BODHISATTVA, MERIT AND IDENTITY:
THE BELIEF AND PRACTICE OF GUANYIN AMONG THAI-CHINESE

MR. YONG LUO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Guanyin has become increasingly popular among Thai-Chinese in Bangkok and nationwide in Thailand in the past several decades. Guanyin originally has its roots in Mahayana Buddhism as a bodhisattva and a goddess in folk religion in China. Guanyin travels with the Chinese immigrants abroad and has taken its new roots in Thailand.

Basing on the phenomenological theory of Van der Leeuw, this study concerns about the meaning of the religious phenomena for the believers themselves, and focus on the belief of Guanyin in religious spirituality, merit making, morality, salvation, and identity requiring. This study relies on textual history and field questionnaires and interviews to gain an understanding of the religious beliefs and practices related to Guanyin.

The integration of Guanyin as a bodhisattva and goddess gains attraction for Thai-Chinese who are mostly Buddhists. They worship Guanyin and acquire good luck, security,
health, wealth, and happiness. At the same time, they have gained merit as well, and merit making will guarantee their wishes, expectations and moral actions. Making merit is the way for the followers of Guanyin to achieve the satisfaction in their spirituality and the salvation from the difficulties in their lives, and it even guides them towards the ultimate goal of Nirvana.

This study shows that Guanyin worship for the Thai-Chinese followers relates to ethnic identity, economic environment and gender. Guanyin is generally accepted by both Thai-Chinese and Thais as a figure of Buddhism, and is considered to strengthen their Buddhist identity. In this way, Guanyin allows Thai-Chinese to practice Buddhism but also retain their Chinese ethnic identity. Guanyin’s female gender feature combines features of love, compassion, kindness, perfection, tolerance, devotion, and thus is especially important for urban middle-class women. These reasons explain why Guanyin is popular in Thailand, and growing in popularity because of the challenges of ethnic and gender identity and the pressures of contemporary urban life.
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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance of the Research

1.1.1 Background

Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist country. Buddhism is the main religious belief of the Thai population, 94% of which are Buddhists. There are more than three thousand Buddhist temples and more than three hundred thousand monks in this yellow-robed country. Meanwhile, in modern times, Buddhism in Thailand faces many challenges from the economic and social development with the process of modernization and globalization. Many new movements in Buddhism have emerged in the past several decades, such as Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke movements. The popular Buddhism is welcomed and attracts much attention. There are some famous Buddhist monks like Luang Phu To and Luang Pho Khoon, who has gained the popularity from their reputation in magic power. Luang Pho Khoon is popular for his magic power on his amulets. He passed away on 16 May 2015, “Luang Phor Khoon amulets have soared in value after the revered abbot's death”1 and the numbers which relate to the days of his death and his life become popular numbers in the lottery markets.

Besides Buddhism, different religions and beliefs are coexisting in this land, and each of them has its own set of beliefs and adherents, such as Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, and Taoism and so on. Islam is the second largest religion with about 4.6% of the total population. There are also many new religious movements and trends in different religions. There are many popular beliefs as well, such as the belief in Indian gods like Brahma, Shiva,

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Indra, Lakshmi, and Ganesh, and Chinese gods like Guanyin, Guan Yu, Nezha, Mazu, and the gods of Earth. There are some royal spirits who are popular as well, such as King Rama V Chulalongkorn who is worshiped by many Thai people.

All these beliefs occupy their own spaces and rituals, and there are no strict or exclusive rules that restrict different followers. All the gods are respected by Thai people, and the general rules for showing the respect is as simple as “wai” (put palms together devoutly) and the offerings of candles and flowers. The faithfulness depends on the degree of the piety and the action of behaviors. All doors are open to all people so that it is common to see some Thais being both Buddhist and Christian, and some of them believe in the teachings of the Buddha while believing in the animist powers of the spirits and gods. Thai people often go to temple on Sunday, and sometimes visit as many as nine temples in one day. When they visit the temple, they pay their respect to the Buddha images and all the deities in the temples. Thailand was even ranked the most religious country in a survey of 65 countries, which is conducted by Gallup International and the WI Network of Market Research in 2015. It shows in the report that in Thailand 94 percent of respondents said they were religious persons, and only one percent said they were convinced atheists.²

People practice their religious beliefs and activities easily and enjoy their religious freedoms in Thailand. In Buddhist festivals or other religious days, people will worship many deities at the same time. There are many new religious activities appear during this period as well. These religious trends will encourage followers to participate in activities, and people gain their own spiritual satisfaction at the same activities and events. It will enrich the participation

² Akkoc, R. (2015, April 13). Mapped: There are the world’s most religious countries. The Telegraph. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk
and reputation in religiosity, and it will be significant for the common people in their religious lives.

There is a big number of Thai population which are Thai-Chinese whose ancestors are from China. Chinese came to Thailand and brought their religious beliefs as well. The major beliefs traditionally in China are Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and other folk beliefs. They are often mixed and integrated, especially in the lay people’s daily lives. For example, Guanyin is a bodhisattva in Buddhism and accepted as a goddess in Taoism. Taoism and Buddhism are also influenced by Confucianism in the field of moral responsibilities for the family and society. In the south of China, folk religions are very prosperous. Different places have their own special beliefs and gods.

Chinese religions have become important parts of the Chinese culture which are significant in maintaining Chinese identity for Thai-Chinese. Chinese religions accompanied these Chinese immigrants and have become a part of Thai-Chinese lives. Chinese religions have been well preserved and have lived in harmony with Thai Buddhism and Thai culture. Thai-Chinese families practice Chinese religions and Thai Buddhism at home, temples and public spaces, especially during the Chinese festivals, traditional Chinese religious performance can be seen all around, even some of which cannot be found in their motherland where many revolutions and changes have erased cultural traditions in the past century. With the development and integration among all the different ethnic groups, the separation has gradually become looser; they cross the boundaries living together, at the same time, all the religious temples and shrines are shared by all groups. Every year there are several big activities organized during the religious events by the Chinese in Thailand, such as the Buddhist and other folk religion festivals. At the
same time, some deities may lose their positions and decline, but some deities may become popular and increase their position among Thai-Chinese.

Guanyin is one of the most famous Bodhisattva in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism and also an important goddess in Chinese folk religious beliefs. She has been transformed to China from India and became rooted in China as a female goddess with great compassion for more than one thousand years. Guanyin has been deeply integrated into Chinese religions and culture, and she is often considered as a central part of Chinese religions and is worshiped by Chinese in China and abroad.

Guanyin travels to Thailand with Chinese immigrants and has existed in Thailand for a long time. Guanyin statues can be seen at many ancient Chinese temples in Bangkok and many local god shrines. There are several Guanyin shrines and temples in Bangkok, and some new Guanyin temples have been built in recent years around Bangkok and other provinces. Ancient Guanyin Temple at Chinatown was built in 1888, South Sea Guanyin Hall was built in 1888, Wat Mangkorn was built in 1871, and Guanyin Hall at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital was established at 1933. Before Guanyin was worshiped as the main deity in temples or shrines, it should be a fact that Guanyin was worshiped by Thai-Chinese in their house for a long period of time. Many Bangkok people like to attend the opening ceremony or activities of Guanyin temples or Guanyin statues in the temples which in or near Bangkok.

Guanyin is accepted and worshiped in Thai context which is a Theravada Buddhist society. The way of reaching Nirvana is based on Arahant ideal in Theravada Buddhism, and it is different in some aspects from the Bodhisattva ideal in Mahayana Buddhism. There are many questions for me to acquire what their attitude to Guanyin, how the followers participate in the religious activities in the belief and practice in Guanyin, and what the meanings are for them.
Guanyin is well known and has become popular in recent thirty years. I have not found many records about Guanyin worshipping publicly in any thesis written thirty years ago. Hamilton observes that "although Kwan Im became especially visible to Bangkokians in the 1990's, her image is everywhere in the south for reasons to be explained shortly, with very old statues and images in many temples, both Chinese and Thai, the histories of which are usually known by temple custodians" (Hamilton, 1999).

White-robed Guanyin, Thousand-hand Guanyin, and South Sea Guanyin are mostly seen in Thailand. Most of Guanyin statues in temples are gold-covered, such as those in Ancient Guanyin Temple and Guanyin statue at Guanyin Hall of Tian Fha Foundation Hospital. This is the influence of Thai temple statuary, as most Buddha statues in Thai temples are in gold color. The early statues look more ancient and are not the same as modern statues which seem to look more beautiful, such as this one in Wat Mangkorn. Most of modern Guanyin statues are imported from China; there are so many styles, and they are getting more colorful and beautiful.

Guanyin has become a general deity for all Thai-Chinese to worship, and Guanyin has crossed boundaries between the different Chinese groups because of her well known in Chinese and her identity as a famous Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism. Furthermore, Guanyin might play active roles in the unification and consolidation of Thai-Chinese and the Thai society for the morality inspiration from the belief and practice of Guanyin. The images or statues of Guanyin can be seen in many kinds of Chinese temples and Chinese families, including Buddhist temples, Taoist shrines, and many different folk shrines, and even in Thai temples. Nowadays, many Thai people become her followers or believe her mythical powers. There are several religious activities that attract many people every year, such as memorial days for Guanyin, the Nine Emperor Gods Festival, and so on. In the Guanyin shrines or temples, one can see there are many
piety followers who worship and practice often. Even many young followers come to visit Guanyin regularly.

The contemporary belief of Guanyin shows some new phenomena which are not the same as the tradition. This occurs with the development in society of commercialization and modernization. During this process, there has been a weakening in interest in institutional religions. However, the decline of the institutional religions does not mean the decay of the religiosity. On the contrary, "many Thai people are shifting their association to new religious movements at the margins of state control. It is not only new Theravada Buddhist movements that attract many Thai people, but also cults such as those associated with the Mahayana bodhisattva Kuan Yin (goddess of compassion) and the former Thai king Chulalongkorn" (Falk, 2009, p.242).

Guanyin belief shows the characteristics of the diverse, dynamic and complex religious belief system in contemporary Thai culture. All these phenomena and trends had become visible during the past several decades. This world is changing so fast, and people will face new challenges all the time, especially with the growth of the middle-class in Bangkok. Nithi Aeusrivonges observes that the popularity of Guanyin belief is mostly among Thai-Chinese middle-class, and focuses on achieving the morals required to achieve success in life and solve the difficulties in the commercial society (Aeusrivonges, 1994, pp.78-106).

In my study, I am concerned about the belief and practice of Guanyin among Thai-Chinese in Bangkok. I need to talk about Thai-Chinese in short. There has been a long history of Chinese immigration to Thailand and there is a large population who are of Chinese ancestry. The population of Thai-Chinese in contemporary time is around 7 million which is about 11% of the total Thai population, and the number is increasing with the new immigrants from China in
the past thirty years (Zhuang, 2009, p.64). Thai-Chinese dominant the commercial fields in Bangkok. They have had this tradition in doing business since they settled in Thailand, now they are the biggest business groups and play important roles in the business field. Especially during the past thirty years or more, Thai economy has developed rapidly and the middle-class became the majority in urban cities, and Guanyin has become popular with the economic development and social changes. Business has helped the Chinese to be prosperous, and has influenced their lives in the field of the spirit too. Wilson states clearly that "in Thailand, Kuan Im applies the principle of multiplying to business and wealth. With economic growth, the Sino-Thai (jek, luuk jiin) who follow Kuan Im have grown in social standing and influence, and their popular culture, including palace tales and Kuan Im cults, has spread beyond the ethnic Chinese to enjoy wide popularity" (Wilson, 2008, p.636).

With the development of modernization and commercialization of society, the middle-class women in the urban cities become the majority and they play significant roles in society, including the religious realm. According to my interview, the majority of the Guanyin followers are indeed middle-class women. Why do so many middle-class women engage in the belief in Guanyin and how do they practice their beliefs? Moreover, it is not only the middle-classes, the followers of Guanyin cross the gaps among all the generations, professions, genders, Chinese and Thais, rich and poor, urban and rural. The belief and practice of Guanyin is for everyone equally and Guanyin is considered as the one who gives her companionship and power to all the followers. Then, my question is that why Guanyin can be accepted by all people and what is the meaning for them to be her followers in their lives?

Theoretically, the emergence of the belief in Guanyin and other diverse religious beliefs in Thailand is what called by Tanabe and Keyes is a "crisis of modernity" (Tanabe and Keyes,
2002, pp.6-25). Roberts calls this "new spirit of capitalism" (Roberts, 1995, p.1). Rajadhon considers it as the syncretism between Buddhism and animism (Rajadhon, 1986). Kitiarsa believes that it goes beyond syncretism, and it is a hybridization of popular religions in contemporary Thailand (Kitiarsa, 2005) and it becomes both visible and subtle because of its expansion into the "mass media and the market place" and becomes "commercialized religiosity" (Kitiarsa, 2005, p.484). Terwiel says in his book "Monks and Magic" that syncretism and compartmental models are two extremes to explain this phenomenon and he states that "it is an incomplete model which probably could be developed further by research in the provincial capitals and in the capital city... but it can be expected that many waver between one view and the other" (Terwiel, 2001, p.249).

Regarding to this, Mayfair Mei-hui Yang explains that the process of modernity normally will stimulate the secularization of the society, and that "the process of secularization is usually understood as the process whereby traditional religious orientations, rituals, and institutions lose their grip on social life, no longer seem viable in modern urban, industrial, and commercial society, and gradually decline" (Yang, 2008, p.4). She claims that secularization can also mean that religious impulses become functionally specialized in private sphere or in the specialized religious organization. Jackson uses the "postmodernization of Thai religion" to refer to the new phenomenon. He argues that the new phenomenon is based on "marketized spirituality" and "commercialized religiosity" (Kitiarsa, 205, pp.461-478).

The phenomenon of the belief in Guanyin has been influenced by the modernization and secularization strongly in the past several decades. Kirsten W. Endres explains that "with the proliferation of religious faiths and movements over much of the world at the dawn of the twenty-first century it became apparent that, contrary to what modernization theorists had
predicted, religion had not faded away in the face of modernity’s scientific and technological advances” (Endres, 2011, p.5). So the understanding and practice of Guanyin belief among Thai-Chinese shows the way of cooperating with the modernization and presents the multi-angle images. Taylor remarks, “People have turned for assistance to a cast of powerful spirits that concretize and give familiar form to that which is ineffable and apparently uncontrollable” (Taylor, 2004, p.87). Aeusrivonges points out that “any institutions or organizations that can help fulfill the need for community of the urban middle class will certainly gain an upsurge of popularity” (Aeusrivonges, 1994, p. 97). Kitiarsa writes that “urban religious phenomena have developed from indigenous religious beliefs and practices...adapt them to urban environments and make them meaningful to the lives of the urban population” (Kitiarsa, 2005, p.484). How the belief of Guanyin adapts the new environment at the new time is my concern as well.

1.1.2 Significance

It is a general phenomenon that many followers believe that Guanyin can bring good luck and prosperity, health, and businesses, what they often request for. Is that really the same as what some scholars criticize that they are only looking for the power and success in wealth as well as samsaric salvation? In my study, I found that many followers believe that the belief and practice of Guanyin is a way to make merit for this samsaric salvation, and most importantly for a good life which is moral actions from the principle of their beliefs. This has enhanced the meaning of the belief in Guanyin for the followers and society.

Merit is a key concept in Theravada Buddhism. Terwiel calls merit a “beneficial karma”. He states that merit “is generally seen as a beneficial and protective force which extends over a long period of time and which links individuals together” (Terwiel, 1994, p.246). Mark Francis Holahn explained that bodhisattva has the “huge amount of merit necessary for him to become a
Buddha”, there are ten ways for making merits: giving or generosity, moral conduct or virtue, meditation, respect or reverence, service in helping others, transference of merit, rejoicing in other’s merit, listening to Dhamma, teaching Dhamma and correcting one’s views (Holahn, 2013, p.96).

The Guanyin followers are constantly looking for merit making. Many followers of Guanyin mentioned that they were making merit for themselves and their relatives as well when they worshiped Guanyin. “Now I am still alive, but I do not know we will see each other again or not. But I want to build merit for myself and for my brothers and sisters, even for all my relatives or others. I feel good when I am chatting. After I pass away I will also feel comfortable.”

My question as follows: what does it mean in making merit and how to make merit within the belief in Guanyin? Are there any differences of the merit making between the belief and practice of Guanyin and the Buddha in Thai Society?

The meaning of merit is important to the believers. Ninian Smart uses the word “exchange” to explain the relationship between merit and the transaction: “First they receive moral teaching and guidance. Second they receive, by proximity, merit. So there is an exchange of visible goods (food, robes, perhaps land) for invisible ones, which help to promote the further happiness of lay people. Such an exchange is just one step removed from a sacramental transaction, where the visible becomes the vehicle of invisible” (Smart, 1996, p.104). Tambiah has conducted research on this issue about the villagers of North East of Thailand, and he found that “the value of merit-making is thus discussed by villagers under two aspects: first, it is said that one’s fund of merit accumulated in this life will ensure a rebirth blessed with happiness,

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3 Personal interview (2013, January 23) at Ancient Guanyin Temple of Bangkok.
prosperity and wealth... While merit-making is thus given ideological direction interims of somehow immunizing the consequences of death and ensuring a prosperous rebirth” (Tambiah, 1970, p.53).

There are some differences in the ways of making merit between Thai-Chinese in Guanyin belief and Thai people in Buddhist belief. The ranking of religious acts is calculated based on a study of seventy-nine family heads in the North-East of Thailand (Tambiah, 1970, p.147): First, financing an entire building a temple; second, becoming a monk oneself; third, having a son become a monk; forth, contributing money to the revamp of a temple; fifth, offering a “katthin” (presentation of robes and gifts) at a ceremony; sixth, giving food daily to monks; seventh, observing every “wanphraa” at a temple; eighth, strict observance of the five precepts. The followers worship Guanyin and request good luck, security, health, wealth, and happiness. That is a way for them to express their hope in their current lives, and many of them consider that at the moment of praying to Guanyin they have gained merit already, and the merit will guarantee their wishes and expectations. Making merit is the way for the followers to achieve the satisfaction in their spirituality and the salvation from the difficulties in their lives, and it even guides them towards the ultimate goal of Nirvana. Merit is an important concept in Thai Theravada Buddhism, and salvation is the key concept in Mahayana Buddhism. The belief and practice of Guanyin in Thailand provides a path of salvation combining these two concepts.

Guanyin provides the meaningful way for Thai-Chinese to articulate their identities which are increasing become an important issue in modern Thailand. Firstly, Buddhist identity is important in Thailand. As Jackson observes that “to be Thai is to be Buddhist”:

“The intimate theoretical and ritualistic relationship between Buddhism and all aspects of secular life in Thailand has placed the religion at the centre of recent
attempts to isolate, define and promote the features of a distinctive Thai identity (ekkalak thai)... However, all of these and other expressions of Thai identity are found on the assumed identity that to be Thai is to be Buddhist” (Reynolds, 2002, p.155).

Secondly, the belief and practice of Guanyin plays a role in the inspiration of gender identity. Most respondents of the questionnaire and the interviewees were female. 58 of the 78 respondents are female, and most of them think that Guanyin followers are also mainly female. “Buddhism is an overwhelmingly male-created institution dominated by making power structures, and the feminine is frequently associated with the secular” (Falk, 2007, p.7). Jeff Wilson states that “new age women have found comfort in the idea that females too can be great spiritual beings and more abstractly the female-coded qualities of compassion and non-judgment are appreciated by both men and women in the personified form of Kuan-yin” (Wilson, 2008, p.304). For them Guanyin is a good deity from whom they can gain their own positions in the religious field. Guanyin’s compassion and female gender provide them with the bridge to understand more about the meaning of believing in Guanyin.

Thirdly, Thai-Chinese identity was a sensitive issue in history. However, it becomes more a positive issue in the contemporary time. In the 1950s, ethnic Chinese identity was sensitive; people had to only seek a cultural identity. Coughlin points out that: under the pressure of the social state, many Chinese adopted a Thai nationality, while often seeking to preserve their cultural identity. The eclectic approach of the Chinese to religious matters made it possible to adopt Thai Buddhist practices, while continuing to adhere to Chinese folk religions (Coughlin, 1960). After the economic reform of China, Thai-Chinese have gradually intentionally preserved their two identities. Bao states that the Chinese identity depends on the special conditions and presents many cultural directions.
"The rules and actions of moral conduct derived from Thai Buddhism and Chinese Confucianism. For family or business affiliations, the Sino-Thai tend to stress Confucian beliefs, such as filial piety, diligence and shiftiness. But when it comes to politics or proper social demeanor, the Sino-Thai emphasize their loyalty to the Thai monarchy, belief in accumulating merit and emulate the polite Thai manner in posture and speech" (Bao, 2004, p.157).

In the modern era, Thai-Chinese identity is no longer a problem. As Erik Cohen says, "the ethnic character of the festival appears to have been of little concern to the authorities. Expressions of Chinese ethnicity do not constitute a threat to national unity and identity in contemporary Thailand" (Cohen, 2001, p.188). In contrast, the belief and practice of Guanyin will enhance both the identities of the Chinese and Thai.

"Thus, their two identities do not clash in Thai society as long as ethnic Chinese prove their allegiance to Thailand by supporting the three symbols of Thai nationalism: the nation, the religion and the monarchy. So, the issue of Sino-Thais and ethnic Chinese in Thailand have been believed to contribute a great deal to nation building and development" (Phanarangsan, 2005).

To achieve salvation is considered the main aim of the religious experience, and takes the form of the celebration, purification, sacrifice, sacraments and other religious activities. Geradus van der Leeuw uses the word "power" to explain how these religious experiences relate to the salvation. The belief and practice of Guanyin provides the followers with several important ways to gain the power in the commercial and modern society. Guanyin plays an important role in the lives and experience of the people in the role of salvation in this samsaric world materially and spiritually.

1.1.3 Theoretical analysis

Phenomenological methodology is the theoretical foundation in my study. The study of phenomenology concerns on "the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meaning things have in our
experience." What I am concerned with is the appearances of Guanyin belief in Thailand. "Appearance of things" and experience become the object of the study. But the "appearance of things" is not the most fundamental things for us to investigate, what is the most important thing is the meaning. Waardenburg concludes that:

"As a movement of the thought, phenomenology tries to come to an understanding of man within a philosophical anthropology. As a movement of research, phenomenology tries to classify specific sets of phenomena, including the religious phenomenon in such a way that it does justice to their expressed meanings... A meaning is an explicit or implicit connection, which is made between different phenomena, thus assembling them into meaningful, structures" (Waardenburg, 1978, pp. 91-92).

Kristensen thinks that the phenomenology of religion seeks to clarify is "the meaning that religious phenomena have for the believers themselves" (James, 1995, p. 144). Van der Leeuw was the student of Chantepie and Kristensen, he stood on the strong shoulders at these two big figures in the field study of phenomenology of religion and developed it into a further and at an international level. Different from Kristensen, Van der Leeuw "sees understanding as a subjective aspect of phenomena, which is inherently intertwined with the objectivity of that which is manifest" (Ekeke, 2010, p. 270). Van der Leeuw's subjective understanding contributes much to the development of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion. According to Van der Leeuw, "the term 'phenomenon', still further, does not imply something purely subjective, not a 'life' of the subject...The 'phenomenon' as much, therefore, is an object related the subject, and a subject related to an object" (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p.671). What shows to us of the phenomenon is the "experience", it is a subjective and objective term, it is a material and a conscious term, it is historical and contemporary term, and it is a processing term as well. And it

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will not appear the meaning of the experience to us automatically. Van der Leeuw says that “the interpolation of the phenomenon into our lives...Further, we must recall that everything that appears to us does not submit itself to us directly and immediately, but only as a symbol of some meaning to be interpreted by us, as something which offers itself to us for interpretation” (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p.674).

The meaning is not clear and directly manifested by the phenomenon, and the phenomenon will not show the meaning to the observers immediately. It is not a scientific process, but a process involving the objective, the subjective and conscious. The observers need to pay much attention to their own capabilities to catch the meaning of the symbol. The process of understanding is the process of “reconstruction” from the understanding. The “reconstruction” is not performed “logically, causally and abstractly,” but founded on experience. The understanding will not come immediately and wholly, only through a process. The phenomenological approach of religions studies will neither concern on the contents of religious data (which normally studied by the history of religion) nor the reality of experience of religions (which often studies by the theology of religion), but the “meaning of the experience of the community of the believers.” Van der Leeuw says that “phenomenology aims not at things, still less at their mutual relations, and least of all at the ‘things in itself.’ It desires to gain access to the facts themselves; and for this it requires a meaning” (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p.677). The meaning of the experience of the community to the believers needs to be understood from the experience which can be seen as the phenomenon by the observers. The “reconstruction” is the method to understand the meaning of the experience. However, “it must confront chaotic ‘reality’, and it’s still uninterpreted signs, and ultimately testify to what it has understood” (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p. 688). The ultimate reality of the human being should be understood by the
reconstruction of religious understanding. Waardenburg says that "the religious experience which is understood reveals itself as the ultimate basis of understanding itself" (Waardenburg, 1978, p.228).

The process of the understanding becomes a metaphysical process. It involves many practices of religious experience, such as the celebration, purification, sacrifice, sacraments and religious activities. Van der Leeuw uses the word "power" to explain how these religious experiences relate to revelation, and the power will help people to gain meaning and salvation.

"Religion implies that man does not simply accept the life that is given to him. In life he seeks power...to gain for it some deeper and wider meaning. In this way, however, we find ourselves on the horizontal line: religion is the extension of life to its uttermost limit. The religious man desires richer, deeper, wider life: he desires power for himself. In other terms: in and about his own life man seeks something that is superior, whether he wishes merely to make use of this or worship it" (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p. 679).

The extension the life will be sustained during the process of the religious activities, and the process of the searching religious significance of thing will be always on the way. This leads to a meaningful world for the believers, and it is the last world for the human being. However, the process will never reach the end, and the meaning will never be absolutely understood. It will be kept as a secret for all the people with the diversities of different degrees and contents. Van der Leeuw says, "The meaning is never understood, this last word is never spoken; always they remain superior, the ultimate meaning being a secret which reveals itself repeatedly, only nevertheless to remain eternally concealed" (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p.679).

The phenomenological approach to the study of religion which presented in Van der Leeuw's work has faced much criticism. Firstly, pure description is unacceptable. Moreau criticizes that "no one is immune from the influence of culture historical setting and social
situation. Each of these areas lays assumptive claims on our world view” (Moreau, 2000, p.5). However, objective description is acceptable according the explanation above. Secondly, the objectivity and the intuition are contradictory. And after the sufficient study, it is possible to reach something “as it presents itself” and meaningful for the study of religious phenomenon.

However, on what ground does the intuition in the revelation stands on? Intuition comes from the subject which will help the believers to gain revelation. The revelation is not a merely objective term which cannot sense and no form or color, we cannot gain it from our senses and our practical experience, it needs the subjective idea to catch on uncatchable world, and it cannot happen without the subjective elements. Intuition will enhance the position of the believers themselves and promote the understanding to a higher level, to gain a more permanent and meaningful meaning.

My study is to describe the phenomenon and experience of the belief in Guanyin, and to explain the meaning of Guanyin belief of the followers themselves. The appearances are dynamic and the understanding is complex. What the appearances and what the meanings of Guanyin belief for the followers are the main object of my study. This study involves activities, rituals, worships, performances, the understandings and the meanings. I am trying to draw a main picture of the function of the belief and practice of Guanyin among Thai-Chinese in Thailand and explain the understanding and meaning of this belief for its followers.

1.2 Research statement and research questions

Guanyin belief has become popular in the past thirty years in Thailand. The major followers are Thai-Chinese, and it has influenced Thai people to a great extent. The trend of Guanyin belief goes with the changes and development of Thai society and it is comprised of
two characteristics-bodhisattva and goddess-which show the diverse understanding both theoretical and practical among Thai-Chinese in Bangkok. The two directions are not separated; they work in coordination with the Buddhist piety and the power of the goddess to bestow the meaningful achievement and fortune. In Thai society, Guanyin is a model and a bridge for the integration of Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism and other religious beliefs at different levels, the crossing of the gap of beliefs and culture has promoted the adaptation, unity and suitability of the Thai-Chinese, at the same time, the beliefs have allowed a way for Thai-Chinese to inherit their own culture and to build their identities. Guanyin plays a significant role for the Thai-Chinese community in Bangkok in the business field and other activities, such as the Thian Fha Foundation Hospital and other associations, Guanyin is the spiritual model and protector to their businesses and can provide the moral guidance and discipline important for unity in communities. Guanyin belief plays an important role to meet the followers’ spiritual and social needs during the process of secularization and modernization. The New Buddhist Movement has been much welcomed by the people in Thailand. My general question: How does Guanyin adapt the developing environment of the commercialization in Thai modern society and which and how the identity of Guanyin between the bodhisattva and goddess play significant roles in the satisfaction and salvation of the lives and in the building of the identities to Thai-Chinese?

The research questions as follows:

1.2.1 What are the practices of the belief in Guanyin among Thai-Chinese in Bangkok?

1.2.2 How the followers consider their practice and understanding of Guanyin, and which identity of Guanyin between bodhisattva and goddess plays the leading role?
1.2.3 What are the reasons for people to become Guanyin’s followers, especially for the middle-class women who are the major group of the followers in Bangkok?

1.2.4 What are the contributions of Guanyin belief is to Thai-Chinese society and their identity?

1.3 Research objectives

1.3.1 To investigate and analyze the diverse understanding of Guanyin belief as bodhisattva and goddess among Thai-Chinese in Bangkok in the contemporary Thailand, and to analysis which one plays the leading role.

1.3.2 To analyze the reasons, trends and problems of the belief and practice of Guanyin who is a bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism in the context of a Theravada Buddhism predominated country.

1.3.3 To investigate how Guanyin plays roles in the Thai-Chinese lives, and what the meaning is for their salvation in the samsaric world and spiritual world.

1.3.4 To see how the Guanyin belief contributes to Thai-Chinese for their identities in religion, ethnicity and gender, and to see what the Bodhisattva ideal contributes to the consolidation and morality in urban society.

1.4 Preceding relevant researches

The belief and practice in Guanyin among Thai-Chinese have become popular, and many people have joined the activities to worship Guanyin and have followed the disciplines in their daily lives. Guanyin has become the goddess, protector, the moral and spiritual model for many followers. However, there are not many studies which directly concern Guanyin in Thailand;
Several related studies show a basic picture of the popularity of Guanyin belief, the background of the religious beliefs and activities gives certain aspiration to my study.

Several articles and theses concerning with Guanyin belief and several famous books on the study of Guanyin will be mentioned in this study. The studies show that Guanyin belief is welcomed in Thailand and Southeast Asia. It meets the needs of people and contributes to the Thai-Chinese population and the society. Yating Yang's study reveals that the Chinese temples and Guanyin belief in Thailand has attracted Thai-Chinese much and are growing in the contemporary time. It is opposite to what the scholars said fifty years ago that the Chinese languages and culture for the young ethnic Chinese generations would be disappeared in the near future, on the contrary, Chinese religious practices will strengthen the traditional culture, community's unity and their Thai-Chinese identity (Yang, 2009).

Satha-Anand explains the reasons for the emerging and popularity of Guanyin that the traditional and official Buddhism is incapable of meeting the modern needs, and the new emerging religious movements give their spiritual requirements (Satha-Anand, 1990). Satha-Anand also says that the belief of Guanyin “is linked more to moral than to political or economic aspects of life” and meets the requirement of the modern society. Buddhist movements in Thailand have developed much during the past several decades, such as Buddhadasa, Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke. She also believes that the middle-class represents “the main adherents of the three major religious movements” (Satha-Anand, 1990, pp.395-408). Nithi Aeusrivonges considered Guanyin belief the moral justification for achieving success in life and for overcoming difficulties to the middle-class in the commercialized society (Aeusrivonges, 1994). Kitiarsa thinks that popular Buddhism and some folk beliefs (including the belief of
Guanyin) is where religion converges with the multidimensional structural forces of the nation-state, market economy, modernization and globalization (Kitiarsa, 2012).

There are some general practical reasons for the belief of Guanyin in the daily lives. Carl E. Blandford expresses some differences between the Chinese and the Thai about the belief of the deities. He talks about the Shen (gods, spirits) which largely controls the fortunes of men and Gui (demons, ghosts) which causes disaster and misfortune in the world. So how to gain the protection from the Shen and how to escape the suffering of the Gui is important for Chinese (Blandford, 1975). This is not different from the beliefs of Thai people, especially the folk beliefs for Thai people. Yueming Tan observes that there are three reasons for the Thai-Chinese descendants to believe Guanyin: they believe Guanyin when they are young and influenced by their parents and ancestors, there are some special things happened to them which helps them to believe Guanyin for different purposes and then become followers, and the outlooks and the stories of Guanyin are full of compassion and kindness which attracts them much.

From the perspective of religious studies, the case studies show that the belief of Guanyin is meaningful for the followers in a religious sense. Erik Cohen has studied the Vegetarian Festival at Phuket which shows that Guanyin has gained its popularity. Some people have criticized that “it is losing its ambience and is becoming ever more ‘touristic’ or ‘commercialized ’” (Cohen, 2001, p.191). After a closer examination, Cohen strongly denied it, and said that “it is primarily composed of devotees and ‘religious tourists’, rather than of spectators in quest of the exotic ‘Other’” (Cohen, 2001, p.191). Sufijan has conducted a study concentrating the development and continuity of the Buddhist Guanyin Hall Chokchai 4, and it shows that the development of the belief of Guanyin is no harm to the society and the religious group will continue and coexist with other institutions in the Thai society (Sufijan, 1997).
In practice, Guanyin is both considered as bodhisattva and goddess. Blofeld believes that Guanyin is both a Buddhist symbol and a beloved deity of Chinese folk religion (Blofeld, 2009). When Guanyin is considered as a kind of folk beliefs, there are two opposite views on the folk religious beliefs. One is a positive view. Rajadhon thinks the folk religions celebrated agrarian-based ceremonies and festivals in relation to folk traditions, highlighting how worshipping guardian spirits contributed to agricultural fertility, individual well-being, community solidarity, and the ability to cope with crises (Rajadhon, 1986). Another one is a negative view which sees it as a result of a decline, crisis, or fragmentation of Sangha-administered, state-sponsored Buddhism.

The key concept in the study of the belief of Guanyin is merit making. From the theory of kamma in Theravada Buddhism, all action has its consequences, and the moral action brings moral consequences. Keys said that there are two original causes of the actions in Buddhism: “the first, caused by ignorance (moha), conduces to bad kamma; the second, the desire for existence, conduces to good kamma” (Keyes, 1983, p.261). Falk points out that “the phrase tham boon is generally used to refer to a wide range of good deeds and acts of generosity that are considered to improve a person’s kammic status.” (Holahn, 2013, p.140) Terwiel calls merit a “beneficial karma.” Merit, he adds, “is generally seen as a beneficial and protective force which extends over a long period of time and which links individuals together” (Terwiel, 1994, p.246). Kiriarsa’s explanation is more detailed, and he points out that merit is a kind of “accumulated mental purify” for a better future. It includes the rebirth of next life and also associated with this life for happiness. He claims that “merit is then a kind of accumulated mental purify that leads to a better future – favourable rebirth and perhaps even nibbana. It is also very much associated with happy, positive and constructive mental states in the here and now” (Kitiarasa, 2012, p.95).
In regard to salvation, Chūn-fang Yū descript the dramatic transformation of the (male) Indian bodhisattva Avalokitesvara into the Chinese Guanyin from a relatively minor figure in the Buddha's retinue to a universal savior and one of the most popular deities in Chinese religion (Yū, 2000). There are some different between China and Thailand, “The Thai have strong beliefs in reincarnation, and believe that the merit gained by feeding the Buddhist monks and by contributing to the building and maintenance of the temples will redound to one's credit in a future life on earth” (Coughlin, 1953, p.420). However, “The Chinese believe that they will attain good fortune in this life and paradise after offering to these ghosts rather than to human beings on earth” (Coughlin, 1953, p.420). However, there are not much different in religious practice.

1.5 Definition of the terms used in the research

**Guanyin:** or Kuan Im, who is transformed from Avalokitesvara in India and became a popular bodhisattva with great compassion and superpower in Mahayana Buddhism of China.

**Thai-Chinese:** people who are of Thai Nationality and of Chinese descent in Thailand.

**Bodhisattva:** a divine being worthy of Nirvana who vows to help all the sentient beings to become enlightened before her attaining Nirvana in Mahayana Buddhism.

**God and goddess:** a spirit or being that owns superpower and can affect nature and the lives of people, even a human being who is and be loved and admired. Goddess is a female god.

**Folk religion:** a system of belief which is made up of certain ethnic or religious traditions and practice, and which is not so strict on the official doctrine, rituals and practice.
Belief: the confidence in the reality of something when there is no true evidence to verify the certainty.

Middle-class: a class of people intermediate between upper-class and lower class in social rank, and having approximately certain similar status in their social, economic, cultural class.

Merit: spiritual credit held to be earned by performance of righteous acts and to ensure future benefits.

Religiosity: the quality of being religious which is characterized by excessive involvement in religious activities.

Salvation: being saved or protected from harm or means liberation and release from the samsaric world or spiritual world.

Identity: a social and spiritual category which refers to commonalities that a group of people shares.

1.6 Research scope

This research will focus on several important places, such as Tian Fha Hospital, Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road, and Guanyin temples or shrines around the Chinatown, it does not cover the whole Bangkok area and other provinces. The study of Guanyin followers will focus on the Thai-Chinese. However, it is difficult to be sure on what scale some latter generations still maintain their Chinese identity.

The methodology of this study will be based on the phenomenology of religion, and I will try to focus on Van der Leeuw’s theory, but not cover his whole theory.
1.7 Research methodology

1.7.1 To interview about one hundred followers of Guanyin at the Guanyin Buddhist Halls Chockchai 4, Tian Fha Foundation Hospital, Wat Mangkorn, Wat Phoman and several Guanyin shrines in Bangkok, to get the first hand data of their understanding, reasons and gains of the belief and practice of Guanyin.

1.7.2 To attend religious and social activities of the Thai-Chinese society in order to observe their spiritual considerations, for instance, the Vegetarian Festival at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital and Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road, the gathering meditation at the Ancient Guanyin Temples, and Chinatown at the Chinese New Year.

1.7.3 To investigate and survey the books, thesis, scriptures, and papers in order to analyze what are the differences and similarities of the bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism.

1.7.4 To distribute about 100 questionnaires to the Guanyin followers in Thian Fha Foundation Hospital and Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road to collect data.

1.7.5 To analyze the data with the Phenomenology of religion theory to in order to find out the meaning of the religious activities to Thai-Chinese in their personal and collective understanding of bodhisattva and salvation in spirituality and moral actions.

1.8 Expectations

In this study, I would like to investigate and analyze the belief and practice of Guanyin among Thai-Chinese in Bangkok. The purpose of this study is to find out what the reasons of its popularity in Thailand and the meanings to Thai-Chinese in the modern urban society, especially
the mutual understanding of Mahayana Buddhism in the context of a Theravada Buddhism predominated country. The belief and practice of Guanyin contributes to Thai-Chinese for their identities in religion, ethnicity and gender, and to see what the Bodhisattva ideal contributes to the consolidation and morality in urban society.
CHAPTER II
THE MOVEMENT OF AVALOKITESVARA TO CHINA AND THAILAND

Guanyin was originally evolved from the Avalokitesvara who was a bodhisattva in India. Later, the Avalokitesvara was introduced to China with the changes that the image of Guanyin became a female during the Tang and Song dynasties in China. Guanyin eventually became one of the most popular bodhisattva worshiped by the Chinese. Guanyin came to Thailand with Chinese immigrants in the past two hundred years, and has preserved and worshiped among Thai-Chinese, even became the general belief for Thai-Chinese. With the development of the modern society during the several decades, Guanyin gains the popularity for both Thai-Chinese and Thais. There are diverse understandings of Guanyin among the followers, and Guanyin is considered as bodhisattva and goddess are the main two orientations.

2.1 The movement of Avalokitesvara to China

Guanyin in Chinese means “the one who hears the cries of the world.” Guanyin was originally evolved from the Avalokitesvara who was a bodhisattva in Buddhism and was worshiped in India. The Avalokitesvara was introduced to China along with Buddhism which was first introduced to China through the Silk Road during the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD. Initially, like the image of Avalokitesvara in India, the image of Guanyin was a male during the first hundred years, and became a female during the Tang and Song dynasties in China. She eventually became one of the most popular bodhisattva worshiped by the Chinese. During the long history of her transformation in China, Guanyin changed gender, images, myths, rituals and stories, and became a part of the Chinese religions and culture.
2.1.1 Avalokitesvara in India

Guanyin has been in China for about two thousand years. However, she was originally evolved from the Avalokitesvara - a bodhisattva who first appeared and was worshiped in India as a popular god who saves people from harm of demons (Li, 2006, pp.16-24). Sukhavativyuha Sutra, an early Buddhist scripture was compiled in India around 100 AD, in which the Avalokitesvara was one of the two main bodhisattvas attending the Amitabha Buddha together with Mahasthamaprapta. This was his main position portrayed in India. According to Chutiwong's study, the images of the Avalokitesvara appeared by the second century AD “soon after the rise of Mahayana and the beginning of the making of Buddhist icons” (Yü, 2001, p.9). Avalokitesvara images have changed during the spread of Buddhism around world. However, one thing is clear that “none of the Indian forms of the bodhisattva are feminine” (Yü, 2001, p.9). However, where, when and how Avalokitesvara originated in India remain uncertain.

2.1.2 Avalokitesvara moves to China

The transformation of Buddhism started from the northwest of India, then it crossed to Central Asia to come to China during the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD after Emperor Asoka sent missionaries to other countries. Buddhism gradually developed in many Central Asian kingdoms, such as Kushan and Parthian. With the trade connection through the Silk Road from China to Central Asia, the Chinese had their first contact with Buddhism through Central Asia where Buddhism was already known. According to research, Buddhism came to China during the period of West Han Dynasty (206BC–9AD). Scholarly accounts of this transmission vary. Xianlin Ji, a most famous scholar in China contemporarily, contends through linguistic study that Buddhism was transmitted to China through two routes: (1) India-Kushan-China; (2) India-Central Asian’s small kingdoms-China (Ji, 2006, p.41).
The beginning of transformation and the creation of Avalokitesvara images happened during this transmission process. At the beginning, Avalokitesvara was an attending bodhisattva, later he became an independent deity and “was attended by other bodhisattvas just as the Buddha” (Yü, 2001, p.11). The innovation of Guanyin happened when it took root in China. It is a great creation in many aspects, such as the gender, images, roles, myths and literature depiction. Guanyin is known by Chinese as a female depicted as serene and merciful and a compassionate protector of the people. When the image of Avalokitesvara was transformed to be a female image in China? Paul Williams claims that “in China the transformation seems to have taken place definitively during the Song dynasty (tenth-thirteenth centuries), and it was complete by the sixteenth century” (Williams, 2009, p.223). Why did this happen? It may “have has something to do with absorption into the figure of Avalokitesvara of Chinese female deities” (Williams, 2009, p.223). Besides, from the Buddhist teaching, Avalokitesvara has many incarnations and can be male and female. From the Chinese cultural perspective, the balance of Yin and Yang is always the model of middle way. Yü said that “Monastic Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism were masculine and patriarchal…One of the most attractive promises of Pure Land Buddhism was that there would be no women in the Western Paradise…There was thus an imbalance and a deprivation. There was too much yang and not enough yin” (Yü, 2001, p.20).

2.1.3 The belief of Guanyin in China

According to the transformation of Guanyin in China, Li’an Li contends that Guanyin belief includes three systems: Mahayana system which follows the teaching of Mahayana traditional sutras, Tibetan Guanyin system which was influenced by Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, and folk Guanyin belief system (Li, 2000, p.44). The folk Guanyin belief system is different from the Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhist traditional systems; it belongs to the folk type. Its most
obvious characteristic is that it does not rely on any classical sutras; it was influenced by the local environment and people, so the origin of folk Guanyin belief is complicated, compared with the traditional Buddhist sutras in some perspectives. The study of Guanyin belief in Thailand needs to be investigated from the perspectives of traditional Mahayana Buddhist and folk beliefs.

Guanyin is the best well known bodhisattva in China. A Chinese saying describes her popularity that “everybody knows how to chant Amitabha, and every household worships Guanyin.” Guanyin Bodhisattva is considered as the personification of compassion and kindness, a mother-goddess and patron of mothers in China since the Song dynasty. In the modern time, Guanyin is most often represented as a beautiful, white-robed woman, who has the supernatural power of assuming any form required to relieve suffering and also has the power to grant children. Guanyin becomes a universal savior and one of the most popular deities in Chinese religions.

Guanyin in China is not only worshiped as a Buddhist bodhisattva, but also she is absorbed and worshiped at Taoist shrines and some other folk religious shrines. For example, Cihang Zhenren in Taoism literally means “Compassion Travel Immortal Person” and is generally considered as Guanyin or the incarnation of Guanyin. Cihang Zhenren is believed to be the one of twelve disciples of Yuanshi Tianzun who is the ultimate god in Taoism.

The acceptation in China in different belief systems shows the importance of Guanyin in the people’s lives. Guanyin has many statues and images, especially the thousand-hand Guanyin, which demonstrate her power and the great help to all the human beings and involving in interactivity with people. “Kuan-yin’s thirty-three manifestations and fourteen ‘bestowals of fearlessness’ provide a wealth of iconographic possibilities, which not only serve as an
inspiration for higher belief but also satisfy the need of popular religion for a personal ‘God’ that ‘answers’ to prayers and sustains the faithful in the fears and insecurities of life” (Tay, 1976, p.159).

2.2 Guanyin comes to Thailand

2.2.1 Chinese immigration in Thailand

The early contact between China and Thailand can be dated back to about two thousand years ago with the evidence that “the earthenware from China Western Han dynasty (1st to 2nd centuries) has been found in Surat Thani in Southern Thailand” (Sng & Bisalputra, 2015, p.17). In a long history, Chinese have mainly been done business with Thailand and Southeast Asia. At the beginning and later for a long time, Chinese immigrants were welcomed by the people and the royal family. During the period of Ayudhaya time, there were many Chinese merchants who were doing their business in Thailand and established their networks in the markets and ports (Skinner, 1957, p.1). Some Chinese merchants married with Thais and stayed in Thailand. “At the close of the seventeenth century, some 3000 Chinese were said to be living at Ayuthia, then the capital H.S. Hallett, an Englishman who visited the kingdom in 1884, declared that ‘the Chinaman in Siam seem to be ubiquitous. Half the population of the Menam delta-the Bangkok area-is Chinese and very few of the people are without some trace of Chinese blood in them’” (Coughlin, 2012, p.14).

The King Taksin who established the Thonburi dynasty was a Teochew originated Thai-Chinese. During that period, many Chinese immigrated to Thailand from Teochew area, and “Chinese were encouraged openly and tacitly by King Taksin to come to Thonburi where they were given priority and various facilities, including royal concessions, to assist their enterprise” (Sng & Bisalputra, 2015, p.103). Many Teochew Chinese came to Thailand and lived near Chao Phraya River, and finally they gradually dominated the Chinatown area where became an
important part of the Bangkok dynasty. "Under King Taksin a new Chinese market enclave rapidly developed on the Bangkok side, across the Chao Phraya River from the king’s palace in Thonburi. Unlike Ayudhta, whose commerce was dominated by Hokkien centered in the Nai Kai Market. Thoburi’s Chinatown was dominated by the Teochew merchant community" (Sng & Bisalputra, 2015, p.104). Until now, the main Chinese in Bangkok are Teochew people who are those came from the eastern coast of China in Guangdong province.

Most of the Chinese immigrants came from different provinces and areas of China, such as the province of Guangdong, Fujian and Hainan, where is far from Chinese culture center and own their various dialects and beliefs. Generally all of them are Chinese; however, there are many differences among those different groups. Chinese established their own communities based on the same original places, dialects, family names, and so on. Becoming members of the communities is a way for them to strengthen relationship with others and their cultural confirmation. Most of these communities own their temples or shrines which are from their homeland. "Perhaps the most conspicuous manifestation of their cultural autonomy are the many Chinese shrines (‘temple’) established in virtually all localities with a substantial Chinese population; these serve as places of worship and celebration of a wide array of regional Chinese deities" (Cohen, 2001, p.7).

With the development of Chinese in the economy and social influences in Thailand, especially after the Communist takeover the mainland China, Chinese faced the pressure with the aggressive assimilation policies from Thai authorities during the twenty century. Chinese was forced to change their surnames, change to be Thai nationality, marry with Thais, enter into Thai schools and speak Thai. Chinese gradually loss their identity and the new generations seem absolutely become Thai (Skinner, 1957). However, Chinese culture and religions have been
preserved and play an important role in their Chinese identity. Cohen states that “under the pressure of the state, many Chinese adopted a Thai-nationality, while often seeking to preserve their cultural identity. The eclectic approach of the Chinese to religious matters made it possible for them to adopt Thai Buddhist practices, while continuing to adhere to Chinese folk religion” (Cohen, 2001, p.8).

2.2.2 Chinese religions and beliefs in Thailand

Chinese immigrants who came to Thailand are mainly from the south of China, where Buddhism and folk religious beliefs are widely rooted in people’s lives. Coughlin states that Chinese and Thais are similar in the religious sphere, including the Buddhism and spirit beliefs, and “religion is one sphere at least where a considerable degree of integration occurs between the Chinese and the Thai” (Coughlin, 2012, p.104). Regarding to Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, Coughlin continues to claims that they are “sufficiently alike for the Chinese to accept certain Thai practices without difficulties or contradiction in values” (Coughlin, 2012, p.104).

The Chinese immigrants came to Thailand and brought many Chinese folk religious beliefs. The different local folk religious beliefs are always worshiped by Chinese immigrants, such as god and goddess of Earth, Mazu who is the goddess of the sea, Guan Gong who is the god of war and the epitome of loyalty and righteousness, and Guanyin who is the goddess of compassion and so on. When first arrived, Chinese lived in communities with those of the same place of origin. This formed different groups or clans. They built their own shrines for their religious activities, such as the Bentou Gong and Dafeng Master for the Teochew people, Water Tail Niangniang for the Hainanese, Mazu for the Hukianese. “Every Chinese group has a shrine
for each its deities. In olden times in Bangkok, these groups of Chinese lived separately, each in their own community".  

There are many Chinese temples in Thailand, according to Lifang Liu’s study. There were 740 located in Thailand and 163 Chinese temples in Bangkok in 1986 (Chao, 2005). Today the number is even larger. Chinese temples have existed for more than 300 years in Bangkok, such as Longwei Temple. It is believed that the earliest Chinese temples were Chinese folk temples. Mahayana Buddhism was considered to have commenced with the establishment of Wat Mangkorn in 1871. It was considered to be the earliest Mahayana temple in Thailand. The Wat Mangkorn was established by a Mahayana monk named Xuxing who came from China in 1862; he received support and was awarded the leadership of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Thailand by the King Chulalongkorn. There are several Mahayana temples which are famous as well, such as the Dafeng Zushi Temple which was established on 1910 and the Wat Phoman which was established by a group of Thai-Chinese in 1959. Even in the Chinese ethnic associations, such as Guang Zhao Association, there is a Guanyin statue in the central hall. There are Guanyin statues in those temples, people usually pray to Guanyin by reciting Mahayana Buddhist sutra, such as Dabei Zhou (Great Compassion Mantra) (See Appendix 2) and so on. In Mahayana temples and Guanyin temples, the Mahayana traditions have been preserved.

Chinese religions are a very important element for Thai-Chinese to maintain their culture and identity. Chinese have tried their best to preserved their traditions and religions in the families, communities and the society. That is why we still can perceive many Chinese temples in Thailand nowadays. Beside those material things, there are many other heritages that we cannot see easily, such as the customs, belief, values, and so on. Religious beliefs play key roles

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in this field. The popularity of the belief and practice of Guanyin shows that Chinese culture and identity are attractive for Thai-Chinese and also the reorganization of Chinese components to the content of Thai identity.

“It should be noted that, while researchers in the past, such as Skinner (1957), emphasized the process by which Chinese immigrants and their progeny become assimilated to and integrated into Thai society, the Chinese also had a marked impact upon the Thai majority and its culture, especially in the religious sphere. Chinese beliefs and customs, whether deriving from Mahayana Buddhism or from Chinese folk religion, had a significant influence on Thai Buddhism, which generally tends to absorb and integrate outside influences from various sources. The most recent case of such influence is the growing popularity of the cult of the goddess Kuan Yin (Kuan Im in Thai) among broad strata of the Thai population. (Aeuosrivongse 1994, Hamilton, 1999). Moreover, while in the past the Chinese were looked down upon and often sought to conceal or down-play their Chinese ancestry in order to advance socially, in contemporary Thailand there is growing recognition and appreciation of Chinese origins and Chinese custom (“Chang Noi” 1996). It could be said that, rather than the Chinese being passively assimilated into Thai society, contemporary Thai identity incorporates as increasingly recognized Chinese component” (Cohen, 2001, pp.9-10).

2.2.3 The belief of Guanyin in Thailand

As mentioned previously, Guanyin came from India and was derived from the male Avalokitesvara. Before Guanyin came to Thailand, Avalokitesvara had appeared in Thailand before Mahayana Buddhism settled here. We can find many statues of Avalokitesvara at the National Museum in Bangkok. Avalokitesvara has never changed his gender and his features in Thailand, and Avalokitesvara has nothing related with Guanyin in Thailand. Until today, Avalokitesvara from India is still Avalokitesvara, Guanyin from China is Guanyin, and there is no direct connection between them. The reason is that there is nothing changes during the transformation of Avalokitesvara to Thailand, which is very different from the transformation of Avalokitesvara to China. For the Thai-Chinese followers, they even do not know that Guanyin is transferred from Avalokitesvara in India.
There are many Guanyin temples or shrines in Thailand. Chinatown in Bangkok is the area where many Chinese temples and Guanyin shrines are located. To my knowledge, there are at least four Guanyin shrines in that area: Ancient Guanyin Temple and South Sea Guanyin Temple are more than 100 years old, Guanyin Temple located the Chao Phaya River is more than 200 years old and Guanyin Hall at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital was founded in 1933 (See Appendix 1.3). Chuimei Ho collected the data about Chinese temples in Chinatown of Bangkok including some shrines of Guanyin as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Sino-Thai Title</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Mandarin Title</th>
<th>When Built</th>
<th>Earliest Date*</th>
<th>Main Deity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>San Chaomae</td>
<td>Neighbor hood</td>
<td>Guanyin Gumiao (Guanyin Ancient Temple)</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Guanyin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guanyin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sanchao Kuanim</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Guanyin Shenmiaio (Guanyin Temple)</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Guanyin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sanchao Kuan-im</td>
<td>Benevolent Society</td>
<td>Guanshiyin Pusa (Guanyin Bodhisattva)</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Guanyin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sanchao Kuan-imnia</td>
<td>Hakka Assn</td>
<td>Nanhai Guanyin Gong (South Sea Guanyin Hall)</td>
<td>ca 1898</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Guanyin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These are the earliest epigraphic material available at the time of survey. They may not represent the date when the temple was built (Chuimei Ho, 1995, Table 1).

Guanyin is considered as an important deity in Chinese religions, and Guanyin statues can be seen at many Chinese temples in Thailand, for instance, Buddhist temples such as Wat Phoman and Master Dafeng Shrine, Taoism temples such as Lv Dongbin Shrine and Eight Immortals Shrine, folk temples such as Xianluo Daitian Paradise, Qisheng Ma Shrine and Guanyu Shrine. Lisheng Duan collected information from 60 Chinese temples in his book “Chinese Temples in Thailand”, and I calculated that at least 21 of the temples have Guanyin statues (Duan, 2000).
Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road in Bangkok is the biggest Guanyin temple and was established in 1983 (See Appendix 1.4). The founder was a successful Thai business woman named Mrs. Varaporn Lertrangsi, who received a full Bhikkhuni ordination and was given the ordained name of Venerable Bhikkhuni Shi Guansheng at Puji Temple in China in 1991. In the temple, there is a 21-floors Great Compassion Stupa of 10,000 Buddhas. Now it has expanded to four branches, Guanyin Temple (Chiang Mai), Guanyin Meditation Center (Lamphun) and Lord Shiva Vihara (Ram-indra). There are more than 10 nuns who live in the temple and in charge of the activities of the temple. All the nuns have been trained in other Mahayana Buddhist temples in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia or some other places. All of them are Thais, and some even can speak and read Chinese. The nuns recite the Buddhist sutra every day in the morning and evening, as it is done in other Mahayana Buddhist temples. The sutras for reciting are original traditional Buddhist and Taoist sutras from China, such as Pumenpin Sutra (Universal Gateway Chapter of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva), Dabei Zhou (Great Compassion Mantra), Yaoshi Sutra (Sutra of the Master of Medicine) and some Taoist sutras, such as “Beidou Xiaozai Zhenjing”. All of the sutras have Thai versions, so Thai people who cannot read Chinese can recite the sutras too. In the temples, there are statues of various deities, which include almost all of Chinese deities, just like an exhibition of Guanyin and Chinese deities.

Guanyin is popular in Thailand now, especially in urban cities. I have created a questionnaire and collected 75 respondents. It shows that almost all of the followers think Guanyin belief is popular in contemporary time in Thailand.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Do you consider Guanyin belief as popular in Thailand now?</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Have you ever seen the Guanyin statues in Thai temples?</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many families have Guanyin statues in their homes, and they pray to Guanyin at home or they go to the Guanyin temples to pray, and sometimes go to attend festivals. Guanyin has even entered some Thai temples today; it is not difficult to see Guanyin statues in the courtyards of Thai temples. Guanyin shrines are also common within the grounds of Theravada Thai temples.

“Many of the most important old temples in and around Bangkok have a Kwan Im shrine. At the great chedi at Nakhon Pathom there is a large and elaborate Kwan Im hall with a wide variety of seemingly ancient Kwan Im figures. At Wat Po in Bangkok immediately adjacent to the Reclining Buddha, is a Kwan Im shrine which until 1992 contained a very old image, subsequently replaced with a recent elaborate figure. The shrine was redecorated and had, in 1998, a permanent female caretaker” (Hamilton, 1999).

The devotees who pay respect to Guanyin do not eat beef, even if they do not know much about Guanyin and her stories, but they do know that Guanyin is a powerful deity with mercy and compassion. They believe people will gain happiness and be saved if they pay respect to and worship her. There is a religious event called Vegetarian Festival which is organized by the ethnic Chinese community at Chinatown every year in Bangkok. It is also popular in the whole of Thailand during that period. Vegetarian Festival originated from the Chinese Festival of Nine Emperors which is called Festival Gin Je in the Thai language.

Guanyin is worshiped and considered an important goddess during Vegetarian Festival (See Appendix 1.16). It takes place from the 1st to 9th September in the Chinese lunar calendar. During this period, people are encouraged to follow the vegetarian disciples of the festival. There
will be many activities in Thailand nationwide. Bangkok, especially Chinatown, there are many shops and restaurants which specialize in vegetarian food. A parade takes place in Chinatown in which many people participate; it is one of the biggest events of the year. The parade will visit several Chinese temples, such as Wat Mangkorn, Guanyin Hall at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital and Ciji Temple which are famous Chinese religious places. All people who want to join in the march need to wear white clothes and pay respect to the traditional deities and Guanyin. There are several troupes who do lion–dancing at the head of the parade which is a traditional Chinese ritual for this performance. Then a wooden thousand-hand Guanyin statue is carried by the people behind the dancing lions, the next is the Nine Emperor Gods altars which are nine earthen jars with several incents and plastic tree leaves inside, but without any statues. People call the Buddha of Nine Emperors. I asked one member of the organizers, he told me that all the nine emperors are the representatives of the Buddha, and Guanyin is the incarnation of the Buddha too. When I asked why they are the representative of Buddha, people could not explain it. The important thing for them to do is to follow the traditional ritual, the reasons may be different for each other, and not so important for them, however, they consider it as an important event to do every year.

Why does Guanyin join this festival? It is said that Doumu is the mother of the nine emperors; she has the power to control the whole universe. She is so supreme that she does not have any images, so Guanyin enables her presence in the festival. “The identification of Doumu with Kuan Im, in turn, provides a focus of allegiance of Thai worshippers to the festival, owing to the recent upsurge of popularity of this Mahayana goddess among Thai Buddhists” (Cohen, 2001, p.23, also see Aeurosrivongse 1994 and Hamilton 1999). Doumu is a powerful Taoist
goddess in the Taoist system. Here, it seems that Guanyin has been deeply integrated with Taoism and influenced each other.

However, that is not so clear for the followers. I asked many people there, however, most of the people do not know about the nine emperors: who are they and where are they come from. That is because the historical background is not familiar to the people, and there are many explanations the appearance of the nine emperors, especially the stories about them are full of miracles and even beyond the people’s understanding. Generally, it becomes a traditional big narrative of the history, culture and belief of the Chinese.

However, people are much familiar with the roles Guanyin plays. I asked several people about the relationship between Guanyin and the Vegetarian Festival. Most of the people told me that since Guanyin does not eat meat and abstaining from meat will make merit, being vegetarians will help us to clean our body and spirituality. From the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, monks are abstaining from meat for the escaping of killing animals, and this is an important discipline from all the monks and Buddhist followers.

Vegetarian Festival has become popular in Thailand, especially in the south of Thailand. It is best known in Phuket for the magic performance. In Bangkok, there are not many magic performances, and it is more like an activity for the promotion of vegetarian food and spiritual cleanliness. At ordinary time, abstaining from the beef is a requirement for believing in Guanyin, now abstain all meat is required for nine days. There are some reasons for not taking beef for the followers of Guanyin are mainly as followers: Guanyin does not eat beef, Guanyin’s father reborn to be a cow, Guanyin’s incarnation is a cow, the cow is a big animal with soul and cow is the partner of Guanyin. Guanyin is an important guide for people to gain spiritual fulfill during
the festival. The belief of Guanyin spreads all around Thailand with Vegetarian Festival which is becoming more and more popular.

2.3 Thai-Chinese and the belief in Guanyin

2.3.1 Thai-Chinese are the majority

Thai-Chinese have become the major group of people who dominant the national business and prosperities, and the achievement ensures their confidence and beliefs. The belief system of Thai-Chinese are complex, however, their beliefs in Guanyin have been traditionally most rooted in their heart. Guanyin was worshiped at many ethnic Chinese families, especially by females. Guanyin status can be seen at all Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temples and some other kinds of shrines or halls. Guanyin can be seen as a bodhisattva in Buddhist temples, a deity in Taoist shrines, or a goddess in folk shrines, she crosses all boundaries between different spiritual beliefs. The reason is that she is famous for her compassion and her superpower to help all human beings.

On the other side, Guanyin becomes the general belief among Thai-Chinese. Historically, Guanyin is the traditional belief of Chinese and the ancestors of the Thai-Chinese. That is why the family factor is the most important reason for Thai-Chinese to be the followers of Guanyin. As Niesvivat explains that the young generations were raised and taught to believe Guanyin by the teachings and practice of their mothers, and it is a natural process and taken in bit by bit, and finally it became a habit and faith for the family (Niesvivat, 2012). Besides the family factors, Niesvivat claims that the personal or family issue factor that they believe in Guanyin because of a certain event and the factor of Guanyin because of her appearance (Niesvivat, 2012). The reasons for the belief of Guanyin for Thai-Chinese sound reasonable. The family factor is an important one for all the main followers, including the elderly generations and the young
generations. It seems that it becomes the most important reason for believing Guanyin, because the society has changed to be a Thai society comparing with the historic time, and Thai-Chinese are not so clear about their Chinese identity. However, these explanations do not reveal the inner reasons which are more deep and complex.

2.3.2 The diversity in the understanding of Guanyin

Guanyin has many names in Chinese, and the general name is Guanyin Bodhisattva (Pusa in Chinese). Chinese know what bodhisattva is, and it is popular for people to ask “Pusa” for protection when facing difficulties, and it is something like the western people call “my God”. There are many bodhisattvas in Buddhism, and Guanyin is one of them. Chinese know that bodhisattva is a term from Buddhism. Guanyin is also worshiped in Taoism and some other folk religions with other different names.

Thai-Chinese know Guanyin mostly from their families, and many of Thai-Chinese families worship Guanyin. There are some stories about the fame of Guanyin, such as Miaoshan who is a princess of a king in China or Guanyin who is the one who helped monk Tang Sanzang to gain his journey to the west in a novel. Besides, “her founding mythical-narrative which is very widely known in Thailand through Thai translations, together with popular videos telling her story, address the problem of balance between yin-yang elements, the central issue in Taoist ritual as practiced through the Pakua (八卦) other mystical symbols” (Hamilton, 1999).

When asked what Guanyin is, and people told me some stories or names about Guanyin, but when I asked some more deep questions, they were confused. During the past several years, I have visited several Guanyin temples or shrines and interviewed many Guanyin followers, I now found that people who believe in Guanyin are so diverse in their understanding of Guanyin, but
the two most important perspectives are Guanyin as a bodhisattva or of Goddess, or both. There are many things on which people are not clear, such as whether Guanyin is male or female, whether Guanyin is a Buddhist deity or not, whether Guanyin belief is a religious belief or not, what bodhisattva is, what the relationship and difference between Guanyin and Buddha are, whether Guanyin has superpower or not, where her superpower comes from, what to require from Guanyin and how to pay respect to Guanyin when the requirement is granted, what kind of merit will be gained by worshipping Guanyin and so on. The answers are diverse according to the understandings of my interviewees.

Generally speaking, Guanyin, as a bodhisattva, are more familiar to those who have known Chinese culture and religions or there are members of Guanyin followers in their families who are piety to Guanyin, or those who come to Chinese temples or Guanyin temples often. Those said that Guanyin is a bodhisattva who helps others. For most followers, they consider Guanyin both as bodhisattva and goddess, and there are not much different from each other.

“Guanyin is Thep (goddess) with compassion.” “Guanyin is Thep Phrachao (เทพพรานุชา). She has much compassion.” “Guanyin is the Thep (goddess) and bodhisattva. It is not the same as Buddha. But all of them lead the people to be good behavior.” “Guanyin does not eat beef. Guanyin is the bodhisattva and the Thep of Buddhism which come from China.” “Whether Guanyin is a religion or not, we are not sure, maybe Buddhism. We do not eat beef, it is said we cannot eat beef if we believe in Guanyin” (Interview).

The answers are different each time. Some people even give contradictory answers. When they considered Guanyin as a real person who like the Buddha in the history of Theravada Buddhism and Guanyin is a goddess at the same time, there is a question here that Buddha is a real person in traditional Theravada Buddhism, and then Guanyin is not like the Buddha. However, they do not want to separate Guanyin from the Buddha and Buddhism.
“Guanyin is one real person who can achieve enlightenment easier than others. She is not Buddha. She is a person. She has done right things and follows the right path to achieve enlightenment. I think Guanyin is a Thep too. But there are no Theps in Buddhism. Guanyin is the one will not be born again” (Interview).

“I know that Guanyin is a Chinese goddess; it will bring good luck for the prayer, so I pray to her as well. However, I do not think there is any relation to the Buddha or Buddhism. There are separate. We pray the Buddha to show our respect to Buddha and Buddhism. The Buddha was a monk, but not just a monk or a person, he is special and has superpowers too, and he will bring good luck to us as well. But he is different from Guanyin” (Interview).

The understanding of Guanyin from different followers maybe different, and it shows the complexities of Guanyin belief among the followers, however, there is one thing is sure that Guanyin belief is meaningful for all the followers, Guanyin plays the roles in their daily lives and spiritual lives.

2.3.3 Two perspectives: Bodhisattva and Goddess

Bodhisattva is important in Mahayana Buddhism. Through the help of the bodhisattva, the sentient beings are able to gain the Buddhahood. Bodhisattvas use their special capabilities and skills to create a Buddhist order of the world (Chutiwongs & Leidy, 1994, p.35). The popularity of Guanyin is considered by some scholars as a “modern urban reform Buddhism, rather than as a popular ‘spirit cult’” and “can be seen as part of the broader Buddhism reform movement in urban middle class” (Roenjun & Speece, 2011, pp.66-67) in contemporary Thailand.

In Thai, bodhisattva is called “พระโพธิสัตว์” (phra putisa), “พระ” (phra) which means monk, sacred person and god, “โพธิสัตว์” is bodhisattva, Guanyin is called “เจ้าแม่กวนอิม” (chaomae Guan Im), “เจ้า” (chao) which means god or goddess, Bodhisattva Guanyin is called “เจ้าแม่กวนอิม” (chaomae Guan Im) or “โพธิสัตว์ เจ้าแม่กวนอิม” (putisa chaomae Guan Im) which means Guanyin goddess or Guanyin Bodhisattva goddess. We can know something about
Guanyin from this name which demonstrates two directions: bodhisattva which is a Buddhist perspective and goddess which is a folk religious perspective.

According to my questionnaire, there are 63 among 75 people who selected the answers that Guanyin is a bodhisattva. It seems most of the followers consider Guanyin as a bodhisattva. The general understanding is that bodhisattva is powerful, compassionate, and has a close relationship with the Buddha. According to my observation, Guanyin plays a leading role in their understanding as a bodhisattva. However, when I continued to ask more questions about what are the differences, people will be confused and some of them consider Guanyin both as Bodhisattva and goddess. This shows that the two perspectives cannot be separated but integrated.

The understandings about the two perspectives are interrelated, integrated, opposite and unclear. As a bodhisattva, some know her stories from movies or books which tell about her as a savior of suffering and her magic power. She is the Buddha-to-be who is willing to help all the beings to be Buddha first before her enlightenment. Some know bodhisattva, but just name, and many of them do not know much about what bodhisattva is. In their mind, the bodhisattva is a god or deity.

The theoretical Buddhism and practical Buddhism or belief are not the same, may be far different from each other. The teaching of Buddhism or belief is not the same as the understanding of the followers, and the understanding of Guanyin belief accords both with bodhisattva which is a Mahayana Buddhist concept and goddess which is a Hindu concept or others. What the understanding of Guanyin as bodhisattva and goddess in Thai context among Thai-Chinese remains a question, and how bodhisattva plays the roles in their belief and practice will be my consideration.
CHAPTER III

GUANYIN AS BODHISATTVA AND GODDESS

The main guiding ways to attain enlightenment for Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism are respectively Bodhisattva and Arahant ideal. However, Bodhisattva ideal was taught by Theravada Buddhist at an early time and bodhisattva still holds a high position in Thailand. People in Thailand do not regard bodhisattva as being in the position to enlighten or save others before their own enlightenment. In real life, both the two ideals work together for the cultivation of liberation. Guanyin is considered as a bodhisattva and plays an important role in the interconnection and mutual understanding between Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism. Meanwhile, Guanyin is considered as a goddess who possesses the miraculous power. This is based on the foundation of Guanyin’s feature as a savior in Mahayana Buddhism and Buddha’s image with supernatual power following the Thai folk religious beliefs. Guanyin has rooted in Thai context and gains the popularity to grant the worshiper’s requests and provide protection and expectation to the followers. The integration of Guanyin as bodhisattva and goddess with the tolerance and competition shows the harmonious coexistence of religiosity, and it provides a good model for religious dialogue and coexistence.

3.1 Guanyin as a bodhisattva: A Buddhist expectation

There are some theoretical differences between Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism. However, there is not much difference in the belief of bodhisattva in practice. Theravada Buddhism accepts Guanyin as a bodhisattva from Mahayana Buddhism and considers bodhisattva as a high position in the belief system. Furthermore, the acceptance of bodhisattva that follows Buddhist feature unifies with Thai Buddhism and plays a positive role to integrate
and enhance Buddhist belief in practice. 84% of respondents in my interview believe that the belief and practice of Guan yin enrich Buddhist belief in Thailand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is Guanyin belief one kind of Buddhist belief?</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you think Guanyin belief can enrich Buddhist belief in Thailand?</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.1 Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism

Bodhisattvas are the guides and helpers for Buddhists to end their suffering and to achieve the enlightenment. There are thousands of bodhisattvas with certain responsibilities and capabilities in Mahayana Buddhism. The way to gain enlightenment with the help of bodhisattvas is called Bodhisattva ideal.

Bodhisattva ideal

There are three vehicles to attain enlightenment in Buddhist schools: the vehicle of the disciple Arahant, which is mostly followed by Theravada Buddhism; the vehicle of the “solitary enlightened one” who attains realization without teaching, which is followed by Tibetan Buddhism; and the vehicle of the aspirant to Buddhahood, bodhisattva-yāna, which is followed by Mahayana Buddhism. Arahant ideal and Bodhisattva ideal are often considered the main guiding ideals of Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism, “before one could become a Buddha, however, one had to be a bodhisattva, a sentient being who has resolved to become a Buddha. The ultimate stage of sanctification in Theravada Buddhism
was represented by Arhathood. This Arhat ideal was replaced by the Bodhisattva ideal in Mahayana Buddhism” (Abe, 1995, p.88).

Bhikkhu Bodhi points out that there are the two types which give us a “historical-realistic perspective” and “cosmic-metaphysical perspective” understanding Buddhism. The former one begins with our common human condition and depicts the Buddha as “starting from within this same human condition.” The Buddha is considered as a human being who is subjected to birth, aging, sickness and death, and achieves nirvana to be the first of the arahants. The second “cosmic-metaphysical perspective” of understanding Buddhism: “the Buddha was viewed as the one who brought to consummation the long bodhisattva career extending over countless eons, in which he sacrificed himself in various ways, many times, for the good of others” (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2013).

What is the relationship between bodhisattva and Buddha? “A Buddha, or ‘awaked one’, has fully realized liberation from the suffering of afflictive delusions and conditioning” (Leighton, 2002, p.25). Buddha is free from all conditions and will not be born again. Buddha is always there, even if we do not realize it, but he exists in the universe already, even before Siddhartha Gautama got enlightened. Siddhartha Gautama is the first person who found the path to be enlightened in the history of the human being; he became a Buddha after he got enlightened. There are many Buddhas before him and many Buddhas after him. The Buddha can be a person, and can be fish or even a tree, all the sentient beings can be seen as an entity with the seed of being Buddha. The seed of Buddha is called bodhicitta in Mahayana Buddhism which can be awaked by the practice or the vow of bodhisattvas or the spirit of the great compassion. Bodhisattvas will help others to achieve this.
Bodhisattva

Bodhisattva is the one who assists all beings to be liberated. “A Bodhisattva, carrying out the work of buddhas, vows not to personally settle into the salvation of final buddhahood until she or he can assist all beings throughout the vast reaches of time and spaces to fully realize this liberation experience” (Leighton, 2002, p.25).

The Path of the bodhisattva is the way of achieving Buddhahood, bodhisattva will make their efforts to help all beings to attain Buddhahood with their skills and compassion of the aspiration in practice. There are many bodhisattvas, and some of them are famous.

Siddhartha Gautama is a bodhisattva who found the path for the human being to follow and to gain enlightenment; he became the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. Manjushri is the bodhisattva of wisdom and insight, who penetrates and expounds the fundamental emptiness or true nature of all beings. Samantabhadra is the bodhisattva of enlightening activities in the world, representing the shining function and application of wisdom. Kshitigarbha is of lesser importance than other bodhisattva archetypes in terms of philosophical doctrine, but is perhaps equal to Avalokitesvara in popularity in Japan, where he is called Jizo. Leighton concludes that there are ten characteristics of bodhisattvas: generosity, ethical conduct, patience, effort, meditation, wisdom, skillful means, vow, powers, and knowledge.

“The first six perfections may be seen as developing bodhisattva qualities. The last four are beneficial practices of accomplished bodhisattva returning to the world for the sake of saving others. But all of these practices are endless as the various beings and their situations, and all are inspirations, source of encouragement for the practitioners, and for all those around them” (Leighton, 2002, p.63).

With the help of bodhisattvas, the aim of the process of Buddhism is full liberation; however, learning skills and gaining capabilities are necessarily required to achieve this goal.
“One account of the bodhisattva path might be described as ascending to buddhahood. Step by step, over seemingly endless lifetimes, the bodhisattva develops enlightening understanding and practice, and skillfulness in helping beings, until at some time she is finally ready to realize anuttara samyak sambodhi, Sanskrit for the ‘unsurpassed complete perfect enlightenment’ of a Buddha” (Leighton, 2002, p.41).

If you follow different bodhisattvas, the ways to performance will be different. Such as Avalokitesvara, it requires recitation of sutras, compassion, perfect with love, to recite her name, to restrain from eating beef, to follow the five disciplines, to pray to her, to worship her, and to help others.

**Guanyin Bodhisattva**

Guanyin Bodhisattva, the bodhisattva of compassion, is probably the most popular bodhisattva and appears in more different forms than any other bodhisattvas. Yu concludes that there are four kinds of roles of Guanyin, one of the Buddha’s attending entourage, a close associate and future successor of Amitabha Buddha, a savior with the request of Sakyamuni Buddha, and an independent savior, and the last role has become the dominant one in China (Yu, 2001, p.32).

The roles of Guanyin Bodhisattva have been recorded in many Buddhist scriptures, for instance, the Lotus Sutra, the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Longer Sukhavativyuha Sutra, the Sutra of Visualization on Amitayus Buddha, the Heart Sutra and Surangama Sutra, and so on. The Longer Sukhavativyuha Sutra is one of the earliest scriptures translated into Chinese and it describes Guanyin like this:

“One of them is Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva. The other is called Sthamaprapta. Departing from this, our buddha-field, they were reborn in the Land of Bliss. And all the bodhisattvas who have been born in this buddha-field are endowed with the thirty-two marks of the superior human being, possessing
They are experts in meditation and psychic powers, experts in the analysis by means of discernment. They are skillful, of sharp faculties, in control of their faculties, possessing the faculties of those who have perfect knowledge, their faculties neither depressed nor agitated, having gained higher receptivity, possessing endless and limitless virtue” (Yü, 2001, p.34).

Lotus Sutra is the one of the most important sutra for Guanyin Bodhisattva. There are many versions of the translation of this sutra, and the earliest version is translated by Dharmarakṣa. Chapter 23 of this sutra is entitled “Universal Gateway” and is devoted to Guanyin. In this sutra, Guanyin is the bodhisattva with the role as a savior. “This is a savior who delivers people from seven perils, frees them from the three poisons of lust, hatred, and ignorance, and grants infertile women either sons or daughters” (Yü, 2001, p.37). The most popular and well-known version is translated by Kumarajiva, and the “Universal Gateway” is chapter 25 and is widely recited in temples until now. In this sutra, people who want to be saved are only required to call the name of the Guanyin Bodhisattva.

3.1.2 Bodhisattva in Theravada Buddhism

There are some scholars who criticize that there is no Bodhisattva ideal in Theravada Buddhism, but it is believable that Bodhisattva ideal was taught by Theravada Buddhists at an early time, and people followed it always. Ratnayaka stated that “the Hinayanists were criticized by the Mahayanists for not having the bodhisattva ideal. The Hinayanists may have lacked it, but the Theravadins were the first Buddhists to teach the bodhisattva ideal. Further, they always followed it, and they always maintained the distinction between bodhisattvas and arahants” (Ratnayaka, 1985, p.87).

The Bodhisattva ideal was also recorded in Theravada Buddhist scriptures. In Sampasadaniya Sutta, Gautama Buddha has acknowledged that there were and will be Buddhas
equal to him, and in the Buddhavarhsa, a book of Tripitaka itself which explains the life stories of twenty-five Buddhas, which shows there are many Buddhas in the past and there will be more in the future. Before Buddha has been achieved, Bodhisattva is a necessary step to be attained first. There are many Buddhas in the past and there will be many Buddhas in the future, so there will be many bodhisattvas in the future. In Pali scripture, Jataka and its commentary, there are five hundred and fifty life stories about Gautama Buddha’s long process to become Buddha. The life of Gautama Buddha as bodhisattva shows a way of sacrificing to help others. In one story, Gautama was a bodhisattva and had the chance to attain nirvana as an arahant, but he did not do it, he gave it up and because he was still willing to help many beings.

“In brief, the Theravadin believe that as there were innumerable Buddhas in the past and as there will be innumerable Buddhas in the future, there were, there are, and there will be innumerable bodhisattvas as well. Furthermore, anyone can become a bodhisattva if he is willing to undertake the hardship of fulfilling the ten perfections of the bodhisattva path” (Ratnayaka, 1985, p.88).

Theravada Buddhism is mostly practiced in Southeast Asian countries which has a long historical contact with India. With the popularity of bodhisattva in India during the early period, bodhisattvas came to Southeast Asian countries during the period of the sixth to seventh centuries and were welcomed by the local people. Bodhisattvas were popular in this region and bodhisattvas images could be seen at the temples. In Sri Lanka, the bodhisattva Maitreya and the bodhisattva Natha who are considered as bodhisattva Avalokitesvara have been worshiped (Holt, 1991). It is clear that people in Theravada Buddhist countries have long respected bodhisattvas. Even some bodhisattvas may be worshiped as an independent deity. Chutiwongs claims that “culture relations with the flourishing Mahayana centers in northeastern India and Maritime Southeast Asia obviously reinforced the popularity of bodhisattvas. Besides assuming the role of
Buddha’s attendants and companions, some of them, like Avalokiteshvara, may have enjoyed independent worship” (Chutiwongs & Leidy, 1994, p.35).

Bodhisattva also is considered as a human being in the history of these countries. Many rulers of Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhist countries were believed to be bodhisattvas, such as historical rulers in Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, many kings were considered as bodhisattvas. In Thailand, there are some records about the king Lu T’ai who was considered as a bodhisattva.

“In Thailand, a similar connection is drawn. One example of a Thai bodhisattva-king is Lu T’ai of Sukhothai who ‘wished to become a Buddha to help all beings...... leave behind the sufferings of transmigration.’ The relation between King Lu T’ai and bodhisattvahood is also manifested by the events occurring at his ordination ceremony that were similar to ‘the ordinary course of happenings in the career of a Bodhisattva’” (Samuels, 1997, p. 406).

Arahantship and Buddhahood

Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism are different in their approach for achieving the enlightenment. However, the two ways do not contradict each other as some scholars described; there are many similarities in theory and practice. Bhikkhu Bodhi said that Arahant ideal has absorbed the bodhisattva ideal into its framework.

“This assumption is not entirely correct, for the Theravāda tradition has absorbed the bodhisattva ideal into its framework and thus recognizes the validity of both arahantship and Buddhahood as objects of aspiration. It would therefore be more accurate to say that the arahant ideal and the bodhisattva ideal are the respective guiding ideals of Early Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism” (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2013).

Walpola Rahula holds that both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism accept Bodhisattva ideal as the highest on the process of becoming a Buddha, and the Theravada Buddhists “which they conveniently identify with Hinayana, is to become an Arahant while that of the Mahayana is to become a bodhisattva and finally to attain the state of a Buddha... But the fact is that both the
Theravada and the Mahayana unanimously accept the Bodhisattva ideal as the highest’’ (Rahula, 1996).

The achievement of enlightenment, Nirvana, is the common goal for all the Buddhists. But in comparing the two ways, people think it is difficult to be an arahant—in Theravada Buddhism, there are more obstacles need to overcome. The way of Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism is easier for the followers to understand and put into practice. As the followers of Guanyin explained as follows:

“Talking about arahant, we want to be an arahant. It is not easy to become an arahant, it is very difficult. How can a person be an arahant? You should not think badly, not do badly and even not get mad. But you know that people are easy to get mad. You should not talk badly, like bullshit, we cannot do like that. You need to give, giving only, but not to take. You should not want this or that. You should not buy a house, not buy a car, and not want anything. During the time of the lives, you will be sick, pass away, and the Buddhist teaching is that if you are an arahant, you will not be born again. But everybody wants the material things; it is very hard to be an arahant.”

Position of Bodhisattva

As in Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattva in Theravada Buddhism holds a high position. The Commentary on the Jataka, in the tradition of Mahavihara at Anuradhapura, provides a precise example: In the past, Gotama the Buddha, during his career as a bodhisattva, was an ascetic named Sumedha. At that time, there was a Buddha called Dipankara whom he met and at whose feet he had the capacity to realize Nirvana as a disciple (Sravaka). However, Sumedha renounced it and resolved, out of great compassion for the world, to become a Buddha like Dipankara to save others. Then Dipankara Buddha declared and predicted that this great ascetic would one day become a Buddha and offered eight handfuls of flowers to Sumedha. Likewise, Dipankara Buddha’s disciples who were with him and who were themselves Arahants offered

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6 Personal interview (2012, December 28) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
flowers to a bodhisattva. This story of Sumedha distinctly shows the position a bodhisattva occupies in Theravada Buddhism.

"The Pali texts also speak of a future buddha, Maitreya, who is presently a bodhisattva training for a future time when the world is in need of a fresh transmission of the dharma (Buddhist teachings). So while Theravadins recognize the existence of the bodhisattva-yāna, they do not see it as an appropriate path for most people, who would be better suited to the pursuit of nirvana...The Bodhisattva was sitting in meditation on his throne under the Bodhi Tree. Mara, the Evil One, was jealous and wanted to stop him from reaching enlightenment. Accompanied by his warriors, wild animals and his daughters, he tried to drive the Bodhisattva from his throne. All the gods were terrified and ran away, leaving the Bodhisattva alone to face Mara's challenge. The Bodhisattva stretched down his right hand and touched the earth, summoning her to be his witness. The earth deity in the form of a beautiful woman rose up from underneath the throne, and affirmed the Bodhisattva's right to occupy the vajriisana. She twisted her long hair, and torrents of water collected there from the innumerable donatives libations of the Buddha over the ages created a flood. The flood washed away Mara and his army, and the Bodhisattva was freed to reach enlightenment" (Prang, 1996).

Theravada Buddhism does not stipulate or insist that all must be bodhisattvas. In the Pali scriptures, the designation "bodhisattva" is given to Prince Siddhartha before His Enlightenment and to his former lives. The Buddha himself used this term when speaking of his life prior to enlightenment. It was very rare for a disciple during the Buddha's time to get the opportunity to attain sainthood and instead declare bodhisattvahood as his aspiration. However, there are some records of some followers of the Buddha aspire to become bodhisattvas and gain Buddhahood.

Although Theravada Buddhists respect bodhisattvas, they do not regard them as being in the position to enlighten or save others before their own enlightenment. Bodhisattvas are, therefore, not regarded as saviors. In order to gain their final salvation, all beings must follow the method prescribed by the Buddha and follow the examples of him. They must personally eradicate their mental defilements and develop all the great virtues.
In real life, the two resemble each other much more than one would think. The arahants, and those who seek to attain arahants, often work assiduously for the spiritual and material improvement of their fellow human beings. Bodhisattvas, and bodhisattva aspirants, often must spend long periods in solitary meditation cultivating the meditative skills that will be necessary for them to attain Buddhahood.

It would be an oversimplification to equate the pursuit of the bodhisattva ideal with engagement in social service and to assume that a bodhisattva for all training on the path to liberation. From my understanding, the foundation of the bodhisattva path is arising of the bodhicitta (bodhicittotpāda), the aspiration to supreme enlightenment. This usually arises only through diligent training in meditation. According to the authoritative sources on Mahayana Buddhist meditation, to generate the bodhicitta, one must systematically train the mind to perceive all beings until such a perception becomes natural and spontaneous.

3.1.3 Guanyin Bodhisattva in Thai context

Avalokitesvara was popular during the seventh to ninth centuries in Thailand. The evidence even shows that he might be worshiped as an independent deity. However, after the ninth century, Theravada Buddhism came to Thailand and took the dominant position. Bodhisattva is mentioned in the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism, especially in the Jakarta stories about the previous life of Buddha. Bodhisattva is the one who will become Buddha in the future, he possesses compassion and perfection, his destination is attaining the Buddhahood. This is the story of bodhisattva in the Tripitaka. Thai people know the features of bodhisattva who want to help others to be enlightenment.

“Cholvijarn observes that prominent figures associated with the Self perspective in Thailand have often been famous outside scholarly circles as well, among the
wider populace, as Buddhist meditation masters and sources of miracles and sacred amulets. Like perhaps some of the early Mahāyāna forest hermit monks, or the later Buddhist Tantrics, they have become people of power through their meditative achievements. They are widely revered, worshipped, and held to be arahants or bodhisattvas” (Williams, 2009, p.328).

Bodhisattva is well-known in Thailand nowadays with the popularity of Bodhisattva Maitryya and Guanyin. According to the belief of Theravada Buddhism, Maitryya is considered as the successor of the Sakyamuni Buddha, Buddhists believe that he will be reborn to the world again in a proper time in the future. Maitryya is called the Future Buddha with prosperity and happiness, and Maitryya is beloved to bring good luck and prosperity to the worshippers, especially for the business man in the contemporary commercial times. The statues of Maitryya can be seen in temples, shops or some sacred places.

Bodhisattvas are well-known in Mahayana Buddhism, and it is familiar to Chinese and overseas Chinese. Mahayana Buddhism and Chinese folk religions came to Thailand with Chinese immigrants and were accepted by local people. Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism have the differences in the traditional scriptures, rituals, and the ways to be enlightenment. However, Mahayana Buddhism remains rooted in Thailand even though it was supplanted and has been kept well for a long time. Chinese folk belief and Guanyin beliefs have found the space for surviving, and even welcomed and worshiped in Thai Buddhist temples.

Guanyin moved to Thailand with the immigration several hundred years ago. The ethnic Chinese traditionally worship Guanyin in their home and the Chinese temple, many Chinese temples possesses the Guanyin statues. Guanyin is popular in Thailand now, especially in cities. Guanyin has become not just a personal belief in the temples and the houses, but involves the public spaces, such as the Vegetarian Festival and public events. The Guanyin followers generally required not to eat beef. There are several reasons.
“There is a story about the princess Miaoshan. Miaoshan was the daughter of the king. This king had killed many people and was reborn to be a cow. Miaoshan felt very sad. So she did not eat meat, only vegetables. All beings have lives and eating animals like killing. Since her father was reborn as a cow, so not eating beef is required of the followers.”

There is many interconnection and mutual understanding between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. In the modern time, Thai people have learned about Mahayana Buddhism from the new Buddhist movement which was led by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa who adopted Mahayana Buddhism into Thai Theravada Buddhism:

“Buddhadasa was also the first Thai Theravada thinker who explicitly used materials from Mahayana and Chan traditions for his own teaching. He used the Mahayanist concept of ‘emptiness’ as one of his key concepts in interpreting Buddhism for his Theravada Thai audience. He asserted, for example, that the ‘empty mind’ is the central realization of Buddhist Dharma in practice, which can be authenticated in the immediate experience of here and now. Thus, he brought the Buddhist ideal into the empirical realm, and this should not be understood as some faraway state in a never-never land as seems to be the case in traditional Thai teachings” (Satha-Anand, 1990, p.398).

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa’s teaching are more founded on the theoretical explanation and empirical realm about Buddhist thought. He also emphasizes the compassion, wisdom, peacefulness which are the features of Avalokitesvara. The influence of his teaching is still going on, especially for the middle-class and educated people.

In practice, people do not care much about the differences about the history between the two groups, but they believe that both of them are Buddhism in common. What they share is a belief in the Buddha for the advancement achievement. For Thai-Chinese, Mahayana Buddhism is the belief of their ancestors, so it is easy for them to follow their families' tradition. The family’s beliefs strongly influence the younger generations. Most of them become Guanyin's

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7 Personal interview (2013, January 13) at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital.
followers, because of the beliefs of their families. For Thai Chinese, Mahayana and Theravada are similar with each other; both share some concepts and beliefs. In this practical way, they integrated to live together. Carl Blandford, in his book Chinese Church in Thailand, explains the similarities of Chinese and Thai concepts and practices of Buddhism. He studied Chinese tradition and Buddhist practice in the history, and points out that the difference between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism are small, the similarities help them to be assimilated into Thai society (Blandford, 1975).

My questionnaires show that more than half of the Guanyin followers think there are no differences or are not sure whether or not there are any differences between Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism.

<table>
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
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<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
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Regarding the belief of Guanyin, the characteristics of bodhisattva has been shown and demonstrated in the ways of chanting, meditation, worshipping, making merit, and salvation. With the popularity of the belief of Guanyin in Thailand, people have more chance to learn about Mahayana Buddhism through the participating activities, rituals, reading, dialogues, comparison, and inspiration.
3.2 Folk belief: a popular trend

3.2.1 Folk belief

Folk belief does not strictly follow the scriptures, and rituals of institutionalized religion and possesses its own beliefs in supernatural powers. Folk beliefs are continuously reviving since thirty years until the present day in Thailand. Many deities have been worshiped by Thai people. In my study, the interviewees think that there are not many differences between Guanyin Bodhisattva and goddess. Guanyin as a bodhisattva and as a goddess is accepted for her devotion to helping all the beings for her super power and responses to the all their requirements.

Thailand is an agrarian country and there are many traditional folk religious deities which are respected and worshiped by the Thais. The King Rama IV (1851-1868 on the throne) has had attempted a reformation in Buddhism with the aims to strengthen Buddhism nationally and to weaken the influences of folk beliefs. People were required to recite Buddhist scripture before worshipping the other gods. However, the Thai traditional folk beliefs are still rooted in people’s heart and have influenced Buddhism strongly. Wo Chinpradit categorizes the Thai deities into five groups: thep, phrom, chao, phi, and winyan phanechon. According to this category, Guanyin is one of them and called Chao Mae Guanyin (Kiriarsa, 2012, p.23). It has become obvious that folk beliefs have become even more popular in the last thirty years.

Ninian Smart points out, “The gods in Theravadin does not on the track of the road for the salvation, it is loose in the system of gods, ‘their function as powers’” (Smart, 1996, p.34). Guanyin belief also shows the feature of “superhuman form” in Thailand.

“The iconography of Avalokitesvara in the Southern East Asian countries, thought largely based on conventional Indian prototypes, was much influenced by local beliefs. In Burma and Central Thailand-the two countries with strong
Theravada tradition—there seems to have a general aversion to depict Avalokitesvara in superhuman forms... In Burma and Central Thailand the representations of Bodhisattva display a special tendency to fuse with the figures of divine attendants of the Buddha, the unrivalled lord of the Theravadins” (Chutiwongs, 2002, p.333).

There are several religious activities that attract many people every year, such as commemoration days of Guanyin, the Nine Emperor Gods Festival, and so on. In Guanyin shrines and temples, many pieté Guanyin followers come to worship and participate in the activities often. In addition, many young Guanyin followers often visit Guanyin temples or shrines often. The phenomenon of the popularity of Guanyin belief is not an individual matter; the worship of King Chulalongkorn became popular almost during the same period.

Some scholars consider that this is a phenomenon of commercial modernization. Some scholars view it as a phenomenon of religion syncretism. Rajadhon considered it is the syncretism between Buddhism and animism (Rajadhon, 1986). Kitiarsa thinks that it is beyond syncretism, but a hybridization of popular religion in contemporary Thailand (Kitiarsa, 2005). Terwiel in his book “Monks and Magic” said syncretism and compartmentalized model are two extremes, but in practice there is a “waver between one view to another” (Terwiel, 2001, p.249). Their arguments are not the main content in my study, but the meaning of the religious will be the first consideration.

3.2.2 Thai folk Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism is considered as the national religion of Thailand, and the study of Buddhism traditionally focuses on “Theravada Buddhism, the historical agency of royal elite, and the role of religion in the birth of the Siamese nation-state” (Kitiarsa, 2012, p.7).
Buddhism does not have the concept of creation, compared to Mahayana Buddhism, "while the Theravada is much more strictly atheistic, the Mahayana does have some substitute for the God and the gods" (Smart, 1996, p.28). From the perspective of Buddhist theory, Thai Buddhism is very traditional and strictly follows Buddha's teaching according to the Pali scriptures and traditions. The Buddha is a real person who finds the way to end the suffering and to gain enlightenment. The way of Buddha's enlightenment should be the way for all the Buddhists to follow and for attaining Nirvana. People worship the Buddha because of his contribution to all the people, and he is considered as a great teacher who should be respected by his disciples. The way to enlightenment is far, even more than one life, and the process goes slowly, little by little, to get close to the goal for each person's karma and deeds.

However, in practice, Thai Buddhism is different from what is shown in the scriptures, and it is combined with Thai folk religious beliefs and rituals. Thai Buddhists believe in Buddha, not only just an abstract religious belief, but it is a worship of the supernatural power of Buddha, and the Buddha is easily considered as a god who possesses the superpower. Thai Buddhism combines the characteristics of Indian Brahman and Thai prehistoric religions to gain the magical power in religious belief. Even the monks are expected to deal with magical powers.

3.2.3 Guanyin as goddess

3.2.3.1 Guanyin as goddess in Chinese tradition

In the Western cultural system, God normally means the one who creates the world and is referred as the Supreme Being. Ninian Smart talks about the gods in non-theistic systems, he gives a wide scope of the various roles of gods in different cultures. Sometimes god does not refer to the superhuman being, but a king or a hero, especially in the eastern world. Ninian Smart
claims that “in Mahayana, Bodhisattvas were regarded somewhat like gods. They postponed their final liberation to help other beings reach salvation and could transfer merit from themselves to the otherwise unworthy faithful” (Smart, 1997, glossary xii). In China, the system of the spirit world is complex for that it has many levels of deities who take different duties and play different roles in the people’s lives. In the folk perspective, Guanyin is considered as many other roles in local religions.

With the modernization during the past one hundred and fifty years in China, the history and traditional Chinese culture have been changed dramatically; the religious systems were destroyed and rearranged by new ideologies. The traditional religious system which gave much space for the folk religions became much rigid. Guanyin belief and practice became many adherents to Buddhist belief. But in Thailand, the Chinese traditional beliefs have not faced such difficulties as in China. Its original features of folk belief have been preserved. However, it has been influenced by the modernization and secularization strongly in the past several decades. Therefore, the understanding and practice of Guanyin belief among Thai-Chinese in Thailand can be seen from many perspectives.

3.2.3.2 Guanyin as goddess in Thai context

Guanyin is considered as a goddess, even the Buddha, similar with Pra Phom or Thai Theps (gods) sometimes in Thailand. In practice, Guanyin normally owns a position which is lower that of Buddha, but the miracle power of Guanyin is more specific than the Buddha.

“We also believe that Guanyin is Thep (goddess) in the Buddhist tradition, but she is not the highest, the Buddha is the highest one. Guanyin stays with the Buddha together, she is near Buddha. The Buddha does not have the life, he just teaches
us about the goodness. But he does not have the miracle power. We believe that
Guanyin has the miracle power to help others. 8

Guanyin is even worshiped in Thai temples (See Appendix 1.5 & 1.6). The Thai monks
and the people do not know much about Guanyin. Guanyin is considered as a goddess which can
be accepted and worshiped in the temple. The Thai-Chinese who become the followers of
Guanyin worship Guanyin as a goddess too. Coughlin explains that the Chinese also have
adopted the Thai animistic practice. “(B)oth people share a common appreciation and respect for
this world and the spirits, and in face the Chinese have readily adopted certain Thai animistic
practices” (Coughlin, 1960, p.92). Kitiarsa states that the features of Guanyin are compatible
with Thai popular religion and become popular.

“Guanyin is known for her compassion and kindness, and is believed to help her
followers prosper in business. The Guanyin cult in Thailand has incorporated
elements of indigenous animism and Buddhist amulet cults. In Mahayana
Buddhism, Guanyin has the double status of goddess and Bodhisattva. The fact
that she features as a deity in Both Mahayana and Chinese folk religion makes her
very compatible with Thai popular religion. Recently, Guanyin statues have been
placed inside many Theravada temples in Thailand. She is worshiped at altars in
private homes or businesses and has attracted a large number of mediums around
the country, predominantly women of Sino-Thai origin” (Kitiarsa, 2012, p.27).

There should be certain evidence to show that Guanyin owns the characteristics of a
goddess. Historically, there are many stories which show evidence. There is a sutra named
Guanyin Pusa Bensheng Jing (the sutra of the deeds of the Bodhisattva Guanyin) which dated to
the first decade of the sixteenth century by a lay Buddhist named Lo Ching. “What is remarkable
about this story is that it is told and retold virtually unchanged to the present day in numerous
popular texts circulating in Thailand, as well as in popular films available on video” (Hamilton,
1999). There are some stories which are told and retold in Thailand as well, and those stories are
good ways to demonstrate the supernatural power and greatness of Guanyin.

8 Personal interview (2013, January 13) at Wat Phoman.
There is a Guanyin shrine next to Wat Kalayanamit which is located near the Chao Praya River. This temple was built during the reign of King Rama 3, and the main statue of Guanyin came from Sae Hun Teng shrine in China during the reign of Emperor Guang Xu of the Qing dynasty (1833-1853). The statue features a kind and quiet Chinese women. The most important is that it never has been changed. ‘It is explained that there have been several rich people who highly respect the goddess and want to renovate the shrine but Kuan Yin herself has never agreed. Normally, when one wants to do any sort of work on a shrine, they have to shake fortune sticks and ask questions to the goddess statue. However, every time renovation has been discussed, the fortune stick always point out the goddess does not need to change. So the Kuan Yin goddess here is quite smart and very modern’” (Sukphisit, Bangkok Post Horizons, 2005, February 3).

Guanyin was considered as a goddess who can grant the worshipper’s requests and provide protection to the followers. Many followers believe that Guanyin has the capability to hear their voices, and when in need, Guanyin will come to help them. There are many miracle stories that have happened in personal experiences of worshipping to Guanyin which can be seen in Chapter IV.

3.3 The integration of Guanyin as bodhisattva and goddess

With the popularity of several bodhisattvas among Thai-Chinese and the growth of Chinese influences, the concept of bodhisattva is spreading widely. 84% of the Guanyin followers in the response to my questionnaires consider Guanyin as a bodhisattva, the trend of the belief and the tales of bodhisattva’s super power capabilities attract people.

<table>
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<th>Question</th>
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<th>Bodhisattva</th>
<th>Goddess</th>
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<td>What do you consider Guanyin is?</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Percentage</td>
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<td>84%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Guanyin in Thailand is well known for her great compassion and good reputation, people know her through different ways, and the narratives of Guan yin show the basic understanding of Guan yin.

3.3.1 Narratives of Guan yin in Thai context

The story of Miaoshan and the stories Journey to the West (之旅) are well-known. These two stories explain the basic understanding of Guanyin in Thailand that Guanyin is a bodhisattva and goddess with the miracle power in determination, dedication, compassion, and salvation.

The story of Miaoshan generally goes like this:

"Miaoshan was the third daughter of King Miao-chuang (Wonderful Adornment). She was by nature drawn to Buddhism, keeping a vegetarian diet, reading scriptures by day, and meditating at night from an early age. The king had no sons and hoped to choose an heir from among his sons-in-law. When Miaoshan reached the marriageable age, however, she refused to get married, unlike her two elder sisters, who had both obediently married the men chosen by their father. The king was greatly angered by her refusal and punished her harshly in different ways. She was first confined to the back garden and subjected to hard labor. When, with the aid of gods, she completed the tasks, she was allowed to go to the White Sparrow Nunnery to undergo further trials in the hope of discouraging her from pursuing the religious path. She persevered, and the king burned down the nunnery, killed the five hundred nuns, and had Miaoshan executed for her unfilial behavior. While her body was safeguarded by a mountain spirit, Miaoshan’s soul toured hell and saved beings there by preaching to them. She returned to the world, went to Hsiang-shan, meditated for nine years, and achieved enlightenment. By this time, the king had become seriously ill with a mysterious disease that resisted all medical treatment. Miaoshan, disguised as a mendicant monk, came to the palace and told the dying king that there was only one remedy that could save him: a medicine concocted with the eyes and hands of someone who had never felt anger. She further told the astonished king where to find such a person. When the king’s messengers arrived, Miaoshan willingly offered her eyes and hands. The father recovered after taking the medicine and came to Hsiang-shan with the royal party on a pilgrimage to offer thanks to his savior. He recognized the eyeless and handless ascetic as no other than his own daughter. Overwhelmed with remorse, he and the rest of the royal family all converted to Buddhism. Miaoshan was transformed into her true form, that of the
This story is well-known in China and in Thailand, many people cannot tell the details, or there are some other differences in the story. The main content that Miaoshan cures her father with her eyes and hands is well known. There are various explanations of this story. Yü argues, in considering Guanyin in relation to the concept of gender, that it is far from clear that she has provided a clear and compelling role model for female power in religious traditions (Yü, 2001, pp.413–419). According to such interpretations, Guanyin is primarily a figure of the patriarchal establishment. Paul Hedges explains that Guanyin is a subversive goddess in four main aspects:

“I turn now to my reading of Guanyin as a subversive religion-cultural figure. For this, I draw upon both literary and iconographic representations of her, arguing that her subversive nature can be seen in four main aspects, although each is inter-related. The first is gender subversion, in which she undermines sexual identity. The second is social subversion, in which she undermines personal identity. The third is patriarchal subversion, in which she undermines women’s (socially constructed) identity. The fourth is moral subversion, in which she undermines our usual codes of practice, and so our ethical identity” (Hedges, 2012, p.99).

For the followers, this story mostly demonstrates Guanyin’s dedication and great compassion to devote her whole heart and compassion to help others, also her purity and her devotion. I met an old woman at the Ancient Guanyin Temple in Chinatown, she is a Guanyin follower, she went to two nearby Guanyin temples to chant and do meditation every Wednesday and Thursday for about two hours. She told me the following short story, but she focused on that Guanyin was a princess, such as the Sakyamuni Buddha was the prince in India so that it looks that Guanyin possesses the same glory as Buddha.

“Guanyin is the daughter of the king, she likes to help others. However, her father does not like it. When her father is very sick, it is said that he needs the medicine which is made from his daughter’s hands to cure his disease. Guanyin cut her hands for her father for the medicine. So Guanyin was a princess before.”
There was a story in which Guanyin was Miaoshan in history. Miaoshan is a daughter of the king. The king has killed many people and was doomed to be born a cow. Miaoshan felt very sad. Therefore, she did not eat meat and eat vegetables only. All the beings have lives, eating animals is like killing lives. And her father was doomed to be born a cow; therefore, restraint from eating beef is required for the followers.  

The other story is from the novel “Journey to the West,” which is a well-known story in China as well as in Thailand. It is about a monk named Xuanzang who lived in Tang Dynasty in China, he was sent by the Emperor of Tang to India to seek Buddhist teaching and scriptures. On the way, he received three disciples and overcame all the difficulties and gained the scriptures finally with the help of Guanyin who was a bodhisattva living in the heaven with Buddha. From the beginning to the end of the story, Guanyin was important and appeared all the time to give help when they faced difficulties.

In this story, Guanyin is pretty, kind, compassionate and powerful. She is welcomed by and gives a deep impression on the audiences. With the spread of the story in Thailand with the ways of the books, TV drama programs, and internet, Guanyin became well-known for her beauty, her compassion, her devotion and her power.

“Kuan Im, on the other hand, is a highly popular Mahayana deity to which altars are often devoted in the shrines. Recently, however, her cult spread among the general Thai Buddhist public (Aeuosrivongs 1994, Hamilton 1999); at the festival, most female mediums, and some male ones, many of whom are southern Thais, are believed to be possessed by Kuan Im herself or by one of her companions (even though shrine officiates deny that Kuan Im, as a high deity, would ever possess a human being). Kuan Im’s mediums play a leading role in the dispensation of blessings to Chinese, Sino-Thais and Thais alike, in the source of the processions and in other ritual events” (Cohen, 2001, p.190).

There is another story which demonstrates the existence of Guanyin. Ancient Guanyin Temple (Guanyin Gumiao) is located in Chinatown. In the temple, there are three central altars

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9 Personal interview (2013, January 13) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
in the temple. The central altars contain Guanyin images in the Teochew style, seated in meditation upon a lotus blossom. The icon and its lotus base, are carved from the wood, are said to be considerably larger than the former presiding image, which was destroyed by fire many years ago. Surrounding it is a bevy of other female images and multi-armed icons representing the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the incarnation of the Buddha from whom Guanyin derives. The left-central altar contains another large Guanyin image, plus additional smaller icons.

There is a story about this temple that was collected by Edward Van Roy. I have heard this story from one of the worshippers as well, and it is believed by the followers of Guanyin Ancient Temple. The story is that about a century ago one of the great fires that periodically raged through Sampheng spread directly towards the Phaisai Road neighborhood. The local people rushed into the shrine to save its contents. When they picked up the large censer standing in front of the main Guanyin image and turned it around, the fire immediately died down. In commemoration of that miraculous rescue and in the belief that Guanyin’s intervention could again quell a neighborhood fire, and the censer was for many years kept in its reversed position in front of the central altar. Years later the shrine caretaker noticed that on every Thursday afternoon, the weekly anniversary of the great fire, the smoke from the joss sticks planted in the censer failed to float toward the Guanyin image but instead drifted out of the shrine entrance. Local people believed this to be a reminder by Guanyin or the miraculous way in which she had saved the neighborhood. The fame of those miraculous events ensured that this shrine was long visited by devotees wishing to place their joss sticks in the reversed censer. The censer was turned back to face in the “correct” direction years ago. No one knows why. Perhaps it was an inadvertent act of the workers engaged in a seasonal cleaning of the shrine. Perhaps it was prescribed on some auspicious occasion by a casting of position; the potency of the old tale of
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the censer’s miraculous behavior has receded from the popular imagination. And as a result, the shrine is no longer as popular a place of pilgrimage as it formerly was (Roy, 2007, pp.111-112).

This story tells us that Guanyin is not just a figure in the tales, but in the real lives. The followers believe that Guanyin is existence in somewhere, as the same as the Bodhisattvas mentioned before. Then, the worshipping of Guanyin becomes reasonable and encouraged for all the followers.

These stories are told by the followers and illustrate the features of Guanyin, and it helps the people to know and understand what the characteristics of Guanyin possess. Guanyin is positive in all stories and situations for her greatness and reputation. At the same time, these stories have built the foundation for the popularity and diverse explanation. Those stories come from the tradition and root of the lives, and it is attractive for the acceptance easily and spread widely. It will be useful to preserve and enhance the tradition of Guanyin belief in Thailand. Niniant Smart points out that “gods are associated often with natural forces, of course, though they often represent social forces and may also be built up through complex stories” (Smart, 1996, p.35).

3.3.2 Guanyin temple: guardian of divine beings

In Chinese temples and shrines, Guanyin is considered as a Bodhisattva and goddess, and normally there is one special altar or room for her, such as Guanyin in Wat Mangkorn and Wat Phoman in Thailand. In Taoist shrines, Guanyin has her position as the immortal named Cihang Zhenren which means Compassion Travel Immortal Person and owns a position under the Emperor Yu Huang. In Guanyin temples or shrines in Thailand, Guanyin is one of the main figures who are possibly presented in the center of all the deities, somewhere there are many
other deities gathering together. Guanyin is considered as the single supreme divinity of the world sometimes, such as during the Vegetarian Festival or Nine Emperor Gods Festival. Guanyin is worshiped and considered as the identification of Doumu who is similar to the ultimate being in Taoism.

There are several Guanyin temples or shrines which are well-known in Bangkok. Guanyin is the main figure and is seated in the center of the altar in the temple, such as the Guanyin Hall at Tian Fha Hospital, Southern Sea Guanyin Hall and Ancient Guanyin Temple. Guanyin is the only deity in Thian Fha Foundation Hospital where Guanyin is considered as a protector and savior for all the people. Guanyin’s role is very correspondence to Tian Fha’s identity as a charity and hospital which is born to help others. Meanwhile, there are many other activities which are organized in front of the Guanyin Hall at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital every year. In the day of the Ghost Festival at Guanyin Hall at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital every year, many activities will be organized. Monks will be invited to perform Buddhist rituals and do the meditation chanting. The members of the community will gather here to show their respects to Guanyin, the ancestors and so on. People will come to present their goods to worship Guanyin. At the same time, on the right side in front of the hall, there is a big horrible image of a person behind the table. That is Dashi Ye who is worshiped as the head of the ghost in the hell and has the duties to open the door of hell to allow the ghost to come out to look for food and close the door before all the ghosts go back to hell this day. He is considered as the incarnation of Guanyin or the disciple of Guanyin. During that time, Guanyin is both able to bring good things and a good manager of the ghost to drive bad things away from the people. That is why many people come to worship Guanyin and pray for good luck and health for themselves and their families.
In Southern Sea Guanyin Hall and Ancient Guanyin Temple, Guanyin is one of the important deity in the shrines, however, Guanyin is not the in the center on the altar, and there are many other deities from China and Thailand which includes Buddhist figures, Taoist deities, and folk beliefs, such as the Buddha, Rulai Buddha, Wukong, Huangmu Niangniang, Thai spirit house, and so on. Both of them have a long historical time and well known already. The two shrines are both located in Chinatown area, and surrounded by Thai-Chinese communities. Those people have been integrated with local people and embodied in the Thai society deeply, so that as usual in Chinese traditional temples, here there are many other deities from China, and Thai deities are also welcomed and participate in the spiritual activities. Even though Guanyin does not own the central position in the temple, Guanyin possesses the most important position in people’s heart and usually come to worship Guanyin for their wishes.

Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road is the biggest one in Bangkok, which was established in 1983. The founder was a Thai-Chinese business woman named Mrs. Varaporn Lertrangsi, who received a full Bhikkhuni ordination at Puji Temple of China in 1991 and was given her ordained name Venerable Bhikkhuni Shi Guangsheng (See Appendix 1.4). In the temple, there are several buildings which are divided into two parts by a road. One side, there is a 21-floors Great Compassion Stupa where four giant Thousand-hand Guanyin statues are standing on the ground. There are thousands of statues of Guanyin and other Buddhist or traditional Chinese religious fingers or deities in the yard, including almost all of Chinese deities, just like an exhibition museum. Buddha is an important one in the temple. There are many kinds of Buddha statues, including Mahayana and Theravada style Buddhas, Amitabha Buddha, Maitreya Bodhisattva, Weituo Bodhisattva, and Arahants which come from Buddhism, and the god and goddess of earth, Chenghuang Ye, Caishen Ye which are from Chinese folk religions,
and many Indian and Thai deities. There are many Thai deities as well, such as the Kings, the famous Thai monks, the Thai folk gods and so on. Beside these Chinese and Thai deities, there are many Indian gods in the temple, such as Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, Ganesha, and Lakshmi and so on.

In one temple, so many kinds of deities, how do the people think about it? How are all the gods or goddess related to each other? When Ekachai came to the temple and saw the statue of Guanyin in the front of the main building, she felt confused and wrote:

“A closer look, however, reveals a dizzying hodgepodge of animism that has nothing to do with Chinese Mahayana Buddhism...Thai-style Buddha images line the altar alongside image of famous monks, intermixed with images of King Chulalongkorn, Kuan Yin and Hindu gods. And the main goddess image itself is standing on a toad, which according to the temple’s own legend, is a guardian of the Goddess” (Ekachai, 2001, p.192).

There is a traditional system to demonstrate the relationships respectively in Chinese gods, Indian gods and Thai gods. However, how can the gods who come from other religious systems such as those of India and Thailand be integrated? What are the positions of different deities in one system? According to historical tales, different deities have different jobs to do and their own responsibilities. Maybe some of them have the same duties, while which is more devoted depends on their followers; there are no conflicts between all the deities. In Guanyin temples, Guanyin has a special position. She is considered as the one who can mediate from one deity to another, she is close to the lord Buddha. According to the talks and perspectives of the founders of the temple and the followers, they believe that all the divining beings can be considered as members of the same family or good friends, some of them can be seen as the incarnation of Guanyin. They face different directions to project their power and help people to gain satisfaction and salvation. In this system, there is an ultimate reality that can be seen in all
the divine beings, but the ultimate reality does not have any images. All images of the gods or other divine beings can be seen as only different representatives of the ultimate reality. Under this system, everyone can find a god or divine being to follow. In Buddhist system, the Buddha is the highest and is positioned the top of the system. Meanwhile, the function of Buddha, no matter in Mahayana Buddhism or Theravada Buddhism, will be accessible with the help of Guanyin.

### 3.3.3 Tolerance and competition

The diversified consideration and practice of Guanyin show the harmonious coexistence of religions among Thai-Chinese through the study of Guanyin belief in Thailand. In Thailand, all the religions are equal principally. The 1932 constitution of Thailand stated that “every person is entirely free to profess any religion or creed and to exercise the form of worshipping in accordance with his own belief, provided that it is not contrary to the duties of a national, or to public order, or to public morals” (Thai Constitution of 1932, Chapter 1, Section 4). All the religions and beliefs can find their own spaces for surviving and live together with harmony; it is a great success in the religious tolerance in Thailand. Meanwhile, the competition is a normal phenomenon in the religious activities.

#### 3.3.3.1 Tolerance

Prosperity and diversity of religions show the religious tolerance in Thailand. Theravada Buddhism, considered as the national religion, dominates the mainstream. At the same time, there is still space for Islam, Christianity, Indian religions, Chinese religions, and other folk belief. All the religious figures can find their own places in this country. As to the popular religious beliefs, there are many deities and gods in different religious systems. The presence of
different deities and gods in public is not a problem for their followers. All the gods can be presented and worshiped in the same room. When they come together, they can find their own proper positions. This shows the greatness of tolerance between religions.

Nowadays, more and more Guanyin statues are placed in Thai Buddhist temples, for instance, in the Great Palace (See Appendix 1.1), Wat Po (See Appendix 1.2), Wat Prakanong (See Appendix 1.6) and some other temples. Guanyin is not an important figure in Theravada Buddhism; however, Guanyin is an important one in Mahayana Buddhism. Macao Abe explains that because Buddhism is not a monotheistic religion, therefore, Buddhism theoretically does not reject the different beliefs and even non-Buddhist religions, and the deeper the Buddhist faith becomes, the more tolerant the attitude toward other faiths. He states that:

“In Buddhism, deep faith and true tolerance do not exclude one another but go together. This fundamental attitude is applied not only to different beliefs within Buddhism but also to different views and beliefs of non-Buddhist religions and ideologies...The basic Buddhist attitude toward different beliefs within Buddhism is not to reject, denounce, or punish them as heresy, but rather to evaluate them critically as different views and to subsume them into its own doctrinal system” (Abe, 1997, pp.203-204).

Guanyin has her own small shrine or was present as a single statue in some Thai Buddhist temples. Buddha is the main figure in the main hall of the temples, Guanyin and other deities are placed at the entrance or some places where they can easily be seen. In some temples, there are one or two figures of deities, but some gather many figures together. The Buddha in such cases presides over these gathered deities.

“Although in orthodox belief Buddha is certainly not a spirit or deity, in popular rituals Buddha is worship as the supreme deity, occupying the highest position in the symbolic and cosmological pyramid of spirits. On the altars, such as in a wat, the Buddha image must be placed in the highest and most prominent position, since Buddha is the most powerful figure in the Thai spiritual world the deity of deities and the teacher of teachers” (Kittiarsa, 2012, p.24).
Comparing with the western religions, religions in Asia really show the diverse faces and the different ways to achieve the spiritual goals. All the ways were theoretically equal for all the people. Maybe the interpretations were different. However, all the beliefs would help people to gain spirituality. When people came to this temple and saw all the different spiritual deities which looked so peaceful and kind, people enjoys the spiritual experiences and respects all the deities. This is a good illustration of religious tolerance in Thailand.

3.3.3.2 Competition

Different gods are welcomed and presented in temples, and it shows the tolerance of religions. At the same time, it also shows the competition between them for the temples’ reputation and for attracting people. Pattana Kitiarsa records that what his abbot told him about how to gain the devotees’ attraction for the survival of temples in the North-East of Thailand:

"We need to find some tricks (ubai) to attract devotees to our temples. We cannot survive without patronage from laypeople. Magic is not encouraged in Buddhist teachings and ecclesiastic laws (vinaya), but sometimes it is quite necessary when we have to deal with popular expectation. I have built this temple with donations generated through magical and supernatural rites and much as by adhering to Buddhist teachings" (Kitiarasa, 2012, p.XIX).

In Bangkok, temples do not face these problems of survival, but they want development and prosperity. New projects, new decoration and colorful revamp of the temples are demanded. This is a way to build a good reputation and to attract more devotees.

The Buddhist Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road has already constructed a pagoda of 21-floors which is said to be the highest one among Guanyin temples in the world, and now they have ordered another giant Guanyin statue from China, which has been built and is waiting to be shipped to Thailand.
To meet the needs of people, the popular gods are welcomed and placed in temples as well. It is a way to service and to attract people. In the Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road, there are thousands of deities which include almost all the deities in Thailand. It is like a museum of the deities in Thailand. In some Thai temples, Guanyin is welcomed and presented in temples. For example, in Wat Arun, which is opposite the Great Palace and a famous temple in Thailand, Guanyin and many other new deities have been placed in the yard recently.
CHAPTER IV

MERIT MAKING IN THE PRACTICE AND BELIEF OF GUANYIN

Merit making is the way to gain the good consequences from the action, and it is a key concept in Buddhism and the belief and practice of Guanyin in Thailand. There are many proper manners to gain merit during the activities, and there are some special ways which are integrated for Guanyin. Merit making is meaningful for the believers, it likes the investment that returns in this life and next life or reduces bad consequences which caused by the former lives. However, during the process of merit making, most of the followers of Guanyin emphasize good heart and moral deed which lead to the satisfaction in the daily lives of the happiness, wealth and success.

4.1 Merit making and the means

4.1.1 Merit making

Merit is an important concept in Theravada Buddhism. Making merit plays a central role in religious lives in Thailand, named as a Buddhist country. Buddhism deeply influences the thoughts and social behaviors of Thai people. The practice of Guanyin belief shares some common aspects of the belief of making merit. Becoming a monk, donating food and money to temples, helping others, meditating, chanting Buddhist scriptures and releasing animals, are all considered the way of making merit for believers, their relatives and their families in this life and the next.

Merit making in Thai language is “tham boon” or good action which means good action that leads to good result and bad action leads bad result (tham dee dai dee, tham chua dai chua). From the theory of kamma in Theravada Buddhism, all action has its consequences, and the moral action brings moral consequences. According to Keyes, in Buddhism, there are two
original causes for the actions: “the first, caused by ignorance (moha), conduces to bad kamma; the second, the desire for existence, conduces to good kamma” (Keyes, 1983, p.261). The acts in ignorance usually involve with one’s passions of greed, lust and anger; one will commit immoral acts and suffer negative consequences. “One acts with awareness, suppressing the impurities (kilesa) of one’s nature and following the desire to reduce or eliminate suffering, one will perform moral acts and experience positive consequences” (Keyes, 1983, p.262).

Falk points out that “the phrase tham boon is generally used to refer to a wide range of good deeds and acts of generosity that are considered to improve a person’s kammic status.” (Holahn, 2013, p.140) Terwiel calls merit a “beneficial karma.” Merit, he adds, “is generally seen as a beneficial and protective force which extends over a long period of time and which links individuals together” (Terwiel, 1994, p.246). Kiriarsa’s explanation is more detailed, and he points out that merit is a kind of “accumulated mental purify” for a better future. It includes the rebirth of next life, and also associated with this life for happiness. He claims that “merit is then a kind of accumulated mental purify that leads to a better future – favourable rebirth and perhaps even nibbana. It is also very much associated with happy, positive and constructive mental states in the here and now” (Kitiarsa, 2012, p.95).

4.1.2 The propriety of merit making

There are many kinds of means which will make merit for the people who are believers, and “giving” is a general way. The proper giving should include some rules as follows:

“(1) Be coordinated to financial condition, but not be reluctant; (2) Assure that all the giving things are originally fine and pure, and the purposes of using are right; (3) Assure it is from the heart and be happy after giving; (4) Be aware that gaining burn already when giving finished and not be hope to be given back from others; (5) To increase the barani through the merit making of donation and build the
harmony relationship among human beings and the relationship between human beings and the nature” (Gong, 2009, p.67).

The proper of manner giving is very important during the process of making merit. It has set a standard for giving, and it is meaningful for the followers. Giving should “be coordinate to the financial condition,” which means that the amount of the money is not important, but the piety of faith. It is not the same principle as doing business, in which you pay more, and then you will get more. In the field of faith, the purity of the heart is the most important thing for gaining merit.

A ranking of religious acts in Thai people is calculated based on a study in the North-East of Thailand. First, financing the entire construction of a temple; second, becoming a monk oneself; third, the son becoming a monk; fourth, contributing money to the revamp of a temple; fifth, offering a katthin (presentation of robes and gifts) at a ceremony; sixth, giving food daily to monks; seventh, observing every wanphraa at a temple; eighth, strict observance of the five precepts (Tambiah, 1970, p.147).

4.1.3 The means of merit making

The ways to make merit in Guanyin belief are diverse: firstly financial contributions: making a donation for construction of new projects; auction of sacred objects; to be a member of the Buddhist community; construction of a Guanyin temple or Guanyin statues; secondly philanthropic activities and welfare, and thirdly pilgrimages to Guanyin temples.

Contributing to a temple is an important way to make merit. It is a way for the followers to show their supports and devotion to their beliefs. In Buddhism, there is no clear requirement of the quantity of donation. It is not like Christian and Islam in which it is sometimes clear how much the followers should donate to their religious communities according to their income. So in
Buddhism, how much to donate depends on the wills of the people. Donation to temples is accepted and encouraged, especially for business people.

According to my study, 81.3% of the followers are sure that they will donate for the building of Guanyin Temple in Thailand, only 2.7% of them said no.

<table>
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<th>No</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>81.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several ways for people to make the donation to Guanyin temples and activities. The first type is to donate money to donation box in temples and there will be shops nearby selling religious goods. You will see a donation boxes in almost all temples. People come to pray and donate money for the flowers, incenses, papers, and other supplies. There is no requirement for the amount of contribution; it depends on the people’s piety and economic condition as long as it comes from the heart.

The second type is the donation for the construction of new projects. The donors need to write their names, the projects which they donate to, and the amount of donation. With the development of Guanyin belief, more and more Guanyin temples and projects in temples need to be constructed. Take the pagoda at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road as an example. It is said to cost about 40 million baht to build this 21-floors pagoda. The donor would receive a small amulet of Guanyin Bodhisattva and their names would be placed on the wall of the pagoda.

There are three kinds of contribution: one of the 10,000 statues of Buddhas requires 10,800 baht, a pagoda requires 2,100 baht and land for building the pagoda 3,999 baht.
The third type is the auction of sacred objects. Auction of sacred objects is held on a specific day, such as at the New Year or in the Sunday activities. The biggest auction is held once a year on the fifteenth of January in the Lunar Calendar. More than one thousand Guanyin followers will participate in this event. They will contribute a large amount of money in order to book a seat at a table with ten people and enjoy the vegetarian food after the religious rituals. The items in the events will be set at a price from a few hundred baht to several hundreds of thousands of baht. The items will include fruits, money pouches, fortune trees, lanterns, the statues of animal zodiac of the year, the image of Guanyin Bodhisattva, and the statues of Buddhas.

The fourth type is to be a member of the temple. All members need to support the religious activities with financial contribution monthly. This will be seen mostly in Shantangs (Virtue Hall for religious activities) and some religious institutions. In the Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road, the membership began the beginning of construction when there were just a few close friends of the founder. Now members of the temple include dozens of ordained disciples, hundreds of lay disciples and regular members and new followers.

The fifth type is to build a Guanyin temple or Guanyin statues. There is a Guanyin Buddhist Hall near the River Kwai Bridge in Kanchanaburi province. (See Appendix 1.10) This is a famous tourist attraction. The Japanese Army forced the English and American war prisoners to build the bridge during the Second World War. It attracts many tourists from all around the world every year. The temple has a nice view of the bridge, and people on the bridge can hear the chanting voice from the temple. During the past several years, this temple has finished several projects and I have even seen news concerned with its activities in Chinese newspapers.
Now, a new tall Guanyin statue has been built, standing in the center of this temple and facing the bridge on the river.

Most of the cost of building this temple came from business people in Bangkok. When there is a new project, the temple will send letters to different Chinese associations or individuals, and even advertise in Chinese Newspapers in Bangkok for donation and support.

4.2 The practice and belief of Guanyin

The belief in Guanyin requires doing good deeds which can bring good results to the followers. Some think Guanyin can give the protection to them; some come to request of better lives, health, safety, compassion, happiness, and power. In fact, not all the followers come to worship Guanyin for requesting something. Many of them said that they felt good and happy to see and worship Guanyin, and they believed they had gained merit already, so they did not need to request anything. In fact, many followers never require anything from Guanyin. They believe that good deeds will make merit according to the belief of Guanyin, and the most important thing is the action, but not the requirement. The belief of Guanyin is not just an example of ideology. Guanyin is a model for action. She is compassionate, diligent, devoted, patient and skillful in helping others; she is the exact model for people to practice her role in their daily lives. During the process of good actions, the direction of revelation will be inspired; the way of bodhisattva is the way of the salvation, revelation and beyond.

4.2.1 Inner happiness

Guanyin followers do not all come for requesting things; many of them, come to look for the compassion which gives them more sense of kindness and happiness, especially the middle-class women who are successful enough and live a good life. I have met a lady A at Guanyin
Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road, who was the third generation Thai-Chinese and now operating a Thai restaurant in the US with her family, and at that time one of her son was studying in China for the master degree in Chinese medicine field. In A’s eyes, there is no big difference between Guanyin and the Buddha regarding merit making. Guanyin is perfect in all good deeds, and she is famous for her great compassion and did help people.

“I respect both the Buddha and Guanyin. The Buddha teaches well, he tells the people to do good things, to not do bad things. Guanyin like the Buddha, we believe in Guanyin. Belief is important, if you believe in something, it is a belief, no need for explanation. Guanyin thinks well, teaches well, she never makes any mistakes. I have never witnessed her make any mistakes. She loves people from her heart, from the inside. This is important. Everything she teaches is nice and perfect, very clear, very warm, and we can touch it, and feel it. We do not think about it, we feel it. The Buddha teaches well, he tells people to do good things, and not do bad things. When we follow her, we can a have good life, good jobs, good family, and good friends, just think well, and then we will do everything good. That is a very important and positive thinking. We just like now, we are talking openly from the heart.”  

The middle-class Thai-Chinese are successful in business and possess a good life, however, in the life, there is nothing permanent according to Buddhist thought. Everything is changing and passing on, therefore it is inner happiness that one should be seeking. For the lady A, Guanyin is the very good agent for her followers to acquire inner happiness. Guanyin is peaceful and compassionate, she is like a mother who always looks after her children and takes care of them. Her love for all human beings can be transmitted to her followers.

“I feel comfortable and peaceful when I come to the temple; you know that if you feel happy, you will enjoy your life. I will not ruin my life to make money. There is much time for me to make money, but life is more important for me. Actually, I do not know what I want, but I feel that she gives me much love when I see her face. I feel strong and have the miracle of love, it is just like mom who looks after me. I will come to the temple if I feel not good in my heart.”

10 Personal interview (2012, December 28) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
11 Personal interview (2012, December 28) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
Guanyin is perfect in all the elements of her stories. She is a bodhisattva. Her perfection is the goal for all people. In the stories of Miaoshan, Guanyin was an ordinary person and she experienced the human sufferings deeply, her devotion to becoming enlightenment showed a way for the people to follow. So she knows all the sufferings of all human beings, she vows to help all the human beings to end their sufferings and help people to escape from the difficulties at all times when people call her name.

"Bodhisattva helps others to be happy. As a human being, the suffering starts with the birth, followed by sickness, aging, death, love and others things. Something that we do not want is considered a suffering. This is one kind of suffering. There is another kind of suffering, such as hunger... However, Guanyin does not have birth, and she will not die, and does not have sufferings."  

Q: "Do you think Guanyin has super powers?"
A: "Yes, She has. She has the power which will help us to strengthen our heart to do good things. That is where the power is located."  

Apple is a young generation of Thai-Chinese who is a staff working in a company in Bangkok. She came to worship Guanyin twice a week, especially when at that day she did not feel good. Apple considers that Bodhisattva Guanyin vows to help others to attain enlightenment, her thousands of hands with different tools to work for others is the sign for practicing. Helping others can be done at any time and in any field, her practical features inspire many people.

"She has much compassion. When I am chanting, I feel my compassion increasing. I did not have any feeling when I saw the poor people before. But now I have much compassion on them. So I will give money to poor people, for instance, I will give money to beggars when I see them on the road."  

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12 Personal interview (2012, December 28) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
13 Personal interview (2013, January 23) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
14 Personal interview (2013, January 23) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
4.2.2 Solver of problems

Guanyin’s compassion is boundless, her power is unlimited. There are many stories told about how the prayers of her devotees come to be answered. In Buddhist text, the Buddha describes the power of Guanyin as following:

“...call upon his name, they will immediately reach the shallows...Or if anyone cries who is in deadly peril by the sword, the sword will be snapped asunder. If wicked demons attack, the one who cries will become invisible to them...If a woman desires a son, worships and pays homage, she will bear a son, virtuous and wise; or if a daughter, then of good demeanour and looks” (Palmer & Ramsay, 2009, p.4).

Guanyin was considered a great helper of all the people, her superpower can help her devotees escape from suffering and karma. For the devotees, they believe that Guanyin will protect them with her great compassion and power. One of my Thai friends said that her old brother and sister-in-law stopped eating beef and became devotees when they had a baby after they prayed to Guanyin five years ago.

In Thailand, people are mostly considered as Buddhists. From the traditional teaching of Thai Buddhism, the Buddha is a teacher and Buddhism is a teaching system which teaches people how to reach nirvana following the teachings of Buddha. However, Thai Buddhism and Thai folk religious belief also have the characteristics of this secularism and utilitarianism in the practice. Thai Buddhists believe the Buddha, not only just as an abstract religious belief, there is another worship of the supernatural power. Thai Buddhism compiles the characters of Indian Brahman and Thai animist religions to gain the magical power in religious belief. Even for the monks, people have much expectancy to look forward the magic power:

“What is magic power? It is not enough to claim it is related to Buddhism. Ordinary people believe the magic power should be show at different magic
abilities; it is the Supernatural power which says in Buddhism. One Buddhist monk will get respect from the people if he can foretell the future and can know what are the people thinking or can cure the disease for the people. In the country of South-East Asia, this kind of monk will get much prestige than those monks who are very profound at the Buddhist Scriptures and teachings” (Song, 2003, pp.153-154).

The belief in magic is also popular in the practice and belief of Guanyin. Ven. Shi Guansheng, who is the headmaster of Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4, said to others that she has the capability to communicate with Guanyin. She claims that Guanyin often speaks to her in her dreams. Once she heard Guanyin in her dream that her husband would like to be a monk. At first, she did not believe it, since her husband was a Christian at that time. But later her husband did ordain to be a monk. Such things happened several times which made her believe that she can communicate with Guanyin and she might be a reincarnation of Guanyin. Later, she dreamed that Guanyin wanted to establish a temple again, then she and her followers established the Guanyin Foundation. They worked together to find a place for building a Guanyin temple (Chockchai 4, Soi 39). She got a message from Guanyin again at 1988 and built a 21-floors Stupa which opposite the Guanyin paradise, it took 12 years to finish it.¹⁵ (Zhang, ) Now, her devotees even call her “Phra Mae”, the same as they call Guan-yin. It is not just Ven. Shi Kuang Seng alone who can communicate with Guanyin in Thailand, there are at least another four people at Guanyin temples said they have the capability to communicate with Guanyin (Hua, 1997, p.88).

Some followers believe that Guanyin can help them to improve their living condition and gain a better life, and avoid bad luck and disease. Requiring health and prosperity for themselves or their relatives is the most expectation for the followers. That is general for people to come to pray Guanyin for a certain requirement, some of them are not so serious about what they have

demanded. They believe that their piety to Guanyin and to Buddha will gain merit anyway. There are some special requirements that will show the faith of the followers in Guanyin.

The requiring child is popular in China, especially for a son, because Chinese are favor of son for inheriting the family generation. In China, one-child policy has been continued for more than thirty years, during this time, a son maybe more precious. However, requiring for a child is not popular for people in Thailand. Well, it is also the content for the followers to ask. If the requirement is granted, people will become more faithful in Guanyin.

“It is one of my friends who introduced me to come here. I came here to prey for a baby one year ago. I promised to Guanyin that if she can give us a baby, I will not eat beef and came to worship her on the same day when my baby is born every month. My wife knows about Guanyin too, so we came together to be here to prey to the Guanyin. Now I came to the temple every month at the day of my baby is born. If I am busy at that day, I will come another day, but I must come here once every month. Now the most important thing is the health. We come here to prey to health and happiness now.”

Good health is the general requirement for the followers. It is not serious for the people to ask when there are no problems of their health. However, when they face the major health problems, they will be much concerned about the special treatment, and try their best to worship Guanyin with the purpose of recovering from the sickness. Something always happens magically in their stories which show the superpower of Guanyin and meaning of the belief.

“I was seriously sick once. When I went to a hospital, the doctor cannot tell me what was wrong with me. I thought it is cancer, and the doctor told me that you need to take medicine your whole life, otherwise your life will be in danger. At the first day, I saw a book which is about Guanyin at the temple. In the book, there is a story about one person who is a Taiwanese or Hongkong people, she was very sick too, and she went to chant “Namo dashi”, after thousands of times chatting, she got much better. I think it attracts me much. So I pray to Guanyin

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16 Personal interview (2013, January 23) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
and to chant the sutras every day to ask for the recovery. Day by day, I do not feel pain and the tumour which is near my neck disappeared too. I do not take medicines anymore.”

Why does Guanyin have power? The abbot of Wat Mangkorn explains that because of her long time devotion and great compassion.

“Guanyin has been living in the world for ten thousand years; the merit power of her is greatly strong. As I said before, she will grant the one who requires a child. This will satisfy people’s spirit, and it must be true. This is the power of Guanyin, this is the compassion of Guanyin to everyone and to save all the sentient beings.”

4.2.3 Protector for success

“It is also indicative of a decline of belief in merit and karma to explain an individual’s position at the apex of the Thai social hierarchy and his concomitant right to rule. This is drawn from a fundamental paradox in Theravada Buddhist cosmology: the notion that as an individual progress closer to achieving nirvana, or non-existence, he or she is reborn into a better samsaric existence” (Vong, 2010, p.1).

There are some requirements for success in school, work, business, and others, and the prosperity and wealth are the general goals. They say that “I have ever asked for something from Guanyin, such as for the good work and happiness.” “I believe in her and my parents do too. I worship Guanyin statues at all temples. I have prayed to Guanyin for money and good luck.”

Business success is the important thing for Thai-Chinese in the commercial world. On 20 December, 2014, I met a family at the Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road, there was a couple in their 40s and their daughter and son. They offered flowers and candles to the deities which were present around the Guanyin statues in the Hall to show their respect. After they

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17 Personal interview (2014, October 19) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
18 Personal interview (2012, December 2) with the valuable Renchao at Wat Mangkorn.
19 Personal interview (2012, December 28) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
20 Personal interview (2013, January 11) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
finished paying the respect to the deities, I went to talk to them. They were excited when they heard that I wanted to talk about Guanyin belief to them, especially the mother. She told me that Guanyin was very helpful in her family; all of the members of her family were followers of Guanyin. Her family owns more than 100 Guanyin statues. She said that her son has become a doctor and her daughter was a student with a business administration major at Assumption University and will graduate next year. She said to me that she feels so comfortable and confident now, much better than twenty years ago. At that time, she and her husband were facing many difficulties in their business. One night, Guanyin came to her in a dream and told her that she should go into business involving insurances with Bangkok Bank. Guanyin was standing on a mountain in her dream, and she was so beautiful with a circle of light around her head. She said she had never seen any images before and even later. That was so attractive and was like a miracle for her. After she asked Guanyin, she talked to her husband and they decided to change their business from clothing to establishing an insurance company. After that, her business went well and her family’s economic situation improved. At the same time, all members of her family became pious followers of Guanyin. Both her children wear amulets with Guanyin images since then. She believed that Guanyin has become the protector of her family and will be their protector for their whole lives in the future.

This family is an example of Thai-Chinese middle-class families who make up the majority of the population of the metropolises with the booming of the economy of Thailand in the past thirty years. Vorng points out, “the middle class status confers a degree of material comfort and security” (Vorng, 2010). The competition of business in the commercial world enhances the important of the prosperity and wealth for keeping the status in society. People are seeking the success for their good future, security and prosperity.
“The emergence of “new”, primarily urban middle class groups in Asia and across the rest of the world is another epiphenomenon of the forces of globalization. These newly affluent, primarily urban, middle class groups, much like the middle classes in Thailand, are frequently linked to lifestyles of consumption, from which scholars argue they derive much of their identity” (Vorng, 2010).

Vorng calls it “samsaric salvation” which means the middle-class of Thailand are not striving for the achievement of nirvanic non-existence which is the traditional orientation of religiosity of Buddhism, “rather, a more enjoyable samsaric existence of attachment to worldly pleasures, power and influence” (Vorng, 2010). The success and happiness in this life, both spirituality and material, is the goal, we cannot escape the present, but must try to enjoy this life.

4.3 Comparison and integration

4.3.1 The similarities

The belief and practice of Guanyin are similar with the belief of Thai Buddhism and some other beliefs in the aspect of merit making. Guanyin is considered as a bodhisattva and Holahn explains that bodhisattva has accumulated “huge amount of merit necessary for him to become a Buddha,” there are ten ways for making merits generally: “giving or generosity, moral conduct or virtue, meditation, respect or reverence, service in helping others, transference of merit, rejoicing in other’s merit, listening to Dhamma, teaching Dhamma and correcting one’s views” (Holahn, 2013, p.96). Thai Buddhism believes that the Buddha is the founder of Buddhism; he is a human being, but not a god. On the other hand, in practice, people believe that the Buddha possesses superpower and worshipping the Buddha makes merit which will return back in the future. Making merit is an important aspect of Guanyin belief, and most of the followers in Thailand are Buddhists. It is a way for the followers to ascend through good deeds and it is also a way to contribute to the society. The interviewee tells me that there are not many differences between merit making in Guanyin belief and Thai Theravada Buddhism:
“It is the same to make merit at any temple, both in Chinese temples and Thai temples. Making merit in Chinese is ‘施舍’, which means giving, and it depends on the heart of the person. There are no differences on doing good things to make merit on the quantity. But there are differences in the heart of intention and purpose.”

For the followers, Guanyin is the one who embodies perfection with great compassion and power. She is the one who can respond to all the requirements of the followers, believing in Guanyin and following the rules will gain merit for this life and the next.

“Making merit in Guanyin belief depends on the heart of the individuals. Gin Je and following the five disciples are required; at least one vegetarian meal one day is welcomed. Try to do good things in daily life. For instance, giving spaces for others on a bus, guiding people to cross roads, giving food and water to cats or dogs, working hard, not refraining from quarreling with others, and so on. Recite the Namo Guan Shi Yin Pusa and Namo Amitofo every day. Those will bring the metta (compassion) and merit in this life and next.”

This interviewee is a second generation Thai-Chinese, and her parents came from Teochew, China. She lives at Chinatown and can speak Teochew dialect well, but cannot speak Mandarin. She comes to Guanyin Hall at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital and other religious centers to chant Buddhist sutras regularly. Considering her explanation, I found that she had practiced the basic disciplines and had fulfilled goals in daily life. The belief and practice of Guanyin are meaningful for her to gain merit. He tried to explain to me what merit was, and asked me what good deeds I had done? Finally she told me that all the good deeds would make merit.

The practice and belief of Guanyin and Thai Buddhism both play the role in people’s daily lives. Guanyin halls and shrines in Bangkok have become important religious places for followers to make merit. Thian Fha Foundation Hospital is located at the entrance of Yaowarat

21 Personal interview (2015, January 22) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
22 Personal interview (2015, January 28), at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
road, where it is crowded with cars and very noisy from early morning to late night. However, inside of the Guanyin Hall, it is relatively quiet and full of spirituality. Inside of the hall, there is only a big Guanyin statue which is covered with gold color and stands in the middle, and there are several pictures of Guanyin on the walls around the hall. Guanyin Hall at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital provides people with a place to practice their religious activities. People come into the Hall to pray to Guanyin after they finish their works or when they pass by, some come here from far away with the purpose of worshipping Guanyin. Some come here once or twice in a week regularly, some come here occasionally, and all the followers believe that they will gain spirituality, happiness and merit here.

There were many people consisting of the young and the old came to worship Guanyin in the hall at the afternoon on 22 January, 2015. Some of them came to pray and meditate. There were three ladies sitting on the floor and doing meditation. A man who looked around 60 years old was sitting in the hall and chanting the sutra with a small book in his hands. One man who was sitting on the chair outside of the hall told me why he came here:

"I am happy to be here to see people coming to worship Guanyin, all the families, the adults and the children, all of them came here with a peaceful face and express their piety to Guanyin, and I can gain happiness and peace from this atmosphere. This is the merit for me to gain." 23

4.3.2 The differences

There are many similarities between Guanyin and Thai Buddhism in merit making, and there are some differences as well. In traditional Thai Buddhism, monks are seemed the intermediates between the sacred world and the secular world. People gain merit from giving food and helps to monks who seems the intermediate between the sacred world and the secular

23 Personal interview (2015, January 28) at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital.
world, especially in the family. When a son becomes a monk, the whole family members can gain merit from this ordination, especially for the mom.

The belief in Guanyin is different, the followers can gain compassion, kindness, and help from their piety and good deeds, and there are no monks or nuns in Guanyin shrines or temples usually in Thailand. In Guanyin Buddhist Hall Chockchai, there are several nuns living in the temple. They are dedicated to helping others and the followers, the nuns are more like the assistants to arrange activities for the followers to engaged to Guanyin and make merit from themselves through their companion and kindness to help others individually. From the theory of Mahayana Buddhism, all the beings possess the seeds inside to become a Buddha, so making merit is a way to wake themselves with the help from bodhisattvas. This is an important reason to explain the phenomenon as Basham observes that “Thai-Chinese more likely to give to charity than the monks” (Basham, 2001, p.112).

Guanyin is considered as a bodhisattva and as a goddess. Guanyin owns two features of Buddhism and folk religion. According to traditional understanding, Buddhism and the belief in gods are different. Thai Buddhism teaches people to be good men; however, the belief in god will give people protection and help in the worshipping of god. The belief of god is a belief of exchange which will focus on the individuals’ benefit and salvation, but Buddhism brings the morality in the society and influences people’s spiritual lives.

Once I have met an old lady, who was the second generation of Hainanese immigrants. She told me that she had been many places to worship Guanyin, and she had felt comfortable and could always get help from Guanyin for certain little things. She believed that it was because her piety to Guanyin that she had gained help from Guanyin.
‘I lose things often. When it happens, I will ask for help from Guanyin, and Guanyin will help me find them. However, I am not sure about others. The requirements are different for each people. And I am not sure if it has been granted to others. However, I feel that it will grant every time. I do not have anything else to ask for, but for the things disappear. And I can find it each time. Sometimes I forget where the things I have kept, then I will ask Guanyin for help. She will help me to find them every time. There was one time when I was doing Gin Je in the south of Thailand, and my ring disappeared, I could not find it, and I thought I had lost it. I went back to the hotel, and looked for it, but I did not find it. Then I went to the bus, but I could not find it around where I was sitting. I really thought I had lost it. However, I found it in my bag after several days. There have been several times like this. When I cannot find my belongings, I will pray to Guanyin for help and I can get it back every time. This may be different for the belief from other people. I have never asked for good luck, money, health and other things, because I do not know about that much, so I never ask for those.”

The belief of Guanyin is more like the individual beliefs which are diverse and much depends on the followers themselves. Guanyin presents different pictures into different people, that is what that the interpretation of Guanyin are more individual to the followers and non-followers.

Master Liang who is a master of Fengshui or geomantic omen came from Malaysia, married a Thai wife, and has lived in Thailand for many years. He claims that Thai people believe in different deities and consider that different deities possess different kinds of powers, but for his understanding, their powers are quite similar, and the important thing is the belief of people. For example, in the stories of Three Kingdoms, there are three leaders Guan Yu, Cao Cao, and Liu Bei. They had been objects of worshipping among Chinese people. Master Liang does not worship Liu Bei who is loved for his virtues characters, but he chooses to worship Cao Cao instead; he views Cao Cao as a leader with wisdom, great skill and strategy. During our conservation, I saw a wooden Guan Yu statue in his house. He told me that it is a gift from his friend and he preferred to view it as a work of art. But he told me that if Guan Yu’s power could

24 Personal interview (2012, December 2) on the bus to a pilgrimage for the opening ceremony of a Guanyin statue.
not bring at least ten customers to his wife’s salon every day in the first six months, he would sell it out. The case of Master Liang represents, this is a general personal form of belief in the individual lives of the Chinese people. But the belief of Guanyin is more than personal beliefs, the power of Guanyin can be viewed in many aspects, and the meaning of belief in Guanyin is much broader.

Sometimes Guanyin is even welcomed accepted as a powerful guardian for the fortune tellers. On August 11, 2013, I met a fortune teller at Silom road in Bangkok. (See Appendix 1.14) He sat beside the road, and there was a Guanyin image in front of him along with some cards and a lit candle. He told me that the Guanyin image was originally from a temple in Bangkok. In his eyes, Guanyin was something like a goddess who possesses more love than the Buddha. She can protect people from bad luck. Guanyin was the goddess with supernatural power. He told me that many people come to him and asked about their future in the area of marriage, jobs, relationship, health, and win the lottery.

4.4.3 The integration

The belief and practice of Guanyin have integrated with Thai Buddhism and other folk religious beliefs in Thailand in many aspects, such as the co-existence, rituals, chanting, meditation, gathering, and pilgrimages.

Guanyin Ancient Shrine at Chinatown is a very old Chinese shrine. It is next to the Paisai road, and opposite the Association of Fujian. It is a Chinese temple styled building with only one story. Inside, there are a hall and a small room for keeping the sutras. The main deity in the hall is Guanyin, and many different style Guanyin statues are kept on a shelf in the middle of the hall. There are some other deities in the hall. The Buddha statue is on the left side, the Nazha and
Monkey Sun Wukong are on the right side. And in the middle of the left side there is a Thai spirit house for Chao Pho and Chao Mae. Outside of the hall, there are two shrines, one is for the sky and the other is for a Thai lady who is considered as a deity of future. In this shrine, there are many deities from Thai Buddhism, Chinese religions, and other Thai folk beliefs, all of them co-existence together without any problems.

On Wednesday evenings from 5 pm to 7 pm, there is a Buddhist gathering for chanting Buddhist scriptures at this shrine. In the evening of January 28, 2015, there were 34 persons who came to the hall, of whom 7 are male, and almost all were above 50 years. In addition, there were three persons sitting on the right side for playing Chinese traditional musical instruments. Around ten of them were sitting on the floor with the sutra on the shelf in front of them, and the others were sitting on the chairs at the back. This time, we chanted the “Sutra of Thousand Names of Buddha in the Modern Time”, which includes one thousand names of Buddha. The chanting started from the people who were standing in the front around a table, including three males in the middle and three on the both sides. Of the three individuals in the middle, one was holding an iron bar for beating the iron bowl and one was holding a stick for beating the wood fish. We chanted the names one by one by following their guidelines with the music.

In Chinese sutra, there are traditional Chinese characters with transliteration on the right side, the pronunciation of the Chinese words are not transliterated in Mandarin, but in the dialects of Teochew, Fujian, and Guangdong. Most people can only read the Thai characters, not the Chinese. Each section included one hundred names of Buddha, and the chanting was divided into two styles, and there was a short time break after one section. After chanting the one thousand names of Buddha, people stood up and walked around the hall for three times,
meanwhile, all the people prayed to the other shrines of deities in the hall. Finally, all of the people bowed down to pray to the center of the hall for three times.

I met one old lady who lives nearby and often joins the gathering. When reciting, she always holds a scripture and reminds me to hold the books too. She said it would help me make merit if I hold the book all the time when I recite it. She thought that chanting sutra would make merit which could be saved and shared with her relatives and other people, and most importantly she felt happy when she was chanting. “Now I am still alive, but I do not know we if will see each other again or not. But I want to build merit for myself and my brothers and sisters, even for all my relatives and others. I feel good when I chant and I will also feel comfortable after I pass away.”

In the religious activities, there is no clear borderline between the differences of Guanyin as a bodhisattva, as a goddess or others. Guanyin has become the bridge which brings the followers together and helps them cross the gaps of religious beliefs. It gives them the sense of religiosity and helps them become pious believers and gain deep religious experiences.

Once I have visited a Tiandao Penglai Tan which is a Shantang (Charitable foundation) and located at Pechburi road. The purpose of Shantang is to provide spaces to members for religious activities, and the members of Shantang give support back. People come here to practice meditation, to celebrate the religious festivals, and to make merit. The members of Shantang are those who usually have been enrolled for a long time. It is like a private club for the members to enjoy themselves with their own faiths. It is an open community and welcomes others with the same purpose to join them. Many people were taking dinner there when we

25 Personal interview (2013, January 23) at Ancient Guanyin Temple.
arrived. All the food is vegetarian and free of charge. They were friendly and most of them knew each other well and many of them have been going there for a long time and often. People came here to pay their respect to the gods’ images. There were Guanyin, Sun Wukong, Buddha, god of wealth and little Guanyu statues there. Sun Wukong stood in the middle; the thousand-hand Guanyin at the left side, the right side was seated a Buddha statue of Mahayana style. Several people had costumed themselves to be Guanyin and Sun Wukong, and they would play their roles in the ceremony. After reciting for about one hour, people came down from upstairs and followed the people who had dressed as Guanyin (See Appendix 1.15). People followed her to show their respect to the altar first, and then walked in line and recited again around the hall for about five times. Then “Guanyin” would take a seat in the middle of the hall, all the people came to offer her lotus flowers. “Guanyin” would give them her wishes and print the stamp on their head with a big round stamp, after that, “Guanyin” would stand up to sprinkle water on all the followers. People are piously there to receive the blessing. After a short break, people walk around the hall again following “Guanyin” for several rounds, then “Guanyin” came to the seat again. This time, there was a lit candle in her hands. She held the candle and circled it above the people’s heads bestowing upon them luck and goodness. Some people then went to get blessed from the Sun Wukong and some other gods. However, Guanyin was by far the most popular.

Paying pilgrimages to Guanyin temples or Guanyin statues in China or in other provinces of Thailand is a way to make merit. On December 2, 2012, an opening ceremony was organized for a newly built Guanyin statue in a Guan Yu shrine in Suphan Buri province (See Appendix 1.7). At 8 O’clock in the morning, I took a trip with a group consisted of more than 100 Guanyin followers from Bangkok to Suphan Buri province. We met in front of a shop in Chinatown and went to Guan Yu shrine together in three buses. Most of the people in the group were women
with their friends and families. After one hour driving, we arrived at a Guan Yu shrine which was next to a road. There were many people there already; there were many buses on one side of the road. Most of them were wearing the white robes. The Guanyin statue stood in front of the temple. It was made from white marble in China and transported to Thailand. A vegetarian lunch was served and many people were waiting in line to take the food. Many people were donating money at a reception on one side of the yard, and the speaker kept announcing who had donated and how much to today’s events and to the temple. Seven Buddhist monks from a Chinese temple called Wat Mangkorn in Bangkok were sitting next to the Guanyin statue. The traditional opening ceremony started before noon, and all the people crowded to participate in the ceremony with their piety to Guanyin. People walked around Guanyin statue and worshiped her, lit incense, and gave flowers. One aged lady brought a wood thousand-hand Guanyin statue there and asked the monks to make a simple opening ceremony. After the ceremony and lunch, people went back to Bangkok with happiness. Events like this become a kind of local Thai social activity, and people enjoyed this process as well.

Abstain from meat are the requirement for believing Guanyin, especially beef. During the festival of Guanyin, many activities will be organized for celebrations on certain days, such as the Nine Emperor Gods Festival, people gather together at Chinatown in Bangkok for the opening of the ceremony, lifting up Guanyin status and parading in Chinatown for people to worship. Eating vegetarian food will continue for nine days, many people wear white clothes and eat vegetarian for cleansing their bodies and spirit. Now it seems becomes a fashion trend for people in the urban societies.
All the events and activities are the phenomenon showing the integration of the belief and practice of Guanyin with Thai Buddhism, Thai folk beliefs in the urban society, where the middle-class Thai-Chinese are the majority.
CHAPTER V

MERIT MAKING, MORALITY AND SALVATION

Merit making is meaningful for the believers to improve one’s spiritual situation in this life and the next and to achieve the quality of virtue. The general principle in the process of merit making can be summarized as the belief and practice of Guanyin with the piety and the moral behavior for their actions. The belief of Guanyin is also the way for the followers to gain the experiences, power, spirituality and salvation in this world and beyond.

5.1 Merit making for all

5.1.1 The meaning of merit making

The meaning of merit making is the crucial thing for the believers, which is the most important aspect of the theory of phenomenological studies on the religious phenomenon. Keyes says that there are two fundamental meanings:

“There are two meanings that are fundamental and are understood in much the same way by Buddhists everywhere. First, merit is seen as a form of spiritual insurance, an investment made with the expectation that in the future—and probably in a future existence—one will enjoy a relatively prolonged state without suffering....In its second fundamental meaning, merit is also valued for the quality of virtue that a person acquires in the eyes of others through his or her acts of merit-making” (Keyes, 1983, p. 267).

The first meaning is that merit is something like an investment that returns to the one who has made it in this life and the next. The followers give the understanding that the way that gains merit decides the destination after their death: heaven or hell.

“The merit gained from the temple decides where the people will go: heaven or hell. If the goodness is much more than the badness in one’s life, one will go to heaven. If not, one will go to hell. Therefore, doing good thing at all times is the
best way to make merit, which will bring happiness and good luck in this life and will bring goodness for next life."  

Keyes explains that kammic theory gives the theory to the explanation that "kammic theory not only explains those physical and social differences among humans that are apparent at birth (or that can be deduced to have existed from birth), but it also is used to explain conditions which emerge during the course of a lifetime" (Keyes, 1983, p.264).

Buddhists believe that one’s birth depends on what has the person’s deeds were in his or her previous life, which is something beyond their capability to control. We usually call it as “fate”, the result of one’s actions in the previous life. One can do nothing to change it. However, kamma is different from fate. Fate cannot be changed, although, there are chances for changing the present life by making merit. In the present and the future situation, one has a choice to act in either a positive or negative way. Here is an example that sums up merit.

"Merit can be kept for this life and the next life. This life is determined by actions performed in the previous life; however, there were some ways to change it a little bit in this life. It is like a person who breaks the law and is sent to prison for several years. When he comes out from prison with the intention to be a good person, he can be seen as an ordinary person again and he earns his rights again."  

The second meaning of the merit making is the virtue or morality. Keyes says, “It is not the state of mind that is significant, although this may also be present, but the social recognition of being a person of virtue” (Keyes, 1983, p.268). He says that there are at least two levels. The first virtue may be for “its own reward”, and the second may “not only be one who radiates virtue in this narrow sense, but may also be a person who has enhanced efficacy in social action” (Keyes, 1983, p.268). Merit can be shared with others and the transference of merit will benefit society. The idea of merit – merit transference is important in popular Buddhism and the belief in

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26 Personal interview (2015, January 28) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
27 Personal interview (2015, January 22) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
Guanyin. The meaning of merit making is not for individuals alone but also for families, friends, and society. Gombrich says, “a sociologist might add that, although the Buddhist doctrine of karma is purely individualistic, merit-transference can make merit appear as the common property of a social group, so that patti (preferring merit to others) is functional for kinship solidarity” (Gombrich, 1971, p.219).

The tradition of Mahayana Buddhism and the Bodhisattva ideal emphasize the merit transference as a means in order to help all the suffering beings to gain their salvations. This meaning corresponds with the belief that Guanyin is a bodhisattva for the salvation of all human beings and reaches the final goal of religious belief.

5.1.2 Merit and morality

“Do well, receive well; do bad, receive evil”, is the basic understanding of merit making. Good deeds and bad deeds lead to opposite outcomes in this life. One of the meanings of merit making as stated before is the virtue or morality. The further relationship as the following, if the good deeds surpass the bad deeds, then the result of their lives will be better. If not, the result will be worst. Therefore, the morality is required for merit making in daily lives.

Keyes says that merit making in the belief in Guanyin marks “the social recognition of being a person of virtue” (Keyes, 1983, p.268). The followers of Guanyin show their purposes for making merit which includes safety, health, prosperity and success in this life and good reflection in next life both for themselves and others. The general principle in the process of merit making can be summarized as the belief and practice of Guanyin with the piety and moral behavior for their actions. Believing Guanyin is the spiritual aspiration which guides the actions of her followers. Guanyin as a bodhisattva gives a very good example for the followers gain the
spiritual life. It is explained that “Bodhisattvas are beings who are dedicated to the universal
awaking, or enlightenment, of everyone. They exist as guides and providers of succor to
suffering beings, and offer everyone an approach to meaningful spiritual life” (Leighton, 2003,
p.25).

Guanyin possesses the power to help people to get out of their sufferings in these lives, as
I have explained in the former chapter. Guanyin provides a way of satisfaction as the helper of
problems and the protector on the way of success for the inner happiness. Moreover, Guanyin
provides a way of salvation to assure the happiness in these lives as well as the next lives through
the practice of making merit through morality in their daily lives.

In my interviews, most of the interviewees mentioned merit making. Most of them
emphasize that good heart and good deed are the most importance things in merit making. The
belief of Guanyin and the belief of Thai Buddhism are similar on the field of merit making. Both
of them require good deeds or moral behaviors basing on the theory of Buddhism.

5.1.3 Merit and charity

For the individual, donation or charity is a way of making merit. Yongteng Ma is a
successful businessman in Bangkok and one of the contributors of the Guanyin statue at a temple
next to the Kwai Bridge at Kanchanaburi province. There was a chance for the author to
interview him when a TV produced a documentary for him. He stated that the donation to build a
Guanyin statue was a good thing to do and made merit. However, he was not willing to pay the
intermediate people who introduced him to this program any fees, and that person was very
angry with his stinginess. According to Ma, he considered it as a business action which could
bring him business opportunities, so that he told the intermediate people that he would like to
pay him when this documentary brought benefits. Ma is a businessman and making benefit is his goal when dealing with business. However, donating to construct a Guanyin statue is not the same as doing business. It is a belief which follows the spiritual principles, but not the business rules.

The morality in making merit is diverse, and it is not just for the individuals, but also for the collective. Most of the Chinese communities in Thailand are established in the form of charities, especially the communities organized in the name of religions, such as Poh Teck Tung Foundation which is the biggest charity in Thailand, Ming Buddhist Foundation Association which has 54 branches all around Thailand and Thian Fha Foundation Hospital which is a famous hospital with a large number of council members who are all the wealthy businessmen. Guanyin belief and practice in religious activities often go with the social organizations and social charities to society.

Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road is a relief center and a foundation. The founder Ven. Waraporn Lertsarangsi founded the Sawang Guanyin Thammasathan Foundation and participated in many social activities. For instance, she founded the Health Development Club to provide health service, the Wisdom with Virtue School Project to train children to become good citizens, and the Novice Ordination and Dharma Cultivation Summer Camp for children to train to be self-disciplined, the language training school to teach languages free of charge. In the temple, there is a large yard for people to gather and work together for social service. For example, during the period of a big flood in 2010, there were many cars and boats in the yard, and some Bhikkhuni and lay women were working together to package food and water for the people who were suffering from the flood. They prepared 5,000 relief packages every day.
5.2 Morality appeals

5.2.1 Social requirements

In the modern times, capitalism and consumerism drive the desire of the people toward the wealth and material enjoyment which draws them away from the temples and attract them to shopping malls. As Sulak Sivaraksa claims, Thai culture and beliefs are facing the challenge of being replaced by the western consumerism:

"A consumer culture bringing Coca-Cola, fast food and blue jeans has replaced out local Siamese ways of life. The great department stores and shopping complexes have now replaced our wat which used to be our schools, museums, art galleries, recreation centres and culture centres as well as our hospitals and spiritual theatres" (Sivaraksa, 2002, pp.37-38).

Kirsten Endres remarks, "Popular religious beliefs and practices generally seem to display a more accommodating attitude towards the market than institutionalized scriptural religions or official state cults" (Endres, 2011, p.174). This is not only a phenomenon of the Thai culture, but also of the Chinese culture and beliefs in Thailand. Chinese in Thailand have been doing business for a long time and most of them are involved in the field of commerce. They are easier to engage in the thriving consumerism. As Endres says, people does not present only with food offerings, "but also with votive paper money, clothes, houses, and modern luxury consumer items such as televisions sets, mobile phones, motorbikes and cars" (Endres, 2011, p.174). In the modern time, the ritual practice has been "flexible enough to be adapted to the symbolization of capitalist relations" (Taylor, 2003, p.85).

Many scholars consider that the thriving of the belief and practice of Guanyin in Thailand is the products of the development of capitalism. The new movements in Buddhism have emerged with the rise of the middle-class. Guanyin belief meets the spiritual needs of the middle-
class. At the same time, in facing the consumerism, people need some power to counterbalance. Guanyin provides the potential power to balance their spiritual life for the salvation of the commercial world. As Irene Stengs says:

“Essentially, there is no hierarchical order within this array of ‘option’. Each of them, morally speaking, is equally good and equally fit as a token of ‘being a good Buddhist’. The selections made by both movements and non-organized individuals therefore are highly eclectic. The apparent importance of expressing moral awareness by any form of degree of asceticism places moderate asceticism within the predominantly Sino-Thai middle class culture, which basically is constructed around ethics” (Stengs, 2002, p.8).

Kitiarso states the belief and practice of Guanyin fosters morality to the followers who can gain their needs from Guanyin as well. Satha-Anand also says that Guanyin belief “is linked more to moral than to political or economic aspects of life” and meets the requirement of the modern society. Buddhist movements in Thailand have developed much during the past several decades, such as Buddhadasa, Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke. She also believes that the middle-class represents “the main adherents of the three major religious movements” (Satha-Anand, 1990, pp.395-408). Satha-Anand explains what the reason is that the traditional and official Buddhism is incapable of meeting the modern needs, and the new emerging religious movements give their spiritual requirements.

“These changes have arisen in the conditions accompanying the intensive development activities of the last 30 years, a process that has given rise to the distinct formation of an urban middle class consisting basically of professional people, owners of small private businesses, and lower ranking civil servants. These middle class people are very different from the rural Thai villagers who had been the major followers of the traditional Thai Buddhism. The former are better educated, better off economically, and more exposed to the mass media; they are also the main adherents of the three major religious movements that will be covered in this article” (Satha-Anand, 1990, pp.396).

Jitnisa Roenjun and Mark Speece has done a research on how the belief of Guanyin influences their morality for the small business owners in Thailand, and finds that Guanyin
"seems to be an adaptation of traditional popular Buddhism to modern urban middle class life, rather than an attempt to purge Buddhism of so-called irrational popular elements, as in many of the movements" (Roenjun & Speece, 2011, p.68). Guanyin provides a moral inspiration for their behaviors on their business. They work more diligently, and give a reasonable price and keep a good relationship with customers. They are more responsible for and care more about the employees, and contribute more to society.

"Kuan Im fosters the application of Buddhist values in mentoring role in small business, both in terms of ethical interactions with customers, and importantly, a mentoring role for employees. The employees the, selves are women because these women shop owners believe women make the most diligent, most ethical employees. Teaching them about Kuan Im helps the business, helps improve ethics in Thai society, generates good karma, and creates more women who will help do the same: all a very virtuous circle" (Roenjun & Speece, 2011, p.77).

Guanyin belief focuses on the moral principle which fit the standard of modern morality. Taigen Dan Leighton summarizes the ten transcendent practices or perfections of the bodhisattva as generosity, ethical conduct, patience, effort, meditation, wisdom, skillful means, wow, powers, and knowledge (Leighton, 2003, p.25). Guanyin is famous for her great compassion, effort, skillful means, wow and powers, and all the features of Guanyin are considered to be very important capabilities for the commercial success as well in the modern society, especially in the business field.

5.2.2 Moral expectation

With the decline of the traditional Theravada Buddhism in modern times, the concept of merit becomes more concerned about the samsaric world. The salvation will happen in this life and the next. During this life, the certainty is that suffering always walks with us on the way from the birth to death. With the help of Guanyin who is full of compassion and power, suffering will be reduced, Guanyin will help her followers to solve all the difficulties and problems, and
help people to attain the nirvana in the next life or later. At the same time, the destiny of one person is determined by his form life according to Buddhism, that same as what is done this life will determine the next life. For rebirth in the next life, merit will play as “spiritual insurance.” That Tambiah discovers about the villagers in a community in northeastern Thailand can be applied to the belief and practice of Guanyin, “It is said that one’s fund of merit accumulated in this life will ensure a rebirth blessed with happiness, prosperity, and wealth” (Tambiah, 1968, p.49).

Making merit from Guanyin will help people to gain happiness and salvation in a certain way. This is a system of belief which plays important roles in the lives of people. It gives expectations for the future and a moral system for people to develop themselves in individually. Each person has the same chance to gain merit and to gain salvation through their own deeds. In modern times in the cities, with the development of the commercial society, the wealth becomes a symbol of success and the evidence of owning boon, so that requiring wealth and becoming successful in business is popular for the urban middle-class.

“(Guanyin) ‘wild-scale’ popularity among the urban Sino-Thai middle class is linked more to moral than to political or economic aspects of life as experienced by urban dwellers. By establishing some religious restrictions for its followers (observation of Buddhist basic precepts, strict vegetarianism and merit-making with monks), the cult provides moral and ethnic practices for achieving success in life and solving hardships and difficulties. Guanyin is well known for her compassion and kindness and is believed to help her flowerers to prosper in business” (Kittiarsa, 2005, p.480).

Stengs in other paper entitled with “The Certainty of Being Thai: The Strive for Thainess in Popular Thai Religiosity” claims that in reference to Buddhism for Thai urban middle class, the belief and practice of the religiosity help them to “obtain a sense of certainty and good citizenship” (Stengs, 2010, p.13). There is a close connection between being a good citizen and
being a pious Guanyin follower, which practices include the mediation, purification, pilgrimage and emphasis on vegetarianism. “In brief, their practices encompass virtually all elements of the modern lay religiosity” (Stengs, 2010, p.12).

5.2.3 Moral practice

The most important power is rooted in the heart of the followers and inspires moral actions. Guanyin followers pay their respects and show piety to Guanyin, and sometimes they demand something from Guanyin, such as good luck, health, wealth, and success. That is only the appearance. Most of the followers believe that the requests cannot be granted without the wholesome aspiration and actions. Their pious worship to Guanyin is considered and understood by themselves as a way of gaining merit and happiness. They gain their merit and happiness at that moment of their concentrating on Guanyin. Worship, meditation, recitation, purification, and donation are highly encouraged and are considered as elements in the process of gaining spiritual power. With the help of Guanyin, the followers gain their inner strength, for instance, confidence, morality, faithfulness, perfection, compassion, kindness, freedom and happiness in their secular lives. At the same time they gain the spiritual orientation toward salvation.

Thian Fha Foundation Hospital is a charity community which takes Guanyin as its main protective deity. It is founded and managed by Thai-Chinese in Bangkok. There is a big Guanyin statue in the central Hall which is believed to be crafted in Tang dynasty in Henan province of China. Thian Fha Foundation Hospital has contributed much to the society and ethnic Chinese during the past one hundred years. This hospital was mainly for treating the poor Chinese who lacked money to go to the hospital, and the medicine is free until today. Under the spirit of saving others, Thian Fha Foundation Hospital has gained much support from Thai-Chinese in
Thailand. In the year 2013, it received a total amount of donation of 150 million Bath from the society, and most of the donors were Thai-Chinese, especially the Thai-Chinese wealth businessmen. People come to worship Guanyin and donate the money to help others and follow the moral rules to be a good person to contribute the families and the society.

My argument is that the inspiration from the belief and practice of Guanyin plays an important role in the morality of the actions of lives individually and collectively for the followers, especially for the middle-class in urban society. Ganjanapan gives a very good conclusion as following:

"Chao Mae Kuan Im is more oriented towards the reproduction of morality in a religious sense, given the belief in the goddess is rooted in the bodhisattva concepts of Mahayana Buddhism. In this sense, the cult also incorporates the religious ethos and morality of Mahayana Buddhism, which enhances its position in the eyes of the urban middle class in comparison with the traditional spirit cults" (Ganjanapan, 2003, p.131).

5.3 Power, spirituality, and salvation

5.3.1 Power

The phenomenological approach religious studies focuses on the "meaning of the experience of the community of the believers." The meaning needs to be understood from experience. "Reconstruction" is the method to understand the meaning of the experience. The reality of the ultimate of the human being should be the direction for the religious followers to seek through the reconstruction understanding. Waardenburg says, "the religious experience which is understood reveals itself as the ultimate basis of understanding itself" (Waardenburg, 1978, p.228). To be revelation is the direction of the religious experience, such as the celebration,
purification, sacrifice, sacraments and other religious activities. Van der Leeuw uses the word “power” to explain how these religious experiences relate to the revelation:

“Religion implies that man does not simply accept the life that is given to him. In life he seeks power...to gain for it some deeper and wider meaning. In this way, however, we find ourselves on the horizontal line: religion is the extension of life to its uttermost limit. The religious man desires richer, deeper, wider life: he desires power for himself. In other terms: in and about his own life man seeks something that is superior, whether he wishes merely to make use of this or worship it” (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p.679).

The power will help people to gain meaning and salvation. Human beings are limited to reach the ultimate meaningful life within the real physical world. They cannot hear the voice from the God directly, even if they follow the God’s indications and religious rituals sincerely. They cannot get answers from God. What can they do if they want to gain a deeper, wider meaningful life? They need the power to reach higher levels to sense or understand the God’s wishes. The power is not from another world, and God will never give anybody the power or help to understand God’s will, but the power turn to become from the religious believer themselves. The human being can strengthen their power through religious activities and understanding, such as the religious rituals, miracle stories, teachings and so on.

To achieve salvation is the ultimate goal of the religious experience, such as the celebration, purification, sacrifice, sacraments and other religious activities. Van der Leeuw uses the word “power” to explain how these religious experiences relate to the revelation. Ninian Smart uses the word “exchange” to explain the relationship between merit and the transaction: “First they receive moral teaching and guidance. Second they receive, by proximity, merit. So there is an exchange of visible goods (food, robes, perhaps land) for invisible ones, which help to
promote further happiness of lay people. Such an exchange is just one step removed from a sacramental transaction, where the visible becomes the vehicle of invisible” (Smart, 1996, p.104).

“People cannot buy their lives with money even they are very rich, and we pray for health and good lives. We know when we were born, but we will never know when we will die. So I want to build the merit and to keep it at somewhere. Then we will have the happiness...After chanting, I feel my heart becomes calm and I stop thinking too much. I pray in front of all the deities for all the good things during my life...I hope all my life is with happiness.” 28

Guanyin also has the power to foster morality of the followers. “Guanyin has the super power; she has the power which will help us to strengthen our heart to do good things. That is where the power is located. It comes from the belief.” 29 I once met a woman in Chinatown who was over 60 years old. She told me that the prosperity of social success of Thai-Chinese is good evidence that demonstrates the power of Guanyin, and she believes that this fact enhances and promotes the popularity of Guanyin belief among the Chinese and Thais in recent time.

There are many ways of gaining salvation, such as dreaming, miracles, incarnation, symbols, success, and so on. Ven. Shi Guansheng in Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road said Guanyin often talks to her in her dreams and she has the capability to communicate with Guanyin sometimes. Some people like to play the joss sticks to receive the guide from Guanyin.

“Today I ask for a house, now we are renting a room in Bangkok. I have come here many times; it is said that we need to wait for a while before I own my house. At the beginning, it is said that there was no house for us. Now it is getting better. I feel she can answer my pray when I am reading the lot. I can get the answer immediately after I ask her.” 30

28 Personal interview (2013, January 23) at Ancient Guanyin Temple.
29 Personal interview (2013, January 25) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
30 Personal interview (2012, January 25) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
The power of Guanyin belief can be explained by the idea of merit making. In Buddhism, merit is considered as the good result that reflects the good deeds in the past, and present deeds determine the production in the future. “All living beings stand in a hierarchy of varying ability to make actions effective and of varying degrees of freedom from suffering...This hierarchy depends on a composite quality call ‘merit’ (bun) or ‘virtue’ (khwaamdi)” (Chalermsripinyorat, 1999). Making merit can be seen as a way of gaining the power to reach a higher hierarchy. Their ways of acquiring merit can be interpreted as a process of gaining the power. Irene Stengs points out that the aim of both the individual and collective “beneficial effects” is for the positive power to gain the merit.

“Participation is believed to produce both individual and collective beneficial effects. As explained on the leaflet, the sessions are organized with the purpose of generating both positive ‘power’ or ‘emerge’ (phalang haeng kan athithan) for the general good and individual merit” (Stengs, 2010, p.12).

The power to gain merit will be seen in different forms of activities, and includes both the individual and collective ways, such as the particular places, sutras, rituals, images and statues of Guanyin, pilgrimage, and so on. One of my interviewees told me that Guanyin Hall at Thian Fha Foundation Hospital is more powerful than the others. According to him, the good management of the Hall and the origin of Guanyin statue are the reasons.

“I think that Guanyin here has more power than others. There are some reasons. Firstly, many Guanyin shrines or temples in other places are not managed well, people just establish one Guanyin status there, but no one really pay attention to it, but here the management is much better, it is clean, the pictures on the wall is colorful and beautiful, this make people feel more atmosphere; secondly, the status of Guanyin here is not the same as other places too, here it looks more natural, it is not the one decorated by the man; thirdly, this Guanyin status is come from China too. Many people come here to worship Guanyin. The majority of Bangkokian who believe in Guanyin comes here. There are some other Guanyin
temples in other different provinces. In Bangkok, other Guanyin temples are not good enough. I come here to worship Guanyin once one week.”

5.3.2 Spirituality

Guanyin plays an important role in the field of the spirituality, besides from the perspective of the pursued of social power. Guanyin is a powerful deity who vows to help all the beings to get rid of suffering. Her power has been described in the sutras, in the traditional narrative and has been experienced in the lives of the followers, including both the power of supernatural power and the power of her great compassion, diligence, tolerance and vows. I have collected many stories from the followers in Chapter IV, and many followers believe that Guanyin possesses her supernatural power to strengthen their wills, to heal their diseases, to protect them from suffering, and to enlighten their lives.

As to the explanation mentioned above, merit is not just only for next life, and it will also benefit this life. Next life is in the future, no one can see and prove it, and it is just a belief. However, this life is a process for all of us to go. In the modern commercial world, the desires for the existence and prosperity have become stronger. For most people, especially for the middle-class in cities, the salvation is more concerned about the material world in wealth which will give them status, power, and success.

“For a large number of similarly-minded middle-class individuals religiosity is oriented not towards traditional forms of merit-making for the sake of accumulating good karma, but towards prosperity cults, which are arguably more logically consistent with what is viewed to be the most significant basis of power and success in contemporary Thai society – namely wealth” (Vorng, 2010, p.16).

31 Personal interview (2013, January 25) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
The material world is limited. However, the life can be expected extended in the religious beliefs and activities, and the process of the searching for the spiritual life is significant for all the followers. This is going to be a meaningful world for the believers. It is the last world for human beings. However, the process will never reach the end. The meaning will never be absolutely understood and it will be kept as a secret for all people with the diversities of different degrees and contents. Van der Leeuw says, "the meaning is never understood, this last world is never spoken; always they remain superior, the ultimate meaning being a secret which reveals itself repeatedly, only nevertheless to remain eternally concealed" (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p.679).

The meaning for the Guanyin followers cannot be understood fully.

"From a Thai perspective, Kwan Im offers the possibility of personal spiritual self-improvement through the incorporation of a supportive spirit power accepted into a person's life – a very different approach to issues of suffering and aspiration to that provided by the conventional Theravada Buddhist tradition, and one which is much closer to the belief in a personal saviour found in many Christian Protestant traditions" (Hamilton, 2003).

5.3.3 Salvation

Guanyin belief is the way for the followers to gain the experiences and power to relate to salvation. The followers worship and pray to Guanyin, chant the scriptures and join the activities, they gain much experiences in the process of Guanyin belief, the experiences of compassion, love, comfort, satisfaction, merit making, spiritual ascendance, which will help them to reconstruct the understanding about Guanyin belief. At the same time, they gain the power to enhance their beliefs and guide them from salvation to enlightenment. Once I was chanting with many people in a Guanyin temple. One of them told me quietly that I should hold the scriptures all the time to gain merit and power. It reminds me that such activities are the way for the followers to get salvation.
Merit making is important to the believers in Thai society, and it is traditionally considered benefit the followers’ happiness and prosperity for this and next life; indeed, it is a process of salvation for the followers. As Tambiah states that making merit gives the ideological direction of the people:

“The value of merit-making...it is said that one’s fund of merit accumulated in this life will ensure a rebirth blessed with happiness, prosperity and wealth...While merit-making is thus given ideological direction interims of somehow immunizing the consequences of death and ensuring a prosperous rebirth” (Tambiah, 1970, p.53).

There is a very good example to explain the relationship between merit making and salvation. There was a ceremony for lay people to become disciples of Guanyin at Guanyin Hall at Chockchai 4 Road on December 2nd 2014. Master Guansheng, the founder and the head nun of the temple, delivered a speech after the rituals. In the speech, she explained why it can make merit through Guanyin worship, and why merit making can help people to escape from suffering in their daily lives and the future lives. She described what hell is like in details, and how terrible it is in hell, and how to get out of hell. She stated that becoming a follower of Guanyin was helpful. She gave paper certification to everyone and she explained that it was seemingly the new ID for the next life. This ID would help people to get out of hell and lead the way to rebirth or go to heaven. She took the relationship between police and army as an example to explain the importance of being a follower of Guanyin. She claimed that the responsibility of police was to arrest people who had broken the law, but they could not arrest the soldiers because the soldiers were more powerful than the police. There was an army court to judge and deal with the affairs of soldiers. Guanyin and the Buddha were more powerful than the Lord Yam King, who is in charge of hell. If those who got the new ID as followers of Guanyin, they could not be sentenced or sent to hell. They could be sent to heaven or to rebirth in the world again.
Vorng has done a field study at central Bangkok, including Central World and Wat Pathum nearby, and he argues that “skepticism concerning the place of traditional Buddhist beliefs in modern society is expressed in modes of popular religiosity amongst the Thai middle class.” She found that most middle-class are the follower of the new prosperity cults including Guanyin Belief. She holds that the middle-class individuals no longer pursue the traditional form of merit-making, but rather for power and success in wealth.

“For a large number of similarly-minded middle class individuals, religiosity is oriented not towards traditional forms of merit-making for the sake of accumulating good karma, but towards prosperity cults, which are arguably more logically consistent with what is viewed to be the most significant basis of power and success in contemporary Thai society—namely wealth” (Vorng, 2010, p.16).

Vorng considers that there has been a phenomenon which is “within the context of the wakening of institutionalized ‘state’ Buddhism and the resultant crisis of legitimacy experienced by the ruling elite,” and it gives the opportunities for the ‘prosperity cults’, such as Guanyin belief and others. “In addition, the prosperity cults comprise a further indication of declining belief in orthodox metaphysical concepts such as merit and karma.” They are “oriented not towards the achievement of nirvana, non-existence, but rather, a more enjoyable samsaric existence of attachment to worldly pleasures, power and influence” (Vorng, 2010, p.22). Vorng calls it “samsaric salvation.”

In terms of the complexity of the reasons and the phenomena of the religiosity in contemporary Thailand, I do not agree with the conclusion that people are not conserving the merit and karma as important contents in the religious activities. In my studies of Guanyin belief, I found that the followers of Guanyin do care about this samsaric world for wealth, health, and success; however, that does not necessarily contradict with the concept and practice of merit-making. There are many ways of making merit, and it benefits not only for the spiritual
orientation towards Nirvana or rebirth on their next lives, but also benefits this samsaric world in the forms of wealth, success and happiness. However, according to my observation, people realize that wealth alone cannot assure their happiness, and it cannot be transferred to their next lives; what is most important is the goodness and happiness of the heart. Material salvation cannot really save people’s souls, the only way to salvation for them is the combining of the samsaric salvation and the spiritual salvation, based on the popular saying that “tam dee tai dee, tam chai tai chuai” (Do good receive good, do bad receive evil). Comparing with the samsaric salvation and the three Buddhist movements in Thailand, Guanyin belief provides a middle way of salvation that is concerned with both this samsaric world as well as the orientation for the next lives or towards the ultimate salvation - Nirvana. Irene Stengs claims that “the popularization of ascetic practices also enables individual merit-making without the prerequisite of monk’ involvement. The high degree of idiosyncrasy characterizing lay religiosity is another aspect of this individuality” (Stengs, 2010).

“I feel it is stronger. During our contemporary time, our heart doesn’t fulfill enough. In our world, it is a broken world. People are not satisfying their lives. So believing in something will help them satisfy their heart. If we pray to San Chao, it is like that one wants to ask something from it. Believing Guanyin will help them more satisfy their lives. The world is separated. People become rich than what do they want more, and what is it for? What is the money should be used for? There is much money, but cannot spend it, to be die is sure.”32

Guanyin belief has been a trend for people searching for the individual salvation. The orientation of salvation is the pursuit of the ultimate goal of the life, to be a human being, to be a revealed guidance that helps the human being to be more divine. As the Master Renchao who is the abbot of Wat Phoman said that, “Buddhahood is corresponding to the human nature; mutual

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32 Personal interview (2013, January 25) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
understanding and attraction between Buddhahood and the human nature will gain the illumination of the Buddha.”

“Buddha should be in the heart. Only the heart has Buddha, Buddha will be in your heart. If Buddha is not in your heart, then Buddha is in the West. We should believe in Buddhahood with ourselves. Everybody possesses his personal Buddhahood, and it means Buddha is in the heart. The classical sutras have written that if the heart has Buddha, and then Buddha is in the heart. Do not abandon your personal Buddha to pray to Buddha along roads. This is not the right way to reach the goal. You should pursue your personal Buddhahood first and then pray for protection from Buddha. Buddhahood corresponds to human nature, mutual understanding and attraction between Buddhahood and the human nature gain the illumination of Buddha. If your heart does not have Buddha, not do the right things, but do the wrong things, bad things, then Buddha will not protect you.”

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33 Personal interview (2012, December 2) with the abbot Renchao at Wat Mangkorn.
CHAPTER VI

IDENTITY OF GUANYIN: RELIGION, GENDER, AND ETHNICITY

Guanyin worship in Thailand among the Thai-Chinese is important in that it connects them to Buddhist identity, Thai-Chinese identity and gender identity. This chapter will examine the multiple meanings and functions of Guanyin worship. It will show how Guanyin is considered as a bodhisattva in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, but crosses the boundaries between Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. Guanyin is accepted by both Thai-Chinese and Thais as a figure of Buddhism, and is considered to strengthen their Buddhist identity. Guanyin belief also is an important element of Thai-Chinese ethnicity. Guanyin’s female gender feature combines love, compassion, kindness, perfection, tolerance, and devotion. Her power provides a focus of worship for her female followers, many of whom are successful businesswomen. These reasons explain why Guanyin is popular in Thailand, and growing in popularity because of the challenges of ethnic and gender identity and the pressures of contemporary urban life.

6.1 The analysis of identity

The concept of identity is influenced by many elements and is increasingly more complex nowadays. Personal identity depends on the particular environment and situations. It can be changed in different contexts, and it is fluid and relative. It is associated with the process of negotiation. Therefore, there are many possibilities and features involved in the identification of personal identities:
"In other words, individuals have many statues and many possible identities, and it is an empirical question when and how ethnic identities become the most relevant ones. This fluidity and relativity of identity can sometimes be studies in interaction as negotiation of identity" (Ericsen, 2002, p.31).

Ericsen enhances the relationships between the groups, and he writes that “for ethnicity to come about, the groups must have a minimum of contact with each other, and they must entertain ideas of each other as being culturally different from themselves” (Ericsen, 2002, p.12). He considers that “the term ethnicity refers to relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive, and these groups may be ranked hierarchically within a society” (Ericsen, 2002, p.7).

Bao points out that “diasporic Chinese Thai have long confronted issues regarding identity formation and the processes of belonging, exclusion, self-assertion, and adaptation” (Bao, 2005, p.15). She continues to explain that it is a game in which people can gain their different identities in the complex society; it is beyond assimilation, double identity and classed ethnicity. It is not neutral, but it relates to power, economics and politics. She concludes that it is an ongoing process (Bao, 2005, pp.15-28).

"Cultural identity...is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But. like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Bao, 2005, p.93).

In the modern times, it is western ideals and values that significantly influence identity recognition. Kitiarsa considers that prosperous cults arise from the modernization and the commercialization of Thai Buddhism and it represents a “religio-cultural space where popular Buddhism has converged with the market economy, consumers’ practices and the quest for personal and cultural identities” (Kitiarsa, 2008, p.121).
“The quest for a new identity in religious terms of the spiritually-thirsty middle class is a symbolic struggle, showing the desire to differentiate themselves from the others. I agree with Jackson that they do reject some traditional ritualistic lay forms, not much because of its irrationality, but rather these rituals are ill-fitted with the middle class’s modern outlook. The emerging bourgeoisie scrambles to search for a place that helps define and affirm their ‘new identity’” (Chalermsripinyorat, 1999).

The identity is a cultural recognition, and it is also the symbol of the power which is the goal of the middle-class. Vorng believes that the increasing of the popularities of the cults is also showing the struggle for power between the middle-class and the elite. The belief in Guanyin and other new religious movements are “associated with the ongoing struggle for power between the establishment elite and the new middle class. Essentially, the latter has pushed for a degree of political participation commensurate with its growing economic significance” (Vorng, 2010). Vorng explains that “the tradition Buddhism has been used as an instrument of legitimation by the established Thai elite”, and the popularity of new interpretation and new beliefs like Guanyin belief is a reflection of the ongoing political struggle (Vorng, 2010, pp.10-14).

6.2 Buddhist identity

6.2.1 Thailand: a Buddhism predominated country

Thailand is labeled as a Buddhist country. The 2007 constitution of Thailand states that “the King is a Buddhist and upholder of religions.” Many religious movements, groups, trends, and activities have emerged in Thailand, but in contrast, Buddhism gets great support from the government. The Buddhist calendar is used as the national official calendar and Buddhist festivals are authorized as national festivals. The traditional way to pay respect to people, “wai”, is associated with the fact that Thailand is a Buddhist country. People are proud to be Buddhists, and Buddhism is generally considered a part of the national identity.
The Buddhist identity is important for all the Thais who consider Buddhism as one of the three symbols of the national identity (King, Religion and People). Religion here often stands for Buddhism, which is similarly viewed as the national religion in Thailand. Buddhism has been rooted in Thailand for a long time and is deeply integrated with the secular world. It “played a key role in the projects of world power and status accumulation from ancient times to the contemporary era” (Vorng, 2010).

“A succession of laws pertaining to sangha organization and administration were integral to the centralization of the sangha, the homogenization of Thai Buddhism, and the emergence of state Buddhism as an institutionalized instrument of the government. State Buddhism has two main features: control over sangha by the king or state, and protection and support of the sangha by the same parties” (Vorng, 2010).

Jackson points out that the relationship between Buddhism and secular life in Thailand attempts to “isolate, define and promote” the Thai identity as well. Buddhist identity becomes an important content of Thai identity:

“The intimate theoretical and ritualistic relationship between Buddhism and all aspects of secular life in Thailand has placed the religion at the centre of recent attempts to isolate, define and promote the features of a distinctive Thai identity (ekkalak thai)...However, all of these and other expressions of Thai identity are found on the assumed identity that to be Thai is to be Buddhist” (Reynolds, 2002, p.155).

Historically, Buddhism had a relative independence from the monarchy, but through continuing reforms lead by the monarchies, Buddhism has become an institutional system under the supervision of the monarchy. The Buddhist identity has been gradually integrated with Thai national identity. “Thais believe themselves to be born Buddhists, that the words Thai and Buddhist are synonymous” (Ishii, 1986, p.39). For another example, see Keyes (1989).

“In 1941, a Department of Religious Affairs (Krom Kansatsana) was created under the Ministry of Education to supervise all religions recognized by the state or all religions under royal patronage. It replaced the Krom Thammakan, which
had formerly superintended violation of the Buddhist precepts by monks (Sutthiwong 2001). In 2002, it was transferred to the newly created Ministry of Culture, while some of its functions relating to the administration of Buddhism were carved off for the equally new National Office of Buddhism. Religious organizations officially registered with the Department include Islam, Christianity (Catholic and Protestant as separate categories), Brahmanism, Hindu, and Sikh, as well as Buddhism. As for Buddhism, the Thai Sangha (Theravada) and two Mahayana sects ('Chinese'Chin Nikai and 'Vietnamese'Annam Nikai, though both are actually Chinese) are listed in the religious statistics of the government” (Kataoka, 2012, p.464).

The religious identity is one of the contents present in the Thai ID card. However, there are only five religions which are recognized officially and can be listed on the ID card, which includes Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Brahmanism, Hinduism, and Sikh. Other religions are even not officially recognized, such as Confucianism, and Taoism, and other folk religious beliefs.

Buddhism is considered as the national religion in Thailand and gets support from the Thai government in providing the funds to build new Buddhist temples and organize Buddhist events and ceremonies. They provide Buddhist education in school nationwide, encourage people to go to temples, and promote Buddhism in the world.

6.2.2 Thai-Chinese and Buddhism

Buddhism and Chinese original religions have been integrated historically. Keyes writes that the Chinese immigrants “could become Theravada Buddhist without having to abandon their own religious practices, including ancestor worship” (Keyes, 1987, p.133). It is not a problem for them to accept Buddhism, and Buddhism also welcomes the Chinese immigrants. Buddhism is practically the national religion in Thailand, and the majority of the Thai people are Buddhists. The Thai Buddhist tradition and culture influence the Chinese immigrants in many aspects. For
instance, acquiring merit has become an important purpose for Thai-Chinese to follow and practice their Buddhist beliefs. However, there are not many Thai-Chinese who want to be ordained as monks. Most of them stay in the temple for a short period of time and then return to lay life. They prefer to do some other lay practices instead of the ordination, such as praying to the Buddha and donating money to temples.

“Religious organizations officially registered with the Department include Islam, Christianity (Catholic and Protestant as separate categories), Brahmanism, Hindu, and Sikh, as well as Buddhism. As for Buddhism, the Thai Sangha (Theravada) and two Mahayana sects (“Chinese” Chin Nikai and “Vietnamese” Annam Nikai, though both are actually Chinese) are listed in the religious statistics of the government (Thailand, Krom Kansatsana, 1998)” (Kataoka, 2012, p.464).

Buddhist identity is their premier choice for Thai-Chinese if they do not belong to the four officially recognized religions. Confucianism, Taoism or other Chinese folk religions are not recognized as a formal religion by Thai government. Chinese shrines (San Chao) is under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior.

Those Thai-Chinese who consider themselves as Buddhists varies in degree of their piety of beliefs. There are many Thai-Chinese who claim to be Buddhists, but some of them do not even believe in and practice the basic ideals of Buddhism, such as the idea of rebirth and merit making. They are similar to atheists. There is a group of Thai-Chinese who were born in Thailand but was sent to study in China by their parents when they were very young. They came back to Thailand after the new China was established in 1949. Even though religion in general has no importance to them, but they would like to identify themselves as Buddhists.

“Laypeople are left out of the scope of the religious administration, and the minimum requirement for laypeople is simply to select one religion on their ID cards. In addition, such selfdeclaration of one’s religion does not require details of one’s affiliation or allegiance to any sect or denomination. In other words, the exact number of Theravada and Mahayana lay followers among Buddhists is not
known. It is also worth noting that Confucianism and Taoism are not listed among the officially recognized religions. The only choice offered by the state to the Chinese (with the exception of small numbers of Christians and Muslims) is Buddhism” (Kataoka, 2012, p.464).

I have found that many Thai-Chinese speak Chinese dialect well. They care about their identity as Thai Chinese. Preserving a good reputation as a Chinese is important. There are many dialect groups and associations in Chinese society, and there is a close network of connections within each group and association. In the context of Thailand, Thai-Chinese emphasize their Thai identity and Buddhist identity. For example, the Thai Young Chinese Chamber of Commerce has established 14 years ago, and it has more than three thousand members now. It has a good relationship with both the governments of Thailand and China, including the central and local governments. Many members of this association are the new immigrants who have come to Thailand after the opening of the reforms in China. They have been living in Thailand for no more than four decades, and some of them came to Thailand in the past several years. Most of them would say that they believe in Buddhism when they are asked about their beliefs, but how much they really believe in Buddhism is another matter.

6.2.3 Guanyin and Buddhist identity

Guanyin is a bodhisattva and plays an important role in Mahayana Buddhism, especially as a popular belief among Chinese people. Guanyin is considered as the most well-known and welcomed Buddhist figure in China and among the Chinese communities abroad, including those in Thailand. Almost all Chinese Buddhist temples in Thailand have shrines or statues of Guanyin. Guanyin is worshiped as a part of Chinese Buddhism; Guanyin is even worshiped as a single independent figure in some Thai temples, shrines, and people’s home. Guanyin is accepted by most Chinese in Thailand as a Buddhist figure. Sometimes she is considered as a goddess of
compassion. In the eyes of some Thais, Guanyin is different from the Buddha, and she resembles some other deities, such as the god of Earth. However, for her followers, there is no conflict in considering her both as a bodhisattva and as a goddess. Even though Guanyin is traditionally called “Chao Mae Guanyin,” a name was given by the Thais, Guanyin has always been called Guanyin Pusa (Bodhisattva) in Chinese.

“Guanyin is called Guanyin Pusa (Bodhisattva) in Chinese. However, now she is called Chao Mae Guanyin, which is called by the Thais, it shows that Thai people consider Guanyin as the same as other deities, such as Chao Pho Guan Yu. Chao in Thai means deity which is a low position in the system of belief. Actually, the Chinese would like to call her Guanyin Pusa. And now, maybe it is easier to call Chao Mae in Thai than Pusa in Chinese, so Guanyin is called Chao Mae Guanyin for both Thai and Chinese now.”

Some scholars even consider that Guanyin has become part of the new Buddhist movements in Thailand. Jitnisa Roenjun and Mark Speece state that Guanyin plays an important role in spiritual aspiration and a desire for a more moral life: “Kwan Im in Thailand is often discussed in terms of ‘spirit cults,’ as a form of popular Buddhism. However, her growing popularity is better understood as part of this modern urban reform Buddhism, rather than as a popular ‘spirit cult’” (Roenjun and Speece, 2011, p.69). Guanyin can be easily accepted for its Buddhist features which are a very good example of an illustration of the symbolism of Guanyin’s image:

“The halo-ed Guanyin is seated on a lotus holding a vase and a willow branch. While Shen Ts’ai is in devoted attendance, the girl Lung Nu stands, holding out the pearl. The halo is clearly a visual representation of her enlightenment and need not detain us. Far more complex is the lotus. This plant had a great religious significance throughout all the great civilization: Egyptian, Greek, Persian, Assyrian, Indian and Chinese. It is the Buddhist symbol par excellence. It symbolises purity, because it grows out of the mud but is not defiled, and perfection because its fruits were said to be ripe the moment the flower blossomed just as Buddha’s words of truth bear immediately the fruit of enlightenment. The

34 Personal interview (2015, January 22) at Tian Fha Foundation Hospital.
petals of the follower are seen as the spokes of the wheel of the law of perpetual cycles of existence along which all unenlightened sentient beings are destined to pass. In Avaloketa’s hands this latter meaning is referred to...The willow branch us similarly an emblem of beauty; girls were noted for their willow-like waists. ...The vase symbolizes harmony and in Kuan Yin’s hand is said to contain the Dew of Compassion” (Chamberlain, 1988, pp.72-73).

The Ancient Guanyin Temple is located at Phasai Road of Chinatown. It is said that it is more than one hundred years old. It is a single hall with one floor beside the Phasai road. There is a chanting assembly in the temple from 7 pm to 9 pm every Wednesday night. Guanyin followers who come from Bangkok or nearby provinces will come to chant here. The number is about 40 peoples, depending on the circumstances. Most of them are 40 up years old, few are old men. Most of them have been here for many years, some for more than 20 years already.

Religious pilgrimage is a good way for people to enhance their Buddhist identity. Organizes pilgrimage tours to religious sites, not only offer convenient ways to engage in religious activities, but also offer alternative modes of expressing their identity and establishing prestige.

6.3 Gender identity

6.3.1 Gender in Thai context

In the past decades, Thailand has a great change in economic and society, one of the important results is that middle-class became the mainstream of society. Most of them hold a university degree from famous universities, and even many of them have the chances to get an education abroad. They work for the big company or for their family’s business, and live in the accommodations located near the BTS sky trains with a modern fashion life style. Among the middle-class people, women have earned great freedom particularly from the family and economic environment. Besides, women have already played an important role in the cities,
especially in the economic field. Research from the 2011 Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) reveals that Thailand boasts the greatest percentage of women in senior management (45%). Now even in the political field, women can reach top position, as the premier minister Yingluck Shinawatra demonstrated. Some women need a new and modern belief to satisfy their needs in the modern society.

The middle-class women have gotten their positions in the economic field, however, there are still some other fields which cannot satisfy them. In the in the modern city, the pace of life is much faster than that in the countryside. There are many things should be concerned, and people face different problems, such as the success, career, marriage, health. The economic instance may be a significance condition for the material lives. However, people also need to seek for the spiritual enjoyment and requirement.

6.3.2 Gender and Buddhism

In Theravada Buddhism, women do not have the same equality as men in the religious achievement. Men are superior to women in the field of Buddhist belief, only male can be monks who have the capability to gain the power to attain the arahanthood. All the images of Buddha and monks in the temple are male; it is a male world. “Buddhism is an overwhelmingly male- cratered institution dominated by male power structures, and the feminine is frequently associated with the secular” (Falk, 2007, p.7). Besides, this kind of belief in Thai local deities is considered a kind of animism, and it is viewed as a low level and undeveloped belief compared to the institutional religions. It does not match the requirement of modern city life. Ekachai claims that “city temples are no longer the heart of the community. Monk’s traditional teachings, based on agrarian lifestyles, have not kept up with city realities. And monks have largely lost their status as role models” (Ekachai, 2001, p.189).
Scandals often tarnish the Buddhist reputation in Thailand, such as the corruption of the monks, wrongdoings of the monks, and especially the abuses from the close relationship between the monks and their female disciples. Consequently, some female Buddhists and their families are worried to enter the temples.

However, there is no problem for women to enjoy their religious activities in Guanyin temple and shrines. I have met a group of young women who come to the Guanyin Buddhist Hall Chochchai 4 on Saturday or some other arranged day. All of them have become disciples of different female monks. They come to meditate, learn to recite the sutras, enjoy meals, participate in the activities, and they help to clean, edit books, assist in arranging the events, to buy the daily needed products for their masters, and share their opinions on their beliefs and about their daily lives. Some of them come to the temple in the morning on Saturday or Sunday, and stay in the temple for the whole day. They usually go home after the evening meditation. Sometimes the event continues for a long time, and they go home very late. It seems that the temple becomes their paradise for them to gather and share their religious lives. The belief and practice of Guanyin can help women to gain the equality in the field of religious achievement.

6.3.3 Guanyin and Gender

The belief in Guanyin provides a platform for the equality for spiritual success. With the development of the modernity and the rise of the sense of equality between male and female, and women are searching for more equality in the religious order as well. Guanyin belief provides that platform for the equality for the success spiritually. “The mother Goddess is reclaiming not only mere quality, but her former supremacy. The parade is part of the Kuan Yin Goddess cult, which has recently become a gripping faith among the economically powerful middle-class. The Goddess, many believe, provides emotional protection against business uncertainties and
spiritual refuge in unfriendly society” (Ekachai, 2001, p.189). The urban middle-class women became the main devotee of Guanyin. “Most of the worshippers are women-men are either too busy with business affairs or too little concerned with the spiritual realm to take a direct and regular interest” (Coughlin, 2012, p.95).

Jeff Wilson has observed and studied the phenomenon of Guanyin worship in America. He claims that the first reason that Guanyin is increasingly favored is her female gender: “Kuan-yin stands out as a female bodhisattva. She thus attracts the attention of many convert Buddhist women, particularly those who are actively looking for feminist or at least overtly women-friendly approaches to Buddhism” (Wilson, 2008, p.289).

Thailand is an agrarian country, and the Thai deities originated from this condition. The gods of land, water, and trees were female. The name “Mae Nam” means the mother of water. It shows that in the history of Thailand, women have their own deities. However, those deities do not meet the needs of modern times. The new belief should be accepted by Buddhism. Otherwise, this belief cannot easily to spread into the Thai contexts. The belief and practice of Guanyin help women to meet their spiritual needs. Guanyin provides a bridge for women to understand Guanyin. One female devotee says that “as a woman, I feel closer to her...It’s like a dialogue between women. She understands our condition better. Besides, my husband prefers that I worship the goddess rather than monks, what with the sexual scandals going on now” (Ekachai, 2001, p.189). In my study, I have found that most of the followers were female. The respondents of my questionnaires and interviewees were mostly female. Among the 75 interviewees, 58 were female, and most of them believe that Guanyin followers are mainly female.
The female gender features of Guanyin combine love, compassion, kindness, perfection, tolerance and devotion. Her power provides the bridge for her female followers to understand each other.

"Guanyin is specially related to compassion. She is a woman. If there is no female, there will be no male who can be born in the world. Women pay their whole lives for the children since they are born. Women are the ones who contribute to our lives. Guanyin is a woman, I am a woman too. I feel it is easy to understand her because of her being female gender. Women have love, compassion, happiness, just like our moms. She wants to give birth to us, even if she has not seen our faces."  

Many of the city middle-class women have their own family business, and they need their own god. “There are simply no gods for city people involved in commerce. Middle-class business people need their own god. It can be said that Kuan Yin has become the Goddess of Trade” (Ekachai, 2001, p.194). Guanyin represents a way for their religious achievements. “These small business owners follow Kuan Im at least partly because she represents the potential for women to reach the highest achievements” (Roenjun and Speece, 2011, p.75).
“I feel comfortable when I am chanting; even if I cannot understand the meaning of the chanting. Guanyin is male, but her image is female. It is much easier for me to get close to her. When we see monks, we are afraid to get too close to them. We just need to respect them. But Guanyin’s female image is much better for us to know her and to know us too, because we are the same gender.”  

Guanyin is a good choice for them to gain their own position and their gender identity in the religious fulfillment and in social status with the success of their business. Guanyin is seen as a female bodhisattva. The belief and practice of Guanyin can be accepted as a Buddhist belief which is welcomed by the majority in the Buddhist community. The followers of Guanyin can gain their identity and reputation as good Buddhists and good Thais from their belief in Guanyin.

6.4 Thai-Chinese identity

6.4.1 Who are Thai-Chinese?

Most of the interviewees in my study want to tell me that they are Thai-Chinese at the beginning of our talk, and try to speak some Chinese words in Teochew dialect. This is an important reason for them to be Guanyin followers. They are from different generations of Thai-Chinese, and they do not even know which generation and which part of China their ancestors come from. However, they are proud to tell me that they are Thai-Chinese. They consider that believing in Guanyin is viewed as an evidence to prove they are Chinese. Maybe they think that all Chinese believe in Guanyin. Otherwise, they considered themselves not Chinese, or at least not true Chinese.

Those who identify themselves as Chinese are different from those people who are living in contemporary China in some aspects. They claim that they are Thai-Chinese for their relationship with China and consider themselves as Chinese descendants who were born in

36 Personal interview (2013, January 11) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
Thailand and possess the Thai nationality. Thai-Chinese gain their reputation historically from their hard work, cleverness, emphasis on education, wealth, middle and elite class status, loyalty to the monarchy, and good family tradition on moral conducts. Therefore, when Chinese mention their ethnic identity, they will focus on certain elements and enhance these strong points. Bao writes that Thai-Chinese show their two faces on the moral criteria for business and the loyalty to the Thai monarchy.

“...The rules and actions of moral conduct are derived from Thai Buddhism and Chinese Confucianism. For family or business affiliations, the Sino-Thai tend to stress Confucian beliefs, such as filial piety, diligence and shiftiness. But when it comes to politics or proper social demeanor, the Sino-Thai emphasize their loyalty to the Thai monarchy, belief in accumulating merit and emulate the polite Thai manner in posture and speech” (Bao, 2004, p.157).

6.4.2 The Identities of Thai-Chinese

Who are the Thai-Chinese and what are the characteristics of the Thai-Chinese? There are many arguments about this. There are several most important western scholars contribute to the subjects of Thai-Chinese in Thailand, such as Skinner and Coughlin. Skinner has written several books on the Thai-Chinese, such as Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History and Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand. In his book Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History studies the history of Chinese in Thailand since 13th century until the 1960s, Skinner depicts the relationship between Chinese and Thai in different period from economic, social and political aspects. He deeply explores the assimilation polices of the Thai government to ethnic Chinese in Thailand during the 1940s. He said Thai-Chinese assimilated through intermarriage and cultural adoption, and “they have no barriers for them to be Thai both from Thai government and themselves...The third Sino-Thai generations only speak Thai language and practice the Thai religious rituals, customs, study in the Thai schools,
wear Thai traditional clothes, and even eat Thai food.” (Skinner, 1857, 126). He proposed that the Chinese will be completely assimilated into Thai society and there will be no Chinese after the fifth Thai-Chinese generation.

“They have no barriers for them to be Thai both from Thai government and themselves...The third Sino-Thai generations only speak Thai language and practice the Thai religion rituals, customs, study in the Thai schools, wear Thai traditional clothes, and even eat Thai food.” Therefore he predicts that “the result is that the fifth Sino-Thai will absolutely be assimilation, there will be no Chinese again, just the blood relationship with Chinese” (Skinner, 1857, 126).

Coughlin does not agree with this idea. In his book Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand, Coughlin depicts the idea that ethnic Chinese Thais maintain both ethnic Chinese identity and Thai national identity, according to his studies in the 1950s. He explains how the Chinese maintain their Chinese identity in the Thai society, he studies it from some perspectives, such as the Chinese community life, their home and families, Chinese temples, spirits and festivals, economic organizations and interests, Chinese schools and education, citizenship and political interests. He points out that under the pressure of the social state, many Chinese adopted a Thai nationality, but they often seek to preserve their cultural identity as a Chinese. The approach of the Chinese to religious matters made it possible to adopt Thai Buddhist practices, and continuing to adhere to Chinese folk religion. He holds that Chinese in Thailand contains two identities: Thai and Chinese (Coughlin, 1960). He holds that Chinese in Thailand contain two identities of Thai and Chinese. Regards to the double identities, Leo Suryadinata points out that Thai-Chinese would like to display their Thai identity in public, speak Thai and behave like Thais, “although they may have double identities (that is, Chinese ethnic and Thai national identities), their Thai national identity is stronger. It should also be pointed out that as some elements of Thai culture are similar to Chinese culture, a certain degree of Chinese is not an issue in Thailand” (Suryadinata, 1997, p.13).
Bao criticizes that "Coughlin and Skinner seem trapped within a binary logic: the Chinese are either unchangeable or assimilated; they have either a single or a double identity" (Bao, 2005, p.20).

"There is no definitively essential quality of Chinese-ness or Thainess; both are always relational, negotiate, and continuously transforming. Moreover, as different constructions of identity emerge, one construction does not simply replace its predecessor; rather, at any given moment there are several competing valuations of Chinese-ness—some positive, some negative, and some both positive and negative, depending on the context" (Bao, 2005, p.101).

Chan and Tong in the 1990s pointed out that during the process of assimilation, it is better to say that Thai influenced Chinese, rather than the Chinese being absorbed by the Thais, and that it is a modification and adaptation of both parts Chinese and part Thai. They retain their Chinese sense and their identity that is open to their heritage, and they formed a new collective identity and consciousness (Chan and Tong, 1993, p.4).

Thai-Chinese were a minority and faced pressure from the Thai nationalists since the early period of the twenty century when the King Wachirawut succeeded his father King Chulalongkorn to the throne. Later, there were another four Thai Nationalism movements happened in Thailand. Most of Chinese have been assimilated into Thai society. Ethnic identity was considered a sensitive issue at the time of assimilation. Now Chinese in Thailand only can be called “Thai-Chinese”, as Supang Chantavanich claims that “in contemporary Chinese in Thailand can thus be called Chinese-Thai because they keep their Thai national identity and only identity themselves as Chinese in terms of descent” (Chantavanich, 1997, p.256).

After the development of the relationship between Thailand and China, Thai-Chinese identity is no longer a problem; Thai-Chinese are loyal to the country and the monarchy. Being a Thai is their first selection if anything assails the national identity. Thai-Chinese mostly pay their
attention to the economic and cultural aspects as Chinese rather than their ethnicity which is no longer a threat to Thailand. As Cohen says that “the ethnic character of the festival appears to have been of little concern to the authorities. Expressions of Chinese ethnicity do not constitute a threat to national unity and identity in contemporary Thailand” (Cohen, 2001, p.188). These Thais of old and new generations clearly claim that they are Thai and loyal to Thailand first, they do not have any allegiance to China. Some of them even have many connections in history, culture, economy to China (Ramsay, 2001, pp.52-65). Bao is concerned more about their cultural identity and finds that it “is never neutral in regard to sexuality, gender, or ethnicity/race” (Bao, 2005, p.23).

Thai-Chinese have intentionally preserved their ethnic identities with their dynamic cultural perspective. The identification of ethnic Chinese in Thailand is different among various generations, groups and individuals. Ethnic identity does not require any fixed cultural perspective, and it can exist and adapt to a society that is already facing changes. Therefore, it is expected that Thai-Chinese retain their Chinese identity as long as they still consider they are Chinese, even if some parts of their culture may be different from their ancestors (Walwipha, 2001, p.70). From this perspective, it may be said that many Chinese still possess a sense of being Chinese descendents. Leo Suryadinata states that “through religious identification, the Chinese are able to retain their ethnic identity” (Suryadinata, 1997, p.15).

6.4.3 Guanyin and Thai-Chinese Identity

For Thai-Chinese, Guanyin came from China, and it is a belief in their ancestries and tradition which are relevant to their sense of the recognition as Thai-Chinese. However, there are no nationwide movements of Guanyin belief that are organized institutionally. The belief in
Guanyin is individual-based and emerges in small groups with different kinds of understanding and worshipping. There are many religious phenomena that emerge in the megacity Bangkok; however, there is no organization that claims to promote the belief of Guanyin. The understanding and the form of worship are also diverse: from the pious ritual worship to the general paying of respect. This religious experience leads Thai-Chinese to the Chinese narratives from the belief of Guanyin historically. It is an important source for Chinese to have a connection with China and the history of their family.

“I became a Guanyin follower when I was a child, and my mom believed in Guanyin first. Then she taught me about her, and then I believed in her too.”

“I know Guanyin from my parents and books. My parents knew all the Chinese deities here, but I do not know much about them. We do not care much about it. We believe in Buddhism only.”

“We love Guanyin very much. I learned about her from my dad and my family. My parents believe in her. After that I tried to study, via movies about her stories, where she was born, where is she come from. She comes from China, from an island next to Shanghai: Puto Moutain.”

In the field of religious belief, Chinese and Thai do not have difficulties and contradiction in values, so Chinese are not required to change their religious habits, and they can preserve their religious culture and beliefs. Coughlin writes that “Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhists are sufficiently alike for the Chinese to accept certain Thai practices without difficulty or contradiction in values” (Coughlin, 2012, p.104). Although there is no big gap between the beliefs of Chinese and Thai, there are nevertheless some differences, such as the worshipping of deities and the ways of making merit. However, most of the believers in my interview are not concerned about the differences, and they practice different rituals and recite different sutras in the temples and shrines. They claim that they are doing the same as the Thai Buddhists do to

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37 Personal interview (2013, January 13) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
38 Personal interview (2012, December 27) at Chinatown.
39 Personal interview (2012, December 27) at Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road.
make merit through purification, piety, and kindness. They focus on the similarities between the Chinese and Thai.

Guanyin has been transformed into a deity with features of modernity, and this attracts many modern urban Thai-Chinese middle-classes who are thirsty for new identity and spirituality (Chalermsripinyorat, 1999). Chinese traditionally worship different deities, such as Guan Gong “god of war”, Tiandi Ye “god of Earth”, Eight Immortals. There are various deities that are worshiped by different dialect groups, such as Shuiwei Niang (“goddess of the lower stream”) for the Hainanese, Tianhou Shengmu (“holy mother and empress of heaven”) for the Hokkien, Bentou Gong for the Teochew and Hakka. All of these deities have persevered in Thai-Chinese more or less, but their influence is declining. They are not one of those deities that emerge as popular that are accepted by all the Chinese and Thais in the modern period; unlike Guanyin.

Guanyin is a special figure who is from China and gains popularity both among the Chinese and Thais. Guanyin crosses the boundaries between the Chinese and Thai in the sense of understanding Buddhist belief. Guanyin is accepted by Thais as an expression of Buddhism too. There are some differences in the belief of Guanyin and Thai Buddhism from a traditional perspective, but her followers will express that their belief of Guanyin is identical or similar to the belief of Buddhism.

“Guanyin belief will enhance both the identities of the Chinese and the Thai. Thus, their two identities do not clash in Thai society as long as ethnic Chinese prove their allegiance to Thailand by supporting the three symbols of Thai nationalism: the nation, the religion and the monarchy. So, the issue of Sino-Thai people’s national loyalty is not questioned among local Thais and ethnic Chinese in Thailand have been believed to contribute a great deal to nation building and development” (Phanarangsan, 2005).

“I am Thai-Chinese, Guanyin is from China, so I think it is easy for me to believe in her and follow her. Now, there are many Thai who believe in Guanyin too. Because there is something about Guanyin belief that is real, they think it is very
good to believe in Guanyin. Thai people believe in Buddhism, Guanyin is Buddhism too, so they are the same religion.”

Social culture is important for people, especially for the immigrants. They need something to classify who they are and where they come from. So, Chinese identity will help them consolidate their identity, and it benefits their lives. After the rapid development of the Thai economy in the past forty years, the middle-class have become the majority of Thai urban society. Most of the Guan yin followers seem to be from the urban middle-classes. Ericsen states that the “high correlation between ethnicity and class” and both two identities can be “criteria for rank” and “pervasive features of societies” (Ericsen, 2002, p.8).

“There may be a high correlation between ethnicity and class, which means that there is a high likelihood that persons belonging to specific ethnic groups also belong to specific social classes. There can be a significant interrelationship between class and ethnicity; both class and ethnicity can be criteria for rank, and ethnic membership can be an important factor in class membership. Both class differences and ethnic differences can be pervasive features of societies, but they are not one and the same thing and must be distinguished from one another analytically” (Ericsen, 2002, p.8).

There are no clear boundaries between the Chinese and Thai culture, and both influence each other. Ericsen also observes that the “cultural boundaries are not clear-cut, not do they necessarily correspond with ethnic boundaries” (Ericsen, 2002, p.34). Thai-Chinese and the subsequent integration of Guanyin enhance the process of building the Thai national identity, as Jackson expresses that Guanyin “becomes integrated into a kind of urban Thai identity which is both Chinese and not-Chinese at the same time” (Hamilton, 1999), and it strengthens that Chinese culture is parts of the component in the Thai national identity.

“The interpretation may help to explain the recently growing popularity of the Vegetarian Festival—and particularly the adoption of the custom to eat che food during the festival period—throughout urban Thailand and among social groups

40 Personal interview (2013, January 31) at Ancient Guanyin Temple.
with loose, if any, links to the Sino-Thai community. The widening dissemination of the festival is thus one manifestation of the broader process of a growing penetration of Chinese customs into Thai culture, and the strengthening of a Chinese component in the Thai national identity” (Cohen, 2001, p.194).

Conclusion

In my study, I have discovered that Guanyin belief is relevant to the follower’s identity recognition in three directions: Buddhist identity, gender identity and Thai-Chinese identity. This is an important reason to explain why Guanyin is popular in Thailand, and at the same time, it is one of the significant elements of their identity recognition and meaning for the followers. Though it is not easy to see which identity of the three plays the roles in the specific situation, the belief and practice of Guan yin enhance their feelings of the identities and the ethnic practice in the contemporary urban life.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

7.1 Conclusion

The popularity of Guanyin belief has become visible during the past several decades in Thailand. Her statue is presented in Chinese temples, shrines, Thai Buddhist temples, roadside, on top of the mountains, near the sea beach, and in people’s homes.

The temples or shrines of Guanyin are the places for the followers to practice their religious activities individually and collectively, especially in the festival, such as the Buddhist festivals, traditional Chinese festivals, and some new popular festivals like the Vegetarian Festival. Guanyin is worshiped as a deity in Vegetarian Festival which has become popular for abstaining from meat during the nine day period of the festival, especially from beef.

The belief in Guanyin originally has its roots in Mahayana Buddhism and transformed itself as it has taken its new roots in Thailand, where Theravada Buddhism is considered as the national religion. The belief and practice of Guanyin in Thailand demonstrate the diversity of understanding and practice, and it is considered by many scholars as a part of the trend of the widespread belief in deities in the commercialized society.

Guanyin is generally considered as a bodhisattva and goddess by Thai-Chinese followers. In the time of modernization and globalization as well as the rise of China, Thai-Chinese pay increasing attention to Guanyin belief.

The belief in Guanyin seems to be a bridge between Chinese Mahayana Buddhism and Thai Theravada Buddhism for their understanding and cooperation in the belief and practice of Buddhism, and it contributes to the religiosity.
The integration of Guanyin as a bodhisattva and goddess gains much attraction for the followers who are pious in their belief in Guanyin. They worship Guanyin and request good luck, security, health, wealth, and happiness. That is a way for them to express their hope in their current lives, and many of them consider that at the moment of praying to Guanyin they have gained merit already, and the merit will guarantee their wishes and expectations. Making merit is the way for the followers to achieve the satisfaction in their spirituality and the salvation from the difficulties in their lives, and it even guides them towards the ultimate goal of Nirvana. Merit is an important concept in Thai Theravada Buddhism, and salvation is the key concept in Mahayana Buddhism. The belief and practice of Guanyin in Thailand provide a path of salvation combining these two concepts.

Guanyin belief among Thai-Chinese relates to their sense of identity: ethnicity, religion and gender. Guanyin belief is traditionally the belief of the ancestors of the Thai Chinese. The family is the place of the preservation and growth of Guanyin belief for the new generations. The belief and practice of Guanyin belief come from Chinese history, traditional narratives, and the experience of the followers. Guanyin has become the link for Thai-Chinese to gain their ethnic identity to inherit their family tradition and to consolidate their middle-class in urban society.

Guanyin crosses the boundaries between the Chinese and Thais on the understanding and practice of Buddhist belief and combines features of the bodhisattva and goddess in merit making for the samsaric world and future lives. Guanyin is accepted by Thai-Chinese and Thais as a part of Buddhism. There are some differences in the belief of Guanyin and Thai Buddhism from the traditional perspective, but the followers tend to focus on the similarities instead. Guanyin belief also enriches and benefits the preservation of Buddhist values and practice in the modern Thai society.
Thailand is a Theravada Buddhist country. Men have a dominant position in temple and society spiritual activities. With the development of the modernity, women have gained their equality in the society, especially in the field of economic enterprise. Women need their spiritual deity to represent their gender beliefs and activities. The female feature of Guanyin is accepted by the female followers with her characteristics of the love, compassion, kindness, perfection, tolerance, devotion and her power which provides the bridge for her female followers to understand her. Consequently, most of the followers of Guanyin are female. It is a good choice for them to gain their own position in the religious fulfillment and the success.

Guanyin belief is meaningful for the followers in the religious spirituality, moral action and identity requirements. People usually pray to Guanyin and request something, however, most of the followers are not concerned that their requests would be granted, but focus on their spiritual satisfaction which strengthens their power, self-control, compassion, kindness, purification, happiness, and salvation. Their spiritual aspiration leads to their moral actions which in turn contribute to the well-being of the individuals, family and society.

In the modern times, urban people face many challenges from commercialization, modernization, and globalization. Economic issues play important roles in people’s daily lives, and naturally people care more about their samsaric activities in this life. However, the economic success cannot guarantee the happiness in this life and cannot assure the good results in next lives. Consequently, religious belief and activities play the role in their spirituality. Guanyin is considered as a bodhisattva and goddess who possess supernatural power and grants people’s requests if people follow the way of the belief and practice. Guanyin belief provides a way for people to overcome their difficulties in this samsaric life and to help them gain merit and salvation in the next life.
7.2 Recommendation for further research

The directions of the belief and practice of Guanyin in Thailand are diverse, and my study focuses on the significance of this movement to the followers. There are many other aspects for further studies, such as the rituals, the scriptures, the organization of the movements, the middle-class followers, and the relationship between this movement and modernization, especially the female perspective in a broad view. The research needs to investigate the individual religious practice and daily lives, and then we can touch the reality and make a contribution to the field of this topic.
REFERENCES

Books


**Thesis**


**Journals**


Retrieved from:
http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/arahantsbodhisattvas.html


APPENDIX

Appendix 1 Statues and Images of Guanyin in Thailand

1.1 Statue of Guanyin in front of the Emerald Buddha Temple of the Grand Palace, Bangkok.

1.2 Statues of Guanyin at Wat Pho, Bangkok.
1.3 Statue of Guanyin at Guanyin Hall of Thian Fha Foundation Hospital, Chinatown, Bangkok.
1.4 Statues of Guanyin (rear) and the founder of Guanyin Buddhist Hall at Chockchai 4 Road (front), who claimed that she is the incarnation of Guanyin.
1.5 Statue of Guanyin at Thai temple Wat Mahabut, Bangkok.

1.6 Statues of Guanyin at Wat Hualamphong.
1.7 Opening ceremony of the statue of Guanyin at Guanyu Shrine, Supanburi Province.
1.8 Statues of Guanyin in the Seacon shopping Mall during a Buddhist Festival, Bangkok.
1.9 The newly repainted Guanyin Statue, Saraburi Province.

1.10 Statue of Guanyin in the Guanyin Buddhist Hall next to the River Kwai Bridge, Kanchanaburi Province.
1.11 The Images of Guanyin on the stamp and Thailand Post.
1.12 Statue of Guanyin at the gate of a Thai Wat at Chinatown, Bangkok.

1.13 The pattern of the style of Thousand-hand Guanyin in an advertisement of shopping.
1.14 The image of Guanyin in front of a fortune teller on Silom Road, Bangkok.

1.15 A woman who dresses herself as "Guanyin" in a charitable foundation, Bangkok.
1.16 Statue of Guanyin in Vegetarian Festival in Bangkok’s Chinatown.

1.17 The girl who dresses as Guanyin in the Vegetarian Festival, Chinatown, Bangkok.
1.18 Thousands of followers join the chanting event of Guanyin at Bangkok.
Appendix 2 The Great Compassion Mantra (大悲咒)

**Bhavairatnavyuthra**

"Naam Bhagvaam Phalnsat"

The Great Compassion Mantra (大悲咒)

Mantra

- Naam
- Phalna
- Sat
- Phalna

Recitation

- Naam Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Naam Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Naam Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Naam Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna

Mantra

- Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna

Recitation

- Naam Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Naam Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Naam Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
- Naam Phalna Phalna Phalna Phalna
Appendix 3 Books and sheets printed the scriptures for chanting and reading
Appendix 4 Questionnaire and the result of the Questionnaire

A Questionnaire about the Guanyin belief of Thai-Chinese in Bangkok

This questionnaire with anonymity is used for conducting a dissertation, thank you for your corporation.

Sex: • Male • Female • Others
Age: • Under 18 • 19—35 • 36—55 • 56 above
Nationality: • Thai • Chinese • Others
Ethnic: • Thai-Chinese • Non Thai-Chinese
Religion: • Buddhism • Islam • Christian • Others

1, About Guanyin
Have you ever heard any stories about Guanyin? • Yes • No
Is Guanyin a male or female? • Male • Female • Both • None
What kind of figure Guanyin is? • Deity • Bodhisattva • Goddess • All
Have you ever seen the Guanyin statues in Thai temples? • Yes • No
Have you ever wear Guanyin amulets? • Yes • No
Do you consider Guanyin belief popular in Thailand now? • Yes • No

2, Guanyin Belief
Do you believe in Guanyin? • Yes • No • Not sure
Does your family believe in Guanyin? • All • Some • None • Not sure
Are there Guanyin images or statues in your home? • Yes • No
Have you ever ask for something from Guanyin? • Yes • No
Is Guanyin belief a kind of religious belief?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

Is Guanyin belief a kind of superstition?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

3, Rituals

Do you prey to Guanyin?  • Yes  • No  • Sometimes

Do you recite Guanyin’s name when you prey?  • Yes  • No  • Sometimes

Do you pray to Guanyin at her memorial days?  • Yes  • No  • Sometimes

Do you make an offering after your wish has been realized?  • Yes  • No  • Sometimes

Do you donate money to the donation box in the temples?  • Yes  • No  • Sometimes

4, Guanyin Goddess

Have you heard about any miracle stories about Guanyin?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

Do you believe these miracle stories?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

Do you think Guanyin has supernatural powers?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

Has Guanyin ever responded to your appeals?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

Do you believe the stories about the reincarnation of Guanyin?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

Is there close relationship between Guanyin belief and Buddhist practice?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

5, Guanyin and Thai Culture

Is Guanyin belief one kind of Buddhist belief?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure

Do you think the spirit of Guanyin meet the spiritual needs of Thai social?  • Yes  • No  • Not sure
Are there any contradictions between Thai culture and Guanyin belief? •Yes •No •Not sure

Do you think Guanyin belief can enrich Buddhist belief in Thailand? •Yes •No •Not sure

Are there more female than male among the followers? •Yes •No •Not sure

Is it easier for the female to be Guanyin followers because of her female image? •Yes •No •Not sure

Do you think there are some commercial characteristics in Guanyin belief? •Yes •No •Not sure

Are there any differences between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism in Thailand? •Yes •No •Not sure

6, Guanyin and Thai-Chinese

Is Guanyin belief a general belief among the Thai-Chinese? •Yes •No •Not sure

Is Guanyin a protective Goddess of the Thai-Chinese? •Yes •No •Not sure

Are Thai-Chinese the majority of Guanyin followers in Thailand? •Yes •No •Not sure

Is it because Guanyin belief comes from China? •Yes •No •Not sure

Is Guanyin belief helpful for promoting the unity of Thai-Chinese? •Yes •No •Not sure

Is Guanyin belief helpful for inheriting the Chinese belief and culture for the Thai-Chinese? •Yes •No •Not sure

Is Guanyin belief helpful for strengthening the ethnic Chinese identity? •Yes •No •Not sure

Are you willing to donate for building a new Guanyin Temple in Thailand? •Yes •No •Not sure
The Result of the Questionnaire about the Guanyin Belief among Thai-Chinese in Bangkok

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<td>Is Guanyin a male or female?</td>
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<td>What kind of figure Guanyin is?</td>
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<td>Bodhisattva</td>
<td>Goddess</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>Have you ever seen the Guanyin statues in Thai temples?</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>Have you ever wear Guanyin amulets?</td>
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<td>Do you consider Guanyin belief popular in Thailand now?</td>
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<td>Does your family believe in Guanyin?</td>
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<td>None</td>
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<td>Are there Guanyin images or statues in your home?</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>Have you ever asked for something from Guanyin?</td>
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<td>Do you pray to Guanyin?</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>Do you recite Guanyin's name when you pray?</td>
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<td>Do you pray to Guanyin at her memorial days?</td>
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<td>Do you make an offering after your wish has been realized?</td>
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<td>Do you donate money to the donation box in the temples?</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
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<td>4.4</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Not Sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
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<td>5.2</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
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<td>6.1</td>
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<td>6.6</td>
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<td>6.8</td>
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