

CHAPTER IV

MONKS, LAITY AND THE ROLES OF THE TEMPLE

This chapter will analyse the interviews conducted with the monks and data from the lay practitioners questionnaire surveys in the Mangkorn temple and Phoman temple. The first part discusses about the monks in both temples. It will look into the background of the monks and their ordination as monks. Research is focussed on interviews with monks and laypersons at the temples due to limited documentation on this area of study. As Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Thailand originates from China, the research will also include interviews with Chinese Mahayana monks from outside of Thailand, in order to compare, assess changes and different points of view about the current situation in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Bangkok. The second part will analyse the data of the lay practitioner questionnaires. The final part will discuss the roles of both temples.

4.1. The Chinese Mahayana monks

4.1.1. Differences in Chinese and Thai traditions

There are significant differences between Chinese and Thai concepts of ordination. In the Thai tradition, ordination often occurs for short periods, with the intention of accruing merit for one's family. It is common for Thais to become a monk before they get married, or when family members pass away. In the Chinese tradition, unlike Thailand, becoming a monk is not a part of daily culture, and can even carry a certain stigma. Ordination for Chinese is not considered a short-term process, but rather a lifetime vocation. The monastic culture in China has undergone dramatic transformation in its long history. When Buddhism first spread into China in the Han period (BC202-220), Chinese were prohibited from becoming monks (Yoshikawa, 1998:248). However, during the later Tang period the Imperial family had a very strong passion for Buddhism and a great respect for monks. At this time an examination process was introduced for entrance into the monkhood, monks were viewed as scholars and advisors, with a high social standing. These changes in the fortunes of Buddhism have continued up until the present era. Even in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution the Chinese state took measures to assist Buddhism. The

communist ideology dictated that everyone must work, and workers should have training. The government looked upon the monks as workers, and allowed ordination exams to be introduced, as evidence of training skills acquired. At this time the Chinese government offered support to the Buddhist monastic community in the form of financial assistance. Chinese monks in China relied upon this support since they cannot exist on donations of food. It is not in Chinese culture to offer food to monks. Chinese Buddhist temples are also frequently found in under-populated areas, also increasing the need for governmental support (Ashiwa, 2001:107).

Still today in Chinese culture becoming a monk is not as normal as Thailand. “When Chinese are ordained they remain ordained permanently, not just for a short period of time (Punyodyana, 1971:39)”. One has to make a big commitment before becoming a monk. It is not in Chinese culture to go off to become a monk for few weeks and return to normal life and work again. The decision to become a monk often creates problems from family and friends. “When I told my mother I want to become a monk she sent me to Tokyo to get an master degree, she thought that would change my mind (Venerable Hui Sheng a Chinese Mahayana monk from Taiwan, who has been ordained for 10 years, personal interview, 2008). The Confucian philosopher, Mencius, makes a very clear statement that “There are three ways to be unfilial, the worst is not to produce off-spring” (Mencius, *Lou Li Shang*). The inability to produce children, for the family, has been a major factor preventing Chinese males from becoming a monk.

The main reasons recorded in the early Chinese history books for the Chinese to ordain are: 1. For the death of the parents. 2. Weary of family life. 3. Weary of fame and fortune. 4. Passion for Buddhism (Yoshikawa, 1998:248).

Venerable Hui Xi said:

‘Right now the reasons for people to ordain in Taiwan mostly are because of weariness of family life, being weary of fame and fortune and also a desire to know more about Buddhism. The reasons are often a mixture of the above. In Chinese culture a man can ordain three times, females can ordain only one time. On the other hand in Thailand males can ordain 7 times. This is very different psychologically. For Chinese culture to become a monk is a lifetime decision. For Thais they can try it out

and then later everything can return to normal. For Chinese, often even very devout lay people are not willing to let their child ordain into the monkhood.’

Table 4.1

Per Cent Who have Not been in the Buddhist Priesthood, Who Would and Would Not Like to Enter if They had an Opportunity to Do So*

	Group I	Group II	Group III
	Less Educated Non-Government Employee (N=148)*	More Educated Non-Government Employee (N=155)*	Less Educated Non-Government Employee (N=234)*
Yes, would like to enter	36.9%	42.3%	40.7%
No, Would not like to enter	<u>38.6</u> 100%	<u>38.3</u> 100%	<u>14.5</u> 100%

*Total male Buddhist/Confucianist respondents.(Punyodyana, 1971:38)

According to Punyodyana’s (1971) work, as indicated in table 4.1, revealed that by 1971 becoming a monk was much more acceptable for the Chinese in Thailand as 36.9% to 42.3% of the respondents were willing to enter the monkhood. There is a clear illustration of the different views between Chinese and Chinese-Thai in this table. It proves that the idea of entering a monkhood has become more common for Chinese because for them becoming a monk can be just a short period of time. The change suggests an adaptation to Thai culture of the Chinese idea of ordination

In order to examine the reasons behind the monks and novices, in Mangkorn temple and Phoman temple, joining the monkhood, interviews were conducted with five novices and two monks from Mangkorn temple, and one novice and two monks from Phoman temple. The main questions posed during these interviews were on the following points:

- 1) Background of the monk and novices
- 2) The life in the temples
- 3) Reasons to ordain
- 4) Future plans

The interviewees were 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26 and 28 years old.

4.1.2 Background of the Interviewees

a. Ethnic Origin

All the interviewees monks and novices from Phoman temple are ethnic Chinese born in Thailand. They are from the Sip-song panna region in Yunnan Province China, just north of Thailand. The five novices from Mangkorn temple are not ethnic Chinese. They do not have Chinese backgrounds. They are from many different parts of Thailand.

b. Life in Temple

Almost all the novices ordained at the age of 12. Four of the monks have been ordained as novices since the ages of 12, 13 as well and have been in the monkhood for more than 6 years. The novices in the Mangkorn temple attend the school inside the Mangkorn temple and help when there are ceremonies. According to the Mangkorn temple's teacher the novices have English, Chinese and computer classes. They have meals twice a day like the Thai monks, but these meals are vegetarian. They are not allowed to carry mobile phones. One of the novices said that he goes back to his home once a year and his family visit him twice a year as well. The novices and monks at Phoman temple attend university outside of the temple, after they finish their meal at 11:30. In the afternoon about two to three times a week the temple holds private religious ceremonies for the lay-people.

c. Monks and novices in Mangkorn Temple

Table 4.2

The daily life of the monk and novice in Mangkorn temple

3:30	Wake up
4:00	Morning Chanting
7:00	Breakfast
11:00	Lunch
11:30	Daily speech
13:00	Class
15:50	Getting ready for evening chanting
16:00	Evening chanting
17:00	Homework and study time
18:00	Class
20:30	Class ends

Mangkorn temple has the highest number of novices and monks in Thailand. During the reign of King Rama V the monks in the Mangkorn temple were all from China. In 1957 Skinner also pointed out that there were only monks from China in the Chinese Mahayana temples. There are no monks from China monks in Mangkorn temple nowadays. The abbot of the Mangkorn temple is second generation Chinese. The novices from the Mangkorn temple are from everywhere in Thailand. Not all of them have Chinese blood. The oldest monk is the abbot, he is over 60 years old, after him the next eldest monk is 42 years old after that all the monks are under 30 years old.

d. Monks and novices in Phoman Temple

Table 4.3

The daily life of the monk and novice in Phoman Temple

3:30	Wake up
4:00	Morning Chanting
5:00	Clean the temple
7:00	Breakfast
7:30	Temple work
11:00	Lunch
14:00	Attend to university
16:00	Evening chanting
17:00	Homework and study time

There are fewer monks and novices in Phoman temple. In total there are only 7 novices and 17 monks. Most of them have Chinese blood. They became monks because of family wishes and also because of their own desires. Most of them came from Sipsong panna, southern China. Not all of them are able to speak Chinese but learning Chinese is the major work in their daily life. The novices attend university

out side of the temple in the afternoon. And come back to the temple in the evening. Some of the novices are from the Chinese Mahayana temple in Chiang Rai but because they want to attend the university in Bangkok and they decided to move to Phoman temple.

e. Reason to ordain

The five novices interviewees of Mangkorn temple are all very young. The youngest novice said:

‘I wanted to learn Chinese that is why I ordained as a monk in Mangkorn temple. Also because this temple offers free education till the university level, one of my friends also ordained as a novice here before but he changed his mind and returned to the countryside last year.’

The 13 years old novice said:

‘My teacher recommended me to become a novice in Mangkorn temple because the teacher saw the advertisement from Mangkorn temple. My teacher said that it would be good for me if I ordained as a novice here because I would able to learn Chinese.’

Another 13 year old novice said:

‘My friend ordained here as a novice and he told me it is very good so that is why I came here. I can be with my friend. My parents do not have any problem with me ordaining as a novice here. I enjoy it here very much.’

The 20 years old novice has be in the monkhood for 6 years from the Phoman temple, he said:

‘I did not have any reason for ordaining, I just felt like it. In the beginning I was in the Chinese Mahayana temple in Chiang Rai but I finished high school that is why I came to this temple so that I can enter the university in Bangkok. I chose Chinese Mahayana over Thai temple because I prefer vegetarian food. My younger

brother is also a novice in the Chinese Mahayana temple I used to stay in. My parents are from Yunnan, China.'

One of the monks, 22 years old, said that he became a monk because of his mother. His mother is second generation Chinese from Sipsong Panna. She wanted him to ordain in the Phoman temple in order to make merit. He also thought it was a good idea. He is a second year university student. Another monk said:

'It is a very private question and each person has their own reason.' He was not willing to answer the question.

f. Future Plan

Only one novice in Phoman temple is sure that he will ordain as a monk very soon. All the novices in Mangkorn temple are not sure if they will ordain as a monk in the future. Many of their friends become a novice for 2, 3 years and return to the country side. There are not many novices from Bangkok. Most of the novices in Mangkorn temple are not from Bangkok.

4.1.3. Discussion

These interviews shows that most of the monks and novices are Thais and they also indicate that the reasons many became novices are much closer to the Thai's idea of religious training. They do not really think that becoming a monk is a life time job because the society will accept them when they go back. The Mangkorn temple has many novices but most of them view becoming a novice as a way of gaining higher education and learning the skill of speaking Chinese. It is very important for the novice to learn Chinese in order to understand the meanings of the sutras. Understanding the sutras gives them a feeling of the essence of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. But again to understand the sutra requires a deep skill of Chinese, because most of the sutras are not written in modern language. Even native Chinese lay people often need monks to explain the meanings of the sutra for them. For the novices it is very difficult for them to understand the sutra, given their ability in Chinese language.

Their Chinese level is often only good enough for the religious ceremony, but inadequate for explaining Buddhism and the Sutras.

4.2 The Lay Practitioners

The data has been presented in tables that allow cross referencing of information from both temples. The content of the chapter includes the following points:

- 1) The background of the questionnaire respondents
- 2) Their opinions about becoming a monk
- 3) The frequency of respondents attending the temple
- 4) How do the respondents know the temple
- 5) The reasons to attend the temple
- 6) The respondents' opinion of differences between Thai and Chinese temples.

During the research period I visited both temples and participated at both in many of their religious ceremonies and temple events. Field-work showed that there are different categories of laypersons attending the temples. Mangkorn temple situated at the heart of Chinatown attracts a wide variety of different people while serving different functions. Being historically and architecturally interesting Mangkorn temple is something of a tourist site for foreigners, Thais and Chinese visiting Chinatown. As a result the laypersons found at Mangkorn are more varied than at Phoman temple. The age and gender groups attending Mangkorn temple are diverse. Both sexes are well represented, and people of all ages can be found in large numbers. Attendees often arrive in large groups of family or friends, bringing the atmosphere of an excursion to the temple.

4.2.1. Background of the Questionnaire Respondents

a. Age, Gender, and Education

Table 4.4
Age Groups

Age range	Mangkorn Temple (N=67)	Phoman Temple (N=64)
Under 20	9.0%	4.7%
21-30	32.8%	23.4%
31-40	22.4%	21.9%
41-50	3.0%	12.5%
51-60	14.9%	18.8%
61-70	9.0%	14.1%
71-80	9.0%	1.6%
Over 80	0%	3.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

The respondents included both men and women and divided into eight age groups: under 20, 21-30, 31- 40, 41- 50, 51-60, 61- 70, 71- 80, over 80.

It should be noted that data collected on age groups is problematic since many older attendees refused to participate in the study. These older members make up a large proportion of temple participants, however these older generation members tended to have problems with hearing, bad sight and often were unable to read, this also limited their participation in the study. In the case of older attendees I resorted to interviews and observation to gain information on them.

Table 4.4 shows the largest group attendees are aged between 20-30, 32.8% in Mangkorn temple and 23.4% in Phoman temple. 9.0% were aged under 20 years old in Mangkorn temple and 4.7 % in Phoman temple, these junior participants often visit

the temples with their family. These figures show the volume of younger generation worshippers who attend the Chinese Mahayana temple. Landon's work states that the Chinese temple was lacking the attention of younger people and as a result the temples would go into terminal decline. Landon's study was published in 1941, we can see the change that has occurred in the past 68 years. The religious traditions have passed on to the younger generations, who continue to visit the temples and keep their ancestors' religion alive.

Table 4.5
Gender

	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=67)	(N=64)
Male	28.4%	34.4%
Female	71.6%	65.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.5 shows that there are more females than males attending both temples. Many scholars state that women tend to have stronger religious beliefs than men and also have more religious experience (Argle, 1985).

The Phoman temple has more male lay people (34.4%) compared to Mangkorn temple (28.4%). At Phoman temple the men tend to sit outside of the altar area talking, while their wives or mothers pray inside. Their main job is driving and accompanying female relatives to the temple. This situation bears similarity to Coughlin's observation: 'Participation in the religious activities and association is now of interest primarily to the immigrant generation and to women (Coughlin, 1960:93).' If we assess the current situation we can now see that although the immigrant generation has almost disappeared women are still the primarily members at the temple. This is not unique to the Chinese Mahayana temple. According to one of the Theravada monks that I interviewed, most of the people who help in the temple

make merit by offering money but the women are the ones that help take care of the temple.

Table 4.6

Education

	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=67)	(N=64)
Primary school	17.9%	14.1%
Secondary school	37.3%	18.8%
High school	14.9%	6.3%
Bachelor degree	25.4%	42.2%
Higher than bachelor degree	4.5%	18.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

The respondents' education ranged from primary school to university graduate. Table 4.6 shows that people who attend Phoman temple have a higher degree of education than those at Mangkorn temple, 42% of attendees at Phoman have a bachelor's degree while 18.8% have higher than a bachelor's degree. This also reveals that both temples attract different groups of lay people. This is a major change because in the early period of recent immigration most of the attendees did not have any education. The data shows a new group of the people who attend the temples, the wealthier, more established children of the immigration generation.

b. Length of living in Bangkok

Table 4.7
Length of living in Bangkok

	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=67)	(N=64)
Less than 10 years	6.0%	1.6%
10-30 years	7.5%	6.3%
More than 30 years	10.4%	7.8%
Born in Thailand	76.1%	84.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.7 shows that most of the respondents in both temples were born in Thailand, which is another major change in the Chinese temple. Again it proves that the present attendees differ from the original groups of earlier period. More Thai born people attend Phoman temple (84.4%) than Mangkorn temple (76.1%). Also more people who have been living in Bangkok less than 10 years visit Mangkorn temple (6.0%) than Phoman temple (1.6%). The reasons that the Mangkorn temple attracts more people who have lived in Bangkok less than 10 years are probably because Mangkorn temple is the most well known and the oldest Chinese Mahayana temple in the country. It is also a place for tourists.

Table 4. 8
How do you identify yourself?

Identification	Mangkorn Temple (N=67)	Phoman Temple (N=64)
Thai	55.2%	62.5%
Chinese-Thai	41.8%	35.9%
Chinese	3.0%	1.6%
Total	100.0%	100%

The result was very surprising because I expect that Chinese or Chinese-Thai are the main people who attend the Chinese Mahayana temple. Even from the interview of the monk they said that 80 % of the people who attend the temple are Teochius. From table 4.8 it is evident that there are more lay people in Phoman temple that consider themselves Thai (62.5%) than Mangkorn temple (55.2%). It can also be because the respondents are mostly young. They feel more comfortable to identify themselves as Thai rather than Chinese-Thai. Mangkorn temple has more people that consider themselves as Chinese-Thai (41.8%) followed by Phoman temple (35.9%). Only 3.0% of people in Mangkorn temple and 1.6% of people in Phoman temple consider themselves as Chinese. It can also suggest that there are a lot of Thais visiting both temples as well.

Table 4.9
Do you have a Chinese name ?

	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=67)	(N=64)
Yes	43.3%	78.1%
No	56.7%	21.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.10
Do you speak Chinese?

	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=67)	(N=64)
Yes	46.3%	65.6%
No	57.3%	34.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

The questionnaires were set so as to find out if people who go to Chinese temples consider themselves Chinese. This is an interesting topic, but also a complex one. The Chinese are well assimilated in Thailand, and often don't see themselves as foreign or a minority. Many Thais have some Chinese ancestry and many Chinese have completely lost connection with their Chinese roots. Other questions asked if any of the interviewees had a Chinese name and if they were able to write it in Chinese and if they were able to speak Chinese. The answers were mixed. Some respondents considered themselves Thai but had Chinese names. Some felt they were Thai/Chinese but did not have a Chinese name. During my interview there were some ladies aged over 60, who said:

'Both of my parents are from China but I was born in Thailand, I suppose I am a Thai- Chinese?' Table 4.9 shows that there are more people with a Chinese name at

Phoman temple (78.1%) than Mangkorn temple (43.3%). Table 4.10 shows that Phoman temple has more people that speak Chinese (65.6%) than Mangkorn temple(46.3%). From both tables, there are more respondents at Phoman temple that are able to speak Chinese and have a Chinese name as well. The result does not match table 4.8 it proves that only 37.5% of respondents consider themselves as Chinese-Thai or Chinese in Phoman temple and 44.8% in Mangkorn temple.

Skinner (1957:381) states that education is an important factor that decides if the third-generation, and forth generation will ever consider themselves as Chinese. He believes that only if they attend Chinese school will they consider themselves as Chinese. My data shows different results from Skinner's argument there are many other factors that decide the way people identify themselves. They can attend the Chinese temple once a month and be able to speak Chinese, have a Chinese name, yet still think that they are Thai because they grow up in Thailand.

4.2.2. Idea of become a monk

Table 4.11

Have any of your family members ordained in this temple?

	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=66)	(N=64)
Yes	10.6%	12.5%
No	89.4%	87.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.12

If your son wanted to ordain in this temple would you agree ?

Identification	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=66)	(N=64)
Yes	85.9%	75.0%
No	9.4%	10.9%
Others	4.7%	14.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.11 shows that only 10.6% in Mangkorn temple and 12.5% in Phoman temple of the lay people have a son who has ordained in the Chinese Mahayana temple.

Table 4.12 shows that 85.9% of the people in Mangkorn temple and 75% in Phoman temple permitted their son to become a monk. One of the respondent said 'I cannot make up his mind for him. If he wants to become a monk that is his choice.' 9.4% of people in Mangkorn temple and 10.9% in Phoman temple did not agree. One respondent said that ' Thai temple is better than Chinese temple if my son wants to ordain.' The others, 4.7% in Mangkorn temple and 14.1% in Phoman temple, stated

that they do not have a problem with any decision that their child makes. The data shows the change in Chinese-Thai ways of thinking about their child ordaining as a monk. They are more assimilated into Thai culture.

4.2.3. The relation with the temples

a. Knowing the temple

Table 4.13
How do you know this temple?

	Mangkorn Temple (N=67)	Phoman Temple (N=64)
Through family	46.3%	54.7%
Through friends	35.8%	25.0%
Through media	11.9%	4.7%
From personal respect to the monk and temple	6.0%	15.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.13 shows that 46.3% of the respondents at Mangkorn temple and 54.7% in Phoman temple know the temple through family. Family is an important factor for people's religious beliefs and affects people's affiliation with specific temples. One of the interviewees, a 29 year old female who works in an advertising company, third generation Chinese, said:

'I have been visiting Mangkorn temple since I was very young. I still visit there every month in order to accompany my mother and I know that if I visit the temple to pay my respects that will really make my mother happy.

It is important to note that though she initially went to the temple out of family obligation, right now, she is 29 years old and still keeps visiting the temple. She even

prays for her boyfriend and his family in the temple by putting down their names and birthdays on paper, registering the ceremony, in order to help them to get rid of bad luck. This shows the power that family tradition can have. Her family instilled the belief that if she faced any trouble she can come to the temple and pray for better results.

Most of the male respondents went to the temple to accompany the female family members, such as their grandmother, wife or girl friend. One 10 year old boy said that he had to accompany his grandmother almost every week to Mangkorn temple. He usually just sits somewhere and waits for the grandmother until she finishes making her offerings. Another male respondent aged 27, third generation Chinese, owns a travel agency company. His mother can speak about four or five different dialects of Chinese but his father can only understand basic Chinese. The interviewee could not speak any Chinese at all, despite of his mother's efforts to force him to study Chinese. Most of the time he accompanies his mother to the temple at least once a month. He has to drive his mother and wait inside of the temple until his mother has bought everything to offer to the Buddha image, then he will accompany the mother while she prays, he helps to carry the fruits, flower and other offering goods. He also goes to the Chinese temple by himself sometimes when he wants to make a wish, if his wishes are granted he will go back to the temple to make offerings to the Buddha image. He said even in old age he will still go to the temple because it is part of his Chinese heritage. His father on the other hand, hardly visits any temple.

Another interviewee, 32 year old female sales manager married to a second generation Chinese, said:

'I was born in Thailand and I had never visited Mangkorn temple before I got married. I visit the temple because of my mother in law. She makes sure that everyone in the family visits Mangkorn temple at least once a year. She also arranges all the offerings for me to bring to the temple. She taught me how to pray to each god and what to offer them.'

35.8% of respondents at Mangkorn temple and 25% at Phoman temple know the temple through friends. Friends can be seen as secondary factor influencing people's religious habits.

11.9% of the respondents at Mangkorn temple and 4.7 % at Phoman temple know about the temple through media, such as newspaper and radio announcements. This represents a change in how the temple communicates and creates awareness with the outside world, in order to reach different groups of people.

There are also people who attend the temple because of their personal respect for the monks and temple. After these people start going to the temple, they then begin to introduce it to their family and friends. 72 year old female said:

‘I like the abbot in Phoman temple very much because he is able to speak Chinese and Thai. I enjoy his speeches very much. I attend every month to listen his speeches. I do not like other temples’ abbots that much. The Phoman temple’s abbot does not care if you have money or not he talk to you.’

There are also people who visit the temple for reason of the beauty of the temple itself. 22 year old, male, university graduate student said:

‘One day I drove past and saw the Chinese style of building and I liked it very much. I have visited the Phoman temple three times. Every time when I visit the temple I chant on my own in front of the Buddha image. I just simply enjoy the atmosphere of the temple.’

b. The frequency of temple visits

Table 4.14

How long have you been going to Chinese Mahayana temple?

	Mangkorn Temple (N=67)	Phoman Temple (N=64)
Less than 5 years	40.3%	35.9%
5-10 years	26.9%	17.2%
10-20 years	3.0%	18.8%
20-30 years	4.5%	7.8%
More than 30 years	25.4%	20.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.14 shows that most of respondents at both Mangkorn temple (40.3%) and Phoman temple (35.9%) have attended the temple for less than 5 years. It shows the majority of the respondents have not visited the temple since they were young. Most of them have only just begun to visit the temple. The second largest group of respondents who attend Mangkorn temple (26.9%) have been going for there between 5 to 10 years, followed by those that have been going for more than 30 years (25.4%). The second largest group of respondents at Phoman temple (20.3%) have been going there for more than 30 years, followed by people going for 10 to 20 years (18.8%) and those who have been going for 5-10 years(17.2%).

Table 4.15
How often do you attend Thai temples per year?

	Mangkorn Temple (N=67)	Phoman Temple (N=64)
1-2 times	13.4%	14.1%
3-6 times	14.9%	18.8%
7-10 times	16.4%	20.3%
More than 10 times	55.2%	46.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.15 shows that most of the respondents at Mangkorn temple (55.2%) and Phoman temple (46.9%) also visit the Thai temple more than 10 times a year. Most of the respondents consider themselves Thais. It is easier for people to visit the Thai temple, which tend to be closer to their homes and also provide more choice between the different temples.

Table 4.16
How often do you attend Chinese Mahayana temple per year?

	Mangkorn Temple (N=67)	Phoman Temple (N=64)
1-2 times	49.3%	32.8%
3-6 times	17.9%	18.8%
7-10 times	17.9%	6.3%
More than 10 times	14.9%	42.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.16 shows that 49.3% of respondents at Mangkorn temple visit it only 1-2 times a year while 17.9% make 3-6 times a year, 17.9% make 7-10 visits a year, and 14.9% make more than 10 visits a year. A 52 year old, male interviewee who visited Mangkorn temple with a big group of family members said that they visit the temple every half year because their homes are outside of Bangkok. 42.2 % of people visit Phoman temple more than 10 times a year and 32.8 % of the people visit Phoman temple 1-2 times a year. The data shows that majority of the respondents at Phoman temple attend the temple more regularly than the respondents at Mangkorn temple. This can be partly explained by the organisation of each temple: Phoman temple holds religious ceremonies and sermons by the abbot once a month and provide time-tables of each ceremony for visitors, and also posts the date of the important ceremony in the registry office. It is much easy to follow Phoman temple's ceremonies. One can also register as a member in Phoman temple. The fee of membership costs 1,200 Baht a year. In Mangkorn temple one has to ask the monk in order to know the time of the ceremony. Other reason can be due to the time of data collection. In Phoman temple the questionnaires were mainly collected during the monthly event because it is the only time that there are a lot of people gathered in the temple. As the result the samples tend to be the group who attend the temple regularly. Mangkorn temple often full of the lay people and the time of data collection was spread over many different periods of time.

Table 4.17
Number of the respondents attending the temple of each event

	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=67)	(N=64)
Chinese New Year	76.1%	17.2%
Ancestor Worship Day (Chin Ming)	9.0%	17.2%
Vegetarian festival	20.9%	14.1%
Wish making	44.8%	17.2%
Family member and own Birthday	23.9%	17.2%
Make merit	53.7%	46.9%
Talk to monk	9.0%	4.7%
In times of misfortune	17.9%	0%
Temple event	16.4%	40.6%
Others	13.4%	15.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

The Table 4.17 shows the reasons for people to visit both temples. At Mangkorn temple attending at Chinese New Year has the highest percentage (76.1%) followed by making merit (53.7%) and wish making (44.8%). The two principal reasons for attending Phoman temple are making merit (46.9%) and participating in temple events (40.6%) while other reasons only account for 17.2%. Mangkorn temple is considered an important temple to visit during the Chinese New Year. One visits the temple to pray for good luck for the New Year (Landon, 1941:102)

These data reveals an adaptation of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism that has occurred in Thailand. One of the most obvious examples of the change in attitude and practice of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Bangkok, compared to those found in Taiwan or mainland China, can be seen in the case of merit making. According to Skinner, 'The religion of the Thai peasant emphasized individual merit-making and salvation and condemned as worldly any excessive concern for the material advancement of self and family (1957:93).' Both Mangkorn temple and Phoman temple show high percentages for this practice, suggesting a local Thai influence. There are other differences that can be found, according to Coughlin's study, Chinese monks work mainly in times of misfortune, but in Table 4.17 this reason accounts for only a 17.9% of visitors to Mangkorn temple and none (0%) of the respondents at Phoman temple visit it for this reason. One of the interviewees, a 71 year old lady and a second generation Chinese who lives around China town said:

'I live around here, whenever I feel like it I come to Mangkorn temple. When I am happy and when I am not happy. When I have problem and when I do not have a problem.'

Table 4.18

Is Chinese Mahayana Buddhism different from Thai Theravada Buddhism

	Mangkorn Temple	Phoman Temple
	(N=67)	(N=64)
Very different	20.9%	26.6%
A little different	49.3%	56.3%
No different	29.9%	17.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.18 shows that 20.9% of respondents at Mangkorn temple and 26.6% at Phoman temple think that the Chinese Mahayana temples are very different from Thai Theravada temples, providing the following reasons:

- Chinese temples are more clean, and quiet.
- The way of chanting, the style of temple.
- The different Buddha image, different kind of monk and different kind of ceremonies.
- One will only understand by visiting the temple by themselves.
- Chinese temples conduct morning and evening prayers while most Thai temples practice meditation and circum-ambulate.
- Different tradition. Thai temples have stricter rules.
- Thai monks are not vegetarian and Chinese monks need to obey more rules.
- Very different because of different tradition and different prayer book for chanting.
- Talk in Chinese.
- Chinese temple seems to be more participatory; everyone involved in ceremony/ritual. More communal, people gather socially, food, tea etc.
- Holy days, deities and belief system are different, although the Buddhist principle is the same. The monks wear different kinds of robe.
- The culture and tradition are different and the monks take care of the laymen more.

In Mangkorn temple 49.3% and Phoman temple 56.3% of the respondents think that it is just a little different. The reasons are the following:

- The building of the temples and the robe of the monks are different.
- The monks' life-style, the teaching and the way to practice Buddhism are different.
- The religious ceremony, the culture and tradition are different.
- Chinese monks seems to be quieter, Thai Theravada monks are very strict. The way of praying is different.
- The place is different and also the architecture and the Buddha image.
- Chinese temple has many saints and goddess.
- Chinese temple is very strict for monk. Chinese temples monks have good reputation about not violating the monks' rule.

- Chinese emphasize on ceremony but Thai temple emphasizes on practicing meditation. The things that you bring to offer to the monk / Buddha image are different.
- Chinese temple emphasize on praying as way to concentrate the practice. Thais want people to meditate and walk in circles.
- There are not enough Chinese temples and she wish for more Chinese temple branches.

29.9% of respondents at Mangkorn temple and 17.2% at Phoman temple think that there are no differences between the two forms of Buddhism. The reasons are as follows:

- They are both good,
- The building style of the Chinese temple is very attractive.
- They both teach people to adhere to good conducts.

None of the respondents said that they go to the Chinese temple because of Chinese heritage, or that the Chinese temple is only for the Chinese. They said the culture is different but did not specify how different.

4.2.4. Problem of Questionnaire survey

It is more difficult to distribute the questionnaire in the Mangkorn Temple because the lay people seemed to be more busy, offering flowers and praying and they kept moving inside the temple, offering one after another. The temple has more people but they come and go a lot and generally spend less time inside the temple. On the other hand, laypeople in Phoman temple seemed less busy. The major period that people gathered together was during the monthly chanting. Around one hundred lay people sat inside the altar area which made it really easy for me to get close with the respondents. The difficulties in conducting the field research at the two temples might also show that those two temples have different types of people. The same problem that I faced in both of the temples is that it was very difficult to get the older worshippers to fill in the questionnaires. Most of them were not able to read and they made it very clear that they did not want to be bothered.

4.2.5. Discussion

The survey results show the general background of the respondents who attend the temples. They also reveal many of the changes in both temples. In terms of identity of the respondents, more people consider themselves as Thai than Thai Chinese and very few people consider themselves as Chinese in either temple. A lot of the respondents at both temples still hold a Chinese name and are able to speak Chinese. The educational level of the people who attend the temple has increased. Most of the people of the immigration generation have very low degree of education level. Nowadays most of the respondents at Mangkorn temple have a secondary school education level. The respondents at Phoman temple have higher educational levels, most of them have a university degree. The results also show that there are many young people visiting both temples.

The results also suggest that most of the respondents also attend Thai temples regularly. This support Skinner's (1957) point that Chinese often converted to Thai Theravada Buddhism practice and as a result blended into Thai culture with ease.

Making merit has become one of the main reasons for people to attend the temple. It shows the strong degree of the assimilation into Thai culture. The results support's Dai's (1991) point that Chinese religious views are flexible and often adapt to local cultures overseas easily. In order to prove that making merit was not as common in the Chinese religious practice interviews with a Chinese female layperson and a Chinese monk have been conducted. According to the Chinese female aged 56, who volunteers in the temple in Taiwan regularly: Chinese often attend the temple for specific reasons, for example in times of misfortune, when they want to make a wish, sometimes even for business purposes, they know they might find business opportunities in the temple. She believes that most of them do not view making merit as a main priority. According to Venerable Hui Xi, the main reason for Chinese people to attend the temple is for religious ceremonies, meditation classes, and to listen to the monk's sermon. He said approximately only 20% of the respondents attend the temple because they would like to make merit. According to his experience,

he has been living in Thailand for 9 years; these are the clear differences between Thais and Chinese.

The result of the surveys point out that respondents attend Mangkorn temple for more different kinds of reasons than Phoman temple. Phoman temple has only worship of the Buddhism deities in the temple, and often the lay people attend the temple for the ceremonies and the speeches. The result found at Mangkorn temple support Lee's point that (2006) Chinese worship different deities for different needs. It is been proved that in fact people are attracted to Mangkorn temple often for the reason that the temple gathers many different deities.

Most of the respondents believe that there are only slight differences between Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temple and Thai Theravada Buddhist temple. The respondents only see the difference in the style of chanting, the monk's robe, and the temple architecture.

Finally, whereas Landon's (1941) findings in the early 1940s suggested Chinese Mahayana Buddhism showed signs of declining and losing the support of the younger generations, the results show that today Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temples are still strong and supported by young people as well old. Both temples show no sign of lacking support financially. In fact the Mangkorn temple has just completed building a new temple branch in March 2009 and Phoman temple is also engaged in building a temple branch in Chiang Rai as well.

4.3. Roles of Mangkorn temple and Phoman temple in their communities

According to Ho (1995) before the speech-group association and charitable societies were established in Thailand, which took place during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the temples played many role beside religious function. The Chinese temple also played the part of a mutual aid association, tribunal, clanship society, and chamber of commerce, supporting a given speech group within the Chinese community (Ho, 1995:31). The functions of Mangkorn temple and Phoman temple have adapted according to the different times and needs of their attendees.

4.3.1. Providing religious ceremonies

Both temples provide many religious ceremonies. This is a very important function of Buddhist temples in Chinese culture. It is also one of the major functions of the two temples. Religious ceremonies are held for ancestor worship, making wishes, getting rid of bad luck, and making merit, amongst others. The religious ceremonies often cost a lot of money because they require huge amounts of food as offerings and for decorations. The people are often very generous in spending money for the ceremonies. Chinese also believe in using rituals to avoid hatred and jealousy incurred by personal success. They believe that it is good for them to donate money in order to gain merit and to spend some money to help them to get rid of bad luck (Nakayama, 2005).

4.3.2. Supporting psychological health

As immigrants, when Chinese first arrived in Thailand they faced many different challenges. Temples gave them support and helped them to overcome difficulties in life. It was the major function in the early period when the Chinese arrived in Thailand. People often attend the temple when they face problems in life and want to pray for luck and improvement. Sugiyama's study states that religion itself is less likely to solve a problem but rather it helps to comfort people. For example if someone's wife got sick the husband might decide to join a religious group. In this case religion does not make the sickness go away or prevent the wife's death but it serves to comfort the husband and help him move on with his life and have a positive thinking toward the future. Religion is able to support people emotionally and give them hope psychologically (Sugiyama, 2004:83). The temple can also feel like home and offers comfort.

Temple also provides the positive psychological outlook for people, which leads to a positive energy about life. When people attend the temple they also feel that they are doing good things. For example, the people who attend the ancestor ceremony, feel that they are doing something good for their ancestor which creates a positive feeling. When people make merit they often felt that something good will

come to them. It creates a very positive energy for people. The other cases are for example that there are many students who often pray before the exam period. One might think that it is better that they spend the time to prepare the exam. But it is very important for the students to know that they are blessed by the Chinese gods because they made some offerings. It made them feel psychologically stronger. A 26 year old, male, travel agency owner said:

‘When I was a student, many of my friends and I often came to Mangkorn temple and pray. You know it is the student thing. Maybe it will help me to get better scores. I am sure that my mother also prays for me.’

Another 25 year old, female, company employee who also was an honours student in her student period said that, she felt less worry if she attended the temple and prayed before the exam period. She was suffering from stomach pain because of the stress from university, temple attendance helped her felt more relief and reduce her stress.

There are in total 27 deities in Mangkorn temple and 11 deities in Phoman temple. Often each deity has its particular function for the different needs that the lay people require at different stages of their life. Starting from before the baby was born, when one can pray to the Zhu Sheng Niangniang, the goddess of babies. Prayers are offered for a healthy baby and sometimes even to determine the sex of the baby that one wishes. Prayers continue right up to the time that a person passes away, with prayers for the Amitaba Buddha to wish that the deceased relatives be able to attend the “pure land”. It also shows that the lay people have the strong degree of dependency on the temples psychologically.

4.3.3. Providing venues for social activities

During the temple events there are always many people in both temples. The temples are very important place for family to gather at least once or twice a year, especially for the older generation to make friends and meet people from similar background. Five old ladies aged 72, 76, 83 and 85 were interviewed at the Phoman temple. The old ladies were all born in China and came to Thailand by boat when they

were very young. They became friends in the temple and have known each other for more than ten years. They often meet each other whenever there are temple events. Temple is the place that they can meet their friends and also find new friends.

A group of people aged around 40 to 50 years were also interviewed, who attend the ceremony in Phoman temple. The reason they gather in the temple and attend the ceremony is because one of their friend's birthday was coming soon. They often attended the Phoman temple's monthly ceremony if their friends' birthday happened to be the same month. There were 12 of them, mostly women. All of them attended the 3 hours of chanting and had a little chatting during the ceremony. One of the lady said by attended the temple ceremony they can make merit together and meet each other as well.

There are many family groups who live outside of Bangkok and when they find a time they drive to the temple. One of interviewees, a 52 year old woman, came with her husband and her friend's family, and said that often they do not have time so they can only attend the temple maybe two three times a year since they live far away. The temple is a major place for many people's social life and not only for the old people but also for other generations as well. The temple ceremony is a good chance for them to get together and sit with each other. They get to spend more time with each other, to do things together.

4.3.4. Improving the local economic situation

The local economy improves when there are people willing to purchase goods. Both temples attract many lay people and also create a good business area around the temples. There are many shops and restaurants around both temples. The people who attend the temple often help increase sales in the shops and restaurants and provide more people with job opportunities. Also when people buy things for offerings like candles, incense, flowers, fruits and paper this also helps to support local business as well.

Since temple is one of the major place for the Thai- Chinese. It creates more chances to meet people and business opportunities. The people who attended the

temple naturally have the higher possibility to improve their economic situation. A lot of time the people attend the temple not only for the religious ceremonies also are involved with making a profit as well (Lin, 1997:95). During one of the ceremonies in Phoman temple two name cards were received from two ladies. One was working in an insurance company and another was in a travel agency. Also in Mangkorn temple, one lady said that she is looking for job if anyone will able to help her. It shows that some of the people who attended the ceremony in the same time also looking for the future customers and to promote their businesses.

4.3.5. Providing Chinese education

Mangkorn temple provides free education for the monks and novices. They also hire native Chinese speaking teachers to teach the monks and novices Chinese three times a week. Although most of the monks do not have any Chinese background, the classes help them to have daily conversation in Chinese and also able to recognize some Chinese words in the sutras. The Abbot in Phoman temple holds speeches in Chinese and Thai every month. There are a lot of older people who are very pleased about it because they will be able to hear their native language. The Thais also get a chance to learn a few Chinese words. A 50 year old female said

‘ I like to attended the chanting ceremony because it helps me to learn more Chinese words and I think I improved little by little’

One 72 year old female held a high social standing among her friends because she was the only one able to read Chinese in that group. She said she thinks herself was blessed by the Buddha that is way she is able to read some much. She was very proud when she read few lines in the prayer books in front of her friends. One of her friend 76 year old female said that she have never attend the school and she could never remember any Chinese words. She just kept forgetting everything she learned.

4.3.6. Preserving and renew Chinese culture

After the Cultural Revolution many of the religious ceremonies have virtually disappeared in China. The Chinese government still bans some of the religious ceremonies. For example the Ullambana festival (Pufu 普渡) the government has kept up the ban on the festival for feeding the hungry ghosts of the seventh lunar month. The Ullambana festival in many ways balanced and corresponded with the rites for the Chinese lunar New Year. The Chinese New Year has been revived but the Ullambana festivals are now very rarely practised on a large scale in China. In the other hand Ullambana festival is the biggest festival in both Mangkorn temple and Phoman temple. The festival lasts three days in both temples and brings in many people. The two temples play a key role in the reinvention of tradition (Dean, 2003:37). The other reason is because most of the main ceremonies often cost a lot of money and require huge amounts of food and many other offerings. Nowadays many of the countryside areas in China are still very poor and people are not able to afford the ceremonies. As a result many traditional rituals have slowly died out. The Chinese on Thailand in the other hand, imported their culture, built temples and in many cases gained wealth, this is why they are able to keep their ceremonies alive when they have disappeared in parts of China. Both of the temples kept most of these traditional rituals from the south of China and are able to hold the ceremonies without fail.

4.3.7. Uniting the Chinese community

In the early days of the Chinese society in Thailand the Chinese did not have any organization. The history of Chinese temples is much older than that of the Chinese associations. The temples played the role that the association later had for a long period of time. Temple played the role of gathering people, also a place to find donation for money for charity (Lee, 2002:130). They were sometimes even involved with politics. The Chinese temples were used as a gathering place for the secret societies. In Ho's work she proved that many temple items were donated from the TianDiHui (天地會), one of the biggest secret societies.

To be able to trust each other is a key thing in the Chinese society. It is the fundamental of the Chinese business as well. Once they join the same temple and they will be consider the same group of people. They often help each other in many ways (Shiba, 1995:208). The Triple Refuge Ceremony has a significant meaning for both temples to unite the people. Only when the laypeople join the temple's Triple Refuge Ceremony they will officially become the disciple of the abbot and the temple. The laypeople normally only attend one specific temple's Triple Refuge Ceremony. After the ceremony they will truly become part of the temple's society. They will often attend the temple more regularly and become more involved with the temple event. One 52 year old female said she also retakes the Triple Refuge ceremony sometimes. She has also tried to convince her husband to join the ceremony.

The temple's religious ceremony is another example of the way that temple unites people. Each ceremony needs a lot of work for the preparation, taking days to finish. The Ullambana festival is a very good example. The festival requires a lot of offerings. It requires a lot of food, fruits and also paper house (Picture 3.14), paper lotus boat, paper-mountains. Those offerings are not just costly but also require a lot of time and effort to make. Those paper lotus boat and paper mountains were all folded by hand from a lot of papers. Each ceremony requires that all people work together in order to produce successful results.