

Social and Personal Values of Christian Minority People in a Buddhist State

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Abstract

Christianity is a minority belief in Buddhist Thailand but its influence should not be underestimated. This study aims to present a real picture of the Christian devotees' true in-heart thinking, which reflected and influenced their life experiences, social roles and personal behaviour. Moreover, the study explores church management structure from the angle of rationalism, going beyond individual devotee's direct, surface emotional feeling. Sincerely listening to the voice of respondents, the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism is more clearly presented with its deep hierarchy, wide diversity and co-existence adapted to the times. A well-designed field study is implemented in Bangkok with a total of 30 interviews in which the respondents include local Thai people, Indonesians, Filipinos, Chinese and Americans. In addition to the interviews, researchers visited various churches and exchanged knowledge and experience, as well as observing the activities there and attempting comprehensively to understand the true belief and its endurance.

Keywords: Buddhism, Christianity, music, religious practice, Thailand

1. Introduction

Christians may be in the minority in Thailand but they are not an insignificant number. In 2022, it was estimated that 1.2% of the population overall is Christian (US Department of State, 2023). There are around 8,500 churches across the country, with at least one in every province apart from the three southern Malay majority provinces (eStar Foundation, n.d.). Both Catholics and Protestants are represented. The history of Christianity in Thailand is closely linked to the presence of Europeans in the country, which first occurred in 1511 when Portuguese explorers reached Siam. Protestant evangelism did not arrive until the C19th but has progressed strongly until the current day. Prominent sects include the Church of Christ in Thailand, the Baptist Church Foundation and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Thailand, among others.

Thailand is a Buddhist majority country (92.5%) with a strong Muslim minority (5.4%), who are mostly but not wholly concentrated in the three states adjacent to the border with Malaysia. Christianity has never been banned in Thailand but some restrictions have been placed on missionary activities under certain circumstances. However, the emergence of modernization and nationalism as an ideology throughout the C20th required people to be Buddhist, speak the central Thai dialect and support the monarchy in order to be regarded as a real Thai. That position is no longer supported and the King is now regarded as the protector of multiple religions. Consequently, Christianity is one of the religions that has grown quickly in the current century in particular. There is a need for research which addresses the everyday relationship between people and the practice of Christian religion. In his concept of habitus, Bourdieu (2008) describes how internalized dispositions and structured propensities shape individual's understanding of the world around them and how this influences the way they behave in even unfamiliar situations. However, Bourdieu was clear that this was not a static understanding of the world and that

individuals had agency such that they can modify their beliefs and practices based on new experiences and they, too, can affect the social relations around them. Hobsbawm (2016) observed that although the nature of habitus favoured reproduction over change, there is a real need for a sense of hope that change can take place. This study works at the level of individuals to consider how their interaction with the world around them in a specific context may bring changes in their understanding of the world and, with Christianity, how does that affect their relations with their family members and others close to them.

2. Literature Review

This paper features research into the lives and beliefs of people professing Christian beliefs in Thailand. It focuses on what people believe, how their religious experiences are manifested in actual practice and what role it plays in producing and reproducing social relations. Inevitably, the research yielded some insights on the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism in Thai society, although this was not the main focus of the work.

2.1. Religion Life and Rationalism

Believers in religions tend to see their belief as rational and, indeed, the only logical response to a universe guided by a larger hand. Non-believers, on the other hand, point to the lack of tangible evidence and may identify religious institutions as nexus points of social and class production networks. Hume (1990), for example, was passionate in his hostility: “Examine the religious principles, ... they’re nothing but sick men’s dreams.” A happy and busy people do not readily turn to religion. When a man is melancholy and dejected, he broods upon the invisible world; but when in a cheerful disposition, he thinks not of religion. In matters of religion, men take a pleasure in being terrified. Hume (*ibid.*) describes the output of religion: preciously self-pitying, morbid, pathologically preoccupied with sin and hypocritical. Nevertheless, belief is persistent throughout nearly every society in the world, rational or not. Consequently, authors have grappled with understanding religion as a social construct. A lot of studies focus on how to divide the stages of religious development and each stage is independent. Comte (1830) believed that each of our knowledge has successively gone through three different theoretical states: theological or fictitious; metaphysical or abstract; positive or scientific. Evans-Pritchard (1965) divided religion into three types of explanation: psychological and sociological, and the former again into intellectualist and emotionalist theories. Frazer (1923) adopted an evolutionary scheme that there have been three main stages of intellectual development, namely the magic, the religious and the scientific. Taylor (1903) did not see magic as irrational but as understandable in the circumstances of ignorance and lack of sound knowledge of the real circumstances. Turner (1973) treats religious visions as both paradox and empowering phenomena, tying them explicitly to the times in which they occurred. Swidler (1973) uses three terms to classify. Rationalism is efficient orientation of means to ends, rationalization is the systematization of ideas and finally rationality is the control of action by ideas. He also argued that rational social action is produced only by powerful irrational motives, and it holds a distinct place in Weber's (1968) sociology of ideas.

Belief remains something of a mystery to non-believers; however, it is evident that it is a powerful force in many people’s lives and is a source of consolation and justification, among other emotions. It is appropriate, therefore, to take it seriously and treat it as an important phenomenon.

2.2. The Role of Music

Music plays an important role in religion life and it is often the means by which a shared celebration of faith is expressed. It was certainly evident throughout the field research, in various forms. Of course, music deemed suitable for a place and time of worship is different from music which might be found in the mundane or even the profane worlds. Adorno (1976) distinguished chamber music from the sacred religious music of the Christian church, which implicit the distinction socially, but he left the study of sacred art blank. The music of Christianity in Thailand tends to follow that part of the Protestant tradition that enables the individual to establish a personal relationship with the divine and for this to be expressed in a semi-formal or informal manner.

The value of music for group cohesion is also recognized universally. Musicality enabled social bonding at larger scales than other bonding mechanisms available in ancestral primate societies. (Savage *et al.*, 2021) Kriengkraipetch (1988) classified folksongs collected in Suphan Buri province into two categories, ceremonial and social songs. The latter one again into songs for entertainment in festivals and harvest. These songs bring the villagers together in ceremony activities and introduce to each other their values and relationships in their village life. Photikanit and Sirasoonthorn (2018) explored the influence of music on social stratification and cultural power, in the example the very national Thai music band Suntaraporn. Social bonding is achieved as Yifan Zou *et al.* (2021) studied the reappearance of Chinese Indonesians in the mass media, mainly digital market platform, in post-Suharto times. Christianity worship involves singing hymns typically in a church setting. We can perceive the enchantment of a secular age through the human relationship with art (Taylor, 2007). The forces of religion and belief construct and complicate the values and practices of music education. Music, Education, and Religion are intersected and entangled. (Foxworthy, 2023) The Gospel-Pop Performance reflects the Sacred-Secular Binary relationship. (Williams, 2023) Tarr *et al.* (2014) deeply analyzed two social-bonding mechanisms from music, synchronization and self-other being. In group music-based activities, we should carefully program and synchronize the active engagements.

2.3. Christianity and Buddhism

There is a long-established tradition of comparative religious studies, which involves comparing different forms of belief and ritual practice. It is generally noted that any well-received and widely practiced thought system must necessarily contain a number of elements that uphold the social order, such as prohibitions on theft and murder and obligations to join with neighbours to re-enact religious rites. For example, Weber (1968) presented a comprehensive relationship study between Confucian rationalism and Protestant rationalism, to explain why industrial capitalism did not develop in China. However, his criticism neglected the positive correlations based on China's thousands of years of bureaucratic systems. The holiness of long-standing tradition and strict adherence to traditional order were obstacles to develop rationalism and to cut off all trust in magical manipulations. This resulted in the frequent rejection or lack of intellectual curiosity about things not close at hand and immediately useful. The traditional "noble" and "educated" but bureaucratic Literati, focusing on only maintaining the dignity and grace of external conduct form, manner and gesture, the "face", are entitled to make arbitrary decisions, and are lack of an inward aim for a rational mastery of the world. Downward to the tremendous lower stratum of the people in China, it leaves an improper impression that the Chinese vendors and small-scale family-owned business owners are living in a lifestyle of calculating mentality.

The distrust, stirring even among the people who are personally kinship close, handicapped all credit and business operations, and failed to create a mentality reaching beyond the organic relations of life.

The contrast between Buddhism and other religious beliefs that have been practiced in the country. Nathalang (2004) categorized Tai rice myths into three types: the indigenous rice goddess beliefs, the conflict between the primitive one and Buddhism, and the third one, the integration. Animism and Buddhism, their relationship from the early separate status, then parallel but side by side, and into the final integrated and syncretistic one. As for Buddhism and Christianity, although there is still a tendency for churches in Thailand to serve communities of overseas people, such as Filipinos, more Thais are attending churches and professing Christian beliefs. The study of Christianity in Thailand has often been framed as a contest for power between Buddhism and Christianity in the form of influence over ethnic minority people (Platz, 2003). Fewer studies have sought to understand the nature of Christian workshop in the country or to consider how the practice of Christianity is conducted. Saiyasak (2006), for example, described Isan people of Northeast Thailand as having deeply entrenched belief systems with Buddhist and animist elements to the extent that they are very resistant to conversion to Christianity. Cohen (1991), on the other hand, observes the contestation of two religious systems as representative of wider power struggles affecting the Thai people. There are numerous other studies that demonstrate the strong relationship between Thai cultural practices and Buddhism, depicting interwoven patterns of practice and belief that are, fundamentally, depicted as morally superior. This paper does not report on attempts to consider one or another side as morally superior in any way. Instead, it focuses on the customs and practices of self-professed Christians in Thailand.

2.4. Social Relations

Bourdieu (2008) argues that habitus is formed through socialization processes, where individuals learn and internalize social norms, values, and practices. It becomes a part of an individual's habitus through repeated exposure and experiences within a specific social context. Habitus operates on an unconscious and implicit level. It shapes individuals' tastes, preferences, and choices, guiding their behaviours in everyday life. It has a religious flavour, too, in that the habitus of Christians is shaped by grace, liturgy and community (in the same way that the Buddhist habitus is shaped by the triple gem of Buddha, his teachings and the sangha). It would be expected, therefore, that social relations and their production and reproduction would be affected by these characteristics and that personal relations would similarly be modified.

Second, for those with low childhood socioeconomic status (SES), the churches are like cohesive neighborhood communities and serve as protective factors. (Garnezy, 1991). Consequently, it would be expected that the behaviours and activities of practicing Christians will feature extensive use of community networks and connections in daily life.

3. Research Method

Based on a grounded theory approach, this study is designed with a qualitative research method. According to this, data is first collected on the phenomenon of interest and then this is used to create a model or theory that makes sense of that phenomenon. The principal form of data collection was the in-depth personal interview, which was supplemented by ethnographic observation over the course of the research project.

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed with 6 areas and over 30 sub questions, covering demographic data collection, the relationship between religion and rationality, Christian and Buddhism, emotional experience, social function for the adherents' routine missionaries and activities, the role of the church, the organizational structure and leadership of the church, and influence for both young and next generation. As the research progressed, the nature of the semi-structured questionnaire evolved accordingly.

The sequence of the questions was updated during the interview process according to the very personal status and response of each respondent. Researchers made efforts to create a rapport with the respondents and give them confidence that their answers would be treated as confidential. "We must be aware of respondent differences and must be flexible enough to make proper adjustment for unanticipated development (Fontana & Frey, 1994)."

The research site was chosen to be the surrounding area in Bang Khen District of Bangkok and finally we visited 8 churches, extending in the area BTS green line north side N19, south N01, pink line west PK07, and east PK19.

All of the respondents were contacted for the first time and then an interview schedule is planned. To respect the religious culture, we visit the church first, attend the activities, then talk with the leaders there, obtain their approval and support, then decide who and when we can interview.

Translation into Chinese from Thai (the language of the interviews) took place with the assistance of a student translator, who is a scholarship winner in the university and independent from the research project. Subsequent translation into English had two parts: the English notes were drafted on-site in the interview following the translator's interpretation, then updated and inputted into a database.

Overall, the first-hand records include three sources: the Thai language notes, the Chinese translations and the English output. At the end of the interview process, we cross-checked all the notes one by one, to ensure accuracy and veracity among the three languages of communication.

Of the total sample of 30 respondents, 56.7% were male and 43.3% were female; 34% were aged 30 and below, 33% were aged 31-50 and 33% were aged 51 and above; 22 were Thai, 1 Chinese, 2 American, 4 Filipinos, 1 Indonesian; 2 were volunteer missionaries, 3 were priests; 4 have served as church management leaders. The main form of sample selection was snowball sampling but this was supplemented where necessary with purposive sampling so as to avoid the possible problem of an overly-homogeneous sample that can occur with snowball sampling.

Translated transcripts from the interview process were added to a research database alongside relevant items of secondary data and the contents of the research diary. The research diary is a means by which researchers can record germane information which might influence the words of the respondents without appearing in the transcripts (e.g. environmental effects, presence of listeners, news of national moment and so forth). The database as a whole was then subjected to a recognized content analysis process in which study yielded a series of codes and themes which have been systematically worked into the model presented in this paper.

At all times, researchers worked according to appropriate research ethics guidelines, including the

treatment and consent of the respondents, confidentiality and the treatment of research data.

4. Findings

4.1. Religion and the Rational

The respondents in this study understand and interpret the relationship between religion and rationalism in the following ways. First, their personal and family real life experiences: they feel they have converted from negative challenges to positive experiences, especially the health recovery from long-time sickness. Secondly, a kind of coincidence during which they are connected to religion at some moments which they regard as magic, or a miracle, or a moment of epiphany. Thirdly, how they understand and explain natural physiological phenomena. In each of these ways, church plays a critical and influential role. For example, respondent 7 described having a painful condition in her legs which meant she could scarcely walk. When she was encouraged to attend a church for the first time, she was concerned when she saw people kneeling, which she was unable to do. However, after visiting the church a few times, she prayed for her health and suddenly she was able to kneel and the pain was gone: “This is what people call the magic of God, which made me believe in God. What did I say before? ‘I didn’t believe it.’ But what I encountered made me believe in God heartily.”

Another respondent, 27, observed that his family had suffered many problems, including indebtedness and his own inability to control his emotions. Now, as a Catholic, he can control his feelings better with support from fellow congregants and has been able to repay all the money he owed. Respondent 18 had a similar story to tell. After attending church and having missionaries coming to the family home, his father has resolved to stop drinking and fighting with his wife. This is also described as a miracle.

Epiphanies are also included as these habitus-breaking events. Respondent 22 tells a story of a time when studying in the UK and receiving a leaflet from a stranger which led to attending the church and this had positive life experiences attached. This moment is described as a miracle and then described as being necessary since the respondent had not been responding to the divine plan:

“The miracle is something that ‘leads me to know the moment comes, it’s time to do something, you can’t avoid anymore’. Before this, I was always invited by friends to join the church gathering, different friends with various reasons. Now I know that all these were guided from God. then in the holiday when I went back to my hometown I was baptized.”

Various kinds of positive life experiences are adduced to the miraculous. For example, respondent 28 decided to visit a particular church but the motorcycle taxi driver took her to a different one, which is considered an act of God, as was finding a lost wallet after praying to find it. However, this respondent also observed that the presence of the miraculous or the supernatural was not necessary for a positive church experience:

“I think religion is completely emotion related. At the beginning, I went to churches in Great Britain, listening to the preaching in English; then in Macao, in Cantonese; and then in Thailand, in Thai language. I don’t understand, but it doesn’t matter. In Thailand, I am sitting in the church and just listening to their singing.”

Respondents generally felt there was a transactional nature to their religious observance, since this will be rewarded in some physical, literal manner. However, this need not happen all the time and being part of the community regularly also brought about a positive life experience.

4.2. The Role of Music

Of the churches we visited, singing hymns is a standard process and plays an important role during worship. The range of performance and musical ability varies considerably from church to church. In church A, a female flautist contributes a lot and works as the foundation from the beginning to the end. When she is not available, others play background music on a computer and the divine atmosphere turns out to be less charming. In church B, the pastor's wife is responsible for playing the small pedal piano that is provided. In church C, several types of musical instrument are made available, including a piano, guitar and drum set. In church D, a professional pianist regularly leads the music and there is an extensive talent pool ready in reserve, while the musical facilities and sound quality are greatly superior to other establishments. Finally, in church E, one lead singer with two or three assistants guide the congregation throughout the whole service, establishing the melody and pacing.

The hymn books also varied from place to place. In one church, some but not all books were kept in good conditions, while others were returned to a cabinet after the weekly service and as a result appeared to be a little worn-out with yellowing pages. Bilingual books are available in some churches, some with Chinese language and numbered musical notation on the left-hand page and Thai language and staved musical notation on the right. In one church, there are no hymn books and, instead, a computer projects onto a screen throughout the service. One church makes available an app called Hymnal. The latest version is 2.3.2 and it is available with 48 language options.

Respondents had different ideas about singing hymns. Respondent 4 noted that the church management decided which hymns to sing based on various criteria and all the congregation were expected to join in the hymns. Respondent 6 saw hymn singing as a form of self-development:

“Nowadays I use You Tube more ... The most important thing for me is to practice hymns from the You Tube platform; those difficult hymns can be practiced casually. And some of my friends send digital photos to me, once a week.”

Meanwhile, Respondent 11 claim that: “I sing [hymns] to make my heart strong.” She then showed two hymns that had particular meaning for her, one to enhance her spiritual strength and one about why we should all thank God for favours received. She was positive about the use of the App, as long as it is used mindfully. Zimmerman (1998) had previously observed that performing music regularly and in public, together with practicing regularly leads to processes that penetrate a person's life and thereby modulate behaviour and habitus. Several respondents observed that singing hymns helped them to feel part of the community and that it is like reading the Bible in that it can stimulate a positive emotional change.

4.3. Christianity and Buddhism

Thailand is a country where most forms of religious belief may be described as ‘syncretic,’ in that there may be different forms of belief which are professed at the same time and which do not change one

another (it is also possible for a hybrid form of religion in which joint beliefs do bring about change). Animist traditions remain strong throughout Southeast Asia, where they have informally merged with imported religions such as Buddhism and Christianity. (Fahn, 2003). Cosmological ideas including Buddhist, spirit cults and local traditions are manipulated and contextualized in the aspirations and motivations of the villagers. (Sparkes, 1999). Buddhists in Thailand generally believe that it is quite permissible to worship or pay respect to other supernatural beings, as long as the Buddha remains the supreme authority.

Respondents had mixed opinions about the relationship between Buddhists and Christians. Thai society has a reputation for tolerance in most cases for example, Respondent 23 laid out the situation of what was and what was not acceptable:

“I have a lot of Buddhist friends. We're all creatures. God creates us. Don't treat others badly, love everyone. In Buddhism, when I was asked to donate to upgrade or decorate the temple, I will not. But if I was told to donate, for instance for the flood in the Northern Thailand, I will. This is what a Christian does.”

However, it is clear that such an attitude exists despite conditions rather than because of them. Respondent 4 observed: “The conflicts, between Buddhism and Christianity, do exist but I don't think it is necessary to compare their differences. Buddhists have their own belief, so too do the Christians.” The respondent also believed that it was the work of God that he had become a Christian. A similar attitude was espoused by respondent 19:

“I respect their choice. I will not force others to believe what I believe. Be kind, be humble, even if they attack me. When I say, ‘shut up,’ but I still help. Not by words, but by actions.”

Humility and kindness are almost universal responses in organized religion to an occasionally hostile world. Together, they make it less possible for people to challenge the existing political order, which includes religion in its control as a valuable form of ideological state apparatus. However, respondent 10 drew a sharp distinction between the two thought systems that has implications for social awareness:

“Christianity is doing good for others, but Buddhism is for yourself. When I was converted to Christian, it's not because I did good things to obtain benefit, it's to relieve my sins and [so that] others would benefit from what I do.”

Respondents were also gently challenged about some of the more problematic aspects of the bible, for example, the sacrifice of Abraham's son. It was seen to be something of a problem, as respondent 13 commented:

“Abraham's story, this is a testing, testing his faith. I don't know [what I would do if I were [him]]. I'm telling the truth. We, no one, wants our kids sick.”

Nevertheless, many respondents had the twin belief that the devout Christian would have their prayers answered in practical ways and that the bible was a reliable source of history.

Respondent 28: “I used to think that Christianity and Buddhism are the same but in fact they're different. As Christians, we pray and, when we do so, Jesus gives us real answers ... Christianity is more rational

in its understanding. ‘The evidence’ can be traced. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was born, there's no social media at that time, but the Bible records everything and can be traced.”

Buddhists were criticised not so much for praying for what they want but for wanting the wrong things – praying for a win on the lottery, especially the underground lottery, was a big issue in this regard, as has previously been noticed (Sparkes, 1999). They were also criticized for praying in the wrong way, for example in front of ancient trees. In fact, Forests are a key element of Buddhism as it grew out of the forests of northern India; the natural environment is viewed as an ideal place for cultivating spiritual insights (Fahn, 2003). However, this approach is considered to lack sophistication. A more conventional spiritual approach was also present, as in the case of respondent 20, a missionary, who observed:

“In hard times, we go to the church, Jesus helps us to find out good ones; in good times, we go to the church, from being good to being better ... We're devoted to our faith, our choices, we do what we can.”

Viewed in the context of the marketplace of ideas, it is rational for respondents to choose the option that they believe provides them with better results while also helping them to feel they are rational in their choice and modern in their beliefs, in that they have agency over the world. They are, then, affecting the habitus and their social relationships, which can be a source of satisfaction and even pride. Even so, it is possible for people to choose the more desirable aspects of each approach:

Respondent 1: “I have a lot of Buddhist friends, they bring me to the locations to practice meditation. I used to be a hot-tempered person and this helps me a lot. I got a balance between meditation and music.”

Respondent 2: “I do meditation at home or in the Buddhist temple. The temple, for instance near BTS station, has courses for us to practice.”

Respondent 1 continued by adopting a syncretic approach to Christian belief, arguing that “... any God is God as long as it is your God.” This, of course, contradicts one of the ten commandments of the Old Testament. However, missionary work in East Asia has a long history of compromise.

4.4. Social Relations

Respondents noted the difference between churches which were aimed primarily at local people and those which aimed at an international or multinational audience. Local churches were thought to be more friendly because there was less of a language barrier. However, nearly all churches needed an international component of some sort to lead the congregation and to provide financial and organizational resources. Respondent 13 was quite keen that the interviewers engage with people attending more international churches but, in fact, the observations were not very different between people from the two groups.

In terms of family relations, there were variations, for example in the relations between different generations when it comes to belief. Respondent 20 has always been influenced significantly by parents, who took him to church as soon as he was able to attend. By the age of 13-14, when he was coming across various questions in his life, his parents talked to him about it and he was able to find answers that satisfied him in the church. Respondent 21, meanwhile, reported having parents who were both leaders in the church. When he made some self-reported mistakes some years ago, his parents urged

him to read the Book of Mormon and he too was able to find suitable answers therein.

However, in the role of parents, respondents were less sanguine about the situation in the present and the future. Respondent 5, for example, noted that his children were all baptized but did not go to church. Although disappointed, he is stoic about the situation: "Let it be. I won't force them because God doesn't force anyone." Respondent 6 spoke about her daughter, who she describes as someone who likes to play and is not close to God, although she does attend church. The daughter became disaffected when one of her schoolfriends suffered a family crisis but her prayers were not answered. Others, such as respondent 1, rather despaired of younger generations whose lives were primarily shaped by communications technology.

5. Discussion

This research into the beliefs and practices of Christians in Thailand found that following the religion had four major forms of impact on the lives of most such believers. First, Christianity was used as a way of explaining the world and the place of the individual within it. It provides an understandable, often transactional means of conducting life on a day-to-day basis. Second, music is a means of expressing these beliefs about the world and it has the benefit of enabling stronger community links with other parishioners. Third, being a Christian requires people to consider the ways in which this makes people different from Buddhists and how, therefore, they may feel estranged or alienated from a Buddhist-majority society. Finally, these differences may have an impact on social relations, potentially in negative ways in some cases but in positive ways in other cases.

5.1. Religion and Rationality

Hume (1990) argued that religion was mainly important for the sick of mind. This research explains how minority Christian people imagine their relationship with their religion. Living in a 21st century modern world with a much tighter schedule, respondents squeeze time from their busy life, regularly visit the church to serve others, to serve the world. They jump out from the very emotional self-pitying status, do their best to convert from negative to positive experience. They do not care much about the different theoretical states, magic or scientific. They have kept witnessing a lot of breakthrough technical changes in the modern world and are satisfied with the output from their religion, a tangible and rational change even though is always regarded by outsiders as nothingness. They are having an open attitude for their rationalism definition.

5.2. The Role of Music

Savage *et al.* (2021) described the importance of music is forming group cohesion in a religious setting. This research investigated the practice of group music mechanism with a view to understand its role in religious practice, and explored the importance of music talent pool. The respondents are encouraged to join with others in singing the hymns, whether musically inclined or not. They create their personal and specific ways to hum slowly at the beginning then gradually sing loudly, and finally to sing confidently, in the way to express their feeling and thinking, and in the end sanctify their religious life choice. They overcome the generally regarded professionalism difficulties, encouraged by other sisters and brothers inside the church when singing together, thus, they turn to own another common language, music. It's not necessary to expect every devotee to be a music professional, which would as Adorno

(1976) described an inhumanly utopian enterprise. However, we suggest to pave the way for the talent pool development for the leading singer, the conductor, and the improvement for each devotee, all of these play an important role in the religious life.

5.3. Christianity and Buddhism

Weber (1968) compared Protestantism with Confucianism to identify structural differences between the two. This research considers how respondents compared their minds, their Christian beliefs with the Buddhist beliefs of the majority. Minority respondents still hold a very sharp distinction, while most respondents had a practical and mixed opinions about the relationship between Buddhists and Christians. Their common responses are tolerance, humility and highly respect personal choice. When they own the free choice, they again feel they are rational and do the right thing.

5.4. Social Relations

Bourdieu (2008) described the habitus as being pervasive but possibly subject to change. This research investigated whether profession of a minority religions belief would act as a force to change the individual's habitus. Habitus operates on an unconscious and implicit level in the long-time when the church members and their family regularly immerse themselves in formal, charisma and structured worships, in which music and education are entangled concurrently. Self-defined and confident rationalism and in-heart free choice not only change the respondents' habitus on their value and worldview, but also extend to their family relations and education, and community neighbours. This is consistent with the view of Myers (2004), in that religion enhances family harmony and also Mohanty (2015), in that it can also improve a positive attitude, self-esteem and general happiness. While habitus is deeply ingrained, it is not static or fixed. However, we explored that some respondents, in their role of parents, were not optimistic on how to cope with the negative challenge mainly by communications technology.

6. Conclusion

This paper has explored the views of a sample of overseas people resident in Thailand professing Christian beliefs. As such, they are in a minority in a country which is significantly Buddhist in belief. The research was based on intensive personal interviewing and subsequent analysis of interview transcripts. Four principal themes emerged from the research. First, people considered their belief generally to be a rational response to their hectic daily life. Second, music was seen to be a way by which groups sharing mutual beliefs could strengthen their relationships with each other and with their religious beliefs. Third, people considered Buddhism and Christianity to be compatible with each other, which reflects the syncretic nature of belief prevalent in Thailand. Finally, religion could be seen to have a positive effect on daily life and could help reproduce social relations in a positive light.

The research is limited in both time and space. This is true of nearly all forms of qualitative research and further work would be helpful in strengthening existing understanding and considering the extent to which it may be generalized. Other groups of minority people in Bangkok could also have been included and will be considered for future work. Belief is important to people in helping them to navigate what at times appears to be a dizzying and complex life and it is helpful to know how it is used in various ways to bring stability and peace to them.

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