. It does not go into the modern dynamics of religious practices. Nevertheless, this research does offer a historical perspective. The interaction between Buddhist Mahayana and Theravada traditions is only briefly emphasized in Chiu (2017), with Yogaman Ulkā-Mukha being one of the only mentioned activities.

Furthermore, Wong's (2018) study underscores the significance of ethnic identification within the Chinese minority in Thailand. However, it fails to address the function of religious rites, such as the Ulkā-Mukha Yogamah, in upholding that identity. Wong focuses on social and economic issues, whereas religious rituals neglect spiritual dimensions. Religious rituals are crucial in sustaining and reinforcing cultural identity within numerous diaspora cultures. Tan (2012) likewise encounters comparable constraints since the emphasis on the economic impact of the Chinese population takes precedence over the significant parts of their religious practices. This phenomenon leads to a knowledge gap about the interconnectedness and dynamics of ethnic and religious identities within the Chinese diaspora in Thailand.

In addition, Chiu (2017) examines the interplay between the Buddhist Mahayana and Theravada traditions in Thailand but briefly analyses how the ulkā-mukha yoga rite is incorporated into the everyday religious observance of the Chinese community. Chiu's research primarily examines the theological and philosophical elements of the two Buddhist traditions without linking them to specific practices like ulkā-mukha. While offering valuable historical information, the Nai research conducted in 2015 is insufficient for comprehensively examining the development and adaptation of these religious practices in contemporary settings. This vacuum underscores the necessity for further comprehensive and up-to-date research on how Ulkā-Mukha Yogamy ceremonies assist the Chinese population in preserving their cultural identity amidst societal and environmental transformations in Thailand. This research aims to address the knowledge gap and offer a comprehensive understanding of the significance of religious rituals in the Chinese diaspora. This research explores two primary questions. First, it seeks to understand the meaning of spirituality and examine the role of the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual in the redemption of Chinese ghosts living overseas. Second, it investigates the challenges faced by the Ulkā-mukha Yogacara ritual in a modern context, particularly in preserving cultural traditions amidst evolving societal dynamics. These questions aim to provide a deeper insight into both the spiritual significance and the practical hurdles encountered in maintaining this traditional practice.

This research uses a phenomenological research design to understand the experiences and meanings felt by the Chinese community in Thailand in carrying out the ritual of the ulkā-mukha. The ritual is usually held around the 15th Day of every Lunar July, during the Ghost Festival, under the collective sponsorship of the Chinese faithful. The well-off Chinese Families occasionally sponsor it on the last day of the functioning for their loved ones. On average, the ritual costs 50,000 Thai bahts

(approximately 1,600 USD), including the material offerings to the monk performers, their lay associates, and the expense of the decorative settings. The Ulkā-Mukha Yogamyan ceremony must be conducted with utmost devotion and dedication to facilitate the wisdom spirits to escape their suffering and attain tranquillity. A monk, under the tutelage of a master, reads the sacred silk to commence the ceremonial procession. This silk reading aims to summon and seek guidance from spiritual entities. This mission is of utmost importance in "Saving the Chinese Ghosts Overseas" since it guides the wandering spirits of the Chinese people in another dimension towards safety.

During the ritual, the spirits are presented with symbolic offerings, such as food and incense. This offering symbolizes reverence and magnanimity toward famished spirits, contributing to their acceptance and gratitude. In this context, the offering is of great significance because it satisfies wandering spirits' spiritual and material needs, thereby facilitating their attainment of tranquillity and contentment in different dimensions. Music and chanting are indispensable components of this ceremony. A reverent and profound atmosphere is established by incorporating sacred music and silk melodies, thereby facilitating the development of a stronger spiritual connection among participants. Music is capable of fostering spiritual communication between the human domain and supernatural entities, as well as calming the senses and emotions of individuals.

The ritual of water conditioning was at its zenith when the master of ceremonies performed it. The subsequent action is to sprinkle sacred water on all individuals and objects, serving as a symbolic cleansing and a blessing. Furthermore, it is purported that this water can assuage the spirits and provide relief. This technique is thought to aid in purifying the soul and preparing it for the subsequent, calmer existence. After completing all the rites, the community recites the closing prayer to express their best wishes to the spirits. After the ceremony, all the participants joined for a shared dinner. Sharing a meal not only serves as a ceremonial framework but also emphasizes the support and companionship within a community. This procedure demonstrates the community's unwavering support for spirits, ensuring their eternal significance and ultimate importance. It is essential to complete this duty to maintain communication with the deceased individual.

Nine individuals, including monks, actively engaged in the practice of ulkā-mukha rituals, participated in this investigation, primarily from Jin Nikāya. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants, with the primary criteria being active engagement and detailed knowledge of the ritual. Nine participants will be interviewed to attain data saturation.

The data of the participants is displayed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** List of interviewees

Name	Role
Bsc	Head of ritual Yogacara Ulkā-mukha
Sch	monks from Jin Nikāya
Zh	monks from Jin Nikāya
Phra	monks from Jin Nikāya
Xus	monks from Jin Nikāya

Xng	monks from Jin Nikāya
Why	monks from Jin Nikāya
Pn	monks from Jin Nikāya
LnY	monks from Jin Nikāya

Data is gathered via comprehensive interviews and active observation. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to assist in analyzing comprehensive material. Researchers are actively involved in conducting participatory observations, carefully observing every aspect of the ritual activities and the actions that take place. Prior to conducting interviews and observations, written consent was obtained from all participants to ensure the ethics of data collection and anonymity.

The primary instrument of this research is the semi-structured interview guide developed to investigate the experiences and meanings that participants associate with the *ulkā-mukha yogkau*. This interview guide includes open-ended questions encouraging participants to provide further details about their experiences and perspectives. Table 2 displays the theme and interview queries in great detail. Additionally, researchers employ reflective journals and field recordings to capture their observations and reflections during the data collection. Furthermore, in order to facilitate data analysis, visual documentation, such as photographs and videos, will be implemented.

**Table 2.** Themes and questions

Themes	Questions
Perceptions	What emotions do you experience while performing <i>ulkā-mukha yogamy</i> rituals?
Spiritual meaning and the role of Yogacara	What is your interpretation of the spiritual significance of the <i>Ulkā-Mukha Yogaman</i> ritual?
<i>Ulkā-mukha</i> ritual	How is it possible for the <i>ulkā-mukha</i> ritual to rescue Chinese ghosts that are located abroad?
Perceptions	Following the <i>ulkā-mukha yogamy</i> ritual, how do you feel?
Challenge	In order to execute <i>ulkā-mukha yoga</i> rituals in the contemporary era, what are the primary obstacles you perceive?

Thematic analysis, which entails the subsequent procedures, is implemented for data analysis: Initially, interview data and observation recordings are transcribed verbatim. The researchers analyzed the transcript in the second step to identify the initial themes. Furthermore, researchers carry out data classification by discerning text fragments that are relevant to the existing topics. Furthermore, the main themes are determined by classifying these identifiers into a more general category. Furthermore, an in-depth understanding of the meaning and relevance of the *ulkā-mukha* rite for the Chinese minority in Thailand is achieved by examining these issues in the context of relevant theory and literature. Triangulating data and member verification are employed to ensure the dependability and accuracy of study findings.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Yogacara Ulkā-mukha Ritual in Saving the Chinese Ghosts Overseas**

In particular, the Ulkā-Mukha Yogamy Ritual is a religious practice in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition intended to preserve the spirit of the *Gingyan* or 'hungry specter' using the passage of *Yogelau*. In order to alleviate the suffering of the souls and facilitate their attainment of enlightenment, monks execute a series of petitions and practices. This ritual is essential for preserving Chinese cultural and religious identity in Thailand, where Theravada Buddhist traditions are the predominant religion. It also functions as a spiritual practice. Gunawan (2020) posits that the Chinese community maintains its beliefs through religious practices, which indicates the complex interplay between the Buddhist traditions of Ma-Hayana and Theravada, represented by the adaptation of this ritual.

The Ulkā-Mukha Yogamy ritual has been adapted and adopted by the Chinese community in Thailand, illustrating the complex interplay between two distinct Buddhist traditions. Despite the significant influence of the Buddhist Theravada Buddha, the Chinese community continues to protect its religious practices to preserve its cultural heritage, as emphasized by Tan (2012). Additionally, Lim (2014) demonstrates that cultural acculturation occurs when the Chinese community simultaneously adapts to a diverse array of social and religious environments while preserving the fundamental components of its traditions.

The Ulkā-Mukha Yogaman ritual maintains the cultural and religious identity of the Chinese society in Thailand, in addition to functioning as a spiritual practice. The Chinese community's ethnic and religious identities are frequently interconnected and reinforced through distinct religious customs, according to Wong (2018). The relationship between the Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist traditions can be interpreted as a form of cultural diplomacy in which the Chinese community employs their religious rituals to engage with and assimilate into the local community, according to Chiu (2017).

While numerous studies have examined the impact of Chinese culture in Thailand, there remain deficiencies in the research about the adaptation and distinct functions of religious rituals like *Yogamah Ulkā-Mukha*. Tan (2012) and Wong (2018) primarily examine the economic and social dimensions of Chinese society, whereas Lim (2014) and Chiu (2017) place greater emphasis on cultural exchanges without delving into the specific theological parts of religious rites. Nai (2015) offers a significant historical viewpoint but does not address the current dynamics of the ritual's modification. This gap highlights the necessity for conducting a more comprehensive investigation of the functioning of the *Yogamah Ulkā-Mukha* rite in a contemporary setting, as well as its role in preserving the cultural identity of the Chinese population in Thailand.

### **The Spiritual Significance and Role of the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha Ritual in Redeeming Chinese Ghosts Overseas**

This study highlights the profound spiritual importance and significant role of the *Yogacara Ulkā-mukha* ritual in the effort to rescue wandering souls or ghosts within the Chinese community of Thailand. The ritual's somber performance of reciting sutras, making symbolic sacrifices, and conducting the water benediction

ceremony demonstrates its spiritual importance. Each level of the ritual provides a unique and harmonious spiritual aspect to provide peace to restless souls. Upon the researcher's inquiry, "What emotions do you undergo during the execution of the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual?"

*"I experience a profound sense of tranquility each time I engage in this ritual. I am of the opinion that the spirits of our ancestors will achieve tranquility following this ritual. Furthermore, I experience a stronger sense of connection with my fellow community members. The act of praying together and coming together as a group helps to strengthen our sense of unity". (BSc)*

The Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual is firmly grounded in the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism and carries substantial spiritual importance for the Chinese community. Monk Zh, who took part in the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual, answered the researcher's question about its spiritual importance:

*"The Buddha's compassion for all beings, including lost souls, is embodied in this ritual. We extend our gratitude to Buddha and the bodhisattvas for accepting these petitions from their followers and for granting them mercy" (Zh)*

The purpose of this ritual is to guide wandering souls toward liberation through reciting prayers and mantras and offering sacrifices. According to the researchers, "How do you respond to the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual?" Unveiling the Biku Phra:

*"Following my involvement in this ceremonial practice, I experienced an enhanced sense of connection to the teachings of Buddha and a heightened awareness of the significance of karma and virtuous actions in my existence." (Phra)*

Numerous participants reported experiencing a sense of tranquillity and serenity after having participated in the ritual. Monk Pn stated:

*"I experience a greater sense of tranquillity and security each time I engage in the ritual. I think the spirits we assist and our ancestors experience the same tranquillity". (Pn)*

The findings from these interviews indicate that the ritual's spiritual potency has psychological and emotional impacts, illustrating how religious practices can provide emotional and mental assistance to the community. However, the ritual serves as both a spiritual exercise and a communal effort to save the lost souls, who are thought to be suffering the repercussions of their previous wrongdoings. Monk Xng responded to the researcher's inquiry regarding the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual's ability to rescue overseas Chinese ghosts:

*"The Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual is a profound spiritual practice intended to provide tranquillity to the spirits without a place in the afterlife." Traditionally, this ritual is conducted in the ancestral land, where the spirits of the ancestors are invoked, and offerings and prayers are offered to assist them in achieving peace. Nevertheless, the challenge arises when discussing wandering spirits that have dispersed abroad, or "Chinese ghosts overseas," and how to connect with this ritual despite their distance from their ancestral homeland."*

Furthermore, he included:

*"The power of sincere intention and prayer enables this ritual to communicate with these*

*spirits. We are of the opinion that thoughts and prayers possess the capacity to transcend the confines of time and space. There is a concept in Yogacara that all beings are interconnected in a single universal consciousness. Consequently, we can attract these spirits to receive the benefits of this ritual by performing it properly and with sincere intentions, despite the fact that they are located abroad, as is the case in the local context".*

The Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ceremony also enhances the cohesion of the Chinese community in Thailand. Individuals actively participating in this event have a strong relationship and experience a heightened sense of interconnectedness. Additionally, they experience a sense of connection with their forebears. Engaging in communal practices such as reading prayers, making offerings, and dining together fosters unity and cohesion. The results of this study suggest that the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual serves as a technique to enhance social connections within the community, extending beyond its spiritual purpose of saving ghosts overseas.

Additionally, the research revealed that engaging in the ritual had a beneficial effect on the psychological and emotional well-being of the individuals. Several participants expressed a sense of tranquillity, security, and a strong bond with their forebears following their involvement in the ceremonial practice. These emotions aided in managing sentiments of bereavement and unease while fostering a sense of camaraderie in daily existence. The favorable effects indicate that the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha rite holds significant importance in the life of the Chinese population in Thailand. Moreover, the study emphasizes that the ability to adjust and introduce new ideas in the execution of the ritual is crucial for ensuring the long-term viability of the tradition in contemporary times. Innovative and all-encompassing strategies can surmount obstacles like the waning enthusiasm of the younger generation and societal expectations. For instance, providing education and outreach initiatives that emphasize the significance of the ritual might enhance comprehension and reverence among the broader community, fostering a more supportive atmosphere for conserving the tradition.

### **Challenges Faced by the Ulkā-mukha Yogacara Ritual in the Modern Context and the Preservation of Cultural Traditions**

Currently, it is difficult for the Chinese population in Thailand to practice the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha rite. The younger generation, in particular, has seen profound changes to their way of life and thought processes due to industrialization and globalization. It is concerning that younger people are losing interest in traditional ceremonies. Many individuals are forsaking their traditional customs, favoring modern lifestyles and mainstream culture. Moreover, the migration and urbanization processes are causing the breakdown of traditional communities, presenting difficulties in carrying out these rituals collectively and consistently. A key concern arose from the younger demographic's apparent disinterest in the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ceremony. A considerable portion of young folks in the Chinese community consider this ceremony to be inconsequential to their modern lives. The researcher asked, "What are the main difficulties you see in implementing the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual in the present time?" Biku LnY expressed:

*"Some young people think these traditions are irrelevant to modern life and have gone the way of the dodo. They participate in more modern activities and show an increased*

*interest in technology" (LnY).*

*"Keeping the younger generation interested is the main obstacle. They are generally more focused on their professional obligations and the fast-paced lifestyle of urban regions. Many people no longer live near temples, so they rarely take part in rituals. We strive to actively involve them via social media; nevertheless, the results remain less than ideal". (LnY)*

Another problem is that globalization and modernization have made people less interested in traditional ways of doing things. Younger people often feel disconnected from their ancestors' traditions and ways of life because they are exposed to more global culture and technology, as Monk Sch mentioned:

*"It is more likely that younger people will spend their time on social media and video games than they will be to learn about our civilization's cultural practices and customs. There is a possibility that these traditions will no longer be practised". (Sch)*

Despite various challenges, specific communities have endeavored to adapt the Yogacara Ulkā-mukha ritual to suit the present-day and specific local circumstances better. Monk Xus declared:

*"We endeavor to integrate contemporary aspects into this tradition, such as utilizing technology to distribute information about the ritual and engaging the younger generation by means of social media". (Xus)*

The forthcoming challenge concerns assimilating this customary practice in foreign nations. When asked about the incorporation of this ritual in other nations, Monk Nhy stated:

*"The main obstacles are the cultural differences and the scarcity of traditional ritual materials commonly found in Asia. It is possible that some countries will not be able to access certain offering materials. Not only that, but we also tell you how to use other materials that have the same spiritual importance. It is also hard to ensure that the ritual happens at the right time for people in different time zones. It is especially hard to do when the ritual involves people from communities across several countries."*

Furthermore, he underscored the significance of intention and mindfulness in executing the ritual. The implemented modifications are separate from the spiritual essence of this ritual, as the primary aspect resides in the intention to rescue these spirits and grant them serenity. This ritual is versatile, and as long as it is carried out with sincere intentions, the results will remain reliable.

The difficulties of modifying Buddhist rituals when conducted in foreign countries were emphasized in interviews with Monk Nhy. The main challenges faced are cultural differences and the limited availability of ritual resources, typically more accessible in Asia. For example, certain religious practices may not be available in specific nations, requiring practitioners to use alternatives that convey similar spiritual importance. Coordinating the timing of the ritual to accommodate different time zones, especially when it involves communities spread across multiple countries, is also challenging. Monk Nhy emphasized that the ritual's most crucial elements are intention and awareness, regardless of the challenges. The intrinsic spiritual nature of the ritual remains unaffected by the adjustments made to suit the specific local

circumstances. Monk Nhy claimed that the ritual is flexible and that as long as it is carried out with genuine intentions, it will successfully achieve its intended spiritual goal of bringing peace to the souls involved.

### **The significance of spirituality and the function of rituals in the saving of ghosts**

The findings of this inquiry suggest that the *ulkā-mukha* Yogamy ceremony has a profound spiritual importance and plays a significant role in maintaining the tradition of traveling within the Chinese minority in Thailand. This rite represents the community's duty to help spirits who have lost their way to finding peace and the kindness of Buddhism. This finding aligns with Wong's (2018) viewpoint, which emphasizes the importance of religious rituals in strengthening ethnic and spiritual identity and providing emotional support to individuals. Furthermore, this inquiry established that engagement in this ceremony strengthens the cultural identity of the Chinese community, acts as a prompt of customary principles, and assists in safeguarding cultural legacy amid modernization. Furthermore, Lim's (2014) study on cultural acculturation supports the idea that religious and cultural activities are crucial in maintaining ethnic identity among diaspora communities.

Moreover, it is infeasible to overlook this rite's psychological and emotional repercussions. Chiu's (2017) study demonstrates the substantial impact of religious rituals in promoting psychological tranquillity and offering mental assistance, as seen by the participants' accounts of experiencing serenity and security after engaging in the ritual. Because it entails incorporating a spiritual framework and acknowledging the value of that framework in one's day-to-day existence, this ritual is an excellent approach for reducing feelings of worry and grief. The study, however, sheds light on the challenges encountered while attempting to keep the interest and involvement of the next generation in this cultural heritage. Due to the impact of global culture and modern technologies, many young individuals need help understanding the significance of traditional rituals. Zhang (2019) suggests that maintaining this event in the future will pose more significant difficulties due to waning interest among younger individuals in conventional religious practices. The community's ability to integrate while preserving its uniqueness is highlighted by the contextualization of rituals in different social settings and the modification of rituals to make them more relevant for the younger generation. This supports Xie's (2020) claim that cultural practices remain relevant in the modern period by being innovative and adaptable.

### **The process of adapting and facing problems in preserving tradition and cultural legacy within a contemporary context.**

The study's findings indicate that the *Ulkā-Mukha* Yogamah ceremony, which has been modified, is confronted with many problems. However, these findings also highlight the determination of the Chinese community in Thailand to maintain its cultural history and traditions. The younger generation sees this age-old rite as outdated and unnecessary in light of the changes brought about by industrialization and globalization, posing a substantial danger to its continuation. In a study conducted by Zhang (2019), it was discovered that younger generations place greater importance on global culture and state-of-the-art technology than historical religious rituals. It provides additional evidence that Zhang's conclusions are accurate. However, the research demonstrates how communities use their imaginations to

identify solutions and adapt to these challenges. For instance, the community utilizes technology and social media to communicate information regarding rites and extend invitations to young people. It is consistent with Xie's (2020) perspective, which emphasizes the importance of innovation in preserving cultural traditions in the present day. Technology broadens the target audience and increases the appeal of rituals for the younger demographic.

Additionally, this revelation illustrates that adaptation involves modifications to how rituals are performed and the methods of educating and enlightening individuals about the importance of this cultural practice. The long-term sustainability of rituals is significantly influenced by education and counseling. Lim (2014) found that cultural education is crucial for Diaspora communities to maintain their ethnic identity. Based on the findings, a good education can help people appreciate and learn about other cultures. Other than that, there is social and cultural pressure from the neighboring community, which might need to understand and value this ritual more. This statement corroborates the findings of Wong (2018), which indicate that the dominant culture can influence the cultural practices of minority groups. However, the community can foster the development of a more all-encompassing and encouraging atmosphere by enhancing comprehension and admiration from the broader community by implementing appropriate counseling.

Moreover, the ritual adaptation process indicates the community's capacity to assimilate while maintaining its identity. It demonstrates the adaptability and cultural fortitude of the Chinese minority in Thailand when confronted with social and cultural transformation. The ability to adapt and maintain one's significance is the most critical aspect in maintaining cultural traditions over time, according to Chiu (2017). The community can maintain relevance to the modern world while preserving its cultural heritage through suitable adaptation. Additionally, this study shows that participating in this event helps the Chinese community feel more connected to their culture, keeps traditional values alive, and protects cultural artifacts from the effects of modernization. Consistent with other studies, this finding highlights the importance of religious and cultural pursuits in maintaining ethnic identity in the diaspora (Lim, 2014). Engaging in community rituals fosters the preservation of traditional beliefs, strengthens ancestry bonds, and enhances mental health and emotional well-being. According to Chiu (2017), religious practices facilitate the resolution of loss and suffering by providing psychological relaxation, emotional support, and a spiritual framework.

### **The capacity of the intention and supplication to transcend the confines of space and time**

Even though the entities are located abroad, the Yogamah Ulkā-Mukha ritual can still be used to contact them. The spiritual benefits of the ulkā-mukha yoga ritual are believed to penetrate the limits of space and time through the sincere intentions and prayers offered. It allows spirits to receive the benefits of the ritual, regardless of their location. It is consistent with the Buddhist tradition that the mind and intention significantly influence the spiritual world. For instance, Faure's (1996) research on the function of prayer in Buddhist rituals underscores the importance of genuine and in-depth intentions to ensure the efficacy of prayer, even in a long-distance setting. This intention is regarded as a conduit between the spiritual and physical realms,

enabling communication with entities in other dimensions.

In another context, Smith (2007) researched the Ritual of Soul Summons in various spiritual traditions and discovered that the spiritual effects of the petitions offered can be bolstered by the collective intentions of the community performing the ritual. It demonstrates that the ritual is contingent upon the focused intentions and physical or location-based actions. In the instance of Ulkā-Mukha, the spiritual energy generated by the strong intentions of participants, despite their geographical separation, is sufficient to reach and offer calm to spirits far from their ancestral land. Additionally, this discovery is corroborated by a study conducted by Gyatso (2010) on meditation and intention in Tibetan Buddhism. The study asserts that sincere intentions in rituals and meditation can influence the spiritual world without being constrained by physical boundaries. Therefore, this study's findings confirm that the Yogamah Ulkā-Mukha ritual can go beyond the limitations of place and time through the influence of purpose and prayer. Furthermore, it may be adapted to establish a connection with spirits in the Chinese diaspora residing in foreign countries.

### **Conclusion**

This study explores the significance of the Ulkā-mukha Yogacara rites and the challenges encountered in their implementation in Thailand. The research reveals three key findings: the adaptation and difficulties in preserving cultural traditions in modern society, and the powerful impact of intention and prayer that transcends spatial and temporal boundaries. These findings indicate that the execution of this rite in foreign countries can be enhanced through the active involvement of younger generations and the use of technology, despite various contemporary challenges such as logistical constraints and cultural shifts. Moreover, the Ulkā-mukha Yogacara ceremony has proven effective in bringing peace to wandering spirits, despite the barriers of distance and time, due to the strength of the intentions and prayers embedded within the ritual. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of preserving traditional ceremonies while incorporating innovative elements to ensure that spiritual and cultural traditions remain relevant and significant in an era of globalization. The research suggests that the Chinese diaspora could benefit from developing a more comprehensive adaptation strategy and utilizing technology to preserve their spiritual heritage

### **Patents**

**Author Contributions:** The primary author, Wenchen DU, is responsible for Conceptualizing research concepts and designs, collecting data via comprehensive interviews and observations, and analyzing the collected data. The author also contributes to preparing the original draft in writing. Yaoping Liu, as the second writer and corresponding author, is responsible for validating the content, writing the review, and editing it. The third author, Metteyya Beliatte, is responsible for managing and coordinating the research activity planning and execution and acquiring funding. They collaborate in the completion of the text before its submission for publication. All contributors have perused and approved the ultimate iteration of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted by the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of the Institute of Science Innovation and Culture, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Thailand (date of approval: August 12, 2024)

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy and ethical restrictions

**Acknowledgments:** We are sincerely grateful to all who contributed to this investigation, especially the nine monks from Jin Nikāya who generously contributed to this research.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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