

Chapter Four

The Tamnak Activities

At the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4, besides the founder's charisma, it is also through its activities that the group has been able to develop into its current well-being. While the Tamnak activities could be roughly divided into religious and social activities, all activities are performed as according to the requirement of its religious belief and tradition, and for the spiritual well-being of the members within and without the religious tradition.

Most of the activities are held regularly following the Tamnak's calendar. Special activities as tributes to the divine beings are held on specific days of in the Lunar year. There are also other activities held regularly on certain day of the week/month/year. As members meet regularly on the first Sunday of the month, information regarding activities are well informed among members. Acknowledgment of activities and ceremonies is forwarded to members' addresses and handed out by volunteer members or followers. Although most of the activities are mainly held in Bangkok, sometime, similar ceremonies would be repeated at the Ramindra Tamnak in Bangkok and at the Tamnak in Chiang Mai. The activities could be summarized as in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of activities held at the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4

Religious Activities	Schedule
Construction of Pagoda	Under construction
Construction of New Tamnak	Under construction
Auction of sacred objects	Yearly
Divine Healing	Any time that Kuan-Yin or any Divine Beings chose to visit the Tamnak
Recitation Session	3-4 times a week
Meditation Session	3-4 times a week
Ritual of Worship	On Auspicious Day according to the Tamnak Calendar; Thai Calendar; and the Chinese Calendar

Social Activities	Schedule
Social Activities	Several times a year
Promotional Campaign	From time to time

At the Tamnak, religious activities and social activities are two important commitments to the followers who have determined to follow Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva's teaching. As listed above, the activities are divided as into religious activities are: construction projects such as, pagoda and new Tamnaks, divine healing, recitation of scripture, meditation practice, ritual of

worship, and pilgrimage; while social activities include social welfare done several times a year such as, giving away of daily necessity to the needy, contribution to educational institution and et cetera.



4.1 Its Religious Activities

At the Tamnak, religious activities are held mainly according to the auspicious dates as listed in the Tamnak's scripture, the **Dharani of Great Compassion**. The summary of the schedule could be seen from the following table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Calendar of Ritual of Worship
at the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4

Lunar Month	Day	Event
1st	1st	Maitreya Budha's Birthday
1st	1st	New Year Day
1st	4th	Making paper amulet
1st	15th	Last day of New Year (15 days celebration)
2nd	19th	Kuan-Yin's Birthday
6th	19th	Kuan-Yin's enlightenment day
7th	unspecified	Merit-Making
8th	15th	Lantern Day (mid-autumn)
9th	9th	Birthday of the Nine Emperors
9th	19th	Kuan-Yin's ordination day
11th	17th	Amitabha Budha's Birthday
12th	29th	To welcome God of Fortune
every	1st & 15th	Ancestral worship

Normally all activities are to begin with a ritual of paying respect and showing gratitude to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. As in every religious activity there is a ritual to begin with, therefore, the schedule of religious activities as seen in table 4 coincides with the schedule for ritual of worship¹.

4.1.1 Construction Projects

The Tamnak has in recent years started three construction projects: the new Tamnak in Chiang Mai; a twenty-one story pagoda at its main Tamnak in Bangkok; and another new Tamnak at Ramindra road in Bangkok.

The largest in scale of all of the recent activities are the campaign for funding the construction of its pagoda at the main Tamnak and the new Ramindra Tamnak. For the construction of new buildings and the twenty-one story pagoda for the main Tamnak, followers have been encouraged to make financial contribution for the merits accumulated for this cause, which according to the Founder, would provide the donor a total merits of nine lifetimes. One of the major sources that provide with the fund for such large scale projects is through the auction of the sacred objects held at the main Tamnak in Bangkok each year for the past several years.

¹ Please refer to 4.1.5 *Rituals of Worships* in this chapter.

1. Construction of Pagoda

In the case of the donation of the twenty-one story pagoda, for a certain minimum amount of donations for the pagoda, one's name would be placed on the wall in the interior of the pagoda. The donation could be made also by separate installments where there is no specific amount per installment and there is no restricted period for the donor to achieve the standard total amount. The donor is also free to choose the type and the date of making the payment. Once the accumulated amount reaches the standard amount required under each title, the donor would receive a small amulet of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva. When the accumulated amount reaches the total of all of the three titles, the donor's name would be placed on the wall in the interior of the pagoda.

For a name to be put in the list of donors placed on the wall of the pagoda, a donor would need to make contribution for three different titles: for 10,000 statues of Buddhas, for pagoda and for the land where the pagoda is built. The required amount for each of the three different titles:

For 10,000 statues of Buddha	10,800 bahts
For twenty-one floor pagoda	2,100 bahts
For land	3,999 bahts

The new twenty-one story pagoda is situated in the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4 area. The pagoda is expected to be totally completed by the year 1999, which is selected for its very auspicious figure, and once completed is to be the world highest pagoda. The globe on the top of the pagoda is said to be covered by nine hundred and thirty kilogram of gold which also contain the jewelry and banknote placed by devotees during a ceremony performed on April 6, 1996, the birthday of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva when the construction of the globe began.

The ceremony began by paying homage first to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; then to all divine beings in all directions who have provided assistance in making the project possible. Then the recitation of scripture followed. After paying respect to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and all divine beings again, all members led by the founder herself, climbed the stairs by foot to the top floor for another process of ritual and recitation session, also to witness the filling of jewelry and banknotes from followers into the globe which is placed on the top of the roof of the pagoda.

Late at midnight on that specific day, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and other Divine Beings were invited to the Tamnak. After hours of recitation and meditation, Chao Chai Ang-Hai-Yi or the Red Child, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva's male attendant arrived to announce the arrival of the Bodhisattva. All participants sensed the present of the Bodhisattva in Phra

Mae Kuan-Seng at the instant that the facial expression and manner of Phra Mae Kuan-Seng changed, and they immediately prostrated to pay respect to the Bodhisattva. Also by observing changes on Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, participants have known the arrival of Chao Pho Mangkon Khiao (The Green Dragon) and several other Bodhisattvas.

To celebrate the occasion of the completion of the top floor of the pagoda, according to Chao Pho Mangkon Khiao (The Green Dragon), he had come to give away his sacred Kaew-Wi-Set (the sacred jewel) to those present as a gesture of encouragement. The Kaew-Wi-Set was said to be earned as an achievement of a deep-meditation done by Chao Pho Mangkon Khiao through a long period of thousands and thousands of years. The Kaew-Wi-Set is therefore said to be a very sacred object that it would materialize all wishes of the recipient of the sacred jewel.

From the conversation between Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and Chao Pho Mangkon Khiao, participants knew that through this compassionate act of giving, Chao Pho Mangkon Khiao (The Green Dragon) was promoted at that instance to the higher spiritual plane by Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva who witnessed the event all along the whole process. Phra Mae Kuan-Seng in the role of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, ensured all participants that all the good deeds would be rewarded sooner or later.

2. Construction of New Tamnak

A new Tamnak on Ramindra road in Bangkok under the commission of the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4 is already on its way. The main building is designed with a statue of the God Siva, an Indian God, which according to the Tamnak would be the world largest Siva statue, on its roof top. Members or the public are encouraged to provide for the funding of the Tamnak. The contribution is accepted on a voluntary basis. However, for a minimum amount of financial contribution of 10,000 bahts, the donor's name would be placed on the wall of the interior of the main building.

In the compound of the new Tamnak in Ramindra, in front of the main building, a statue of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva standing on a sacred toad cruising on the water accompanied by her male child attendant, Chao Chai Ang-Hai-Yi would be erected. This statue of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva would be a remembrance of the one in the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4, also with the pond that symbolizing the sea.

At present, the smaller Ramindra Tamnak is situated in a small compound at the site of the construction. It is expected to be moved to the main building once the new Tamnak is completed. In the compound, beside the statues of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, there are also pictures of God Siva, in some of which, photographs of Phra Mae Kuan-Yin are arranged as if God

Siva is carrying Phra Mae Kuan-Seng. Among the statues and safety boxes for donation, there is also a cut stone wall where a blurred image of standing Buddha could be seen.

3. Auction of Sacred Objects

Auction of sacred objects is held yearly with an attendance of more than one thousand of followers. The proceed for the year 1996 and 1997 have been estimated to reach a separate total of millions of bahts (Thai currency) each year. Auction is also held on an auspicious day which is on the fifteen of the first month in the Lunar year. After the long routines of ceremonies to commemorate the occasion for that specific day, auction is held at around eight o'clock in the evening after an outdoor dinner of a full course of vegetarian food that begin from seven o'clock in the evening. In 1996, reservation for table has been able to be made by obtaining the coupon in advance by making a contribution of three hundred fifty bahts per head or more up to the donor's decision. As all contribution is on a voluntary basis, those without a coupon is also allowed to enjoy the vegetarian food. Seating arrangement is made for ten persons per table and vegetarian food is served from hors d'oeuvre to dessert.

Prices of items set before bidding began are ranging from a few hundreds bahts per item to those with several hundreds of thousands of bahts

per items. Items put on auction including fruits with blessings; sacred objects such as money pouches, fortune trees, lanterns, statues of the animal of the year as according to the Lunar Calendar and pairs of the sacred lions, and et cetera. There are also vases with images of Bodhisattvas; statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The sacred fortune trees (as one item), well-known among followers for bringing prosperity to the owner, so far is the most sought after item. The fortune trees each year has been the highest priced item which has been sold at around five hundred thousands bahts. Even for fruits such as oranges, pears, apples and et cetera which is arranged in a basket, the bidder would pay for several tens of thousands bahts of contribution per basket. Items that required the least contribution normally are smaller statues of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and sacred animals with a price range from 300-500 bahts per item.

Although bidders for the sacred objects in majority are from well off families. Attendants of the auction have been from different backgrounds. Occupation of auction attendants ranged from employees to owners of businesses and their family members. The less financially successful attendants would normally choose to bring home sacred objects that could be obtained by a smaller and fix contribution. The better off participants would show their disappointment when losing the bid for a sacred object well-known

and highly sought after by the followers.



4.1.2 Divine Healing

According to the teaching at the Tamnak, all beings live as destined by their *karmic condition* (destiny)—the ultimate answer to all matters—which is determined by or as the consequence of actions done in one’s past lives. However, with Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva’s determination to save all souls from sufferings and to help all sentient beings to enter nirvana, there is always a hope to improve the karmic condition and thus changing the status of living. It is, therefore, important to get hold of the chances to improve one’s karmic condition, that is to accumulate the amount of merits for each purpose to the required level.

As a common safety measure, followers are advised to carry *fu* (符) or paper amulet². Another common measure for protection is to use the sacred water as prescribed by Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and which is always available at the Tamnak. The sacred water is made from ashes of paper amulet and fresh flowers—the paper amulet is burned while reciting mantras from the Dharani of the Great Compassion, then the ashes are put together with fresh flowers into fresh drinking water. As to how much sacred water

² Please refer to 4.1.5 *Rituals of Worship* in this chapter.

is required per dosage, it is totally up to the preference of the user. Neither Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, even in her role as Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, nor the traditional prescription available gives any explanation regarding the effectiveness of a bigger volume or the more saturated sacred water in the case that more paper amulets or types and quantity of fresh flowers are used to prepare the same volume of water.

To purify the soul as a cure for all illnesses or to drive away all evils or to eliminate negative karma that causes illnesses in the first place or, the hindrance to success and good fortunes, there are three methods of using the sacred water to choose from: to sprinkle or/and bath with the sacred water to our body; or on the effected part only in the case of pains and injuries; or/and to drink the sacred water. The best is, indeed, to use all of the three methods.

Yet among all priorities, according to the Tamnak, is to consult first with the divine form or human form of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, and to follow the instructions given by the Bodhisattva which usually involves a series of follow-up process for healing and for prevention of illnesses. The combination is for the followers to choose freely. A complete healing process might take the full course of which might include all or part of the following formulas: divine healing; recitation; meditation; ritual; making merits; and pilgrimage, if circumstance allowed, and, providing that the patient involved must have faith in the divine way of

treatment.

To invoke Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, there is a long process of which begins from paying homage to the Bodhisattva, followed by recitation, meditation and chanting mantra while circling the meditation hall—a symbolic pilgrimage. Sometimes Phra Mae Kuan-Seng would retire from the hall after leading the final round of circling the hall and come back already as Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and sometime the exchange of roles happens in the middle of conversation with participants, a while after Phra Mae Kuan-Seng settles on her throne placed at the opposite end of the meditation hall facing the main altar for images of Buddhas and Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva. There are also times that the changing of role does not occur and some of the participants would leave while others stay on to wait patiently while occupying themselves with whatever they feel like to. Sometimes the exchange of role happens immediately after part of the attending participants has left. As Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, the divine being, or Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, the human being, participants always prostrate or pay respect to her any time that she walks pass by.

At the first sign of the change of role, participants always warn first-time participants quietly and all would immediately prostrate while uttering *Omithofo*³ for three times. The first sign—the only sign—is, with her

³ The name of Amitabha Buddha in Chinese language which is equivalent in meaning to the phrase “praise to the Lord Buddha, Amitabha Buddha”. It is used to show gratitude to the Buddha who

eyes closed, all of a sudden Phra Mae Kuan-Seng's head would move rapidly to the left and right and sometimes also back and forth. When the movement calms down, with her eyes opened, a smile would appear on her face. To the followers, then, the one sitting in the throne is already the Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin, with the likeness in the physical features of Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, not the Phra Mae Kuan-Seng in her human role anymore. In whatever role, through her voice, her manner, facial expression, and her gestures which change as according to the requirement of her role, the participants also seem to have no difficulties in recognizing the identity of the role that Phra Mae Kuan-Seng is involved in and are able to give the proper response as according to the Tamnak standard of formality as a gesture of gratitude by prostrating to the being in her while uttering "*Omithofo*" which is to be repeated for three times.

Normally Chao Chai Ang-Hai-Yi arrives first as if to announce the arrival of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and also to provide participants with recent events in other realms⁴. As Chao Chai Ang-Hai-Yi, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng's voice and manner is as those of an active young boy with her face resemblance the face of a healthy young child with rosy cheeks which is very much different from when she comes in to the hall as Phra Mae Kuan-Seng to lead the process

is the spiritual father of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva as according to the Dharani of the Great Compassion.

⁴ According to the Tamnak, there are different realms for human and for divine and supernatural beings.

to invoke Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva.

In her role as Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng's voice, facial expression and gestures change at that instance. Her voice and manner of speaking become more gentle and polite. She also appears calm. Her face seems to have become the reminiscence of the face of the taller and bigger than human size standing statue of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva at the compound of the Tamnak.

According to the participants who witness the changes, it reminds them of the name given to the Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin, "the Goddess of Compassion", like a mother— very loving, very forgiving and very understanding. The atmosphere in the hall is simply comfortable and pleasant. To begin with, as Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng always give her blessings and sermon. Then counseling session would begin. Even with the occasional standard formality of prostrating and repeating the phrase "*Omithofo*" for three times, the whole session always proceed under the same pleasant and lively atmosphere like a big happy family gathering.

All participants sit on the floor facing the throne in front of Phra Mae Kuan-Seng with a follower kneeling in front of her dutifully serving tea to her. Once the participants sense the sign for counseling is about to begin, everyone would rush forward to approach her. The particular participant in turn kneels



on a stool place in front of the throne as the foot rest for Phra Mae Kuan-Seng to consult with the Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva (Phra Mae Kuan-Seng). Phra Mae Kuan-Seng as the Healing Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin always respond in a very gentle manner, holding the participant's hands while leaning forward and listen very closely. The whole counseling process normally proceeds quietly. There are also times when the atmosphere becomes more lively with jokes and there are objections from the participants regarding what Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva (Phra Mae Kuan-Seng). Cases consulted ranging from personal matters to financial problem such as, asking for children, safety, happiness, the cure for depression, and illnesses, the solution to marital problems, good fortunes and future prediction.

To heal minor illnesses, pains or injuries, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng as Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, places one of her hands above or on the effected area and the other hand on the head of the patient to transmit the healing power and then advises the use of the sacred water which is available in the hall and in the compound of the Tamnak for followers and visitors to be used freely.

As a gesture of gratitude for wishes granted and the compassionate way that Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva has extended, those who have asked for help in return are more than willing to let others know of where to ask for help in time of need—as a way to be compassionate to others—by handing out leaflets of the miracle of healing or the legendary story of the compassionate

Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin because by doing this, the person would again gain merits.

In the case that a wish is not materialized through the direct divine power, then it is the karmic condition of the person which is needed to be improved by the follow-up process. It does not matter how almighty the Bodhisattva is, it is also one's karmic condition that determines as to whether he/she is able to absorb the healing power. Once the level of one's karmic condition reaches a certain stage, according to the founder, as a consequence of the follow-up process performed with faith, then his/her wish would be granted. In the case that a patient dies before the healing power takes effect, it should be understood that this happens only due to the imbalance of his/her karmic condition—positive karmic condition is stronger than the negative karmic condition that hinder his/her ability to absorb the healing power and his/her merits accumulated for such purpose has already been used up. And if the patient is destined to be elevated to a higher spiritual plane, then leaving this world of suffering to a better land or higher realm is a relieve to the patient. In this case, through the ancestral worship merits could be transmitted to the deceased for him/her to earn a better place in spiritual plane⁵.

As solutions to most of the problems brought to her, Phra Mae

⁵ Please refer to *Ancestral Worship* in 3.3.4 Rituals of this chapter.

Kuan-Seng as the Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin, gives blessing, advises and encourages participants to make merits and reminds participants to offer candles and incense sticks in front of the standing statue of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva in front of the main building at the compound. To end the session, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, as Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva always gives her blessings again and personally hands out one candle and three incense sticks to participants who queue to accept such kindness and leave the hall while participants prostrating and repeating the “*Amithofo*” again and again while she might touch the heads of the participants along the way as she walks toward the stairway that leads to the upper floors. Ever since Phra Mae Kuan-Seng has begun showing up as another manifestation of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, none of her followers interviewed has witnessed how Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva leaves Phra Mae Kuan-Seng body. They believe that since she has become one with the Bodhisattva, then the Bodhisattva has never left her body and she has since taken the double role—as the human role of Phra Mae Kuan-Seng and also the divine role of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva—whichever is required of her at a particular moment.

According to the testimonies given by the followers interviewed who have experienced the miracles—have been healed from illness or have had their wishes granted, they have had their wishes granted and miraculously saved when the situations have been hopeless. In the following are some of the testimonies:

- (1) We had given up hope because for many years we have followed the doctor's advises, but we had not been able to bear any children. After I heard of this Tamnak, I came to ask for children and our wish was granted...
- (2) I was heavily in debt and has filed for bankruptcy... We came here and asked for help. Then miracles has happened, we are saved and we now live even better than before our business failed... Since then we become vegetarian and visit the Tamnak several times a week for recitation and meditation...and join in the merit making ceremonies...
- (3) Ever since I started visiting Tamnak, I have felt better. I had been ill for many years and it is difficult even to sleep without medication. After coming here, I sleep well and my health has improved and the doctor is amazed at the improvement. Since then my family and friends have also started to visit the Tamnak...
- (4) I had not been able to walk for more than a few meters at a time, and had not been able to bend my knees or kneel down for many years and the doctor told me it is because of my age, I am seventy years old, that my legs have become weak... But after my visit to Phra Mae (Kuan-Seng) at the Tamnak, I have been able to climb up the hill during the pilgrimage to pay homage to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, and now I go up and down the stairs several times a day and take a walk for more than an hour everyday...

Even if the healing process is merely psychological in the medical term, according to the followers interviewed who have not experienced the miracles, they have felt better when even what has happened is not quite the way they had expected, and they have accepted failure with less depress and able to work harder to meet a more challenging situation. They believe that

Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, in her role as the reincarnation of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, has benefited those who have needed her.

4.1.3 Recitation of Scripture

Recitation of scripture is taken seriously by the followers and with great enthusiasm. It is taught at the Tamnak by the ordained disciples and senior members of the lay disciples, and classes are held 3-4 times a week. The scripture adopted by the Tamnak is the **Dharani of the Great Compassion**⁶ (hereinafter refer as the **Dharani**). The Tamnak has also published an interpretation of the **Dharani** in the bilingual text of Thai and Chinese language which is edited by Jen-Wen, a monk at the Mahayana Buddhist temple in Bangkok, the Sweet Dew (玉露) Temple.

The enthusiasm of the followers in reciting the scripture is due to the reputation that the Tamnak has earned, under the leadership of its founder, through the decades since its establishment that has helped convince the followers of the effectiveness of the functions as described in the **Dharani**. The reputation has also been drawing more and more people to join the activity. The followers are convinced that, through recitation of the **Dharani**, they would obtain help and the ability to absorb the healing power transmitted

⁶ Jen-Wen, ed., *The Interpretation of the Dharani of the Great Compassion*. (Year: unknown). Bangkok: Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4. (p.1)

from the Boddhisattva Kuan-Yin, while the Tamnak with its location chosen by the Bodhisattva, is definitely the right place for a sacred formula to take effect. The following is a close look into the content of the **Dharani**:

The first part of the interpretation of the Dharani of the Great Compassion includes:

On the very first page, a painting of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva⁷ standing on a lotus on the cloud above the palace attributed to her—with her right hand holding a branch of willow which she put in to a cup hold in her left hand to soak the sweet dew from the cup to shower the world with, so as to relieve all beings, especially those who recite the **Dharani** from all sufferings⁸.

To follow is the **Dharani**⁹ with its 84 incantation (sacred formulas) in its original language of Sanskrit text written in phonetic symbols of Chinese language and by using the Chinese characters. It is then followed by the Mandala¹⁰—the religious symbol of the universe— adopted by the Tamnak. At the center of the Mandala, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, with twenty seven heads, thousands arms and thousands eyes surrounding her in the background, with a pair of her hands meet palm to palm is sitting on a large

⁷ Ibid. p.1

⁸ Ibid. p.208

⁹ Ibid. p.2-3

¹⁰ Ibid. p.4



full bloom lotus in the lotus position with her right foot on her left knee and her left foot on her right knee, with fire burning outside her domain at the outer layer of the Mandala. Immediately after the Mandala is the page with a photograph of the Founder—sitting crossed legs in the lotus position also as the abbot of the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng¹¹. The next page is a short biography of the Mahayana monk, Jen-Wen, the editor of the interpretation of the **Dharani**. After that is another painting of the Bodhisattva Kuan-Yin¹²—sitting by the water at a beach in a relax position, with the Dharani settled next to her right hand that rested by her side, her left hand is on her left knee with her left foot rested on her right knee, while her right foot rested on lotus in the water; there is also a vase with a branch of willow in it set aside to her left.

The painting of the Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin, chosen for the Dharani also show similar atmosphere at the Tamnak where the comfort of peacefulness and relaxation is emphasized—by its air conditioned hall and by having large natural shape wooden furniture made from tree trunks and branches. This has also become one of the factors that many of the followers have preferred in choosing the place for religious practice.

Aside from the above-mentioned reasons, and the belief that Phra

¹¹ Ibid. p.5

¹² Ibid. p.7

Mae Kuan-Seng is truly the reborn Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, it is written in the **Dharani** regarding the original purpose of composing the **Dharani**¹³— Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva has said, “Should any being recite and cleave to the sacred **Dharani of Great Compassion** and yet not be reborn in my land, I vow not to enter realm of the supreme enlightenment.” Another main factor that attracts the followers to pay much attention to the recitation of this scripture, is the collection of a total of 84 incantations or sacred formulas which is to be composed by Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva due to her compassion to save the world by relieving all beings from all sufferings and lead them to Nirvana. Therefore, to those who devote themselves with effort to recite the **Dharani**, are promised with a total of 15 merits¹⁴ in their future lives, as described in the following:

1. he/she shall be reborn with 5 happiness¹⁵;
2. he/she shall always be reborn in a good land;
3. he/she shall always be reborn in good era;
4. he/she shall always be able to meet compassionate friends;
5. he/she shall always be find contentment;
6. he/she shall be reborn with pure heart;
7. he/she shall be able to live as required by the precepts;

¹³ Ibid. p.10

¹⁴ Ibid. p.11-16

¹⁵ Ibid. p.206

8. he/she shall be able to live in harmony in a good family where all members care for each other;
9. he/she shall always live in prosperity;
10. he/she shall be reborn as a respectable person and able to obtain assistance;
11. he/she shall never be robbed of any of his/her property;
12. he/she shall be able to do as his/her wish;
13. he/she shall always be protected by divine and supernatural beings;
14. he/she shall be reborn in the land where he/she shall meet Buddha and hear the teaching of Buddha;
15. he/she shall be reborn with the ability to understand Buddha's teaching.

As mentioned in the first of the 15 merits above, according to the

Dharani of Great Compassion, the devotee:

1. shall have happiness; shall be free from all illnesses; shall have long life; shall live in prosperity; shall not commit any crime; shall be free from all hindrances; shall be able to accumulate all kinds of merits; shall be free from all evils; shall be able to enter Buddhahood and be reborn as his/her wish;
2. shall be cured from all of the 84000 illnesses in the world;

3. be free from the hindrances caused by all evils when in meditation in the forest or mountain;
4. be free from all dangers because of the protection provided by all the guardian deities;
5. shall have his/her wish granted if he/she becomes a vegetarian and recite this **Dharani** for a period of 3x7 days (21 days).

Another attractions of the **Dharani** is the central section in which the functions of each of the 84 incantations as represented by the 84 manifestations¹⁶ of the Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva are described:

Table 4.1.3 The Functions of the 84 Incantations of the **Dharani**

No.	Function of each of the 84 incantations
1	to invoke Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva
2	to have the determination to follow the religious practice
3	for longevity
4	for self-awakening/ enlightenment
5	to be relieved of suffering
6	to be compassionate so as to be able to help others in the way to salvation

¹⁶ Ibid. p.21-187

7	to understand the truth
8	to invoke the four guardians kings of the four directions-east/south/west/north for protection against all evils
9	to invoke the four guardians of the four directions to help one turns over a new leaf
10	to invoke the four guardians kings of the four directions to make all evils surrender
11	to be able to enter the paradise
12	to obtain happiness
13	for protection against poisonous and would beast
14	to receive the sweet dew - the elixir for all illnesses from Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva
15	to drive away evil thought and become a good person
16	to be free from suffering
17	to be able to become a good person
18	to be free from suffering
19	to be relieve of suffering
20	to be relieve of suffering
21	to be relieve of suffering
22	to invoke the thirty three giants from heaven to help relieve all suffering
23	for peacefulness of mind so as to be able to follow the religious practice

24	to be relieve of all sufferings
25	for longevity
26	to be reborn in paradise
27	to invoke the millions of soldiers from heaven for the relieve of suffering
28	to invoke the King of peacock with his army of peacock to make the evils surrender
29	to invoke a giant General from the heaven to help in meditation
30	to obtain help for concentration in meditation
31	to obtain protection against dangers
32	to make all evils and their relatives surrender
33	to obtain help in following the religious teaching
34	to obtain good luck
35	to be able to obtain enlightenment
36	to invoke one of the kings of heaven for relieve of sufferings
37	to invoke one of the kings of heaven for protection against dangers
38	to obtain help in understanding of the scripture
39	to be relieve of sufferings
40	to be reborn to meet the Maitreya Buddha

41	to invoke the King of the eight forces to make all evils surrender
42	to invoke the Four-Armed King to be relieve of suffering
43	to invoke the Bodhisattva Kuan-Yin
44	to ask for the sweet dew from Kuan-Yin
45	to ask for the sweet dew for four happiness
46	to be relieve of sufferings
47	to be relieve of sufferings
48	to invoke the Buddha of the future, Maitreya Buddha to lead the way to salvation
49	to be able to all evils behind and turn to a new leaf
50	to be relieve of all sufferings
51	to be relieve of all sufferings
52	to be relieve of all sufferings
53	to attain enlightenment
54	to be relieve of all sufferings
55	to be relieve of all sufferings
56	to be relieve of all sufferings
57	to attain enlightenment

58	to invoke the Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin
59	to be relieve of all sufferings
60	to attain enlightenment
61	to convert followers of Theravada Buddhism to become the follower of Mahayana Buddhism for this is the only way to salvation
62	to express determination to follow the Mahayana way to salvation
63	to be able to become compassionate and make merit through social welfare
64	to be cured of illnesses
65	to drive away lust
66	to be cured of illnesses
67	to be able to enter the pure land
68	to drive away all evils and hindrances in the way to salvation
69	to attain enlightenment
70	to be relieve of suffering
71	to obtain happiness
72	to be relieve of suffering
73	to know the right way to salvation
74	to be able to concentrate

75	to be relieve of suffering and be led the right way to salvation
76	to control one's mind so as to have a pure mind
77	to be able to concentrate
78	to be able to enter the forever land of paradise
79	to clear our mind so as to make it pure
80	to clear our mind so as to make it pure
81	to be able to concentrate in meditation
82	to clear our mind so as to make it pure
83	to attain enlightenment
84	to attain perfection

Actually, there are very few followers who care for the specific function of each specific incantations. To them, the best way is to recite all of the 84 incantations so as not to take any unnecessary risks because when one formula does not work, then they would have to repeat the process with another formula and there is no guarantee that this time they have chosen the right one. Therefore, there is more practical advantage in reciting the complete **Dharani**. For example, to recite a complete **Dharani** seems to

serve the purpose better than to repeat 84 times of one wrong incantation. Moreover, among all the sufferings in the world, it is difficult to define as to which belongs to what categories and thus there is always the possibility that one might have chosen the wrong formula. Another reason for being enthusiastic in the practice, according to the followers, is, recitation has trained them to concentrate easier even when attending other matters.

In the case that recitation has not served its purposes after the specific period as stated in the **Dharani**—those who recite this **Dharani** and become a vegetarian for a period of 21 days shall have their wishes granted¹⁷, there is an explanation for this: there are other conditions that are required to make any of the formula works, such as, one's karmic condition, the state of the purity of one's heart and mind, which determine one's ability to absorb the power radiating from the incantation; and then there is the question also as to whether one has devoted enough effort.

4.1.4 Meditation

Meditation, as one of the processes that promotes the divine healing, is, to the followers at the Tamnak, one of their commitment and is drawing an increasing numbers of followers and non-followers to the Tamnak because

¹⁷ Ibid. p.206

of the popularity of meditation practice. At the Tamnak, meditation classes are held 3-4 times a week in the evening on certain days of the week. Normally it is held after the recitation of scripture at the meditation hall on the third floor of the main building. Attendance of the classes on weekdays is around 20-30 persons and more on weekends. On special occasions, the number would reach to about 100-120 persons.

At the Tamnak, the practice of meditation is done by focusing on chanting the phrase “Om-Mani-Pad-Me-Hum”, a mantra to invoke Kuan-Yin (Avalokitesvara) Bodhisattva because it is said in the **Dharani** that the Bodhisattva has uttered the syllables “*Om-Mani-Pad-me-Hum*” at the moment that she was born. Therefore, it is the most powerful incantation to absorb the healing power from the Bodhisattva since the Bodhisattva is born from the light that sprang from Amitabha Buddha and is certainly to have the similar divine power as those of a healing Buddha.

According to the **Dharani**, *Om*¹⁸, the first syllable in the incantation, is the fundamental truth and the origin of life. By uttering this syllable, with the wisdom to understand its meaning and purposes, one calls out to all Buddhas—therefore many of the incantations are begin with this word as a reminder to all beings of the origin of life—and also shows one’s

¹⁸ Ibid. p.32

determination to follow the Buddha's teaching, faith, gratitude, alertness and consciousness. *Mani*¹⁹ is the jewel—the creation; *Pad*²⁰ is the red lotus—the supreme wisdom; *Me*²¹ is the great compassion; while *Hum*²² is consciousness—emptiness or nothingness. Therefore, *Om-Mani-Padme-Hum*, means *the jewel (of creation) is in the lotus*. By *Om-Mani-Pad-Me-Hum*, one refers to the countless population of Buddhas and the light (power) of the supreme wisdom from the lotus will shine upon the person who utters the incantation. He/she then would be protected by all divine and supernatural beings from all evil influences and be shown the way to enlightenment.

The method of meditation is, sit in a lotus or relax position, arms extended to the knees with palms facing upward in a relax manner. There are simply two steps to follow—when inhale, visualize or concentrate on the sound of the syllables while uttering “*Om-Mani-*” and when exhale focus on the sound of the syllables while uttering “*-Pad-Me-Hum.*” At “*-Hum*”, nothing is left. Finally, after several or many repetitions—depending on the level of concentration of the practitioner, the mind would then enter a state of consciousness but uncontrolled tranquillity with stable light breathing.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.158

²⁰ Ibid. p.158

²¹ Ibid. p.158

²² Ibid. p.180

According to witnesses, those who have faith in the power of the meditation have been healed of their illnesses even with the practice of meditation alone when their doctors had given up. The founder has also told of her experience where her physician had at first warned her that she needed an operation for the tumor in her ovary that had caused hemorrhage and further heavy bleeding, but was later amazed at the fact that the tumor had disappeared by itself and there has been no trace of tumor at all since then.

The following are a few examples of the testimonies given by long time devotees which also show the reasons of the increasing popularity of the religious group of the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4:

- (a) Phra Mae has materialized whatever wishes that I made some of which even seem hopeless. Ten years ago the doctor had said I was very ill. But I felt my health has improved although I still see the doctor from time to time, but I had stopped taking medication. As her follower, I have been a vegetarian for ten years. I follow the religious practice, recite the Dharani and meditate..... I knew she would continue to show us that our proper action would be rewarded.....
- (b) I have been a follower of Kuan-Yin for ten years. Everything has gone well ever since I started visiting this Tamnak and began the meditation practice. I felt better and healthier each day. Whenever I am not feeling well, I would visit this Tamnak...
- (c) My family's health has improved since we began worshipping her and became vegetarian. I am grateful to the Bodhisattva for giving me children who are willing to follow the practice too. Since we started to practice meditation, my husband has stopped being unfaithful; the children are doing better in their

school work although they have joined in more activities now that they also join the Tamnak activities. Visiting the Tamnak has become part of the family outing. We also spend time together at home for recitation and meditation. My husband and I have agreed that this is indeed a healthy way of living to our family...

- (d) Many years ago, I used to feel proud for being a playboy... It was by chance that I had visited this Tamnak with a friend and had started the meditation practice for curiosity. I forgot how I have become indulged in this activity but I have never expected any reward even spiritual attainment. I have since felt that I have become a new person and have lived better and happier with even better achievement in the business although I have not asked for or perform any rituals for more prosperity. Now I am a vegetarian and come here several times a week for recitation and meditation. It has now become a habit ...
- (e) I first visited the Tamnak a few years ago after the doctor told me that the medication I had been taking is not a cure and can only stop the pain and prevent the tumor from getting worst too fast. I was nearly sixty then. At that time, I thought may be at least I can prepare myself and for my children to have a better future condition. Anyway, there is nothing else for me to do except staying at home and being taken care of. I told my children that I would like to visit a Kuan-Yin temple and I was taken here, practical being carried here, after they were told of the Tamnak. I started the meditation instead of staring to the air—I have known too well of the environment where I had been staying in bed for many years. I meditate full-time at home—I spent very little time for meals and sleeping. Then I started recitation at first to entertainment myself. One day, I felt bored that I decided to get off the bed and was amazed at the fact that I was ‘normal’—I felt the strength in my legs. Later I went to the pilgrimage and walked all the way to the Kuan-Yin temple at the top of the hill! Now I do not need medication. Since then, the whole family, all ages, becomes vegetarian and has join me to meditate and recite the Dharani without any of my effort to recommend the practice. We do not come to the Tamnak often but I am very grateful and I know my family feels the same too ...



As seen from the above examples, the majority of the followers are voluntary long-term vegetarian. According to them, this is to follow the teaching of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, to be compassionate and therefore not to exploit and encourage the exploitation by consuming meat of animals. It is also because one's future lives is determined also by one's actions done in this life, it is wise not to do anything that one would not choose to do whatever that one does not want others to do to him/her. It is written in the **Dharani** that, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, in one of her incarnations as Princess Miao Shan, had been a vegetarian since her birth, had taken the vow to save all sentient beings and had attained perfection and entered the Pure Land.

4.1.5 Rituals of Worship

Rituals of worship at the Tamnak is another commitment of the followers as part of follow-up processes to heal the karmic condition by asking for the assistance of divine beings and ancestors in other spiritual plane. For all of the events as noted here, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng normally leads the ritual first at the main Tamnak, then to the Tamnaks on Ramindra Road later on the same day, and to Chiang Mai on a later day. Events performed

regularly at the Tamnak as are listed as in Table 4²³ which mainly consist of rituals of divine worship and ancestral worship. At the Tamnak, both are held regularly on auspicious days as listed in the **Dharani and** also according to the Thai and Chinese custom. There are rituals held in private on the followers' request as well.

1. Ritual of Divine Worship

Rituals of divine worship are held mainly to commemorate the major events in relation with Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, such as, Amitabha Buddha's birthday, the Bodhisattva's birthday, ordination day, and enlightenment day; among all, one of the most important events for the year is to pray for divine power from Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva to be transmitted to the paper amulets and is held on the 4th of the first month of the Lunar year. As it is also important to have the assistance of the God of Fortune in the coming year, ritual of receiving the God of Fortune for the divine being to transmit the divine power of good fortune to the amulets is performed on the year end as an event to prepare for a prosperous year.

Other major events where rituals are held for the respect and the divine assistance of all divine and supernatural beings include:

²³ Please refer to p.75 of this thesis.

- a. to mark the birthday of the future Buddha, Matriya Buddha;
- b. to pay respect to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on the first and fifteenth days of the new year day as according to the Lunar calendar;
- c. to mark the birthday of the Nine (name) Emperor;

All rituals mentioned above include those listed in the following are performed as a gesture of respect, and gratitude, also for the divine assistance whenever it is needed. In any of the rituals, to begin with, offerings which includes incense, flowers, fruits, vegetarian food, and recitation of scripture are made and laid out on the long rows of tables in front of the altars.

Asides from the major events as stated above, there are also rituals privately held on the request of individual followers where a suitable date and procedures for the event is decided based on personal expectation of the person involved and purposes of such rituals.

At the Tamnak, there is a menu for the common rituals as always requested by individual followers which also could be held personally or with the assistance of the priest and priestess in the Tamnak on almost any day.

Common rituals are as listed in the following menu available at the Tamnak:

1. for wishes to be granted;
2. for good fortune;
3. for prosperous business;
4. for successful career;
5. for family blessing;
6. for health;
7. for assistance anytime and anywhere;
8. for safety;
9. for success;
10. for assistance from people of higher spiritual status;
11. for assistance of divine power;
12. for promotion in career;
13. for educational achievement;
14. for longevity and prosperity;
15. for family and financial prosperity;
16. for protection in a journey.

The basic procedures for the above private rituals is, first to write the name, surname, birthday and address of the person who apply for the divine power; then to obtain the set of offerings prepared by the Tamnak for each occasion or as one's preference which usually includes incense, candle, fruits, vegetarian snack and a piece of sacred prayer sheet to write on. Although the prayer sheets are in three different colors—in green, or red or pink, all serve

the same purpose.

2. Ritual of Ancestral Worship

Ritual of ancestral worship is held twice a month on the first and fifteen of the month in the Lunar calendar and the Chinese custom. Offerings to ancestors are prepared at the Tamnak by paying a certain amount of contribution depending on the size of offering which includes incense, flowers, fruits, vegetarian food, along with the recitation of the scripture performed by the monks and nuns of the Tamnak. Rituals are performed to obtain spiritual assistance from the ancestors.

On a special day when the ancestral worship day coincide with an auspicious day, the special ceremony of divine worship is also held. Altars with the name of the families who make the request are lined out in rows which sometime reaches more than one thousand. The Tamnak then held a special recitation service to the followers while the monks and nuns of the Tamnak performed the recitation to mark the occasion. A special offering of recitation of scripture to ancestors for the ancestors to enter a higher spiritual plane is also provided but it would require a certain amount of contribution.

Ritual of worship begins with paying respect to the divine beings or ancestors with offerings displayed in front of the altar. Then offerings such

as fruits and food is distributed among participants and visitors. It is believed that by eating food offered to divine beings and ancestors, the person receives protection from the divine beings and ancestors.

As a major event to mark a special occasion, merits gained through the compassion given in the act of giving through social welfare²⁴ are offered to the ancestors as the highest respect to one's ancestor, and in the hope that the ancestor would be raised to a higher spiritual plane and be released from any present and future sufferings.

The Tamnak also performed rituals of Thai custom and the custom of other cultures with the belief in the merits obtained by paying respect also to all Buddhas, divine beings and other higher spiritual beings, such as:

- (1) robe offering ceremony—the offering of monk robes to monks at the Theravada temples as according to the Thai Theravada Buddhist tradition;
- (2) to mark the new year day in Thailand Songkran on 13th of April as according to the Thai Calendar.

²⁴ Please refer to 4.2.1 *Social Welfare* in this chapter.



4.1.6 Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is encouraged at the Tamnak. It is a journey visiting holy places as told according to the religious legends in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Visits to any of the Buddhist temples in other countries outside Thailand, such as, India, Nepal, the People Republic of China and Taiwan; are included. Also it can be a symbolic journey to the Tamnak and even simply within the Tamnak compound. The most sacred place of all indeed is Pho-Tho-Sua (as pronounced in the Chinese dialect of Tae-chiew) in Nam-hai (South Sea) in the People's Republic of China in relation to the the legend which marks the place where Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva attained enlightenment.

To the followers, pilgrimage is believed to be the best way to understand the teaching of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas where the the truth can be found, and with this knowledge, higher level of merits and divine assistance can be obtained.

It is also very important to the followers, to show whether they are able to overcome difficulties met in the journey to pay homage to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the four directions—mainly, the East, West, South and North, as it is an important way of showing one's faith and determination in serving the religion in all possible ways, and through the responses to these

difficulties that evaluation of one's determination to serve the religion is judged. According to them, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng has shown them such possibility with her own experiences in all of her journey in the pursuit of the truth. They, therefore, believed that, with faith, determination and sincerity shown, all the wishes would be materialized.

4.2 Its Social Activities

As the leader of the Tamnak, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng knew that besides her own charisma known to the followers through the religious activities, it is also through its commitment to the social activities that maintain the interaction between group members and people outside the religious tradition in the society that secures further development and the continuous well-being of the Tamnak.

4.2.1 Social Welfare

Also with such understanding, the Tamnak organizes activities that provide for social welfare regularly. The Tamnak, with the active participation of its followers, provides funds regularly to other establishments that concern the welfare of the people outside the religious tradition. It also attend to the need of the poor by giving away staple food such as rice and other daily necessities; provides funds regularly to educational institutions;

sponsor activities held at other Buddhist religious institution of the Thai Theravada tradition. Also, in one of the main events in the pilgrimage, the Tamnak and its followers also make contribution to other temples and social institution outside Thailand, such as those in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, the People's Republic of China and et cetera.

4.2.2 Promotional Activities

As social activities are held under the name of the Tamnak, and by such activities, it is made known to the public of its main objective is based on the understanding of compassion as the key to salvation, and the need to also save the people outside its tradition from suffering so as to accomplish the mission of the Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin, being held responsible by the Tamnak, under the leadership of its founder and leader, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, whom for this purpose has been reborn.

One such activity held by the Tamnak to promote the teaching of compassion and actively participated by all members including their families, is the ritual of ancestral worship as according to the Chinese custom which is also a practice still maintained by a large number of the Thai-Chinese in Thailand.

A part of the process in the ritual involves the transferring of merits

which is required to be made through the act of giving by providing daily necessities to help the poor and the needy. The Tamnak emphasizes that through compassion the whole families are to be saved, not only the individual who performs good deeds. During such activities, rice and other daily necessity are given away to the poor and the needy.

The Tamnak also serves vegetarian food to the public on specific days for the same purpose of promoting the welfare of the poor. In other activities which have also contributed to the reputation of the Tamnak, its founder and leader, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng provided for such activities as the pilgrimage where members outside the tradition are also welcomed to join; giving useful items such as electrical home appliances to individuals or group who are noted for their service to the society.

Among the activities, while the commitment in its religious activities focuses on divine healing, recitation, meditation and ancestral worship, healing is the interpersonal experience between the leader and the followers. Meditation is a personal experience shared among followers. Both divine and ancestral worship seen as a way of merit-making, is the social experience shared between group members and the people outside both the Mahayana Buddhist religious tradition and the Chinese tradition. The Tamnak, under the leadership of the founder has maintained this tradition and expanded it to a larger social context and financial scale where the leader and the activity

committee encourage followers in providing and campaigning for the contribution to help in providing the material support to the poor and other organization that attend to the social need.

Illustration 3.3 The Tamnak Activities—Religious and Social

(top) Reservation coupon for vegetarian food at auction of sacred objects, 1997;
(bottom) Distribution of rice to the poor, 1996.



ตำหนักพระแม่กวนอิม ไซดชัย 4 ลาดพร้าว

โทร. 5140715, 5389368, 9316708

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ขอเชิญร่วมรับประทานอาหารทิพย์

วันศุกร์ที่ 21 กุมภาพันธ์ 2540 เวลา 19.00 น.

ขอเชิญสาธุชนทุกท่าน ร่วมรับประทานอาหารทิพย์ ขององค์พระแม่กวนอิมมหาโพธิสัตว์ (อวโลกิเตศวร) ซึ่งจะมีปีละ 1 ครั้ง ในคืนวันพระจันทร์เต็มดวงครั้งแรกของปี (วันห้วงเชิว) พร้อมกันนี้ ขอเชิญร่วมประมุขของทิพย์อันศักดิ์สิทธิ์ขององค์พระแม่กวนอิม เพื่อนำเข้าบ้านเป็นสิริมงคล สุขภาพแข็งแรง อายุยืน เงินทองไหลมาเทมาเต็มบ้าน จะสมปรารถนาแก่ตนเองและครอบครัวทุกประการ.

เชิญสาธุชนทุกท่าน ร่วมเวียนเทียนในวันมาฆบูชา ในเวลา 18.30 น.

ชื่อผู้ทำบุญโต๊ะเจ..... HENRUNIANTI EDI Sufijan (บัตรใบละ 200 บาท)

ผู้ออกบัตร..... ผู้รับเงิน..... บัตรโต๊ะที่ 34 เลขที่ 0350.

