

## การดำรงอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมของ ศาสนาพุทธนิกายมหายานในมิติของศาลเจ้าจีน กรณีศึกษา อำเภอเมืองภูเก็ต จังหวัดภูเก็ต

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### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยในครั้งนี้มีจุดประสงค์ในการชี้ให้เห็นถึง  
อัตลักษณ์และการดำรงวัฒนธรรมของศาสนาพุทธนิกาย  
มหายานในศาลเจ้าจีน อำเภอเมืองภูเก็ต การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ  
ได้ใช้เพื่อวิเคราะห์ปรากฏการณ์ทางสังคมกับการสังเกตแบบ  
ทั้งมีส่วนร่วมและไม่มีส่วนร่วม และการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก  
อัตลักษณ์ของศาสนาพุทธนิกายมหายานในศาลเจ้าจีนนั้นเป็น  
อัตลักษณ์ที่สามารถสื่อถึงความเป็นชาติพันธุ์จีน เช่น องค์พระ  
แบบจีน คำโคลงคู่แบบจีน ตัวอักษรจีนในการสื่อถึงคำมงคล  
และคำสอนของศาสนาพุทธ ศิลปกรรมแบบจีน และพระโองาพ  
จากพระโพธิสัตว์และพระอรหันต์ของจีน เช่น เจ้าแม่กวนอิม  
และพระอรหันต์จี้กง ในศาลเจ้าจีนยังมีกิจกรรมอันสื่อถึงการ  
สืบสานคำสอนจากศาสนาพุทธ และอัตลักษณ์ของชาติพันธุ์จีน

เช่น การสวดมนต์แบบมหายาน ชั้นเรียนการสวดมนต์ (ซ่งเก้ง) พิธีกรรมอันประกอบด้วยความเป็นมหายาน และประเพณีประจำปี ซึ่งกิจกรรมทางสังคมเพื่อสืบสานอัตลักษณ์เหล่านี้ยังได้รับการสนับสนุนจากหน่วยงานทั้งรัฐบาลและเอกชน อันเป็นกิจกรรมทางสังคมที่สื่อถึงความช่วยเหลือเกื้อกูลเพื่อสืบสานวัฒนธรรมฮกเกี้ยนในภูเก็ต

**คำสำคัญ:** การธำรงวัฒนธรรม; ศาสนาพุทธนิกายมหายาน; ศาลเจ้าจีน; อำเภอเมืองภูเก็ต; จังหวัดภูเก็ต

## Cultural Preservation of Mahayana Buddhism Identity in the Dimension of Chinese Shrines: Case Studies of Muang Phuket District, Phuket Province

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### Abstract

The research purposed to indicate the identity and cultural preservation of Mahayana Buddhism in Chinese Shrines in Muang Phuket District, Phuket Province. A qualitative approach was used to analyze the social phenomena of the study by using participant and non-participant observation, as well as an in-depth interview. The identity of Mahayana Buddhism in Chinese shrines represented the Chinese ethnicity such as Chinese style deities, Chinese poem decoration, Chinese auspicious words, Chinese Buddhist doctrines, Chinese arts, and teaching of Chinese deities such as Kuan

Im Bodhisattvas and Jigong Arahants. There were also various social activities aiming at the maintaining of Mahayana Buddhism as well as inheriting Chinese ethnicity such as praying Mahayana Buddhism Mantras (Songkeng), classes for teaching Mahayana Buddhist Mantras and prayers, rituals containing Mahayana Buddhist identities as well as annual traditions. Every social activity of the Chinese shrines was supported by bilateral governmental organization and private sectors representing the social solidarity to Phuket Hokkien Culture inheritance.

**Keywords:** Cultural Preservation; Mahayana Buddhism; Chinese Shrine; Muang Phuket District; Phuket Province



## 1. Introduction

Buddhism (佛教) was originated in ancient India by the spread of the Buddha and his followers. There were two significant doctrines (Nikayas: 大派), consisting of Mahayana Buddhism (大乘佛教), and Theravada Buddhism (小乘佛教). Mahayana Buddhism emphasized the way of Bodhisattvas (菩萨), and the purpose of Mahayana Buddhism was to assist all life surviving from the suffering world (Phoprasitsat, 2008).

Mahayana Buddhism was diffused to China in Han Dynasty (汉朝). Additionally, Mahayana Buddhism spread to Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Tibet, and Bhutan. Most of the countries believing in Mahayana Buddhism were in Northern Asia (Schirokaver et al., 2013). Theravada Buddhism was spread to various Southern Asian countries including Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Laos (Schumacher, 2013).

The main religion of Thailand was acknowledged as Theravada Buddhism. However, Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism (道教), Confucianism (儒家) and Chinese folk belief (民间信仰) has diffused in Thailand by the migration of Overseas Chinese. Moreover, Skinner (1957) described that Chinese migrants brought their culture to the new society by the migration. Pinpradab (n.d.) and Pattamacharoen (2011) also found that Chinese culture, tradition, religion and faith could influence the social solidarity of Chinese society in Thailand. Chantawanitch (2016) indicated that Chinese migrants established their society in many important area of Bangkok. Keawborisut (2012) supported that there was a large Chinese society in Songkhla Province supporting the business of the province effectively.

Two groups of Buddhism was the main reason reducing differences between Thai religion and Chinese belief. There were various kind of Buddha's images and Theravada Buddhist monk's image in

Chinese Shrines. This situation decreased the political conflicts between Chinese Shrines and Thai Government, affecting the positive image of Overseas Chinese in Phuket. Furthermore, welfare organizations established by Overseas Chinese transformed Overseas Chinese into a positive society of Thailand such as Poh Teck Tung Foundation, Chinese Shrines, and Chinese Association. Mahayana Buddhism was also to decrease the different between Chinese Shrines and Thai Theravada Buddhism providing doctrine, principle and God's image related to Thai Buddhism. Although various local people described that there were very few of Mahayana Buddhist symbols in the Chinese shrine, the study aimed to discover and analyze Mahayana Buddhism symbols and cultural preservation providing new finding to the cultural studies of Phuket.

## 2. Objective

1) To indicate the identity and cultural preservation of Mahayana Buddhism in Chinese Shrines in Muang Phuket District, Phuket Province

## 3. Significance of the Study

1) The result of the study provides the comprehension of Chinese Shrine in the dimension of Mahayana Buddhism.

2) The research is to present new findings related to Mahayana Buddhism in Chinese Shrines, which can be used in cultural tourism of Phuket and cultural studies including the history of Phuket.

## 4. Limitation of the Study

Outstanding GPA Scholarship supported this study, Graduate School, Prince of Songkla University, contracting that the researcher

had only one year for bilateral coursework and thesis (from March 2017 to May 2018). Therefore, the time to collect the data and review related literature was limited. The content included six related theories and six categories of related literature for conducting in-depth analysis from the target social phenomena. The result of the study was categorized into area studies, target shrines, identity, and cultural preservation of Chinese shrines. Mahayana Buddhism in this study was focused mainly on Chinese Mahayana Buddhism that Thailand accepted from Overseas Chinese migration.

## 5. Theoretical Framework

To analyze the social phenomena of cultural preservation of Mahayana Buddhism identity through Chinese Shrines in the target place, six theories were used to conduct the analysis: Cultural Hybridity Theory of Stuart Hall (1990), Invented Tradition Theory of Eric Hobsbawm (2000), Symbol Interpretation of Clifford Geertz (1973), Symbol in Ritual of Victor Turner (1967), Functionalism of Malinowski, and Structural Functionalism of Radcliff Brown (1997).

### 1) Cultural Hybridity Theory of Stuart Hall (1990)

Hall (1990, p.222-225) described that “Cultural Hybridity” established from migration and cross-cultural marriage. Cultural hybridity also means the combination of different cultures, and each culture had originally complex meaning. Some cultures in cultural hybridity phenomena were adapted from gathering with other cultures (Wiwatthanakul, 2007). There are some cooperation, negotiation, and conflict between different cultures in the society that cultural hybridity existed. The different symbols indicating the different feeling establishing from a different nationality, linguistic, faith, and religion in each society. Hence, the complexity of these issues

indicated the conflict. Cultural hybridity conformed to the way of life of people in the society, for instance, various languages are spoken in a country such as Switzerland (Boonmee, 2003 as cited in Panuwat-tanakul, 2009)

In the social process to comprehend the different cultures, Hall (1976 as cited in Euamornvanich, 2017) described that people could comprehend the basic culture from observing the truth of culture which are business sectors, marriage, family, social organization, language, military, gender, and laws. The truth of culture could be reflected in the culture of individuals. This truth was not only one dimension of life, but the truth of culture of individuals included the characteristics related to the behavior, way of thinking, movement, and problem-solving method. However, there was still some culture identifying themselves as a different culture from other cultures. The government of the culture tried to preserve the term of “Patriotism” in the country through various media, such as school course book, music, movie, television, and newspaper (Praphanturakit, 2008).

## 2) Invented Tradition Theory of Eric Hobsbawm (2000)

Hobsbawm (2000) wrote a book of “The Invented Tradition” describing the theory of “Invented Tradition.” Hobsbawm described that “Invented Tradition” was the product in the period of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The word “Tradition” was referred to some antique symbols; furthermore, the “Invented Tradition” was produced to the specific purpose of the society, for instances, tourism, cultural maintaining, migration, and politics.

The thesis of Kewborisut (2012) described that Vegetarian Tradition of Hatyai, Songkhla province was a kind of invented tradition invented for tourism and maintaining cultural purpose. The invented Vegetarian Tradition of Songkhla province responded to the psychological needs

of individuals and social needs of Hat Yai municipality. The invented tradition could increase the social solidarity of Overseas Chinese in Hat Yai feeling proud about their ethnicity, and the invented tradition could gather various international and Thai tourists which influencing satisfying economic growth of Hat Yai city.

### **3) Symbol Interpretation of Clifford Geertz (1973)**

Geertz (1973) composed a book namely “The Interpretation of Cultures.” He referred to the cultural, conceptual morass from the pot-au-feu cultural theory of Tyrolean kind about the definition of culture.

**3.1) Complete way of life:** In the book “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa” written by Walter Rodney (1972), he defined culture as a complete way of life. Culture was also the way people travel and communicate together. In addition, the culture included the tradition of teaching the next generation to inherit from generation to generation.

**3.2) Social legacy:** Every action of children’s lives were from their parents, teachers and their kinship system from socialization. There was the process of inheritances in the society.

**3.3) Way of thinking, feeling and behavior:** These factors shaped human feeling and belief, especially religion, political system, social value, social norms, human behavior, tradition.

**3.4) Abstraction from behavior:** Culture shaped personality and ideology of people. The great example could be the personality study of Ruth Benedict (1982); she discovered that Japanese people highly focuses on social regulation; because, they have the culture that everyone must do their best appropriately, influencing the intensify society.

### **3.5) Anthropology theory related to the behavior of a**

**groups of people:** According to the Royal Anthropological Institute (2018), Anthropology was the study of people around the world, for example, history, human behavior, adaptation to the different environment, communication. and socialization.

**3.6) Storehouse of complex learning:** Culture contained the complex meaning that there are bilateral direct meaning and connotation. Culture was aimed at responding to social and individual desires.

#### 4) Symbol in Ritual of Victor Turner (1967)

Turner (1967) was a British cultural anthropologist and wrote a book of “The Forest of Symbol” describing “Symbols in Ndembu Ritual.” Ritual mainly referred to mystical being or power, and ritual was a form of formal behavior which was not the technical routine of people. Symbol was the smallest unit of the ritual, but symbol could assist the researcher to comprehend the meaning of the ritual.

Two studying methods of rituals were suggested by Turner: 1) The researcher must observe the meaning of each symbol; 2) The researcher must observe people who use each symbols and the way they use them during the ritual, as well as the relation between the symbols and other procedures.

There are also two kinds of symbols in the rituals: **1) Dominant Symbol:** The symbol in the social contexts displayed obligation and desires which are a natural necessity and social needs; **2) Instrumental Symbol:** The symbol was used to observe the object of the ritual. The researcher could consider instrumental symbol from symbol system of the ritual.

In the symbol system of the rituals, there were also two categories of instrumental symbols: **1) Material Symbol:** There are objects, activities, words, relation, events, and gestures in the rituals; **2) Non-**

**material Symbol:** There is atmosphere, and music in the ritual (Pattamacharoen, 2001).

### **5) Functionalism of Malinowski and Structural Functionalism of Radcliff Brown (1997)**

Functionalism initially concerned human desire in the society. In the twentieth century, Malinowski (1997) studied culture and responds through individual need by using participant observation to collect the data. To study human behavior, Malinowski suggested the researcher to use at least 1-2 years to collect the in-depth data for reliable analysis. Moreover, the researcher should study the language of the sample for comprehending their life and behavior. Malinowski studied Trobriand Islanders in Papua New Guinea. There are more than 1,000 languages found in Papua New Guinea. The theory of “Psychological Functionalism” was established by Malinowski.

For “Structural Functionalism Theory,” social structure was the relationship consisting of the family institution, religious institution, economic institution, and political institution. The structure of the society also included the social norm, social value and social roles of each social institution. The social structure was the equipment to analyze the behavior and relation of people in the society (Royal Society of Thailand, 2006, as cited in Pongsapich, 2016). There are various patterns of social structures in the nomadic, tribe, farmer, agriculturalist, fisherman, and relative societies.

Functionalism is one notion of understanding social and cultural phenomena in the society that the researcher needs to use a holistic approach to analyze each organ of the society. The society is the system that combines related issues. When there is a change in the society, the society becomes disequilibrium status (Rintaisong, 2005). Therefore, each change of the symbol is subjected to face with adap-

tation and re-organize all the social systems. The functionalism is recognized as an organism body, and the society could administrate similar to the working of the organism body which is involved (Royal Society of Thailand, 2006, as cited in Pongsapich, 2016).

### 6) Summary of Theoretical Framework

There are bilateral, traditional, and modern cultures in Muang Phuket District. The culture of Overseas Chinese migrants combined with the Thai domain culture for bilateral cultural maintaining and political reasons because; Royal Thai Government once circum-spectly investigated Chinese community. There was the cultural hybridity containing identities from the Overseas Chinese diaspora. Consequently, the transformation brought invented tradition to Muang Phuket District. The purpose of invented tradition was cooperation, negotiation, and conflict solving. Rituals, objects, and media displayed symbols in rituals such as environment and atmosphere influencing people to feel satisfied for maintaining a culture in Muang Phuket District. There are also various invented objects in the invented tradition to suitably adapt to the local people's way of life and belief. Some media, television, social media, and new media were used to advertise this kind of tradition where traditional and modern culture existed together in Muang Phuket District. The relationship influenced people in the social structures to maintain the social legacy which provided social and individual desires.



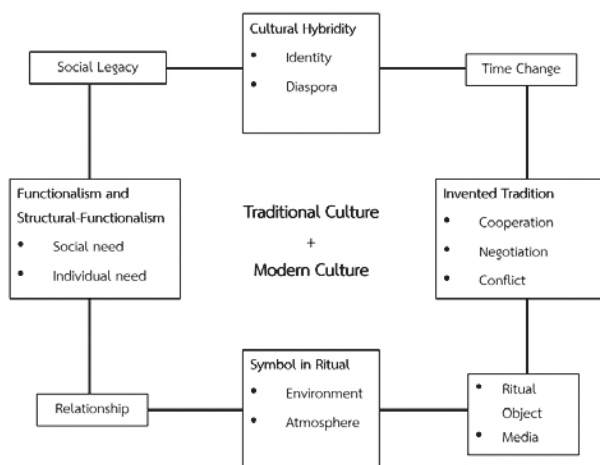


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

## 6. Related Literature

### 6.1 Mahayana Buddhism in India

The above two major groups of Buddhism were mentioned because of the influences of the two major groups of Buddhism nowadays: 1) Theravada (小乘): This group studied the way of the elders, this tradition also called Southern Tradition, because it spread to southern Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. The ultimate goal of Theravada was Arahantship. People who believed in Theravada could reach the Arahantship by the desired extirpation and made perfection of themselves, and the scripture was only one the Pali Canon or Tripitaka as mention in figure 2; and 2) Mahayana (大乘). They were very interested in many classes of people, because their studying way was free to gather any Buddhist ideologies and doctrines. Mahayana spread to various areas in Northern Asian such as China, Japan, Mongolia, Manchuria (满洲国: 1932-1945),

Korea, Vietnam and Tibetan autonomous region of China (西藏自治区) for centuries (Landaw & Bodian, 2003, p.76 & Phoprasitsat, 2008, p.78-79). The ultimate goal of Mahayana was Bodhisattvas-hood, people who believed in Mahayana could reach the ultimate goal by assisting all living creatures to leave from the suffering world. Mahayana had numerous scriptures from Sanskrit Canon and Translations in Chinese and Tibetan languages, and there were also various schools of Mahayana such as Pure Land, Chan, and other Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan schools as mentioned in figure 2 (Ming, 1985, p. 13).

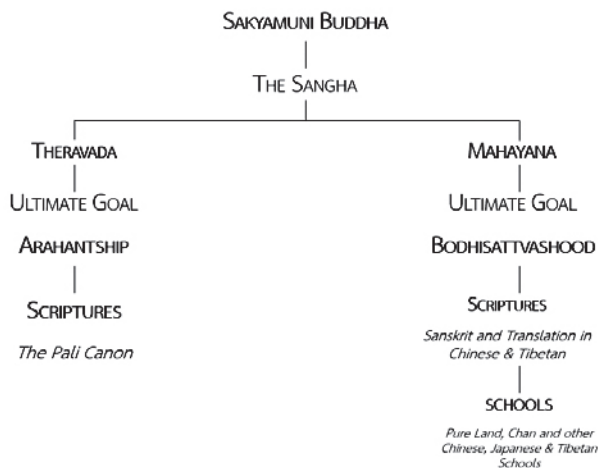


Figure 2: The Schools of Buddhism, from Ming (1985, p.13)

## 6.2 Mahayana Buddhism in China

To diffuse Mahayana Buddhism to many areas of China, Mahayana Buddhism was suitably adapted for ethnic Chinese people, for example, some ethnic gods could be paid respect similar to the Buddha's image and Bodhisattvas' image in the Chinese Pantheon.

Chinese people believed that they could make wishes from gods such as success in love, business, wealth, illness, recovery and even extension of life. Some Mahayana Buddhism in China also influenced by Taoist thoughts in term of Chinese Pantheon and shared gods, for example, Kuan Im Bodhisattvas, the great compassionate Bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism was appointed as the goddess of mercy in Taoist temples. The following statements are a chronological level of installing deities of Mahayana Buddhism in Chinese Pantheon: 1) Kuan Im Bodhisattvas who had two famous disciplines: Golden youth (善财童子) and Jade girl (龙女). She was the most popular deity of the entire Chinese pantheon; 2) Wen Shu Bodhisattvas (文殊菩萨) or Manjusri Bodhisattvas who was the embodiment of the wisdom which came from the meditation, perfect practice, and happiness; 3) Dizangwang Bodhisattvas (Ksitigarbha: 地藏王菩萨). He was the embodiment of benevolence, but he sat below Kuan Im in the Chinese Pantheon; 4) Maitreya Buddha (弥勒佛) who was the Buddha in the future world. He is very fat and smiles for referring happiness and happily practice meaning. 5) The Eighteen Arahants (罗汉) who are the most popular among all Arahants in Mahayana Buddhism. Normally, the Arahants' image was installed at bilateral east and west of the temple (Ming, 1985,).

### 6.3 Migration of Overseas Chinese in Thailand

Chinese Mahayana Buddhism was diffused to Thailand by the migration of Overseas Chinese. Skinner's doctoral dissertation was published as a book in 1975, "Chinese Society in Thailand" in 2005 (Translated Thai version) (Kasetsiri, 2016). Furthermore, powers related to economy and politics in many Southeast Asian nations belonged to Overseas Chinese people who resided in Southeast Asian nation by their immigration (Skinner, 1959).

Overseas Chinese who immigrated to Siam could be categorized into 5 dialect categories: Teochew (潮州话), Hokkien (福建话), Hakka (客家话), Cantonese (广东话) and Hainanese (海南话). Hainanese and Hakka followed the number of Overseas Chinese after Teochew in Bangkok. In addition, 47% of Siamese people in Bangkok were of Chinese descent. The reason to Overseas Chinese interest in immigrating to Thailand which were similar atmosphere, geographical features, way of life, religion, and faith. One of the most significant reasons to immigrate to Siam was the benevolence of the king of Siam. King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V) said on the day of opening Tianfa Hospital (天华医院) that Overseas Chinese brought the flourishing atmosphere to Siam, so Overseas Chinese were governed similarly to Siamese people (Manomaivibool, 2011).

The hospital was donated by five dialectic groups of Overseas Chinese which are Swatou (汕头), Kwangdong (广东), Hokkien (福建), Hakka (客家) and Hailam (海南). Another characteristic of Overseas Chinese in their immigration history was welfare association such as Cantonese Association, Po Tek Tung (Baode Shantang: 报德善堂). Po Tek Tung was the largest philanthropic association in Thailand, and they worshipped Dafeng Zushi (大峰祖师), a former Chinese Mahayana monk who was very famous in benefit of humanity. The association also owned Huaqiao Hospital (华侨医院), and such associations also provided hospitals, clinics, schools and recreational facilities for the community (Kataoka, 2012).

#### 6.4 Chinese Society and Shrines in Phuket

There is no Mahayana temple in Phuket like Bangkok, but Chinese shrines in Phuket represented the three combined religions. There were three categories of the shrines which are 10 state shrines, 14 private shrines and 18 non-registered. There are six shrines inside

worshipped Muslim guardians of locality. The most popular deities in Phuket are Pun Thao Kong (本头公) who is worshipped in 6 shrines, Cho Su Kong (清水祖师) who is worshipped in 4 shrines, Kuan Wu (关羽) who is worshipped in 4 shrines, Lim Thai Su (林府太师) and Kuan Im Bodhisattvas (观音菩萨) who are worshipped in 3 shrines each. Many Chinese shrines in Phuket also worshipped Mahayana Buddhist deities such as Kuan Im, Mitreya (弥勒佛), Ti Chong Ong (地藏王菩萨), Three Golden Buddhas (三世祖佛), and other Bodhisattvas. Some shrines in Phuket worshipped Theravada monk's image such as Luangpho Chaem who used the supernatural power to protect Phuket from the war which described the theory of double identity. Some shrines also invite Theravada monks to make merit in the shrines for auspicious atmosphere and suitably adapted to Thai culture (Chanasakun, 2017, 186-191).

The shrines in Phuket were categorized as “department store” which contained numerous deities for worship, such as Yok Ong Song Te (玉皇大帝), Nine Emperors God or Kiu Ong Tai Te (九皇大帝), Lao-Tze (太上老君), Machopo (妈祖婆), Sam Tong Ong (三忠王), Sakyamuni Buddha, as well as ancestry gods of Tan and Koi family. Siva and Uma Devi are also worshipped in some shrines of Phuket such as Ro Long shrine.

The majority of the shrines in Phuket do not have actual management for the shrine. The ways to manage the shrine are learned from the elder generation and asking nearby people for assistance. However, the management has suitably changed with the modernization of Phuket people. Jui Tui Tao Bo Keng shrine emphasizes spirit medium and miracle performance for making people to comprehend the ritual and the shrine. (Chansattham, 2007, p.59-63).

There are three groups of people in the festival for preserving

Vegetarian Festival: 1) Committee. They coordinate each work for the festival, arrange the tradition and ritual professionally; 2) Spirit medium and their caretaker. They perform the miracle performance in the festival, and local people believe that they can decrease the sickness and sadness of the community; and 3) Participant. They have individual thinking about the festival, and some of them support for continuing rituals and activities in the festival. Some festivals of the shrine also arrange human behavior such prohibiting killing an animal for preparing food and the continuation of doing appropriate actions, Vegetarian Festival. Although there is multitudinous modern technology nowadays, numerous Phuket people still believe in the supernatural power of spirit medium (Phochanakit, 2003).

## 7. Methodology

A qualitative approach was used in the Ethnography, a field of study in Anthropology Studies. Bilateral non-participant observation and participant observation were used to collect data on different occasion of the rituals. The researcher also used the deep-interview by bilateral formal and informal interview. Three Mahayana Buddhism Chinese shrines were selected as the key information of the study, which were 1) Chao Mae Kuan Im Phra Phothisat Shrine (观世音菩萨), 2) Put Cho Shrine (佛祖庵), and 3) Sang Tham Shrine (定光堂).

## 8. Result

### 8.1 Muang Phuket District and Cultural Hybridity Environment

#### 1) People in the Area

People who lived in Muang Phuket District and those were Overseas Chinese descendants had a close relation with Chinese Shrines

since they were born. The newborn was brought to the Pud Jor Shrine (佛祖庵) for telling Kuan Im Bodhisattvas (观音菩萨) that she would protect and bless the newborn for fortunate luck in her or his life. People in this study were focused on the people who lived in Muang Phuket District. For children, their lives were based on going to study at the school, and their school activities are related to Buddhism. The activities that children do every morning are aimed to socialize the students.

## 2) Cultural Hybridity

There were Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and local beliefs of Overseas Chinese people (Heaven and ancestor spirit) and local belief of Thai people (ghost and spirit). The figure 3 shows the holy bridge of Taoism religion, the reason for belonging the bridge of Taoism is the black and white circle symbol of Taoism. In Chinese, it means both darkness and lightness (阴阳).

The other symbol of Taoism of this figure is the crafted picture of the Eight Immortals (八仙过海), and each side of the bridge was crafted four of the Eight Immortals. There was a phenomenon of combination of three religions (三教合一), consisting of Buddhism (佛教), Confucianism (儒家) and Taoism (道教), and the purpose of the combination was done for the preservation of religious culture (Dhammathai, n.d.).



Figure 3: The holy bridge of Taoism at Sam Sae Chu Fut Shrine

The figure 4 shows four images of the Eight Immortals which are similar to the Figure 3 as given in the above. The Eight Immortals were categorized as Chinese god heroes, and the story of the Eight Immortals was considered as one of the most famous folk legends of China.



**Figure 4:** Images of The Eight Immortals Cross the Sea (八仙过海) at Kuan Wu Shrine

Taoism is famous in traditional herbal Chinese medicine, because the philosophy of Taoism comes from living in the mountain of Lao Tzu (老子), the founder of Taoism. The figure 5 shows the paper from lucky stick random in the curing ritual. This ritual started with people who would like to assist them in curing their sickness.



**Figure 5:** Lucky stick paper for traditional medicine at Pud Jor Shrine

## 8.2 Chinese Shrines in Muang Phuket District

### 1) Pud Jor Shrine

Pud Jor Shrine is located at 289 Ranong Road, Taladneua Sub-district, Muang Phuket District. There is no actual date for the estab-



lishment of the shrine, nor is the date crafted at the wall of the shrine, but the result of the interview found that the shrine was maintained approximately for 100 years because of the collapse of building materials. One hundred years ago, the shrine had Kuan Wu (关于) as the main deity of the shrine, had a canal connecting to the sea in front. A merchant had come by a ship arriving at the canal, and he found that the place was very fortunate for building the shrine of Kuan Im Bodhisattvas (观音菩萨).



Figure 6: The front of Pud Jor Shrine

## 2) Chao Mae Kuan Im Phra Phothisat Shrine

Chao Mae Kuan Im Phra Phothisat Shrine (Another name: Chidchiew Shrine) was located at Moo 5, Vichit Sub-district, Muang Phuket District. According to the interview of bilateral shrine caretaker and shrine committee, the shrine is 156 years old. There were seven generations of the chairman of the shrine which was his family. He studied in Singapore during his primary and middle school; he also learned Chinese religion and faith in Singapore for developing knowledge related to the culture of Chinese religion and faith in the shrine. Many auspicious objects in the shrine are also imported from Singapore such as Kuan Im Bodhisattvas image decoration and auspicious cloth knitting in the picture of the Eight Immortals (八仙过海). The main religion of the shrine was Mahayana Buddhism.



**Figure 7:** The front gate of Chao Mae Kuan Im  
Phra Phothisat Shrine

### 3) Sang Tham Shrine

The shrine was established by Hokkien Chinese descendants of “Tan Luan Jae” family in 1891 with the objective to provide a holy place for a consecrated worship to their ancestor gods and gods to whom they were faithful. It is said that the success in the shrine establishment was contributed to the devotion as well as the sacrifice and financial support from Luang Amnart Nararak (Tan Kuad) who was the senior government official at that time. The architectural designs applied to the shrine derived from the traditional Hokkien Chinese influences as evidenced in the terracotta-tiled roof on the single storey construction with various aesthetic modeled figures of the propitious symbols elegantly decorated with traditional tiles.



**Figure 8:** Shrine gate of Sang Tham Shrine

### 8.3 Mahayana Buddhism in Chinese Shrine

#### 1) Doctrine

According to the figure 9, the center of the figure is a Chinese character meaning ‘Heart or Mind’ emphasizing greedy (贪), angry (嗔), and mistaken (痴) influencing people to bear in each category. There are two groups of categories which are good and bad categories. The good category contained (1) Full Buddhas (佛法界), (2) Bodhisattavas (菩萨法界), (3) Pratyeka Buddhas (缘觉法界), (4) Arahants (声闻法界); basically, Buddhism believes that the above four worlds were forever, meaning those who were born in these four world would not necessary fall down into the bad category. The bad categories contains (5) Devas (天神法界), (6) Realm of Asura Demon (阿修罗法界), (7) Human realm (人间法界), (8) Realm of animals (畜生法界), (9) Realm of hungry ghosts (饿鬼法界), and (10) Hell (地狱法界).



Figure 9: Ten World of Spirit in Buddhism at  
Chao Mae Kuan Im Phra Phothisat Shrine

#### 2) God's Image

A thousand hands of Kuan Im Bodhisattvas' image was one of the most famous image styles of Kuan Im Bodhisattvas in Phuket, especially the image made from white jade. Local Phuket people, as well as people in the shrine, believed that white jade represented the immaculate mind of people.



**Figure 10:** White Jade Thousand Hands Kuan Im Bodhisattvas' image at Chao Mae Kuan Im Phra Phothisat Shrine

Tae Chong Ong Bodhisattvas (地藏王菩薩) (Figure 11) the image carrying holy mace on the right-hand side. The ritual conductor of Sang Tham Shrine informed that Tae Chong Ong Bodhisattvas was different from Kuan Im Bodhisattvas regarding a place to assist suffering life. According to Mahayana Buddhism, Kuan Im Bodhisattvas had the aspiration to assist people in the human realm for comprehending Buddhism doctrines and could reach the enlightenment; nonetheless, the determination of Tae Chong Ong Bodhisattvas was to assist all kind of creators in the Hell. He once addressed that when the hell had no creator, he would go back to the Bodhisattvas realm. This reason is why many people highly respect the majestic aspiration of Tae Chong Ong. He was also the symbol of compassionate similarly Kuan Im Bodhisattvas.



**Figure 11:** Tae Chong Ong Bodhisattvas' image at Kuan Wu Shrine

### 3) Worship Object

The lotus (Figure 12) has substantial implication in Buddhism, referring to four kinds of human as the Buddha described during his lifetime. First, the lotus which rising on the water compared to enlighten people. Second, the lotus rose at the similar surface of water indicating people who interested in making merit; however, they lacked Buddhist practice. This category of people was easily taught to be good people in the society, according to the Buddha. Third, the lotus rose under the water surface, indicates who bilateral had satisfying and undesirable action, this kind of people should spend times to improve themselves similar to the lotus trying to rise above the water surface. The last kind of lotus was the most anxiety people, this class of people could not even separate between virtuous and immoral. They also were negative to Buddhist principle; furthermore, they were dangerous to themselves as well as everyone around them. The above implications were the reason many Theravada temples, as well as Chinese shrines, used lotus to worship.



**Figure 12:** Lotus to worship the god  
at Chao Mae Kuan Im Phra Phothisat Shrine

#### 4) Ritual Equipment

Bilateral Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism had a similar praying instrument (Thammasangkrita: 法器). The rosary (Figure 13) was counted during the praying; in addition, alms bowl (Figure 14) and wooden fish (Figure 15) were hit for the rhythm. Bilateral figure 13 and 14 were taken during the Por Tor Festival of Hok Nguan Kung Shrine.



Figure 13: Rosary for Praying at Hok Nguan Kung Shrine



Figure 14: alms bowl (Left) and Dangzi (Right) for Praying at Hok Nguan Kung Shrine



Figure 15: Wooden fish for praying at Chao Mae Kuan Im Phra Phothisat Shrine

### 5) Sutras and Mantras

There are two most famous Mahayana Buddhism Sutras in Muang Phuket District, Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra (The Heart Sutra: 心经) and Phra Maha Garuna Thani Sutra (The Great Compassionate: 大悲咒). For the Heart Sutra (Figure 16), Vachara implicated noble truth being which could not be born or disappeared, Prajna (Philosophy) indicated wisdom, Paramita means enlightenment, and Sutra implied a way.



Figure 16: The Heart Sutra at Chao Mae Kuan Im Phra Phothisat Shrine

## 8.4 Cultural Preservation of Mahayana Buddhism

### 1) Chanting Class

There were various chanting classes in each shrine available in Muang Phuket District. The bilateral chairman of the shrines and shrine committee, as well as ritual conductors in each shrines, aimed to inherit this culture to a newer generation of Muang Phuket District because they realized this chanting was auspicious and could assist them in their success in their lives. Furthermore, chanting was a kind of merit making in Mahayana Buddhism. Chanting also established the wisdom to the chanter because they had to understand the meaning and their mind must be in peace expressing the main principle of Buddhism



Figure 17: Chanting equipment at Hok Nguan Kung Shrine

## 2) Ritual

The Por Tor Festival in this context was the relation to Mahayana Buddhism, Por Tor Festival was originally the festival of Mahayana Buddhism because the festival aimed to assist all suffering spirits in the hell by the holy power of Kuan Im Bodhisattvas. Another relation to Mahayana Buddhism was the chanting. The chanting at the festival used the Heart Suttas for reminding people to practice themselves as moral people for the society because those spirits fell to the hell influenced from negative action when they were human, which is the implication of the festival that reminds people to make much merit as well as assisting each other than harming others.



Figure 18: Por Tor Festival at Hok Nguan Kung Shrine

Figure 19 shows the ceremony of Sin Apology, Mahayana Buddhism believed that all people should apologize for the sins we committed in the past, and we should not commit those sins again by chanting this mantra





Figure 19: Sin apology ceremony at Sang Tham Shrine

### 3) Household Altar

Researchers found three houses of Overseas Chinese in Muang Phuket District. For other Overseas Chinese informants in the study, they have their new houses from their ancestor house, because they would like to find new houses near their workplace. Therefore, they were unable to take photographs of other household altars. The figure 20 contained three famous deities in Phuket which are Ma Jor Po, Kuan Im Bodhisattvas and Luang Por Chaem. Bilateral Kuan Im Bodhisattvas and Luang Por Chaem belonged to Buddhism but different groups, Mahayana and Theravada. Ma Jor Po goddess was the most famous female god of Taoism. Many families in Phuket worshiped her because she was the maritime god, every Overseas Chinese migrated to Thailand worshiped her for the purpose of safe sailings.



Figure 20: Household altar in Muang Phuket District

#### 4) Welfare Organization for Community

There was various assistance provided by the Chinese shrine to the community as a welfare organization. According to the observation of shrine committee of every shrine, the researcher found that, first, the shrine assisting in installing household altar, because commonly Phuket people believed that arranging household altar position need to be correct; this could affect their house directly. Sometimes, they met with an unfortunate situation; they would recall that their household altar was arranged correctly or not. The ritual conductors in the shrine assisted to hold the birthday ceremony at many households, especially the house of spirit medium. There were Chinese god altars in every house of spirit medium. They hold the birthday ceremony of their god every year.

#### 5) Inheritance of Phuket Hokkien Culture

There were not only the advertisement on social media from the shrine, but governmental organization in Phuket also supported the shrine for maintaining Phuket culture. Although the shrine was a Hokkien culture which belonged to Chinese culture, the shrine was recognized legally as Phuket culture, because Phuket was prosperous from the migrant of Overseas Chinese. In addition, they all changed their Chinese nationality into Thai nationality for better occupation and life opportunities. In the figure 21, Phuket City Municipality (PCM) visited Hok Nguan Kung Shrine and donated some money during the Vegetarian Festival. This situation indicated that PCM was highly interested in the culture of Chinese shrines. According to the interview, governmental organizations in Phuket supported and invited the shrines many times holding cultural ceremonies for advertising cultural tourism in Phuket such as Vegetarian Festival and Por Tor Festival.



Figure 21: Phuket City Municipality visited Hok Nguan Kung Shrine

## 9. Discussion and Conclusion

Before comprehending maintaining Mahayana Buddhism phenomena in the Chinese Shrine, Muang Phuket District, the comprehension of the Overseas Chinese migrated to Thailand was significantly important, especially Phuket, by using the Cultural identity and diaspora theory of Stuart Hall (1990). The theory was used to analyze the establishment and development of the shrine and Mahayana Buddhism from the past to the present. There are various religion and faith in the shrine combining from Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, local Chinese faith (Chinese gods and ancestor spirit), Theravada Buddhism and Islam. Under the development of Chinese shrines, which contained only three religions in China, Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism transforming various religion and faith comparing to an empty salad bowl which could contain as many vegetables as the chief and customers require (Pinpradab, n.d.; Pumiputavorn, 2007; Pattamacharoen, 2011; Kataoka, 2012 & Chanasakun, 2017).

Under this development of the shrine, the theory of Eric Hobsbawn (2000), *Invented Tradition* could describe this change from bilateral cultural and political factors. For studying Mahayana Buddhism symbol in the shrine, especially Taoism shrine, the theory

of Victor Turner (1967) and Clifford Geertz (1973) were significant to the study, Symbol in Ritual and Symbol interpretation. Finally, besides studying symbol maintaining Mahayana Buddhism in the shrine, the researcher also should study the function of people in the shrine for maintaining Mahayana Buddhism. The theory of Malinowski (1997), Functionalism and Structural-Functionalism have analyzed such phenomena for studying Chinese shrine in the dimension of Mahayana Buddhism maintaining, case studies of Muang Phuket District.

Chinese shrines established from the Overseas Chinese diaspora migrated from Hokkien province (Manomaivibool, 2011, Pinpradab, n.d, & Chanasakun, 2017). They brought their Hokkien culture with their migration to Phuket; there were Vegetarian Festival, Por Tor Festival, Chinese-language school as well as Phuket Hokkien Association in Phuket for their maintaining cultural purpose. Some of their tradition were invented for bilateral cultural maintaining and political purpose (Dachwilai & Krutchon, 2014). Moreover, there were various symbols expressed in Mahayana Buddhism as well as Taoism identities in the Chinese shrine (Pattamacharoen, 2011).

Originally, culture had its own complex meaning, with the combination of cultural hybridity phenomena, various religion and faith fulfill in the Chinese shrine, there were Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Islamic. Although Chinese shrines were observed several times by the Ministry of Interior during the period of General P. Pibulsongkram, Chinese shrines have negotiating power with Thai government, as well as local community, becoming the local Phuket identity (Kataoka, 2012). Furthermore, a governmental organization in Phuket also accepted this ideology and maintain Phuket Hokkien culture as ‘Cultural

capital' for tourism and cultural maintaining purposes.

## 10. Suggestion

1. The result of this study could conduct a comparative study between Mahayana Buddhist identity inside Chinese Shrine and other places.

2. A lot of lucky sticks inside Chinese shrines have some interesting issues related to Chinese ethnicity. Researchers who are interested in research on the lucky stick could conduct the study of ethnicity inside lucky stick and related issue.

3. There are various styles of making Chinese deities in Chinese shrines, Muang Phuket District, Phuket Province. Researchers who are interested in analyzing art could analyze the differences of these various style.

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