

# Buddhist Temple: The Well-being Space for the Aged in Thailand

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*The world is experiencing an increase in the number of elderly people. This global trend is more advanced in western countries. However, many Asian countries are experiencing the same phenomenon, and within the next few decades, Asia will be the “oldest” region in the world. Adverse effects from a rapidly aging population on society and economy are evident; therefore, policy options are being created to deal with these problems. Nevertheless alternative solutions are still needed. As Asia is the region with the highest proportion of Buddhists in the world and Buddhist principles are embedded within belief systems of followers, the idea of using religious space to support the aging population might be worthy of consideration. This academic interest raises two questions: (1) beyond the use of temple space for preserving and spreading Buddhist teachings, do monastic institutions manage temple space for the benefit of elderly ?, and (2) how do such ancillary activities contribute to the well-being of the aged?*

*This paper uses evidence from Thailand, a country with a large number of Buddhist temples (37,075), to explore these issues. The synthesis reveals that beyond religious activities, numerous secular activities are conducted at temples. These activities conform to the Buddhist worldview on aging and seem to actively promote the well-being of the aged in three dimensions; namely, physical and psychological health, lifelong learning, and social well-being. This article seeks to refocus attention away from governmental management of the elderly towards local management, in the belief that this would be particularly helpful in parts of Asia where institutional welfare is somewhat unreliable. As the temple is a component of the community and plays an important role in the cultural life of Buddhists, it is argued that using temple space can serve as an alternative approach to the development of appropriate policies aimed at enhancing the well-being of the aged in the Buddhist world.*

**Keywords:** space, Buddhist temple, well-being, elderly, Thailand

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## Introduction

The world is experiencing an increase in the number of elderly people. There were approximately 477 million aged people worldwide in 2005, and this number is projected to increase to 1,492 billion by 2050 (The United Nations, 2006). This global trend is more advanced in western countries. Yet the most rapid increases in older populations are appearing in developing countries. Projections show that the percentage of the aging population will soar by 140 percent in the next two decades (The United Nations, 2006). The Asian region is also following the path of demographic transition towards an aging population. Over half of the world population aged 65 and over is in Asia, and within the next few decades, Asia will be the “oldest” region in the world (The United Nations, 2006).

The phenomena of population aging has been brought to world attention as it significantly affects local, regional, and global health and the economy, particularly, labour market, health care, pension systems, and social insurance (Menon & Melendez-Nakamura, 2009; Mccall, 2001; Norton, 2000). In response to this, many countries where societal aging has become wide spread have created policies to deal with these problems. Japan and many countries in developed world are prominent cases in point. Such implications dealing with the bulge of elderly citizens are public pensions (Faiola, 2006), delay retirement (Colebatch, 2004), and active aging promotion (World Health Organization, 2002). Nevertheless alternative solutions are still needed. Recently, the paradigm on aging care has shifted from being a state responsibility to social care (Cantor, 1991). The community-based approach has been introduced to tackle the problem related to *aged population*. Religious institutions which are already well established and accepted within the community are often suggested to become involved in this global issue (Wandersman, Goodman, & Butterfoss, 1997).

Asia is the region with the highest proportion of Buddhists in the world and Buddhist principles are embedded within the belief systems of followers. The idea of using religious spaces to support the aging population might be worthy of consideration. A number of previous studies are mainly focused on how religious doctrine, religious practices, or religiosity related to health and subjective well-being (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Maltby, Lewis, & Day, 1999; Ellison, 1991). Yet the immense potential contribution of religious institutions and their ‘space’

towards well-being in old age has been rarely tapped. This academic interest raises two questions: (1) beyond the use of temple space for preserving and spreading Buddhist teachings, do monastic institutions manage temple space for the benefit of elderly?, and (2) how do such ancillary activities contribute to the well-being of the aged? This paper uses evidence from Thailand, a country with a large number of Buddhist temples to explore these issues by reviewing documents related to activities operated in temple space and synthesizing the nexus of the use of temple space with the well-being of the elderly basing on social capital concept (Putnam, 2000).

## Rapid Population Aging in Thailand

Despite the population projection anticipated by the United Nations (2006) that the Asian region as a whole is expected to become an aging society by approximately 2025, the transition towards an aging population among sub-regions occurs in different timing and speed. Population in more developed countries in East Asia, for instance, ages faster than in Southeast and Western Asian countries. Thailand is markedly different from a majority of Southeast Asian countries; it has been entering into an aging society since 2005 (National Statistical Office, 2008a). According to the National Survey of Aging Population, the percentage of older persons has increased from 6.8 in 1994 to 10.7 in 2007 (National Statistical Office, 2008b) and will continue to increase up to 25 percent in 2030 (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2007). The percentage of Thai population aged 65 and over will increase much higher and faster than the average of Asia and the world (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of population aged 65 and over, 1950-2050

Country or area	Percentage of population aged 65 and over				
	1950	1975	2005	2025	2050
World	5.16	5.61	7.33	10.47	16.23
Asia	4.09	4.08	6.36	10.11	17.52
Southeast Asia	3.80	3.62	5.41	9.05	17.60
Thailand	3.25	3.60	7.80	14.94	23.28

**Source:** The United Nations, 2006.

The rapid transition is primarily due to the remarkable developments in the health care system and successful campaigns for birth control, resulting in declining fertility and mortality rates. The total fertility rate has declined from 6.4 in the mid 1960s to 1.9 in the mid-1990s and longevity has shown a steady increase during the same period from 55.2 years to 69.9 years for men and 61.8 years to 74.9 years for women (Jitapunkul, Bunnag, & Ebrahim, 1993). A rapidly aging population raises Thailand's attention to address strategies to support this group.

## Buddhist Temples in Thailand

About 93.6 percent of the Thai population is Buddhist (National Statistical Office, 2009). Buddhism has long been the cultural root of the Thai people, creating many Buddhist traditions and customs. Temples are the products of the faith of Thai Buddhists. There are approximately 37,075 temples in the country (Table 2), with as many as 291,116 monks (National Office of Buddhism, 2011).

Table 2: The distribution of Buddhist temples by regions<sup>3</sup>

Region	Number	Percent
Bangkok	425	1
Central	2,984	8
North	8,809	24
East	1,865	5
West	1,878	5
Northeast	17,906	48
South	3,244	9

**Source:** National Office of Buddhism, 2011

Generally, Buddhist temples in Thailand are divided into two types (Phutta, 1999); a forest temple or “Wat Pa” in Thai (*Aranyawasee*) and a community temple or “Wat Ban” in Thai (*Kamavasee*). Compared to Wat Ban, Wat Pa is of a small proportion, that is about 4.0 percent<sup>4</sup>. Monks in Wat Pa slip away from the secular world

<sup>3</sup> Calculation of percentage here is based on information from the National Office of Buddhism (2011).

<sup>4</sup> Calculation of percentage here is based on information from the National Office of Buddhism (2011).

into the forest to seek spiritual enlightenment, while the primary mission for another focuses on Dharma education for the means of teaching laypeople. The guiding principle of the monks in Wat Ban has been amended to help the 'others' for the relief of suffering rather than seeking enlightenment and nirvana for 'themselves'.

An agency officially in charge of Buddhist activities was established in the early Rattanakosin Period, called *Krom Dhammakarn* or Department of Buddhism Affairs. It was later changed into the Department of Religious Affairs which is responsible for promoting, supporting and maintaining activities of Buddhism and other officially recognized religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism). In 2002, the government established an agency specifically managing Buddhism called the National Office of Buddhism, which is under the supervision of the government through the Ministry of Culture. The agency carries out the work designated by the Sangha Council and the state in promoting Buddhist affairs. The office has branches in all 77 provinces in order to supervise and follow up religious activities in accordance with Buddhist disciplines and the policies (National Office of Buddhism, 2011).

## **Traditional and Contemporary Use of the Temple Space**

Historically, the temples were a "space" where the Lord Buddha delivered his teachings and sermons to monks and laypeople. Later on, the faithful people provided land for temple construction as residence for monks and for them to conduct religious activities, as well as for the stability of the religion. The number of temples increased in line with the faith of the followers. Whenever and wherever a village or community was founded, a temple would be constructed as a spiritual refuge for community members. Therefore, temples have always been a foundational part of a community.

Physically, the temple space is mainly divided into three parts: religious zone, monk zone and public zone. The religious zone is an area where the stupa, pagoda, chapel or ordination hall are located. It is where religious activities are conducted. The monk zone is a living quarters for monks and novices to carry out non-religious activities. The area is usually enclosed and composed of buildings for monks to do their daily-life activities. The public zone is the most dynamic in terms of use. The area is set for public use for the benefits of both the temple and the community. It can be an

open shady space of the temple or other buildings, such as a crematorium, a temple school or an area for community activities. Some temples may allow laypeople to use this area to earn a living, e.g. a market or a commercial building for rent (Phuttha, 2009). This area is outside of the temple boundary and beyond the analysis of this paper.

The use of temple space mostly depends upon the role of temples in community. According to the Buddhist canon, the temple plays two major roles (Krom Phraya Vachirayanvaroroch, 1971). Firstly, it is a place for preaching Dharma to monks and novices as a way to create “Dharma children”, to pass on the teachings and conserve the religion. Secondly, it is a place for teaching Dharma to laypeople so as to facilitate their livelihood. Consequently, the temple environment according to religious principles is equipped with four suitable aspects: it is quiet, peaceful, cool and comfortable. It is proportionately compartmentalized, appropriate for Dharma learning and practices, in order to be saved from all sufferings.

Apart from religious activities, temples offer secular activities for the well-being of the community. The role of Buddhist temples in society has been recognized since ancient times. To date, their roles remains active as Buddhist practices permit a close relationship between monks and laity. Monks rely on alms offered by laymen; the sacrifices of laypeople sustain and maintain the monkhood. This close relationship, together with religious duties, means that social responsibility has always been an obligation for monks. Traditionally, the secular roles of the temple are found in various aspects of the community life; these include: (1) a learning place, (2) a shelter for the poor and travelers, (3) a traditional healing unit, (4) a club or meeting place for villagers, (5) a community court, (6) a place of consultation for daily-life and psychological problems, (7) an entertainment place for holding traditional festivals, (8) a center for cultural arts and sculptures, (9) a museum, (10) a warehouse and cargo space of community, (11) an administration center for the community which heads of the village used for meetings or to announce some messages to villagers, and (12) a place for holding rituals concerning rites of passage, such as ordinations and funerals (The Siam Society and The Buddhist Association of Thailand, 1970, p. 8-17).

However, temple space and patterns of use have changed over time. Partly, this is due to the Buddhist policies of Thailand that try to attract more people to the temples as a spiritual refuge and center for ethics and morality learning like in the past in order to avoid the traditional role of temples from being overshadowed by

worldly changes. The policies focus on the development of temple infrastructure and activities for monks. The policies specify that monks should improve the standard of their temples. In 1992, regulations concerning the obligations of monks' activities (Volume 2) were issued, specifying six areas of monks' activities: public service, administration, religious studies, religious propagation, educational welfare, and public welfare (National Office of Buddhism, 2011). Essentially, the mission is mainly religion-based, with more diversity. Religious propaganda tends to include knowledge on other local cultures in addition to morality and Buddhist teachings. Public welfare is concerned more with the livelihood of people, e.g. career and law, besides helping the needy and providing shelter to travelers. Changes in monks' mission have brought about a more diverse use of temple space.

As described above, the temple is not only a crucial social resource underpinning all aspects of the Buddhist community, but it also plays an important role in the well-being of community. The thesis of this paper is based on the concept of social capital. According to Putnam (2000), religion is recognized as the most important repository of social capital in terms of social property and social capital formation. Religious institutes provide important services and resources to their members and others in the community. Additionally, religious behavior contributes to the formation of social capital in relation to volunteering, charitable, contributions, and other acts of mercy (Smidt, 2003). Religious institutions play distinctive roles in building relationships of trust, norms, and networks through personal contacts, committees, group numbers, meeting space, and so on that potentially foster people, both with and beyond the congregation, into collective intention and action (Field 2003, p. 4; Putnam, 1993, p. 169).

## **Temple Space and Well-being of the Thai Elderly**

Temples in Thai Buddhist society can be generally designated as a “space” for the elderly. There is a Thai saying that “when you get older, you should enter the temple”. This perspective is derived from the Buddhist principle of impermanence of the human body. Birth, sickness, old age and death are unavoidable natural phenomena. Therefore, every Buddhist should not be spiritually attached to anything and should unconditionally accept the changes of their bodies. The Thai worldview perceives the elderly as being in the state of physical degeneration. Entering a temple to learn the Dharma would help them understand and accept the nature of life, in the belief that perceiving the impermanence of life would make the elderly happy

by means of non-attachment (Paonil & Sringernyuang, 2002). Retiring to the temple by the elderly is regarded as a social norm. Thus, it is not uncommon that temples are a suitable space for the elderly in view of family and society. From the review of documents and activities as well as programs conducting in temples, in both religious and secular form, the evidences suggest that temples spaces have been used as social assets and places for social capital building. These are likely to yield positive results on the well-being of the elderly in a variety of ways.

## **The Space for Psychological and Physical Well-being**

***Psychological health:*** Old people usually go to temples on Buddhist Subbath days (four times a month) to make merit by offering alms to monks and listening to Buddhist teachings or Dharma. It is common for all temples to use this space for these religious activities. Additionally, temples also organize special activities on important Buddhist holy days, such as Lent, Visakabuja Day, Asanhabuja Day, and Robe Offering Ceremony. These occasions enable the elderly to observe precepts, meditate and learn Dharma all year round. Temple space is also used for other religious activities that promote the mental health of old and young people. The activities include mindful and insight meditation practices (Yarmnin, Tathomtero, & Subhakaro, 2005). Many studies have confirmed that meditation practices are beneficial to mental health by calming and relaxing body and mind, as well as activating the secretion of sleep and other good hormones. It was found that meditation activates the pineal gland of the brain to secrete more melatonin hormone (Tooley, Armstrong, Norman, & Sali, 2000). The hormone helps solve sleep disorders and depression problems in old people and increase recognition (Kapland, Goldenberg, & Galvin-Nadeau, 1993) as well as self-esteem (Pongpieng, 2001). Moreover, temples are also where the elderly and laypeople seek advice from monks to solve daily-life and psychological problems concerning luck, karma and fate, or even economic problems. This is accepted as an effective way to reduce stress and worries (Sirintarho, Vasri, Suksamran, & Sivaraksa, 1982).

***Traditional healing:*** Before western medicine became the mainstream practice in Thailand, temples were a place for medical treatments and some of monks took a role as the healer. In the old days, the beliefs in sickness were closely associated with religion (Chumpol, 2002, pp. 52-66). Although the role of monks as healers was not prescribed in religious practices, such a role had been handed down in many areas. When modern medicine with the development and supervision of hospitals and

medical centers took over the role, the healing role of temples was gradually diminished. Nevertheless, monks in certain temples are still giving folk medical treatments to patients. In general, healing practices by temples have changed to collaboration with local health organizations or community folk healers by providing temple space for treatments of chronic or terminal illnesses or for rehabilitation centers for patients suffering from paralysis, hemiplegia, and other chronic diseases (Chankaj et al., 2008). Many temples provide alternative therapies to old people and others by providing traditional Thai massage services, herbal steam bath and herbal medicines (ThaiPost, December 12, 2004; Wat Kaewcharoen, n.d.).

**Health promotion:** Nowadays, temples play a significant part in health promotion rather than treatment for the elderly by collaborating with concerned public agencies and providing temple space for health promotion activities (Treerutkuarkul, 2008). For instance, Thailand's Health Promotion Temple Program is operated by the Ministry of Public Health as a part of the Healthy Thailand Agenda. It started in 2003, using temple space for health promotion for the public, including the elderly. The activities focus on developing temples as centers for physical, mental, social, traditional and cultural development for improving the health of the public. Temples should be shady and cool with a healthy environment. Monks and community members are encouraged to stay healthy by integrating healthcare knowledge with religious activities, e.g. preaching health through sermons. The aim of the program is to have one health promotion temple in each district (875 districts in Thailand). Up to now, there have been 123 temples participating in the program (Jitapunkul & Wivatvanit, 2009).

**Health screening and physical fitness check-up:** Temple space is used for health check-ups for the elderly by local health agencies through elderly clubs stationed in the temples. Health screening and physical check-ups include weigh measurement to monitor their nutrition, blood pressure measurement and urine or blood examination to monitor sugar levels (Narkpong, 2000).

## The Space for Lifelong Learning

Buddhist temples are multi-purpose community centers. Education has been hand in hand with temples for as long as their existence. In the past, monks played the role of teacher and education generally took place in the temples. It can be said that Thai education, formal and non-formal, originated from temples. Formal education

under the supervision of the Ministry of Education was established in the reign of King Rama V, making education more universal and clearly separating it from the temples, while Dharma studies still remain in the temples. In 1932, the first education plan was established (Costa, 1997). Nevertheless, the relationship between temples and schools has been present until today. Many schools were founded on the temple grounds and there are 21,125 schools (67%) out of 31,424 having the word “*wat*” or temple in front of their school names (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2011). The temples still have played an active role to facilitate lifelong learning for laity up to present.

Although the role of monks in education is mainly religiously related, general public can learn from the temples as well. According to the Sangha Act, B.E. 2505 (1962), amended (Vol. 2) in B.E. 2535 (1992), religious education or religious studies involve two aspects of education management. The first feature is educational management for monks in Dharma, Pali and general education sections, which is operated for maintaining and promoting Buddhism. The second aspect is concerned with educating laities in terms of religion and other related issues necessary for their livelihood. Succinctly, temples are learning centers not only for the elderly, but also people of all ages. More importantly, what young generations have learned in the temples would enable the elderly to lead a happy life in society.

***Dharma lifelong learning space:*** Knowledge base according to Buddhism is the concept that stimulates and empowers all Buddhists to acquire knowledge throughout their lifetimes. With regard to the religious principles, there are two factors that motivate humans to learn. The first consists of extrinsic factors, such as learning from texts, knowledgeable individuals, environment, or institutions. The second consists of intrinsic factors, deriving from the inner motivation of individuals. These factors are an intelligence-based approach, enabling individuals to think, examine and analyze by themselves. The intrinsic factors motivate an individual to have a lifelong inquisitiveness. Both of Buddhist principles and the way of teachings primarily direct to intrinsic learning (Phra Phromkunaporn, 2006). Temple space is utilized to organize activities that bring about the two types of learning. A number of activities enabling learning potential are conducted by temples and other agencies. For example, the Learning Program on the Temple Ground, with 800 participating temples nationwide, temple space is used to teach Dharma to people of all ages (Ministry of Public Health, n.d.). Other programs include the Meditation Training Program, the Sunday Merit Accumulation Program, and the Buddhist Sunday School Program (Satherasilaphin & Yarmnin, 2005). Besides being

a learning center for the elderly, the temple ground is used to organize learning activities for the youth, such as Buddhist Children Camp, Ethics Camp and Sunday Buddhist Program (Dhammadjak, 2003). This will be indirectly beneficial to the well-being of the elderly as these activities cultivate and carry on the customs and values of seniority and gratitude which potentially shape positive view among young generations towards the old age. Respect and filial piety obtaining from their descendants will bring dignity and delight to the elderly.

***Arts and culture lifelong learning space:*** Temple space facilitates the elderly to learn freely and at all times. Many temples have libraries for the elderly to use after merit making or at other times (Dhamnimitchok, 2007). Moreover, temple architecture and mural paintings are a knowledge source for local arts, history of Lord Buddha and local histories as a result of temple construction (Buranapisut, 2002). Temple museums are another learning center. There are currently 319 museums managed by temples and communities. They exhibit histories, archeology, folk wisdom, local ways of life, important persons, and arts and performances (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 2011). Furthermore, many temples are promoting the learning of local wisdom, such as herb gardens for villagers to learn the types and medicinal properties of herbs, so that they can be used for treatment.

## **The Space for Social Well-being**

As mentioned earlier, there are activities and infrastructures on the temple grounds, which facilitate social activities for the aged. Additionally, temple space is not only for the aged, but also for people of different ages to participate in religious and traditional activities. Temple space also emphasizes and conserves the values of the Thai elderly.

***Social integration:*** In the past, temples were community centers for all kinds of activities related to religion, traditions, rituals and even recreation. Nowadays, this role has been decreasing due to decentralization, enabling community members to gather at other places rather than the temple space. Nevertheless, the temples still play a significant role as a social space for the aged to conduct religious activities. They are also locations of organized groups and activities, such as the non-formal education centers, career training centers, and particularly more than 200 elderly clubs scattered all over the country (Bureau of Empowerment for Older Persons, 2010). The elderly clubs enable the aged to meet and talk to people of the same age group and provide them more channels to catch up with the changing world. Besides

associating with people of the same age group and partaking in traditional festivals and religious activities all year round, temple space provides the elderly an opportunity to interact with people of different age groups (Busayawong & Tangphet, n.d.). Temples are considered an important arena for interactions with people of all ages. Due to age difference and interests, these people rarely have opportunity to interact on a daily basis. However, religious activities connect Buddhists of different ages and interests to participate in activities and learn from one another.

**Social respect:** Buddhist temples carry on beliefs and social values of seniority, gratitude and value of the aged. Festivals and activities are organized at temples. For instance, the elderly are paid respect to on Song Kran Day, Elderly Day, Gratitude Day, Mother's Day, and Father's Day (Wat Rakasamed, n.d.). These activities provide young generations a space to express their respect and gratitude to the elderly. These expressions make the elderly feel valued and taken care of. Temple's space facilitates social mechanisms to function for the elderly to have better social well-being.

**Social contribution:** Many activities performed in temples by elderly may claim that they provide the elderly with self-esteem, making them feel that they can contribute to others and to society by making merit, cooking during merit-making ceremonies or preparing venues during festivals. In some temples, older people volunteer to be curators in the museums or folk wisdom specialists transmitting local knowledge to young people in career promotion centers located in temple grounds (Busayawong, & Tangphet, n.d.). What they do will ultimately become their self-worth and self-esteem.

## Conclusion

Preliminary synthesis in this study indicated that activities conducted in Buddhist temples most are religious activities. However, activities have recently been more secularized, such as providing worldly knowledge necessary to livelihood and using temple space as an exercise area, career promotion, and locations of groups or organizations for the aged. The religious zone considered a semi-public zone continues to be a space for preaching Buddhist principles and carrying out religious activities. Nonetheless, this zone is currently used more proactively in the form of Dharma programs instead of customary practices. Likewise, the non-religious zone or a public zone tends to be widely utilized since operations are more involved with community-based approach.

As regards the concept of social capital, temples are traditionally associated with a relatively high degree of social capital. The findings here reveal that this kind of community asset potentially contributes to the well-being of the elderly. Temples play regular roles in providing religious or spiritual capital which some writers consider a sub-set of social capital (Iannaccone, 1990). Temple attendance and religious beliefs encourage religious practice and greater religious satisfaction which can lead to enhance physical and psychological health for the aged. Likewise, a number of researches point to the multiple advantages of applying religiosity to health care services (Wannasiri & Triakanukul, 2010; Sringernyuang, 2009; McFadden, 1995).

In other instances, temple space is also shown as a place of social capital building. It facilitates the transformation of various dimensions of religious interaction that in turn influences social connections. According to Putnam (2000), social capital is divided into two basic forms: bonding and bridging. The former is clarified in the light of intra-group networking, while the later is described as linkages to other groups. Temples provide space for the elderly to gather as a group and build up reciprocities, mutual help and support, as well as promote collective actions that powerfully promote their well-being. In addition, temple space is a place that facilitates the elderly to interact with younger-age-groups. Moreover, communicative norms, values, and practices dispersing in temples are changing to a varying extent and seem to support the self-esteem, value, and dignity of the elderly. The positive aspects of religion on the well-being of older adults are not found only in Buddhism, but also in Islam (Abolfathimomtaz, Hamid, Ibrahim, Yahaya, & Abdullah, 2011) and Christianity (Eugenia, Hatch, & Callan, 1985; Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988; Koenig, Kvale, & Ferrel, 1988; Neal & Tran, 1989).

Therefore, it is argued that using temple space can serve as an alternative approach to the development of appropriate policies aimed at enhancing the well-being of the aged in Buddhist countries. This article seeks to refocus attention away from governmental management for elderly towards local management. There is a strong potential to use Buddhist temples to promote the well-being of the elderly as there are tangible and intangible advantages. With regard to space, there are a large number of temples scattered throughout communities with an average land area of about 8.3 *rais* (3.3 acres) per temple<sup>5</sup>. Lots of space together with a role in the cultural life of Buddhists, temples can claim to be good places for social capital building.

<sup>5</sup> The average number is calculated by authors basing on the data from National Office of Buddhism (2011).

In addition, it is not just the religious knowledge provided by monks, but a large number of them are more involved in secular education that would be beneficial to the elderly in terms of applying secular knowledge to Dharma sermons and religious campaigns.

Yet, despite this recognition, much more attention needs to be given considering some of the limitations in using temples to promote well-being of the aged. In spite of large number of temples, the number of monks has been decreasing and the time they spend in the monkhood is also shorter (The Siam Society and Buddhist Association of Thailand, 1970). This would affect mechanisms facilitating the well-being of the elderly. Nowadays, the centrality of the temple in society has diminished. Certain roles of temples have transferred to other organizations. Consequently, some activities which potentially build social capital for the elderly are conducted outside the temple space in places where older people find inaccessible and so rarely participate. Furthermore, the level of veneration in the monk among members of a new generation was much less than before (National Statistical Office, 2005) and this may affect the building process of norms and values supporting the dignity of the elderly. However, these are just some of the shortcomings; there may be others that need to be overcome in order to promote the temple as a well-being space for the aged.

The above synthesis of temple activities in relation to the well-being of the aged is based on review of existing documents from limited sources, particularly empirical research focusing on the nexus of 'well-being' and 'Buddhist temple'. Thus, further research is suggested to examine an interaction of using temple space and well-being outcomes of the aged and to investigate how to raise the existing capacity of temples in order to support an increasing older population. More research are needed to develop a model that will become a prototype to be applied in the Buddhist countries of the Asian region that are becoming or have become aging societies. This may facilitate Buddhist countries in dealing with major challenges according to their own cultural conditions.

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