

Research Article

Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine: A Pillar of Protection and Inheritance for Phuket's Jia Cai Festival

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Abstract

This study examines the strategies employed by the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine to preserve the Jia Cai festival in the face of contemporary challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and declining interest among younger generations. The research focuses on the shrine's adaptive leadership, highlighting its innovative approaches to sustain the festival's cultural integrity while ensuring its relevance in a rapidly changing world. These strategies include implementing public health measures during the pandemic, leveraging digital platforms to reach broader audiences, and actively engaging younger generations in festival activities. By balancing the preservation of traditional values with the necessity of modernization, the shrine navigates complex societal dynamics that influence cultural continuity. This study also explores broader themes tied to the shrine's efforts, such as government initiatives promoting tourism, the festival's role in fostering community pride, and its function as a medium for transmitting cultural and spiritual values to future generations. Through its governance, the shrine serves as a case study on how cultural institutions can respond to crises while maintaining authenticity and spiritual significance. The findings contribute to global discourses on cultural preservation, adaptive leadership, and the sustainability of heritage practices in the context of globalization. This research offers valuable insights into the delicate interplay between tradition and modernization, demonstrating that cultural heritage can be both preserved and innovatively adapted to meet contemporary needs. By documenting the strategies and outcomes of the shrine's efforts, this study underscores the importance of proactive governance in ensuring the longevity and relevance of cultural practices for future generations.

Keywords

Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine, Jia Cai festival, Phuket, Overseas Chinese Community, Cultural Preservation

1. Introduction

Phuket's Chinese community has a long and storied history dating back to the 19th century when Chinese immigrants arrived in significant numbers, primarily from the Fujian province. The opportunities in tin mining and other economic activities drew these immigrants. Over time, they established a vibrant community that retained strong cultural ties to their homeland. The cultural and religious traditions they

brought with them have been carefully preserved and adapted to the local context, with the Jia Cai festival being one of the most prominent expressions of their heritage.

The Jia Cai festival, an integral aspect of Phuket's cultural heritage, uniquely expresses the island's rich historical and cultural tapestry. Rooted in the rituals and practices of the local Chinese community, this festival has been preserved

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and celebrated for generations. The Jia Cai festival, also known as the Vegetarian Festival, is celebrated annually by Phuket's Chinese community. It is a nine-day event characterized by various religious rituals, including street processions, temple ceremonies, and acts of self-mortification. Participants adhere to a strict vegetarian diet, believing this will purify their bodies and minds and bring good fortune. The festival is marked by its spectacular and sometimes intense rituals, such as fire-walking, piercing, and other forms of self-mortification, which are believed to invoke divine protection and ensure community prosperity.

Despite its continued vibrancy, the Jia Cai festival has not been immune to the challenges of modernization, the disinterest of younger generations, and the global COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges pose significant threats to the festival's long-term sustainability and raise questions about how effectively the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine has navigated these external pressures. At the heart of this preservation effort is the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine, a spiritual and cultural hub that plays a pivotal role in maintaining and transmitting the Jia Cai festival. The Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine is not merely a religious site but a cornerstone of community life in Phuket. It serves as a focal point for cultural activities, religious ceremonies, and community gatherings, making it indispensable for the continuity of the Jia Cai festival. However, the shrine's leadership faces growing concerns regarding sustaining this cultural heritage amid social transformations. The impact of modern lifestyles, the increasing disengagement of younger generations, and the operational disruptions caused by COVID-19 have placed the shrine in a problematic position, raising critical questions about whether its strategies are sufficient to address these pressures.

Through an ethnographic lens, this paper explores the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine's critical role in preserving and inheriting the Jia Cai festival. Ethnography, as a qualitative research method, involves systematically studying people and cultures from the subject's point of view. By immersing oneself in the community, observing practices, and conducting in-depth interviews, ethnography provides a holistic understanding of cultural phenomena. This method is particularly suitable for exploring how community traditions are maintained, adapted, and transmitted. The research also critically examines the strategies the shrine's leadership employed to confront the challenges of modernization, youth disinterest, and external crises such as the pandemic.

Using an ethnographic approach, this study delves into the lived experiences of the community members involved in the Jia Cai festival. It seeks to capture the nuances of their practices, their significance to the festival, and their strategies to ensure continuity. The immersion in the field allows for a detailed exploration of the shrine's role in fostering cultural heritage and the community's responses to the challenges posed by modernization and globalization. The analysis focuses on whether the shrine's leadership has successfully negotiated these challenges or whether alternative strategies

may be necessary to ensure the festival's future sustainability.

The objectives of this research are threefold: first, to provide a comprehensive historical overview of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine and its association with the Jia Cai festival; second, to analyze the contemporary practices and adaptations of the Jia Cai festival facilitated by the shrine; and third, to evaluate the strategies implemented by the shrine's leadership in addressing modernization, youth disinterest, and the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, critically assessing their effectiveness in ensuring the festival's continuity.

By addressing these objectives through the lens of ethnography, this paper aims to contribute to the broader understanding of the role of religious institutions in cultural preservation and heritage management. It also seeks to offer a critical perspective on how religious and cultural institutions can adapt to external pressures while maintaining their core traditions. Through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and immersion in the community, this study captures the intricate relationship between cultural traditions, community involvement, and religious leadership in sustaining intangible cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world. The ethnographic approach provides a rich, detailed account of the Jia Cai festival and highlights the dynamic cultural preservation and adaptation processes.

2. Literature Reviews

The literature review for the preservation of the Jia Cai festival through the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine can be structured around several key themes: the role of religious institutions in cultural preservation, the impact of modernization on traditional practices, and the specific dynamics of the Jia Cai festival within the context of Phuket's Chinese community. Below is a structured literature review drawing on relevant research and theoretical frameworks.

Religious institutions often serve as custodians of cultural heritage, maintaining traditions and practices that might otherwise be lost in modernization and globalization. This role is well-documented in anthropological and sociological literature. For example, Geert [5], in his study of Balinese cock-fighting, highlights how religious and cultural rituals are intertwined, serving as a means of social cohesion and identity preservation. Similarly, Rosaldo [11] emphasizes the importance of rituals in maintaining the cultural fabric of indigenous communities in his work on the Ilongot headhunters. These studies underscore the significance of religious institutions like the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine in preserving the Jia Cai festival. By maintaining traditional rituals and adapting them to contemporary contexts, these institutions ensure the continuity and vitality of cultural practices.

The impact of modernization on traditional practices is a critical area of study in cultural anthropology and sociology. Modernization often brings about significant changes in so-

cietal structures, leading to the erosion of traditional practices. However, it can also provide opportunities to revitalize these practices through adaptive strategies. Smith [13] discusses how heritage management practices can evolve to incorporate modern elements while preserving core traditions. This idea is mirrored in the work of Harrison [6], who explores the concept of “heritage as performance,” suggesting that traditions can be dynamically maintained through active community participation and adaptation to modern contexts. However, the literature also reveals gaps in understanding how religious institutions specifically address the challenges of youth disinterest and global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, which can disrupt traditional practices. In the Jia Cai festival context, modernization has necessitated adaptations such as using digital platforms for promotion and incorporating modern elements into traditional rituals. These adaptations are crucial for keeping the festival relevant to younger generations while maintaining its traditional essence.

The Jia Cai festival is a significant cultural event for Phuket’s Chinese community, reflecting their ancestral heritage and religious beliefs. Studies on the Chinese diaspora, such as those by Pan [10] and Nyiri [9], provide insights into the cultural dynamics of Chinese communities abroad. These works highlight how diaspora communities maintain cultural practices to preserve their identity in foreign lands. In Phuket, the Jia Cai festival is a focal point for cultural expression and community cohesion. The work of Cohen [2] on the cultural identity of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia is particularly relevant as it explores how festivals and rituals play a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity. Despite these insights, there is a lack of specific research on how such festivals navigate the challenges posed by modernity, particularly in engaging younger generations and adapting to external shocks such as pandemics.

Theoretical frameworks such as Geertz’s “thick description” [5] provide a methodological approach to understanding the deep cultural meanings embedded in rituals and practices. This framework helps analyze the Jia Cai festival as it allows for a detailed examination of the symbolic and social significance of the festival’s rituals. Additionally, the concept of “cultural resilience,” as discussed by Folke [4], provides a lens through which to view the adaptive strategies employed by the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine. Cultural resilience emphasizes the ability of cultural practices to adapt and thrive in the face of external pressures, ensuring their continuation over time. However, the concept of cultural resilience is often applied broadly, and there is a need for more focused studies on how it operates within specific contexts, such as the Jia Cai festival’s response to COVID-19 and other modern challenges.

The literature on the role of religious institutions in cultural preservation, the impact of modernization on traditional practices, and the dynamics of diaspora communities provide a comprehensive backdrop for understanding the preserva-

tion of the Jia Cai festival through the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine. These studies underscore the importance of adaptive strategies and community engagement in maintaining cultural heritage. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in the literature regarding how these institutions address contemporary challenges, particularly in maintaining youth engagement and adapting to sudden global crises. The Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine’s efforts to preserve the Jia Cai festival reflect broader themes of cultural resilience and the dynamic nature of tradition in the modern world.

In conclusion, while existing literature offers valuable insights into cultural preservation, it often overlooks the specific challenges that arise from modernity and global crises. This study seeks to fill this gap by critically analyzing the strategies employed by the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine in addressing these challenges, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of cultural resilience and the role of religious institutions in a rapidly changing world.

3. Methodology

This study employs an ethnographic approach to understand the role of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine in the preservation and inheritance of the Jia Cai festival. The methodology is grounded in well-established ethnographic traditions and includes fieldwork, participant observation, targeted interviews, and historical analysis.

Fieldwork and Participant Observation: Following the ethnographic traditions of Malinowski [8] and Geertz [5], extensive fieldwork was conducted, focusing mainly on the activities of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine during the Jia Cai festival. Participant observation was crucial, involving active engagement in the shrine’s rituals and interactions with the devotees. This immersive approach is vital for gaining an insider’s perspective on the shrine’s practices, the significance of its rituals, and the behaviors and beliefs of its participants. By participating in the festival’s daily activities and significant events, the researcher could observe the dynamics of ritual performance, community involvement, and the shrine’s role in cultural transmission.

Targeted Interviews: Semi-structured interviews, informed by interpretive theories [5, 11], were conducted with key informants. These included the shrine’s caretakers, ritual participants, local community members, and festival organizers. The aim was to collect varied narratives and perspectives, mainly focusing on the shrine’s role in the Jia Cai festival. Additionally, specific attention was given to exploring how the shrine’s leadership has responded to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, youth disinterest, and the pressures of modernization. Interview questions were designed to elicit detailed accounts of the strategies employed by the shrine to adapt to these challenges, offering a critical evaluation of their effectiveness. Through these interviews, the study sought to understand the contemporary relevance of the shrine and the individual meanings ascribed to its prac-

tices. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling the interviewees to express their thoughts and experiences in depth while ensuring that key topics were covered.

Historical Analysis of the Shrine: The historical trajectory of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine within the festival context was examined through the analysis of historical records, academic literature, and archival materials. This method, aligned with historical anthropology [12, 19], underscores the importance of historical context in comprehending the shrine's contemporary cultural role. By tracing the development of the shrine and its association with the Jia Cai festival over time, the study contextualizes current practices within a broader historical framework. This analysis highlights the continuity and change in the shrine's functions and significance, providing a deeper understanding of its role in the cultural landscape of Phuket. The historical analysis also considered how past challenges were managed by the shrine's leadership, offering a comparative perspective on how current strategies differ or align with historical precedents.

By integrating these methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine's role in preserving and transmitting the Jia Cai festival. The combination of participant observation, targeted interviews, and historical analysis allows a multidimensional exploration of the shrine's cultural significance and community engagement with its practices. Moreover, this methodology facilitates a critical assessment of the strategies employed by the shrine's leadership in responding to the unique challenges of the present day, offering insights into the broader implications for cultural preservation in a modern context. This methodological approach ensures a thorough examination of the complex interplay between tradition, community, and cultural preservation.

4. Historical Context and Function of the Shrine

The Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine, an ancient and revered religious site on Phuket Island, is a vital link to the island's rich Chinese heritage. The shrine's history is deeply intertwined with the local Chinese community's efforts to preserve cultural and religious practices, most notably the annual Jia Cai festival.

The origins of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine date back to around 1902 when it was initially located in the Suan Phlu area. Historical accounts describe a significant event where a fire broke out in a house in Ang-Arai Alley, now known as Soi Rommanee. As the fire threatened to engulf the shrine, quick-thinking villagers saved crucial items such as the incense burner and other sacred objects dedicated to the Nine Emperor Gods, relocating them to a safer location in Suan Phlu [14]. This incident highlights the community's deep reverence for the shrine and their commitment to its preser-

vation. Ang-Arai Alley, situated in the Bodhi Monastery area, is approximately one kilometer from the shrine's current site. The relocation to Suan Phlu allowed the community to continue the Jia Cai festival, an integral part of their cultural and religious life. However, the initial relocation site, a small thatched house, proved inadequate for the festival's needs. Recognizing this, Mr. Yang Fu, a prominent community member, facilitated the construction of a new, more spacious thatched house, ensuring that the shrine could adequately serve its purpose. The building, a harmonious blend of Chinese and Thai architectural elements, was designed to accommodate the shrine's expanding role in the cultural and religious life of Phuket [17].

The Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine's historical development is a narrative of physical transformations and a story of resilience and communal effort. Over the years, the shrine has withstood numerous challenges, including natural disasters and socio-economic changes, thanks to the unwavering support of the local community. The continuous renovations and expansions reflect the community's commitment to maintaining the shrine as a vital cultural and religious institution. In essence, the history of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine reflects the collective memory and identity of Phuket's Chinese community. Its evolution from a small thatched house to a prominent cultural landmark underscores the community's dedication to preserving its heritage and religious practices. The shrine stands today not only as a place of worship but also as a symbol of cultural continuity and resilience, central to the celebration of the Jia Cai festival and the broader cultural life of Phuket.

The Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine holds profound cultural and religious significance within the Phuket community, acting as the epicenter of the Jia Cai festival. This festival is celebrated annually from the first to the ninth day of the ninth lunar month; it is a major cultural event that underscores the community's religious devotion and cultural identity. The Jia Cai festival, also known as the Vegetarian Festival, involves a series of elaborate rituals, street processions, and acts of self-mortification aimed at purifying participants and invoking blessings from the Nine Emperor Gods. The shrine is central to these activities, serving as the venue for key ceremonies and rituals that define the festival. The shrine's cultural significance is deeply rooted in its role as a preserver of tradition. It is not merely a place of worship but a cultural institution where community values and identities are reinforced. During the festival, the shrine becomes a hive of activity, drawing large crowds of devotees who participate in rituals such as fire-walking, piercing, and other acts of devotion. These practices, while intense, are believed to bring good fortune and spiritual purification.

For the local community, the shrine is a symbol of cultural resilience and continuity. It provides a space for the expression of collective identity and the transmission of cultural values across generations. The rituals performed at the shrine are imbued with deep symbolic meanings, reflecting the

community's beliefs and social structures. The shrine also fosters social cohesion by serving as a gathering place for communal activities. The interactions during the festival strengthen community bonds, creating a sense of belonging and solidarity among participants. This social aspect is crucial for maintaining the community's cultural fabric, ensuring that traditions like the Jia Cai festival are preserved for future generations.

In conclusion, the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine is a cornerstone of cultural and religious life in Phuket. Its historical development, architectural beauty, and central role in the Jia Cai festival highlight its importance as a guardian of cultural heritage. The shrine is vital in preserving Phuket's Chinese community's cultural identity and religious practices through its rituals, community engagement, and symbolic significance.

5. Main Findings

5.1. Overview of Challenges Faced by the Shrine in Preserving the Jia Cai Festival

The Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine has long been the custodian of the Jia Cai festival, a profoundly significant cultural and religious event for Phuket's Chinese community. Over time, this role has placed the shrine in a position of immense responsibility, preserving the traditions of the past and negotiating the complexities of the present. Several critical challenges have emerged, including modernization, the COVID-19 pandemic, the disconnection between traditional practices and modern lifestyles, and external pressures from tourism and commercialization. These challenges test the shrine's ability to maintain the festival's authenticity while adapting to external pressures, creating a delicate balancing act for its leadership.

One of the most persistent challenges facing the Jia Cai festival is the impact of modernization on community participation, particularly among younger generations. Modernization has increasingly distanced the youth from traditional practices, as many now perceive the customs of the Jia Cai festival as outdated and irrelevant in the context of their modern lives. This generational gap poses a serious threat to the festival's future, as the continued engagement of younger generations is critical for its survival [15]. Younger members of the community, influenced by globalized media, education, and technology, often view the traditional rituals associated with the festival—such as fasting, prayers, and incense burning—as disconnected from their everyday realities. Many prefer modern forms of entertainment or social engagement over religious practices that require discipline and dedication. As a result, the Jia Cai festival, once a vibrant celebration attended by all generations, is now struggling to attract young participants who see little personal relevance in its traditions [18]. The failure to bridge this generational gap

has broader implications for cultural transmission. If the younger generation remains disengaged, there is a real risk that the cultural knowledge and values embedded in the festival will not be passed down, potentially leading to the erosion of the festival's significance over time. This cultural disconnect is not unique to Phuket; it reflects broader societal changes where modernization and globalization often conflict with preserving local traditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an even more immediate and severe threat to the Jia Cai festival's continuity. The pandemic forced the shrine to halt or drastically reduce public gatherings and threatened the festival's essence, which relies on large communal participation, traditional rituals, and physical presence. The pandemic highlighted how fragile cultural practices can be in global crises, revealing the shrine's vulnerability to external forces beyond its control [18]. The shrine's leadership was forced to adapt rapidly to unprecedented circumstances as soon as the pandemic struck. Health and safety protocols such as D-M-H-T-T-A (Distancing, Mask-wearing, Hand washing, Testing, Temperature checking, and Alert application) were implemented to safeguard the participants. While necessary, these measures significantly altered the format of the festival. Key events were scaled down, participation was strictly limited, and specific rituals, such as communal prayers and processions, were modified or omitted to comply with public health guidelines [1]. While these adjustments allowed the festival to continue, they posed a significant challenge to maintaining its spiritual and cultural authenticity. Some community members expressed concern that these changes diluted the festival's meaning. For example, rituals requiring close contact or collective participation, integral to the festival's religious efficacy, were no longer feasible. Although the shrine's leadership worked diligently to adapt to these challenges, many devotees felt the festival had lost some of its spiritual depth due to the necessary modifications [15].

Moreover, the long-term impact of these pandemic-induced changes remains uncertain. The shrine's leadership must consider retaining some of these adaptations in future festivals or reverting to traditional practices. This decision is further complicated by the lingering effects of the pandemic, including the possibility of future health crises. The challenge lies in determining whether the festival's modified format will weaken its cultural integrity or, conversely, whether these adaptations offer a new model for resilience in the face of external threats [18].

In addition to modernization and the pandemic, the Jia Cai festival faces an ongoing tension between its traditional rituals and the demands of contemporary life. Many of the festival's practices, such as strict fasting, extended periods of prayer, and physical participation in processions, are increasingly viewed as incompatible with the fast-paced, technology-driven lives of younger community members [3]. For younger participants, the festival's traditional format often feels rigid and inaccessible, creating a growing disconnect

between them and the religious and cultural values the festival embodies. This cultural rift threatens the festival's relevance and the community's broader connection to its Chinese heritage. Without meaningful engagement from the younger generation, the cultural transmission that has sustained the festival for generations is at risk of breaking down. Furthermore, this disconnect is exacerbated by globalization and digitalization, which have introduced alternative forms of social engagement and entertainment that often overshadow traditional practices. As younger community members embrace these modern alternatives, the Jia Cai festival struggles to retain its place as a central event in their lives. If this trend continues, the festival could gradually lose its ability to function as a bridge between past and present, potentially leading to a decline in cultural significance [16].

Tourism is both a boon and a burden for the Jia Cai festival. On the one hand, it brings financial resources and visibility to the festival, attracting visitors from outside the local community. However, this attention comes at a cost. The growing influx of tourists has led to commercializing certain aspects of the festival, transforming some of its sacred rituals into spectacles designed to cater to visitors rather than preserve cultural authenticity [1]. This shift toward commercialization raises critical questions about the festival's future. As the shrine seeks to balance economic benefits with cultural preservation, it faces the risk of diluting the religious and spiritual meaning of the festival. If the festival becomes overly commercialized, it could lose its relevance to the local community, further deepening the disconnect between traditional practices and modern life [7].

Moreover, the shrine's reliance on tourism may leave the festival vulnerable to external market forces, as evidenced by the pandemic's impact on global travel. The disruption of tourism during the pandemic further emphasized the precariousness of relying on external audiences for cultural preservation. As the shrine moves forward, it must carefully navigate the pressures of commercialization while striving to maintain the festival's integrity for future generations.

These challenges—modernization, the COVID-19 pandemic, the clash between traditional practices and modern lifestyles, and external pressures from tourism—pose severe threats to the continuity of the Jia Cai festival. Each of these factors undermines the cultural and religious significance of the event, placing the shrine under pressure to adapt while maintaining the festival's core traditions. The shrine's efforts to navigate these multiple challenges reflect the broader struggle for cultural preservation in the face of evolving social, economic, and public health landscapes. This overview sets the stage for a more focused analysis of how the shrine has responded to two critical challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic and youth disinterest, which pose the most immediate threat to the festival's long-term sustainability.

5.2. Challenges Faced by the Shrine in COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic posed immense challenges to the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine's operations and its ability to continue the Jia Cai festival. With the outbreak of the pandemic, traditional community gatherings were severely restricted, as the government imposed stringent public health measures such as social distancing, mask mandates, and limits on the number of attendees. Typically, the Jia Cai festival draws large crowds of devotees and tourists, but the pandemic necessitated a significant reduction in the festival's scale. Furthermore, many vital religious rituals and communal activities had to be modified or canceled. For instance, communal prayers, processions, and large-scale vegetarian food distributions were either scaled down or omitted entirely to ensure safety [15].

In response to the pandemic, the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine swiftly implemented a series of adaptive strategies to ensure that the Jia Cai festival could continue while adhering to public health protocols. The shrine adopted the D-M-H-T-T-A measures (Distancing, Mask-wearing, Hand washing, Testing, Temperature checking, and Alert application) to mitigate the risk of virus transmission. These adjustments included rearranging the shrine's layout to create designated entrances and exits, setting up temperature screening checkpoints, and providing hand sanitizing stations for all participants [18]. Social distancing was strictly enforced, which limited direct interactions and affected the festival's traditionally vibrant and communal atmosphere. Despite these measures, the essence of the festival was inevitably altered.

Moreover, the shrine leveraged technology to maintain the festival's accessibility by live-streaming many religious ceremonies. This allowed those unable to attend in person due to travel restrictions or safety concerns to participate virtually. The shrine also expanded its communication efforts through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. These platforms were used to broadcast the events and engage with the audience by addressing questions and concerns in real time. This digital shift allowed the shrine to reach a broader audience, including younger generations who may have previously been less involved in the festival [1]. Although these innovations helped to maintain the festival's vitality, the changes sparked a debate among devotees about the appropriateness of conducting sacred rituals online.

While these measures enabled the Jia Cai festival to continue, they significantly affected the cultural and spiritual depth of the event. Many devotees expressed concerns that the strict health protocols diluted the religious sanctity and social cohesion traditionally associated with the festival. In previous years, the festival provided an opportunity for religious expression and a vital space for community bonding. The scaled-down version of the festival, combined with the reduction in communal rituals, left many participants feeling

that the essence of the tradition had been compromised [15].

The use of technology, while necessary, also raised concerns about the spiritual efficacy of online participation. Devotees who joined virtually noted that while they could observe the rituals, the experience lacked the profound emotional and spiritual connection from being physically present at the shrine. This highlighted a fundamental limitation of virtual engagement in deeply rooted cultural and religious practices [1]. However, the shrine's leadership emphasized the importance of balancing tradition with modernity, recognizing that the digital shift was essential in ensuring the festival's continuity during a global health crisis.

The adaptations made during the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to have lasting implications for the future of the Jia Cai festival. The pandemic revealed the vulnerability of large gatherings to public health crises, which may prompt the shrine to retain specific health and safety measures even after the pandemic subsides. The successful integration of online platforms during the festival could lead to a more permanent hybrid model, blending in-person participation with digital access. This approach would allow the shrine to engage a wider audience, particularly those who are geographically distant or unable to attend in person [18]. However, this digital transformation presents challenges regarding the festival's cultural integrity. Over-reliance on virtual formats may weaken the social and spiritual bonds central to the festival. The community-based nature of the Jia Cai festival, which relies on physical presence and communal participation, could be further diluted if virtual engagement becomes the norm. The shrine's leadership now faces the complex task of balancing the preservation of cultural heritage with the need to modernize and adapt to external pressures, such as public health concerns and technological advancements.

The experience of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine during the pandemic is echoed in the challenges faced by many cultural and religious institutions in Thailand. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the shrine had to adjust its practices to comply with health protocols swiftly, mirroring broader trends nationwide. For example, adopting the D-M-H-T-T-A measures was essential in ensuring the safety of participants. These included physical distancing, temperature checks, and using face masks and hand sanitizers to prevent the spread of the virus. The shrine's ability to rapidly implement these measures ensured that the festival could proceed, albeit in a modified form.

Additionally, the shrine's leadership embraced digital platforms to maintain community engagement. The festival's rituals were live-streamed on social media, allowing devotees who could not attend in person to participate remotely. This shift toward online participation expanded the festival's reach, attracting younger audiences and those unfamiliar with the festival's traditions. Social media became a critical tool for broadcasting events and fostering dialogue between the shrine and the public. Despite resistance from traditionalists who questioned the appropriateness of online platforms

for religious rituals, the shrine succeeded in adapting to the new normal by creating a digital space for religious and cultural engagement. This strategy helped build stronger community ties and ensured the festival's relevance during uncertainty.

In conclusion, the shrine's response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 highlights its resilience and ability to adapt to a rapidly changing world. The pandemic forced the shrine to rethink how it organizes and communicates the Jia Cai festival, ultimately strengthening community involvement and enhancing cooperation. While the future format of the festival remains uncertain, the lessons learned during this period will likely inform how the shrine navigates future crises and continues to preserve its cultural and religious heritage.

5.3. Challenges Faced by the Shrine in Engaging Younger Generations

One of the most significant challenges facing the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine in preserving the Jia Cai festival is the growing disinterest among younger generations. Modernization, globalized media, and contemporary social values have contributed to a widening generational gap between older community members, who deeply value traditional practices, and younger individuals, who often see these customs as outdated and disconnected from their modern lifestyles [18].

Many younger people view the festival's traditional rituals—such as fasting, prayer, and incense burning—as irrelevant or burdensome within the context of their fast-paced, technology-driven lives. Instant gratification, convenience, and engagement with global pop culture overshadow religious ceremonies' slower, more contemplative rhythms. As a result, fewer young people actively engage in the practices the festival seeks to preserve, weakening the transmission of cultural values between generations [15]. To address the challenge of youth disinterest, the shrine has implemented a series of initiatives designed to encourage greater involvement of younger generations. These strategies focus on fostering a connection between youth and the festival by incorporating modern elements, promoting skills development, and using digital platforms to engage the younger audience.

Building Positive Relationships: The shrine has focused on creating a collaborative atmosphere by involving younger generations in the planning and execution of the festival. This approach has allowed young people to feel they play a vital role in the festival's success, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership. Additionally, the shrine has organized activities that promote intergenerational collaboration, strengthening ties between youth and older community members. This strategy has been key in bridging traditional values and modern expectations [14].

Skill Development and Education: The shrine has invested in training programs that equip younger community members with valuable skills and cultural knowledge. For example,

before the festival, youth are given opportunities to participate in workshops that teach them about the festival's historical and cultural significance and how to manage various aspects of the event. These training programs are designed to instill a deeper appreciation for local traditions among the youth. Notably, the shrine also encourages students to participate in various preparatory activities months before the festival, ensuring that young people play an active role in maintaining the cultural heritage [1]. One standout program involves the youth taking on active roles in the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine's museum, where they share their knowledge of the Jia Cai festival with visitors. This strengthens their understanding of the tradition and provides them with a platform to transmit cultural knowledge to the broader public. Their involvement extends beyond education to logistical support during the festival, such as preparing materials, explaining festival etiquette, and assisting with offerings. This hands-on experience helps young participants develop a deeper connection to the festival, reinforcing the continuity of these traditions [18].

Leveraging Digital Platforms to Attract Youth: Recognizing the need to reach young audiences where they are most active, the shrine has turned to social media and online platforms to promote festival activities. For example, the shrine has hosted creative competitions, such as music and art or photography contests, allowing youth to express their creativity engaging and culturally relevantly. Additionally, public speaking competitions on the theme "My Jia Cai Festival" have provided a platform for youth to articulate their connection to the tradition, with winners receiving recognition through community announcements [14].

Through these initiatives, the shrine has fostered greater youth involvement, ensuring the preservation of the Jia Cai festival is dynamic and sustainable within the community. By embracing modern communication tools, the shrine has broadened the festival's appeal, attracting a younger audience while maintaining the festival's cultural essence.

While these strategies have undoubtedly increased youth participation in the Jia Cai festival, their overall impact remains mixed. Many younger community members still perceive the festival's core practices as outdated despite incorporating modern elements. The challenge is ensuring that digital engagement and modern activities do not overshadow the festival's deeper religious and cultural significance. While youth may be drawn to creative competitions or online events, these initiatives must also lead to a genuine connection with the festival's traditions and values [3]. Furthermore, the risk of alienating older, more conservative community members persists. While necessary, modernizing the festival to appeal to youth could dilute the religious and cultural integrity that the older generation holds dear. Finding a balance between maintaining the festival's core traditions and adapting to modern expectations remains a critical challenge for the shrine's leadership [14].

The disconnection between youth and traditional practices seriously threatens the transmission of cultural values em-

bedded in the Jia Cai festival. If younger generations view the festival as irrelevant, the risk of cultural erosion increases. The shrine's leadership recognizes that without youth engagement, the festival's significance may diminish over time, potentially weakening a key cultural link within Phuket's Chinese community [16]. However, the shrine's initiatives, particularly those that involve skill development, education, and digital outreach, have laid a solid foundation for potential future involvement. The shrine fosters a meaningful connection between tradition and modernity by providing young people with the tools to appreciate and participate in the festival. This strategy ensures that the festival will continue to evolve while preserving its core traditions, thus securing its place in the community for future generations. The challenge of cultural transmission is not simply about participation but about ensuring that the values and practices of the Jia Cai festival are passed down to future generations. The shrine struggles to balance modern engagement strategies with preserving cultural authenticity.

5.4. Leadership and Governance in Navigating Multiple Challenges

The leadership and governance of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine represent more than just the management of a local festival. The shrine's ability to adapt to crises and social shifts speaks to a universal struggle faced by cultural and religious institutions worldwide—the preservation of cultural heritage in an increasingly modernized and globalized society. This challenge is exacerbated by unexpected crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and long-standing generational shifts that lead to a disconnect between younger and older generations. Through strategic leadership and governance, the shrine demonstrates how cultural heritage can be preserved, adapted, and relevant in contemporary contexts, appealing to local and global audiences.

5.4.1. Leadership and Crisis Management: Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The shrine's leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the broader issue of cultural resilience in global crises. Many cultural and religious institutions faced challenging maintaining their traditions when public gatherings were restricted. Nevertheless, the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine's adaptive leadership ensured that the Jia Cai festival continued, albeit in a modified format. By quickly implementing health measures such as D-M-H-T-T-A, the shrine's governance has responded pragmatically to public safety without abandoning the festival's core traditions [18]. This adaptive approach reflects a universal theme: how cultural institutions can survive and even thrive in the face of external shocks. The use of technology—such as live-streaming religious ceremonies and engaging with the community through social media—demonstrates how cultural practices can be sustained during times of crisis by integrating modern tools.

This aspect of the shrine's governance connects to broader global discussions about the role of digital technology in preserving intangible cultural heritage. The shrine's leadership is a case study of how cultural institutions can use digital platforms to maintain community engagement, ensuring that even physically distant can participate [1]. By emphasizing how leadership and governance navigated the pandemic, the study can resonate with a global audience interested in cultural preservation, community resilience, and adaptive leadership. It also raises broader questions about the future role of technology in religious and cultural events, which is increasingly relevant in today's digital age.

5.4.2. Engaging Youth: Leadership's Role in Securing Cultural Continuity

Another significant aspect of the shrine's governance is its efforts to bridge the generational gap and engage younger community members in the Jia Cai festival. The challenge of youth disinterest is not unique to the shrine; it is a common issue faced by cultural and religious institutions worldwide. As younger generations are influenced by globalization, digital media, and modern lifestyles, they often become detached from traditional practices, which they may perceive as irrelevant or outdated [18]. Young people were invited to take on active roles in festival planning, giving them a sense of responsibility and a stake in the festival's success. Workshops were offered to teach young participants about the historical and cultural significance of the Jia Cai festival, deepening their connection to the event. The shrine used social media and digital platforms to promote the festival in ways that resonated with younger audiences, such as hosting creative competitions and public speaking contests [14]. These strategies are significant beyond the local context, as they illustrate how cultural institutions worldwide can navigate the challenge of generational transmission. Youth involvement is essential for ensuring that traditions are not lost over time, and the shrine's governance provides a model for how this can be achieved. By empowering young people through active participation and digital engagement, the shrine preserves its heritage and adapts it to modern realities, ensuring its relevance for future generations.

In a broader context, the shrine's efforts in youth engagement speak to the global challenge of cultural sustainability. Many cultural traditions face extinction due to the lack of interest from younger generations. However, the shrine's proactive governance demonstrates that it is possible to foster a meaningful connection between youth and tradition with the right strategies. This approach could inspire other cultural institutions globally to rethink how they engage the next generation in preserving intangible heritage.

5.4.3. Balancing Tradition and Modernization: A Leadership Dilemma

The overarching governance challenge for the shrine lies

in balancing the preservation of tradition with the necessity of modernization. This challenge resonates with many cultural institutions worldwide struggling to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. The leadership's strategic decision-making is crucial in maintaining this balance. On the one hand, the shrine must retain the religious and cultural integrity of the Jia Cai festival to honor its roots and fulfill the expectations of older generations. On the other hand, it must adapt to the modern needs of younger generations and the realities of a globalized society, which often require integrating technology and contemporary forms of engagement [16].

This delicate balancing act speaks to the broader global tension between tradition and modernity. The leadership's governance provides valuable insights into how institutions can maintain cultural authenticity while embracing necessary adaptations. Whether through technology to sustain rituals during a pandemic or the inclusion of youth in planning and execution, the shrine's leadership demonstrates how adaptive governance can help navigate the complexities of preserving heritage in the modern world.

Ultimately, the leadership and governance of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine offer valuable lessons for the broader discussion on cultural preservation. The shrine's success in navigating multiple challenges—whether through pragmatic responses to the pandemic or innovative strategies to engage youth—illustrates how cultural institutions can remain resilient in the face of external pressures. This case study underscores the importance of adaptive leadership in ensuring that cultural heritage is preserved and made relevant for future generations.

6. Further Discussions

In this ethnographic study, the challenges the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine faces in preserving the Jia Cai festival provide a lens through which broader societal issues surrounding cultural heritage preservation can be explored. The shrine's ability to navigate multiple challenges—such as the COVID-19 pandemic and youth disinterest—offers insights into local dynamics and more universal themes relevant to a broader readership. These themes include the delicate balance between tradition and modernization, the role of leadership and governance in sustaining cultural practices, and the importance of intergenerational transmission of values. This section will emphasize the significance of cultural preservation in various contexts, including government promotion of tourism, religious efficacy, community pride, and the transmission of values to future generations. By examining the shrine's leadership strategies, this study reveals how the preservation of cultural heritage extends beyond the immediate festival context and touches on diverse issues that are relevant both locally and globally.

6.1. Government Promotion of Tourism and Cultural Preservation

One way to channel the analysis in an exciting direction is to explore how cultural preservation intersects with the government's tourism promotion. Although deeply rooted in religious and cultural traditions, the Jia Cai festival has become an important part of Phuket's identity as a tourist destination. The festival attracts both local devotees and international visitors, contributing to the local economy while also highlighting the cultural heritage of Phuket's Chinese community.

However, the relationship between tourism and cultural preservation is fraught with tension. On the one hand, tourism provides necessary financial support and raises awareness of cultural practices. On the other hand, the pressure to cater to tourists can lead to the commercialization of sacred traditions, potentially diluting their cultural and religious significance. The Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine has faced this dilemma as it strives to maintain the authenticity of the Jia Cai festival while accommodating the influx of tourists. The leadership's careful governance in balancing these competing demands demonstrates how cultural institutions can navigate cultural tourism's complexities without compromising their traditions' integrity [1].

6.2. Religious Efficacy and the Preservation of Rituals

Religious efficacy is another key theme that can broaden the study's appeal. The Jia Cai festival is not just a cultural event but a deeply religious experience for many of the shrine's devotees. Preserving the festival's spiritual integrity in the face of modern pressures is one of the shrine's most significant challenges. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the shrine to modify or omit key rituals, such as communal prayers and processions, raising concerns among devotees about whether the festival could still fulfill its religious purpose [15]. The shrine's leadership had to navigate this challenge by balancing the need for public safety with the community's spiritual needs. Using digital platforms to live-stream religious ceremonies offered a temporary solution but highlighted the limitations of virtual participation in religious practices. This dilemma speaks to a broader issue religious institutions face: how to maintain religious efficacy in an increasingly digital and modern world.

6.3. Community Pride and the Role of Cultural Preservation

Another important aspect of this study is the role of cultural preservation in fostering community pride and social cohesion. The Jia Cai festival is a religious event and a vital expression of community identity. For the Chinese community in Phuket, the festival serves as a reminder of their cultural heritage and provides a space for intergenerational

bonding. The leadership of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine has actively worked to preserve this sense of community by involving young people in the planning and execution of the festival, thus ensuring that the festival remains relevant to future generations [14].

The shrine's efforts to engage youth are particularly significant in the context of community building. By providing young people with meaningful roles in the festival—such as organizing events, managing logistics, and educating others about the festival's history—the shrine fosters a sense of responsibility and cultural pride among the younger generation. This helps ensure the festival's continuity and strengthens the community's social fabric by creating a shared sense of purpose [16]. It also connects to more extensive discussions about the importance of heritage preservation in maintaining social ties and fostering a sense of belonging in an increasingly fragmented world.

6.4. Transmission of Values to Future Generations

Perhaps the most significant theme of this study is transmitting cultural values to future generations. The leadership of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine has recognized that the future of the Jia Cai festival depends on the active involvement of younger generations. This recognition has prompted the shrine to implement programs designed to educate and engage young people, such as offering training workshops on cultural heritage, organizing youth-led activities, and using digital platforms to connect with younger audiences [18].

However, the challenge lies in getting young people to participate in the festival and in ensuring that they develop a genuine connection to the cultural values embedded in the festival. Without this deeper connection, there is a risk that the festival will lose its significance over time, as younger generations may only engage with its surface-level aspects. The shrine's leadership must navigate the fine line between modernizing the festival to appeal to youth and preserving its core religious and cultural traditions [3].

In conclusion, the leadership and governance of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine offer a rich case study for exploring broader issues surrounding cultural preservation. By addressing the shrine's responses to the challenges posed by COVID-19, youth disinterest, and modernization, this study engages with universal themes such as government promotion of tourism, religious efficacy, community pride, and the transmission of values to future generations. Each theme is relevant to a wide readership and allows for a deeper understanding of how cultural heritage can be preserved and adapted in the face of external pressures.

7. Conclusions

This ethnographic study of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine's preservation of the Jia Cai festival reveals the complex inter-

play between tradition, modernity, and leadership in navigating multiple challenges. As the shrine faces threats from both the COVID-19 pandemic and youth disinterest, its leadership's role in balancing the preservation of cultural heritage with necessary adaptations highlights key themes that resonate beyond the local context.

The shrine's ability to swiftly implement public health measures during the pandemic while simultaneously adopting digital platforms to ensure the festival's continuity speaks to its resilience and adaptability. These actions preserved the festival in a crisis and showcased how religious institutions can incorporate modern tools to maintain community engagement. However, the shrine's leadership must also address the long-term implications of these adaptations, particularly as the festival becomes increasingly digitalized. This case study reflects broader global concerns about the impact of modernization on religious efficacy and the authenticity of traditional practices in contemporary society.

Moreover, the shrine's strategies for engaging the younger generation emphasize intergenerational transmission's critical role in ensuring cultural traditions' survival. The shrine has made strides in fostering a connection between younger people and their cultural heritage by involving youth in festival planning, offering training programs, and leveraging social media. However, the leadership must continue to find ways to deepen this engagement, ensuring that younger generations are not only involved but also emotionally and spiritually connected to the festival's core values. This challenge of youth engagement is not unique to the Jia Cai festival. However, it reflects a global issue many cultural and religious institutions face in the modern world.

This study also touches on the broader societal implications of cultural preservation, including its role in government tourism promotion, community pride, and social cohesion. The Jia Cai festival is a critical cultural marker for Phuket's Chinese community, contributing to a sense of place and identity. At the same time, the leadership must navigate the delicate balance between maintaining the cultural integrity of the festival and accommodating the pressures of commercialization and tourism.

In conclusion, the governance and leadership of the Shui Dui Dou Mu Shrine provide a model for how cultural institutions can adapt to modern challenges while maintaining the authenticity and spiritual significance of their traditions. This study demonstrates how cultural heritage can be preserved and revitalized in an evolving world by addressing issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, youth disinterest, and the balance between tradition and modernity. The lessons drawn from this case study offer broader insights into the sustainability of cultural practices in the face of globalization, digitalization, and societal change.

Abbreviations

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease 2019

Author Contributions

Jularat Kamnoi is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Research Fields

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