

Research Article

Designing A Tool for Small Rural Community Classification Based on Traditional Belief and Its Implication for Future Tourism Development: A Case Study of North-Eastern Community

Duangkamol Limwongse^{*1}, Makoto Watanabe² and Kenta Ono³

¹ Department of Design Science, Chiba University, Chiba 263-8522, Japan

^{2,3} Faculty of Engineering, Chiba University, Chiba 263-8522, Japan

Abstract

This research focused on the cultural and economic significance of traditional ghost beliefs in rural communities. The primary objectives of this study are threefold: 1) the development and contribution of tools and processes for classifying communities based on their ghost beliefs, 2) the testing and validation of these classification tools, and 3) the proposition of strategies aimed at leveraging ghost beliefs for local community space development to foster tourism. This study engaged 240 local residents in community classification testing, sought insights from three key informants, and collaborated with three academic experts for validation. A combination of quantitative and qualitative surveys was employed to rigorously test and refine the community classification tools. The findings demonstrated that the developed tools effectively classified rural communities, thereby increasing residents' awareness of traditional beliefs as valuable community assets. For more effectiveness, two innovative strategies—"Watch local" and "Be local"—are introduced to the cultural and economic development in rural communities. The tools expedited community assessment and the development of custom tourism formats for diverse tourist types. These contributed to coherent tourism plans that met community needs, thereby enhancing tourist destinations. Data analysis refined the tourism formats to efficaciously meet community and tourist expectations. This research furnished vital insights into capitalizing on ghost beliefs for the economic advancement of rural communities via sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords: Local Ghost Belief, Community Classification Tools, Assessment Process, Future Tourism Development

* Corresponding author:

Duangkamol Limwongse E-mail: duangkamol.lim@gmail.com

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Introduction

Throughout Thai history, ghosts, known as “Phee” in the Thai language, have played a significant and enduring role in Thai society especially in the agricultural community of the Isan or North-Eastern region. This region ethnographically composed of diverse ethnic groups, including the Phuthai, Yor, Yoi, Laos, Kaso, Kalerng, and more. The rich diversity of arts, culture, and traditions in the North-Eastern region can be attributed in part to its historical significance for a wide range of nationalities, a diversity primarily driven by immigration. This multifaceted tapestry of cultural backgrounds has facilitated social interactions with neighboring countries, resulting in profound cultural exchanges. Notably, the people of this region maintain a strong connection with nature. As Nartsupha and Uitrageol (2017) elucidated, historical settlement patterns in North-Eastern Thailand reveal a preference for areas abundant in natural resources, particularly those in proximity to water sources and forests. Living in harmony with nature and the relative distance from central government authority have further reinforced the people's belief in ghosts and the spiritual realm, using these beliefs as a form of psychological anchoring. It is imperative to explicate that the term “ghosts,” as employed in this context, does not allude to posthumous spirits. Rather, it designates autochthonous sacred entities that inhabit a variety of geographical settings, including mountains, forests, rivers, and agricultural terrains. These spiritual beings constitute a distinctive and intrinsic facet of the region's spiritual and cultural heritage. The Isan people classified ghosts into two distinct groups: benevolent and malevolent. The benevolent ghosts served as protectors and brought blessings to the local community. However, if not treated with respect and proper care, they could also bring misfortune and disturbances. This group included ancestral spirits, house spirits, and localized spirits revered within specific regions. On the other hand, the malevolent ghosts were inclined towards causing harm and wreaking havoc, such as those associated with sickness (Ketthart, 1999). As Potiwat (2016) stated, the belief in ghosts and supernatural phenomena has long been deeply ingrained in the culture and traditions of North-Eastern Thailand, significantly influencing local customs transmitted through rituals. In the Isan region, belief in ghosts holds a pervasive and integral role in the life cycle of its inhabitants, spanning from birth to death. For instance, the “Su-Kwan ritual” represents one of the earliest encountered rituals in this context. This ceremonial practice is specifically designed to safeguard newborns from malevolent spirits while simultaneously beseeching guardian spirits for protection. Similarly, the “Boon Khunlan” ritual assumes a paramount role in the cultural landscape of Isan. This ritual is conducted to pay homage to the guardians of rice fields, with the overarching aim of ensuring the favorable conditions necessary for a bountiful harvest characterized by high quality and yield of rice. Furthermore, in instances of illness, Isan individuals frequently turn to ghost communicators for guidance. These intermediaries are consulted to gain insights into the nature of their afflictions and to seek advice on the appropriate course of action for recovery. This practice underscores the deep-rooted and dynamic relationship between ghost beliefs and the everyday lives of the Isan people, exemplifying the profound influence of these spiritual beliefs on their cultural practices and well-being. Thongtao (2019) revealed that these beliefs and practices extended their influence on mental health, social dynamics, environmental conservation, and entertainment. Ghost belief apparently holds significant value in the rural community, both culturally and economically. These beliefs permeate all aspects of local life, evolving in response to sociocultural changes (Silapa-MAG, 2023).

However, modern local ghost festivals have shifted their focus from offerings to spirits towards tourism-oriented events, posing a risk of diluting the historical and cultural essence of these practices (Phungpracha, 2005). This evolution underscores the uncertain future of ghost belief culture: it could either flourish as cultural capital or disappear from rural communities. As communities develop, their engagement with ghost beliefs fluctuates, with some transforming these beliefs into valuable assets for local tourism. Recognizing and preserving each community's cultural values is pivotal for future development. However, there is currently no suitable method to encourage rural communities to appropriately understand and utilize their valuable ghost beliefs. Researcher aims to search for an appropriate tool to classify communities based on ghost beliefs, optimizing the use of local ghost belief in cultural and economic aspects. Hence, this research aims to design and test community classification tools rooted in ghost belief, using comprehensive methods. The ultimate objective is to devise a sustainable tool that preserves and meaningfully employs ghost belief as a fundamental component of local culture.

Literature review

Rural communities were typically characterized by four traits: (1) low population density, (2) dominance of agricultural activities, (3) the mutual interaction of population and natural environment influencing identity, and (4) robust social ties among residents (Drew, 2020). Such communities were formed either by geographical location, often centered around specific activities or shared beliefs. Diverse community types fostered unique interaction, exchange, and relationship patterns, enhancing everyday life in various ways (Douglas, 2010). Literature suggested that cultural beliefs served as the foundation of local communities. For instance, the widespread ghost belief in Northeast Thailand acted as a profound cultural capital with substantial impact on local life and spirit. This belief, esteemed as a cultural asset, required preservation and transformation into local economic capital. The concept of embodied cultural capital by (Bourdieu, 1986) related to the assimilation of thoughts and beliefs where common cultural capital augmented social capital. The expansion of social capital then contributed to the accumulation of symbolic capital, which led to economic capital (The Matter, 2019). (Limwongse & Watanabe, 2023) exhibited three characters of ghost belief in the community: (1) Local ghost belief levels, consisting of “Individual, Community, and Regional” levels. Individual level rituals were private, whereas community level rituals required collective organization by locals with a unified goal. Regional level rituals were coordinated collectively by multiple communities. (2) Local ghost belief components, related to the forms and purposes of the belief. Locals often maintained the purpose of the belief while modifying its form to suit societal changes. This adaptability enabled the evolution of ghost beliefs while conserving traditional ones. (3) Local ghost belief appearances, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects. Therefore, utilizing ghost belief as a form of capital for community development necessitated a comprehensive understanding of its local impact. The categorization of rural communities provided an instrumental means to guide potential management strategies of ghost belief in community development such as Waldorf (2016) proposed in Rationalizing Rural Area Classifications for the Economic Research Service: A Workshop Summary proposed rural community classifications based on thresholds, similarities, and aggregate indices. However, this study offered a community classification framework based on theoretical proposition of ghost belief from Limwongse and Watanabe (2023), distinguishing three types: The communities can be classified into three stages: “Untransformed,” “Transforming,” and “Transformed.” In the “Untransformed community,” ghost belief remains intact as a significant cultural capital. In the “Transforming community,” ghost belief persists but has experienced alterations or discontinuations. In the “Transformed community,” ghost belief has evolved into an economic asset. These classifications offer a structured understanding of the evolving relationship between ghost belief and the socioeconomic dynamics within these communities. This framework, coupled with the attributes of local ghost belief, constituted the basis for devising community classification tools design in the research.

Scope of study

This research aimed to scrutinize community classification mechanisms and procedures rooted in collective ghost beliefs, symbolized through culturally significant rituals and symbols. Additionally, the study probed the potential conversion of these beliefs into economic capital. The conceptual research framework was constructed based on empirical discoveries associated with three ghost characteristics and community categorization proposed by (Limwongse & Watanabe, 2023). The independent variable is the three-community type, and the dependent variable are the ghost belief characters. The study's geographical selection criteria encompassed four key factors; 1) The community's location within the Northeast region of Thailand, 2) Its status as a rural community situated outside urban centers, 3) A community population ranging between 250 to 400 families, and 4) The presence of ghost belief manifestations, such as rituals and symbols, within the community. Through purposive sampling, three unique small local communities in the Sakon Nakhon province were purposefully selected as case studies.

Objective

This research aimed to devise efficient tools for classifying local communities based on ghost beliefs and to propose a future development plan. This goal was distilled into three primary objectives:

1. To develop and to contribute community classification tools and processes.

2. To test and to validate the community classification tools, processes, and results drawn from expert reviews.
3. To propose strategies to exploit ghost belief in local community space development for tourism purposes.

Research method

The research methodology entailed six steps. The first, “Literature Review,” constructed a theoretical framework and set the foundation for the research. The second, “Construction of the Community Classification Model and the Design of the Community Assessment Tools and Process,” concentrated on designing a suggested classification model based on comprehending the relationships between local traditional ghost belief attributes and community types. This stage incorporated the development of a community assessment form and the description of the assessment process for community classification. The third step, “Testing,” employed the three local community cases assessment and evaluation. Interviews with key informants from each community were also conducted to collect data for analysis. The fourth step, “Community Classification Results,” concerned the interpretation of the classification outcomes. The proposed classification model was compared with the test results, leading to conclusions about community classification based on ghost beliefs. The fifth step, “Validating the Classification Results and the Community Classification Assessment Tools,” ensured the precision and dependability of the assessment tools. Here, comprehensive interviews with three experts were performed, leveraging their insights and perspectives to validate the classification results. The final step, “Proposing Ideas for Future Community Development in Tourism,” involved suggesting future development strategies for the communities within a tourism context. This stage sought to utilize the research findings to augment and enhance the communities' tourism potential.

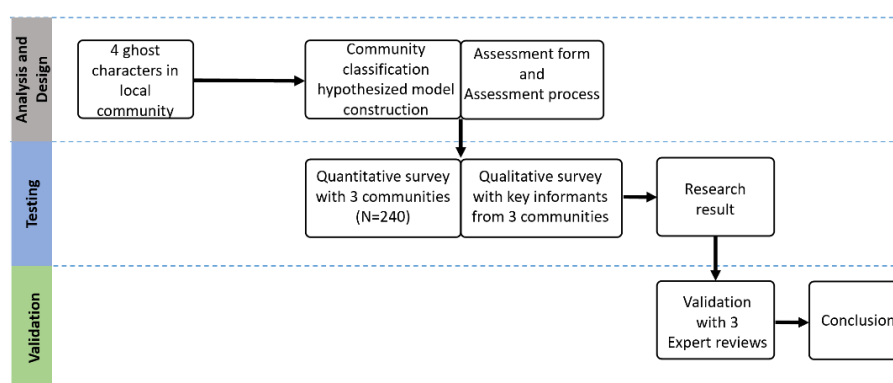


Figure 1 Research Methodology Diagram
source: author team, 2023

Participants/ Sample

In this study, participants were sorted into three groups utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The first group encompassed 240 residents from three rural communities in North-Eastern region (80 residents per community). Screening questions were utilized to identify specific participant profiles for a quantitative survey on ghost beliefs. The selection criteria included: 1) respondents must have been born in the community, 2) they needed to be at least 30 years old, and 3) they had to have previously attended a ghost ritual within the community. The second group included three key local informants (one from each community) actively engaged in future community management and development, like village headmen. This group provided extensive information about potential ghost belief cultures, rituals, or symbols in the community, along with possible community spaces for tourism development. They also shared insights related to future community development. The third group consisted of three academic experts acquainted with the three community cases or who had collaborated with these communities for over three years. These

participants contributed to the validation of the community classification tools, process, and results, and suggested ideas for future development.

Instruments and Procedure

This study utilized both qualitative and quantitative research methods to meet its objectives.

1. The quantitative research method was employed for community classification testing. This approach included two tools. The first was the community classification model, acting as a hypothesis for community classification. The second was the community assessment form. This form, aided in understanding the current manifestation of ghost beliefs within the local community and the inherent characteristics of these beliefs affecting local lifestyle. The researcher contributed to the development of the variable measurement instrument, drawing from the results of a community survey. The community assessment form was utilized for validation, and it was tested on a subset of samples to reassess the comprehension of the assessment questions and their consistency. Data collection for this phase occurred in April 2023, involving in-person interviews with local residents. Each interview, lasting about 10-15 minutes, presented a series of questions covering two main domains: 1) Background information and personal levels of ghost belief, and 2) Community-level ghost belief, including associated rituals and symbols. Additional questions provided further context on the ghost phenomena within the community.

2. The qualitative method was used in the result confirmation with key community informants and deeper community understanding. To generate recommendations for the use of community spaces in a tourism context, open-ended questions probed two main aspects: 1) Local ghost belief rituals and symbols and their relationship with community locations, and 2) Future community development plans, with a specific focus on tourism development. Insights from these interviews informed proposed strategies to exploit community spaces for tourism development, thereby enhancing the cultural significance of local ghost beliefs. The final tool was designed for validating the community classification tools, process, and result. Expert validation was sought through in-depth interviews with three academic experts, who had extensive familiarity with the cases of the three communities or had collaborated with these communities for at least three years. These interviews aimed to validate the community classification tools while also eliciting expert suggestions for future development.

Result/Finding

1. The relationship of the community type and the local ghost belief characters

The research findings clarified a relationship between three characteristics of ghost beliefs and different community types, as depicted in Figure 2. The research framework recognized three types of communities: “Untransformed,” “Transforming,” and “Transformed,” along with three key characteristics of ghost beliefs: 1) Level of ghost belief, 2) Component of belief, and 3) Appearance of belief. Different community types generally showed varying degrees of these ghost belief characteristics, as detailed below. The “Untransformed” community primarily engaged in ghost belief rituals at both individual and community levels, showing a high intensity of belief and a strong sense of originality. This community preserved the original form and intent of rituals, with a high frequency of both tangible and intangible ghost belief rituals and symbols. The “Transforming” community mostly organized ghost belief rituals at the community level. While the belief's form and purpose had partially changed, the appearance of belief remained, manifesting in both tangible and intangible forms, albeit less frequently than in the “Untransformed” community. Lastly, the “Transformed” community tended to prioritize regional level rituals more than the other types. This regional level had experienced significant transformations due to external influences. The rituals' form and purpose had entirely transitioned into a festival format, and these rituals no longer served to honor local ghosts and spirits for the community's current generation. This community type exhibited fewer instances of ghost belief compared to the other two communities.

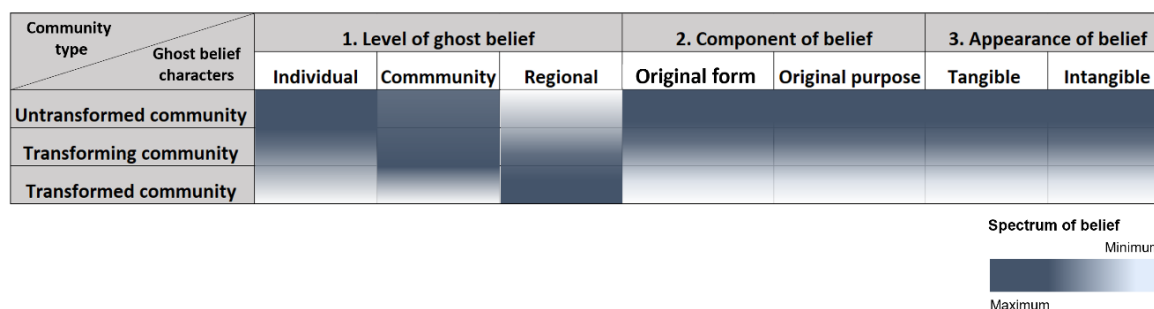


Figure 2 The relationship of community type and the ghost belief characters
source: author team, 2023

2. Community classification model, assessment form and assessment process design

Community types interpreted the intensity of ghost belief and the variable measurement using both quantity and nominal scales. Field research data was utilized to determine appropriate belief scaling for each community type. The framework for constructing the community classification model encompassed four key components (Figure 3):

2.1 Part 1: Personal Belief - This related to the individual's belief level, determined by their score on a personal ghost belief scale, which ranged from 1 to 10. A score of 1 signified no belief in ghosts, while a score of 10 reflected the highest level of belief.

2.2 Part 2: Level of Belief - This involved assessing the level of belief at individual, community, and regional levels, based on the frequency of rituals at each level.

2.3 Part 3: Components of Belief - This evaluated the form and purpose of the belief by considering the degree of originality.

2.4 Part 4: Appearance of Belief - This determined the manifestation of belief through rituals and symbols, based on the quantity of rituals and symbols.

These quantities were then used to establish the ghost belief within the hypothesized model of community classification, which was tested with three selected communities in the subsequent step.

Community type	P1-People	P2-Level of Belief			P3-Component of Belief		P4-Appearance of Belief	
	Personal belief (nominal scale)	Individual (amount)	Community (amount)	Regional (amount)	Form 1=Original 2= Some transform 3= Transformed	Purpose 1=Original 2= Some transform 3= Transformed	Rituals (amount)	Symbols (amount)
Untransformed	7 to 10	3 to 5	8 to 12	-	1	1	>15	2 to 4
Transforming	4 to 6	2 to 3	8 to 12	1	2	1	5 to 15	2 to 3
Transformed	1 to 3	1 to 3	1 to 3	1	3	3	<5	1 to 2

Figure 3 Community classification hypothesized model
source: author team, 2023

Following the construction of the community classification hypothesized model, the researcher designed an assessment form with questions corresponding to the model. Supplementary questions regarding various aspects were included for thorough explanations, covering areas such as reasons for belief and ritual arrangements, the names of ghost belief symbols in the community, and factors influencing belief. The assessment form employed different levels of measurement in scoring, including nominal scales and rankings. The assessment process comprised four steps: 1) Community Survey: This aimed to understand the current manifestation of ghost belief in the community. 2) Community Assessment: This involved applying the assessment form to measure and evaluate the community based on the model's parameters. 3) Community

Classification: This step involved categorizing the community based on the assessment findings. 4) Key Informant Interviews: Local key informants were interviewed to gain additional insights into future development prospects.

Data analysis

The data analysis in this study consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, aimed at providing a comprehensive assessment of community classification tools. The dataset was bifurcated into two distinct segments for effective and systematic processing. The first segment was analyzed quantitatively, using descriptive statistics to provide numerical insights and understandings. The percentage of community comparison was calculated to understand the proportion of communities represented in the classification tools. In the second segment, a qualitative approach was adopted, using content analysis as the primary tool. This included interpreting the data to provide rich, detailed, and valid process data. The qualitative results served to confirm the quantitative findings, improve the classification tools, and guide future developments. A comprehensive and iterative process was adopted to ensure that both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated and synthesized effectively. The findings from this study will be instrumental in the improvement of community classification tools and in facilitating future research in the same arena.

Research result

1. Community classification tool testing: the quantitative survey and qualitative survey result

The quantitative survey analysis revealed significant insights regarding general information, personal beliefs, and the current situation of ghost belief prevalence within the communities. The survey questions, based on the hypothesized model, yielded the following results:

1.1 Part 1: Personal Belief: In community A, 43.75% of respondents acknowledged their belief in ghosts at levels 8-9, while 46.25% expressed their belief at level 10. Community B had a substantial majority (82.5%) maintaining beliefs in ghosts at levels 4-5, whereas in community C, an overwhelming majority (98.75%) expressed belief in ghosts at levels 6-7 (as shown in Figure 4). The primary influencers fostering belief in communities A and C were identified as familial and spiritual leaders. Conversely, in community B, family was recognized as the main influential factor. These findings enhance our understanding of the demographic composition and personal beliefs within the surveyed communities, providing valuable insights for further analysis and interpretation within the study's contextual framework.

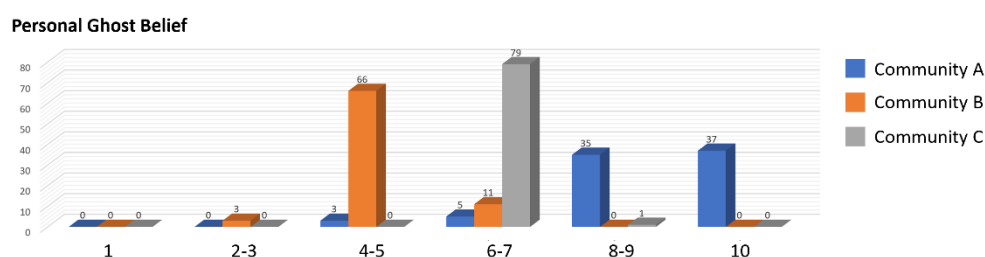


Figure 4 Personal belief level
source: author team, 2023

1.2 Part 2: Level of Beliefs: The results indicated variations in the intensity of ghost beliefs among the surveyed communities. At the individual level, communities A and C consistently engaged in annual rituals, while community B showed varying responses based on specific circumstances within each family unit. At the community level, all three communities uniformly practiced monthly rituals in accordance with their traditions, as reported by 100% of respondents from communities A, B, and C. At the regional level, communities B and C demonstrated diverse arrangements influenced by the village headman's specific situations and considerations. In community A, 50% of respondents reported irregular organization of regional level rituals, while the remaining 50% expressed uncertainty about the frequency (Figure 5). These findings contributed to our understanding of the different levels at which ghost beliefs were observed within the

surveyed communities, highlighting the significance of individual, community, and regional factors in shaping the practices and organization of ghost-related rituals.

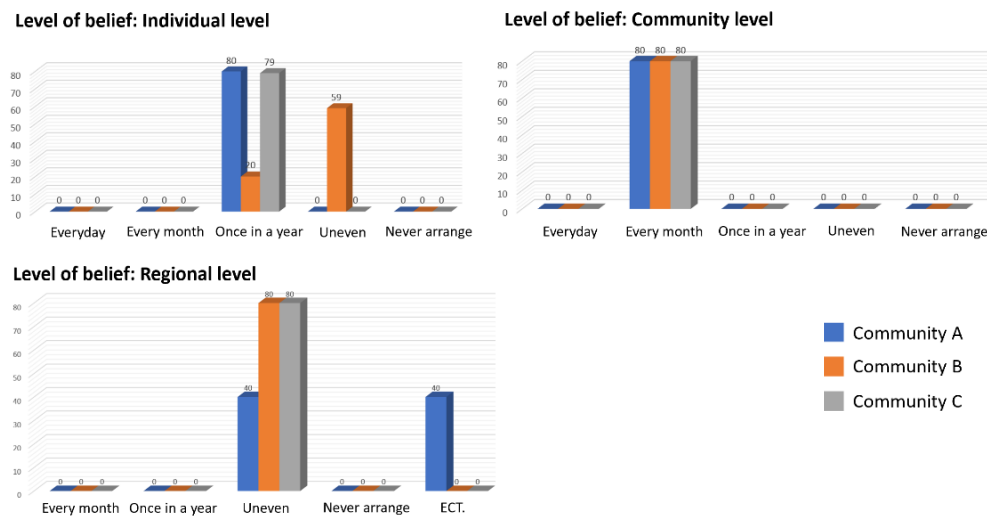


Figure 5 Level of belief
source: author team, 2023

1.3 Part 3: Component of Belief: The analysis of the results revealed a shared original purpose for rituals among all three communities, as confirmed by 100% of the local participants. In community A, the role of ghosts belief revealed in providing protection from bad luck, fulfilling wishes, and ensuring success in agricultural endeavors. Community B associated ghost beliefs with attracting good luck and achieving agricultural prosperity. Meanwhile, community C held the belief that ghosts contributed to overall well-being by promoting good health, warding off misfortune, and ensuring safety. Concerning the belief's form, in Community A, 87.6% adhered to the original form. In Community B, 100% of respondents indicated that the belief's form had already undergone transformation. In Community C, 56.25% exhibited certain transformed elements, while the remaining respondents asserted the retention of the belief's original form (see Figure 6). These findings illuminate the motivations and expressions of ghost beliefs within each community, offering valuable insights into their cultural and spiritual practices.

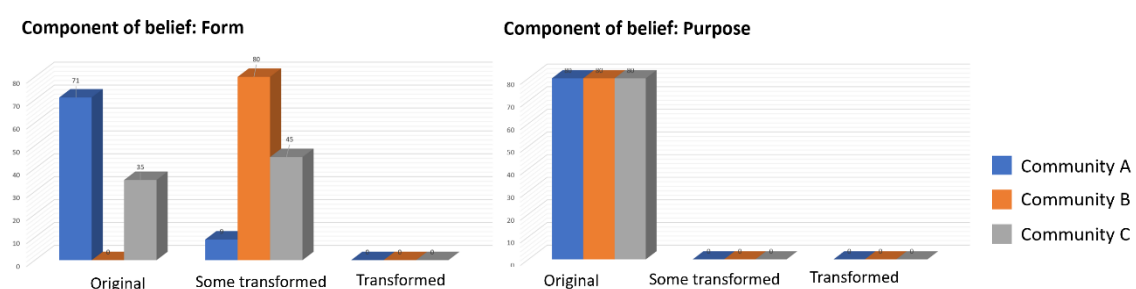


Figure 6 Component of belief
source: author team, 2023

1.4 Part 4: Appearance of Belief: Community A 100% of respondents displayed the highest level of ghost belief manifestation through rituals. This community actively engaged in a significant number of rituals, observing more than 15 rituals per year. In contrast, Community B (92.5%) and Community C (93.75%) participated in approximately 5-10 rituals annually, as shown in Figure 7. Additionally, Figure 8 highlighted the symbols of belief revered by each community. All three communities universally acknowledge the significance of the ancestral shrine. Additionally, the natural spiritual shrine, situated within personal rice fields, emerges as the second symbol of belief that persists within the communities, notably prominent in Communities A and B.

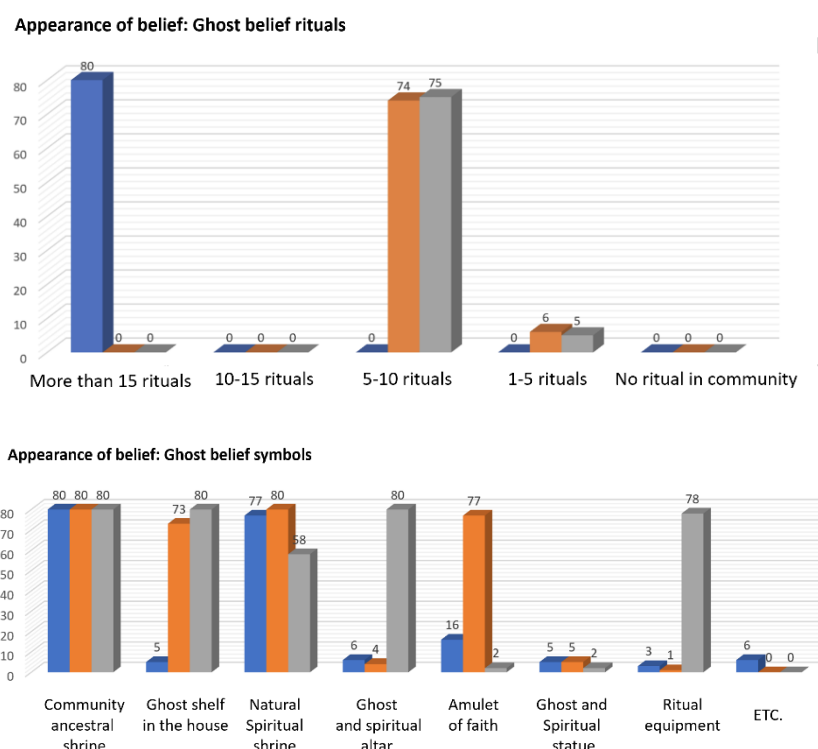


Figure 7, 8 Appearance of Belief, ritual, and symbol
source: author team, 2023

The results from the four parts have been compiled into a table summarizing the community types (Figure 9) and comparing them with the hypothesized model. The testing results classified Community A as an “Untransformed community,” while Community B and C were classified as “Transforming community”. However, there were two deviations from the hypothesized model. Firstly, the individual levels of belief did not align with the hypothesized model. According to the hypothesized model, “Untransformed community” should have individual belief levels ranging from 3- 5, “Transforming community” from 2- 3, and “Transformed community” from 1- 3. However, the testing results indicated an uneven distribution of individual belief levels within the communities. Secondly, the number of symbols of belief differed from the hypothesized model. Community B and C exhibited an average of four symbols of belief, which was higher than the number observed in Community A, an “Untransformed community”. These two deviations would be further investigated through interviews in the next steps to uncover the reasons behind the uneven distribution of individual belief levels within the communities and the differing number of symbols.

To gain a deeper understanding, further analysis was conducted to consider potential factors that may have influenced the uneven distribution of individual belief levels and the differing number of symbols. These findings underscored the complexity of belief systems and emphasized the need for additional investigation to uncover the underlying reasons behind these variations.

Researchers conducted interviews with representatives from three distinct communities, probing three primary inquiries: 1) Verification of community classification result and exploration of potential economically viable ghost-belief cultures, rituals, or symbols; 2) Acquisition of insightful data for a phenomenological explanation of two deviations; 3) Identification of potential ghost beliefs for future community space development targeting tourism. The results indicated:

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Table 1 Testing Result: A Community Classification Table

Community name	P1-People	P2-Level of Belief			P3-Component of Belief		P4-Appearance of Belief		Community classification result
	Personal belief (Nominal scale from 1-10)	Individual (Amount)	Community (Amount)	Regional (Amount)	Form 1=Original, 2= Some transformed 3= Transformed	Purpose 1=Original, 2= Some transformed 3= Transformed	Rituals (Amount)	Symbols (Amount)	
Community A	8 to 10	At least once in a year	monthly	50% said uneven and 50% said not sure	1	1	Rituals has more than 15 and number of ghost communicators is more than 15 people	3	Untransform Community
	Locals has very high belief, participate in almost ceremony, the believe is influence by their ancestors and spiritual leaders							ancestral shrine , the natural spiritual shrine and amulet of faith	
Community B	4 to 6	varying responses depending on specific circumstances within each family	monthly	Uneven	2	1	Rituals has more than 5-10 and number of ghost communicators is more than 4-6 people	4	Transforming Community
	Locals has less belief, be a participant in some ghost ceremony, the believe is influence by their ancestors							ancestral shrine , the natural spiritual shrines, ghost shelf in the house and amulet of faith	
Community C	6 to 7	At least once in a year	monthly	Uneven	2	1	Rituals has more than 5-10 and number of ghost communicators is more than 4-6 people	4	Transforming Community
	Locals still believe and be a participant in the some ceremony, the believe is influence by their ancestors and spiritual leaders							ancestral shrine , the natural spiritual shrines, ghost shelf in the house and amulet of faith	

1. All three informants concurred with the community classification, fortified by justifications. Community A, geographically secluded due to its mountainous locale, exhibits strong preservation of its indigenous traditions, heavily influenced by ghost beliefs and spiritual mediums. Conversely, communities B and C, linked by the highway, blend traditional ghost beliefs with Buddhism. For local community development, two noteworthy rituals are proposed - the “Ritual of Offering Sacrifice to a Community's Ancestral Guardian,” viewed as a protective measure by locals, and the “Ritual of Offering Sacrifice to Evil Spirits,” known for its engaging traditional plays encapsulating local life. The Cultural District Headman of Community C suggested developing the latter into a community event, encouraging smaller communities to create a district-wide spectacle, although preserving originality remains paramount. The Village Headman of Community B suggested staggered scheduling of traditional events to retain authenticity.

2. Two quantitative survey results had diverged from the hypothesized model- the frequency of individual level rituals and the count of symbols. The Village Headman from Community A had proposed that

the variability in ritual frequency depended on individual family circumstances, making it challenging to ascertain an annual average. However, it had been noted that at least one ancestral ritual was annually conducted as a family tradition. As for the symbol count, communities that were undergoing transformation and did not strictly adhere to original symbols might have had more opportunities to evolve their belief symbols, potentially increasing the total count.

3. Regarding potential community spaces for tourism development, the Cultural District Headman from Community C had proposed utilizing the public hall and temple for community-level rituals and activities, with the community forest and ancestral shrine reserved for annual sacrificial rituals due to their sacred significance. However, it had been suggested that the community forest should remain exclusive for local traditional rituals. Similarly, Community B's Village Headman had underscored the necessity of community consent for any tourism-focused space development. Despite its weak public transportation infrastructure, Community A had strategies in place to leverage local culture for tourism, targeting tourists seeking immersive local experiences, including potential homestays. Community C had been encouraging locals to establish homestay enterprises for supplemental income.

In conclusion, all three communities had harbored the potential to capitalize on their unique ghost beliefs for tourism development. However, it was vital to respect the authenticity and locality of these rituals during their development. Traditional local rituals should have been exclusively preserved for the local community, while separate festivals could have been organized for tourism purposes. Suitable venues for tourism development encompassed both private spaces, such as homes, and public spaces like community halls or cultural centers. However, sacred spaces designated for local rituals should have been meticulously preserved.

Expert review and validation result

The community classification results, and subsequent conclusions had been validated by three academic field experts. The open-ended questions had been divided into three segments:

Part 1: Review of the community classification hypothesized model and validation of the classification results. All three experts had concurred with the classification results and the hypothesized model predicated on quantity and numerical scale. However, they had observed a discrepancy in individual ritual numbers compared to the hypothesized model, necessitating readjustment. The experts had pointed out significant variability in individual level rituals among families. Although certain events like graduations, weddings, newborn celebrations, or funerals might occur predictably annually, the frequency of these rituals could not be reliably quantified due to their highly personalized nature. They had noted that the transforming community's belief symbol count exceeded the hypothesized model. They attributed this to the cultural evolution of beliefs in both "Transforming and Transformed communities". The "Transforming community" had experienced an expansion in belief symbols as the culture adapted to new influences, while the "Untransformed community" had strictly maintained its original symbols, resulting in fewer belief symbols.

Part 2: Community Assessment Tools and Assessment Process Review; The experts had also concurred on the division of the community assessment form into two main parts: a major part utilized for conducting the community classification model and a minor part used to elucidate the phenomenon of ghost and spiritual beliefs within the community. This process had also involved reconfirming the findings with a group of key community informants.

Part 3: Suggestions for Future Development; The experts had proposed several suggestions to further develop the study. One recommendation was to group different segments of the local population and conduct interviews or focus group discussions. This inclusive approach would yield a broader range of perspectives and foster a comprehensive understanding of the overall viewpoint held by the local community. To ensure diverse representation, it was crucial to involve teenagers and young locals, as they would play a significant role in shaping and engaging with local ghost beliefs in the future. This inclusive approach aimed to raise awareness regarding these beliefs and their significance. Implementing this approach could enable researchers to determine the potential future utilization of ghost and spiritual beliefs within the community. Moreover, it would provide invaluable guidance for future development initiatives. However, it was imperative to emphasize that this tool should also raise awareness among local residents about the current state of the

community and highlight the prevailing situation concerning ghost and spiritual beliefs. In doing so, it would assist the local community in developing its cultural capital and leveraging it for economic growth.

Discussion

“Cultural capital,” a key element that encompasses value in various forms; social, political, and cultural, alongside financial (Janjumba, 2016), held significant importance. It was the result of collective human creation, accumulation, and development, serving individual and societal needs. Over time, it had transformed into a heritage passed down from past to present and beyond (Koson, 2018). In rural areas, ghost beliefs had represented a form of cultural capital. These beliefs had found use in different community contexts. As communities had developed, certain ghost beliefs might have diminished, while others had undergone significant transformations, often incorporated into tourism festivals. The creation of a classification tool based on ghost beliefs had aided communities in understanding the status of their traditional beliefs. Further, it had facilitated the exploration of opportunities for cultural and economic growth, empowering communities to protect their traditional culture.

1. Community Classification Tools and Community Classification Process

The research had highlighted the utility of community classification tools, including classification models, surveys, and interviews, in the process of classifying primitive communities. These tools assisted in understanding and assessing the ghost belief landscape within a specific community. The community classification process had comprised three main stages. The classification process unfolded in three stages: 1) The community survey, encompassing a cultural map and a ritual review, shed light on prevailing ghost beliefs. This data was subsequently employed to construct a community classification model predicated on these beliefs. 2) The classification phase evaluated the community's ghost belief situation across personal belief level, belief components, and belief manifestations. The outcomes were juxtaposed with the model to identify the community type. 3) The concluding stage entailed qualitative surveys, in which a variety of local individuals were interviewed to compile their perspectives. These insights, coupled with the established community type, guided future development directives. In summary, community classification tools, such as classification model, survey, and interview, were instrumental in understanding and evaluating ghost beliefs within primitive communities. These tools were pivotal in generating insights to establish suitable guidelines and strategies for future community growth. Utilizing this holistic approach, community classification mechanisms fostered a profound understanding of the existing ghost belief situation within a community, offering invaluable insights to direct future development endeavors. The classification process should have incorporated both quantitative and qualitative surveys to amass exhaustive information guiding the community towards determining tourism-oriented development directives. The data acquisition and community classification processes can be encapsulated as follows.

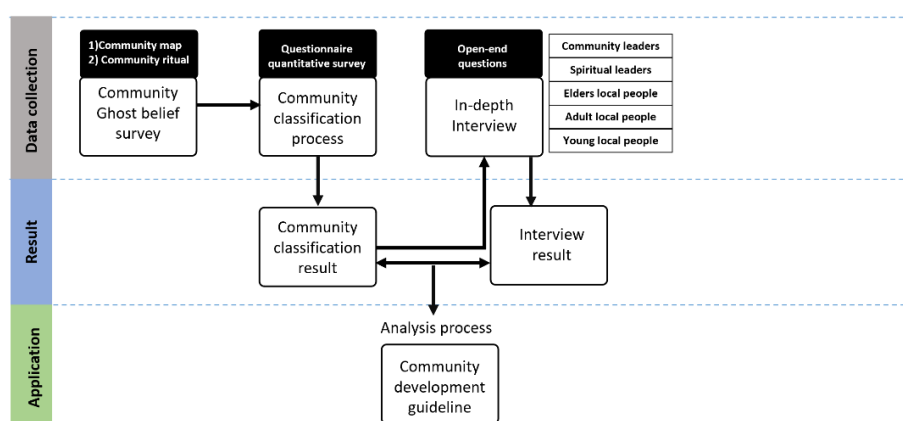


Figure 9 Appearance of Belief, ritual, and symbol
source: author team, 2023

Limwongse & Watanabe (2023) categorized communities into three types based on ghost beliefs: “Untransformed,” “Transforming,” and “Transformed.” Findings from interviews and observations suggested that communities distant from the central government displayed heightened intensities of ghost beliefs, aligning with (Nartsupha & Uitrageol, 2017) 's assertion that the North-eastern region of Thailand, distant from the central government, was relatively autonomous. This correlation was reinforced by findings on community characteristics. “Untransformed” community, typically remote from urban centres, were predominantly agricultural with local interactions being the norm. “Transforming” community retained ghost beliefs, albeit with diminished intensity. In contrast, “Transformed” community exhibited robust urban connections, increased public interactions, and a decline in local ghost beliefs with a corresponding rise in external ones. The initial community classification model was refined to enhance accuracy, subsequently accounting for the variance in annual individual rituals by standardizing their count to a 1-5 range per community type (Figure 10). This revised model more accurately represented the ghost beliefs within rural communities in the North-eastern region, thereby enriching the understanding of cultural dynamics.

Community type	P1-People	P2-Level of Belief			P3-Component of Belief		P4-Appearance of Belief	
	Personal belief (nominal scale)	Individual (amount)	Community (amount)	Regional (amount)	Form 1=Original 2= Some transformed 3= Transformed	Purpose 1=Original 2= Some transformed 3= Transformed	Rituals (amount)	Symbols (amount)
Untransformed	7 to 10	2 to 5	8 to 12	-	1	1	>15	2 to 4
Transforming	4 to 6	2 to 6	8 to 12	1	2	1	5 to 15	2 to 4
Transformed	1 to 3	2 to 6	1 to 3	1	3	3	<5	1 to 2

Figure 10 Community Classification Model Revision
source: author team, 2023

2. Direction of community classification application for tourism development in local community

The utility of community classification tools was manifold. They assisted researchers and community development organizations in comprehending the prevailing ghost beliefs in the community and stimulated local understanding, augmenting their awareness of potential management and exploitation of ghost beliefs for community-based tourism. From the tourist experience typology posited by Cohen (1979), five distinct cohorts emerged: “Recreational tourists” emphasized leisure and rest; “Diversionary tourists” sought novelty and routine avoidance; “Experiential tourists” pursued authenticity; “Experimental tourists” valued local interactions and lifestyle learning; “Existential tourists” craved for long-term cultural immersion. The diversity of tourist expectations, as elucidated by Cohen’s typology, indicated potential for diverse strategies. This encapsulated a rural community framework aimed at providing hospitality, preserving, and presenting cultural identity through specific activities. Cultural capital, rooted in local heritage, functioned both as an income generator and a sustainable mechanism for preserving and restoring traditional identity and livelihood (Kitpadung, 2021). Future community development centered on two main strategies: 1) preserving and presenting “Traditional ghost belief” as local cultural capital, and 2) promoting “Modern ghost belief” as a festival, encapsulated by the phrases “Be Local” and “Watch Local,” depicted in Figure 11. The concept of “Be Local” and “Watch Local” signifies distinct approaches to promoting immersive tourist experiences and understanding indigenous beliefs within a local context. “Be Local” prioritizes experiential learning and understanding through direct engagement with daily life and rituals, fostering a profound connection between tourists and the local community by allowing tourists to connect with indigenous beliefs on an individual level. Activities such as daily offerings to ancestral spirits during local family stays or participating in rice farming serve as avenues for tourists to gain insights into the local way of life and appreciate the significant influence of ghosts and spirits on the local community. In contrast, “Watch Local” “capitalizes on the appeal of specific shorter-term community rituals events to draw tourists, potentially boosting economic opportunities for the

community. This approach recognizes the potential economic benefits of community-level beliefs, particularly in the context of ghost beliefs. Such beliefs can be harnessed to generate income for the community, for instance, by organizing annual festivals rooted in local ghost belief rituals or by developing faith-based amulets or accessories for sale to tourists. It is important to note that both approaches have their merits and contribute to the preservation and dissemination of indigenous beliefs. On the other hand, Ultimately, the choice between these two approaches depends on the goals of the community and its desire to balance cultural preservation with economic development through tourism.

It is essential to consider the nuances of the local context, the preferences of tourists, and the long-term sustainability of each approach in promoting and safeguarding indigenous beliefs. However, the diagram illustrated user mapping possibilities and proposed tourist development directions based on Cohen's theory. The “Untransformed community” catered primarily to “experiential and existential tourists,” portraying ghost beliefs through daily routines, rituals, and storytelling. The “Transforming community” could accommodate “experiential, experimental, and existential tourists” with offerings such as short-term programming and homestays without routine shadowing. Finally, the “Transformed community” targeted “recreational” and “diversionary” tourists, offering activities centered around ghost belief culture. However, adaptability of these tools for other Thai regions or international locations was deemed essential, requiring local reality-based adjustments to the number of rituals and the understanding of specific communities. As such, prior to applying the community classification process and tools, a comprehensive survey to understand the ghost belief situation was critical.



Figure 11 Mapping of tourist typology in community classification
source: author team, 2023

The community classification tool, based on ghost belief, proved particularly advantageous for rural communities, especially those retaining traditional beliefs. This tool classified communities based on their existing ghost belief level, serving as a framework for managing ghost belief in various domains. Its primary advantage was its capacity to direct local management towards leveraging local ghost beliefs for future development indications. It also provided community researchers and other stakeholders a deeper understanding of the role of ghosts within the community. Indirectly, the tool elevated local awareness of traditional belief's role, given that ghost belief, as an often-overlooked cultural capital, is deeply ingrained in rural communities. The tool was expected to facilitate future community operations and development decision-making. However, ghost belief, a valuable cultural entity, could be harnessed for both cultural and economic strategies, such as tourism. Recognizing the historical aspects and local expectations could empower the community to leverage its own resources for development. This tool and its process could make a significant contribution to the community's successful and sustainable development. Using this assessment and classification framework, it has the potential for future applications in various facets of cultural capital within

small rural communities, including but not limited to aspects such as cuisine, fashion, festivals, and distinctive traditions. Additionally, it can be extended to assess the prevalent ghostly and spiritual beliefs in other rural communities across diverse regions, facilitating the formulation of community development plans for these areas.

Conclusion

The community classification tool, based on ghost belief, proved particularly advantageous for rural communities, especially those retaining traditional beliefs. This tool classified communities based on their existing ghost belief level, serving as a framework for managing ghost belief in various domains. Its primary advantage was its capacity to direct local management towards leveraging local ghost beliefs for future development indications. It also provided community researchers and other stakeholders a deeper understanding of the role of ghosts within the community. Indirectly, the tool elevated local awareness of traditional belief's role, given that ghost belief, as an often-overlooked cultural capital, is deeply ingrained in rural communities. The tool was expected to facilitate future community operations and development decision-making. However, ghost belief, a valuable cultural entity, could be harnessed for both cultural and economic strategies, such as tourism. Recognizing the historical aspects and local expectations could empower the community to leverage its own resources for development. This tool and its process could make a significant contribution to the community's successful and sustainable development.

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