

Thai Buddhist Temples in the Republic of Korea: Thai Community Centers or Not¹

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Abstract

The number of Thai people entering the Republic of Korea has increased to such an extent in the last five years that they are now the largest number among Southeast Asian visitors. Furthermore, the number of Thai migrants living in Korea is ranked second after Vietnamese migrants. Along with this phenomenon, the first Thai Buddhist temples were established in Korea in 2010. The inauguration of religious organizations and the increasing number of Thai migrants is not a coincidence.

Buddhist temples have spread over not only Asian countries, but also the United States and European countries. Religion no longer belongs to the private sector, but plays a pivotal role in the public sector as well. Therefore, this research aims to study the socio-cultural transnational activities of Thai Buddhist temples in Korea by adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods. The goal of this study is to determine the role of Thai Buddhist temples as Thai community centers in Korea, a country where the socio-religious field for immigrants has not been explored to date.

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The results of this study reveal that Thai Buddhist temples in Korea conduct roles to inherit national identity and also can serve as intermediaries between Korea and Thailand; however, these temples do not serve as social fields providing better social capital. Furthermore, they are not community centers where Thai immigrants interchange useful information about living in Korea.

Introduction

Korea established diplomatic relations with Thailand in October 1958. This was the second Southeast Asian country Korea established ties with after the Philippines, and Korea has continued its relations with Thailand for 57 years. Ever since, the number of Thais residing in Korea has gradually increased as Korean relations with Thailand have continuously developed. According to statistics from the Korea Immigration Service, there were only 21 Thais who entered Korea in 1960; however, in 2008, Thais residing in Korea amounted to 45,198, including both legal 30,852 and illegal 14,346 aliens. Moreover, the number of Thai legal residents increased even more to 55,110 people in 2015. Since the Korea Immigration Service has not reported the number of illegal aliens by country of origin since 2014, the accurate number of illegal Thai residents is no longer officially available. However, the number of Thai illegal alien consistently increased to 20,665 until 2013.³ Therefore, it could be estimated that both legal and illegal Thai residents in Korea have been trending upward.

Thai residents in Korea, for the first time among Southeast Asian immigrants, founded religious temples – Wat Buddharangsee, Wat Dhammajetiyaram and Wat Bhavana – with resident Thai monks. These three temples were built around 2010 when the number of Thai residents in Korea was on an upward trajectory. These temples become centers of traditional Thai activities by hosting events celebrating Thai

³ Korea Immigration Service statistics.

holidays, participating in hosting events to celebrate Thai national days and the birthdays of Thai royal family members, as well as helping Thai immigrants perform religious activities.

Traditionally, Thai society has been characterized by its emphasis on individual freedom and the difficulty its members find in forming groups and collectivizing. In the same context, John F. Embree characterized Thai society as a loosely structured social system.⁴ Girling and Dhiravegin explained that Thai society possesses a sociopolitical characteristic that stresses individual freedom and, because of this individualism, Thais shun being part of an organization or interest group, and that even if they form such groups, they tend to disintegrate easily.⁵ Even though recent social phenomena in Thai society seem arguable in this standpoint, Stithorn Thananithichot, a Thai scholar described Thai ethnicity in his recent research as follows: “Thai people’s understanding of their *ethnie* [ethnic group] as a ‘free’ and ‘independent’ people is a modern view surfaced in the 20th century.”⁶

Thai Buddhist temples have advanced into many parts of the U.S., Europe and Asia in recent years. Buddhist temples are religious organizations and thus differ from the aforementioned social interest groups; however, in Thailand, where 90% of its population professes to be Buddhist, Buddhism occupies a central part of Thai life and identity. Thus, it can be understood that Thais living abroad who build new Buddhist temples and gather in their newly settled countries strive not to assimilate to the society and environment of their newly adopted country, but instead hope to maintain their Thai identity through transnational activities. Considering that in the three Northeast Asian countries – Korea, Japan, and Mainland China – Thai Buddhist temples were founded in 2011, 2009 and 2015, respectively, it can be conjectured that the establishment of temples in immigrated countries after the 2000s has to do with the correlation between

⁴ Embree, *A Loosely Structured Social System*, 181-193.

⁵ Girling, “Past and present”, 37-45; Likhit, “Political Culture and Development of Thai Politics”, 306-333.

⁶ Thananithichot, “Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity”.

immigrant religious organizations, immigrant community formation and immigrant interaction with newly settled societies.

Hirschman has studied the role of religion within immigrant groups, finding that religion not only helps immigrants overcome the trauma of emigration by giving mental stability through faith, but also provides a national community that functions as a refuge from the discriminations of the adopted country.⁷ Moreover, religion is significant because of its role in preserving cultural heritage and because it provides opportunities for economic and social mobility. Similarly, Martes, Braga and Rodriguez found that religious networks can be crucial in an individual's effort to gain social capital.⁸

In addition, religion can be a bridge between immigrants and their native country. Hervieu-Leger and Tweed mentioned that religion can link immigrants with the flow of the past, present and future.⁹ Laurence and Vaïsse analyzed that the children of immigrants who have not been faithful or devoted to their native religion before, increasingly convert to their native religion because their native religion is a crucial part of their own identity.¹⁰ Meanwhile, scholars, such as Guest, argued that immigrants are able to continue participating in the happenings of their native country through religion.¹¹

As mentioned above, the relationship between religion and immigrant communities have been studied in various ways, and in particular, have found that religion is greatly correlated with the effort of immigrants to maintain their cultural identity in their newly settled country and keep ties with their native country while adapting to and interacting with their newly settled country.

In other words, in studying immigrant transnational acts, researching the specific religious organizations immigrants have established in newly settled countries is highly significant. Thus,

⁷ Hirschman, "The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States", 1206-1233.

⁸ Martes, "Church membership, social capital, and entrepreneurship in Brazilian communities in the U.S.".

⁹ Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a chain of memory*; Tweed, *Our lady of the exile*.

¹⁰ Laurence, *Integrating Islam*.

¹¹ Guest, *God in Chinatown*.

the Thai community, which for the first time as a Southeast Asian immigrant group established its own religious community within Korea, is a very appropriate object of study in evaluating immigrant transnational acts.

Furthermore, Portes mentioned the study of immigrant transnational acts that has taken place abroad has focused on immigrants in North America and Europe.¹² When Asian immigrants were concerned, those studies mainly targeted second-generation Korean immigrants,¹³ or second-generation Chinese immigrants living in the United States.¹⁴ Studies concerning transnationalism in Southeast Asia have focused on residents of border areas, refugees and ethnic minorities. Such was the case in a study of the lives of Karen refugees along the Myanmar-Thailand borderland and international relief organizations,¹⁵ a study of ethnic minorities in the Myanmar-Thailand borderland and Myanmar-Thailand international relations and politics,¹⁶ and a study of people living in the border areas of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.¹⁷ Previous research on immigrants in Korea has mostly centered on the application of the assimilation model of multiculturalism on marriage involving immigrant women and immigrant workers.¹⁸

¹² Portes, *Conclusion*, 874-892.

¹³ Kim, "Transnational identity formation of second-generation Korean-Americans living in Korea", 70-82.

¹⁴ Louie, "Re-territorializing transnationalism", 645-669.

¹⁵ Lee, "A study of a border social system in the Thailand-Myanmar borderland", 109-150; Lee, "The modes of livelihood pursuits of the Burmese Karen refugees in Thailand", 207-234.

¹⁶ Lee, "The relation between Thailand and Myanmar", 67-100.

¹⁷ Thanachate, "Nationality Discourse of the Thai State", 71-90; Chainaong, "Tactics of Everyday Life Practice", 23-44; Pattakorn, "Transnational Migration Processes of Victims-Migrant Trafficking", 95-110.

¹⁸ Sul, "Social network and transnational identity of marriage migrant women", 229-260; Jeon, "How do transnational ethnic networks boost and support international marriage in Korea?", 205-232; Kim, "Deterritorialization and Transnational Networks of the Multicultural Families", 421-436; Koo, "Multiculturalism and Transnational Migrants", 5-51; Jang, "Multi-Cultural Awareness and Attitude Toward Migrant Human Rights Policy".

The studies on transnationalism of Southeast Asians in Korea also tend to cover the entire Southeast Asian immigrant experience and thus does not adequately represent the diverse ethnic and cultural groups within Southeast Asia that possess distinctive histories, societies, races and religions.¹⁹ Therefore, as this study deals with the transnational existence of immigrants within Asia that connects Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, it is expected that this study will expand the application of transnational theory to Asia and that the study's results will help in revising and supplementing transnational theory.

Method of Study

Paasche and Fangen point out that research studies on immigrant transnationalism have mainly been qualitative research through case study methods and that to integrate qualitative research and quantitative research more quantitative research on immigrant transnationalism should take place.²⁰ On the other hand, they also indicated that quantitative research on younger generations of immigrants entail difficulties because these immigrants consider their identities multidimensional and products of special circumstances.

Levitt and Jaworsky criticize that studies on transnationalism so far have been too explanatory, focused on single case studies, and centered on the perspectives of the adopted countries.²¹ Therefore, future studies on transnationalism should include consistent and predictable analysis based on the cause and effect of transnationalism, focus on systems of transnational acts by different individuals and groups and also consider the relationship between immigrant transnational acts and assimilation into newly settled countries.

Thus, this study on Thai immigrants has adopted both qualitative and quantitative research methods, thereby breaking away from the qualitative focus of existing studies. This study consisted of a

¹⁹ Kim, "The Movement of Transnational Culture", 113-159; Kim, "The Origin and Diffusion of Southeast Asian Phenomena in Korea", 77-213.

²⁰ Paasche, "Transnational involvement", 1-12.

²¹ Levitt, "Transnational migration studies", 129-156

primary field investigation of Thai temples in Korea from April 2015 to June 2015, after which secondary field investigation took place from December 2015 to February 2016 to supplement the primary field investigation results.

The researcher participated in not only religious activities, but also socialization, education and community services in order to observe in depth and in close physical and psychological proximity as a participant observer. Moreover, the researcher used qualitative research methods by conducting in-depth interviews with main community agents, such as leaders of religious organizations, event planners and people who regularly participate in organized religious activity. The surveys used in this study asked questions that were designed by referencing transnational theory, as well as religious and social theory.

The research was concerned with material obtainable through intensive observation and face-to-face interviews, such as the difference in frequency and scale in religious activity before and after immigration; reason and purpose for participating in immigrant religious organizations; and whether there was any change in the relationship with the adopted country or native and immigrant community after participating in immigrant religious organization.

In addition to such quantifiable material, the study covered the effect of activities, such as religious service, socialization, education and community service, on newly settled immigrant community and on the immigrant ethnic identity and identity formation and transformation experienced as immigrants; the effect of religion on the settlement efforts of immigrants; the relationship with the native country; activities planned for the future and reasons behind such plans; and future direction and things to improve on.

Thai Buddhist Temples in Korea as Thai Community Centers

A basic survey was conducted on 30 Buddhists at Wat Buddharangsee on 12 April 2015. After that, survey questions were revised and a second survey of 120 Buddhists was conducted at the

three Thai Buddhist temples in Korea for the purpose of exploring the roles and activities of Thai immigrant Buddhists at the temples.

On 21 February 2016, a survey was conducted of 50 Buddhists at Wat Buddharangsee. In addition, five members of the Buddhist followers group of Wat Buddharangsee, who were called the Monk's Attendant Group, or *Luksit Wat*, were interviewed on 12 June 2016. These members living in Korea have participated in the activities of Wat Buddharangsee for about four to five years. The interviewees were all male non-professional workers.²²

41 people participated in the survey at Wat Dhammajetiaram on 14 February 2016 and 29 people participated in the survey at Wat Bhavana on 7 February 2016. During the survey process, participant observation was also conducted while a Buddhist service was in progress, hence what ordinary Buddhist did on the very day was observed. The following analyses were all based on these aforementioned processes.

McLellan said that a number of Buddhist temples and meditation centers are located in North America,²³ but an academic method aimed at precisely calculating the number of Buddhists taking part in those facilities has not been established yet. The situation is pretty much the same for the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea. It was extremely difficult to find out how many Thai immigrants were now living in Korea. The reason is that many Thai immigrants, who profess to be Buddhists, do not, or rarely visit the temples. Therefore, it remains unclear as to what criterion to use to determine the number of Buddhists who are part of the Thai Buddhist temples.

While monk Phra Jitsak Daris at Wat Buddharangsee said that around 500 Buddhists are on the Buddhist list, through observing it was found that between 60 to 150 Buddhists attended the Buddhism sermon on Sundays without special events. This was affected by a number of variables: season, weather and Korean holidays. The

²² Petcharat Suphamongkol [เพชรรัตน์ สุภามงคล], Pisal Thongthang [พิศาล ทองแห่ง], Tibet Boonrat [ธิเบต บุญรัตน์], Thanachoti Kohthale [ธนโชติ เกษะทะเล], Itthikorn Chuenjai [นาย อิทธิกรณ์ ชื่นใจ].

²³ McLellan, "Themes and issues in the study of North American Buddhists and Buddhism", 20.

number of participants was relatively small during Korean holidays, such as the Lunar New Year's Day and Korean Thanksgiving Day.

In addition, the number of visitors to the temple went down to around 50 to 70 in early May in which Korean national holidays were included, even when the weather was good. On the contrary, more Buddhists visited temples during Thai national holidays or when Buddhist festivals were held. A huge number of Thai Buddhists could be encountered at the temple during Buddhist events, such as the Buddha's Birthday or the ceremony of presenting robes to the Buddhist monks at the end of the Buddhist Lent. Similarly, many people visited on Thai national holidays, such as the birthday of a Thai royal family member.

As for Wat Dhammajetiaram and Wat Bhavana, which are relatively smaller than Wat Buddharangsee, a great number of Buddhists came to the temple for the Buddhist festivals and on Thai national holidays. They hold events by securing external facilities such as the Yangju Culture and Art Hall. Therefore, there is a significant discrepancy between the number of visitors on a usual Buddhism sermon day and on Buddhist festivals and Thai national holidays. It should be noted that the survey at each temple was conducted in February, a winter month according to Korea's season, and collected answers from almost all the visitors to each temple on the very day they visited the temple.

The survey was composed of 13 questions written in the Thai language, here translated into English as follows:

1. How long have you been staying in South Korea?
2. At what degree can you speak Korean?
3. What was your reason for coming to South Korea?
4. What was your reason for coming to this temple? (Multiple-choice question)
5. What is the role that overseas Thai temples should play? (Multiple-choice question)
6. I want to come to the temple as often as possible.
7. I seek positive participation in Thai traditional events at the temple (e.g., Thai dance performance, sharing Thai food at the booth).
8. I feel connected with Thailand through the events held by the temple.

9. I think the Thai temples in South Korea help with my life in South Korea.

10. I have donated to overseas Thai temples through the temple (e.g., the fire accident at Wat Buddharangsee in Tokyo).

11. I have donated to Thailand through the temple (e.g., flooding in Thailand).

12. I am aware of and take part in the operation of the temple.

13. I think the Thai government agencies can play a crucial role in constructing and maintaining the overseas Thai temples.

The survey found that 78.2% of the visitors to the Thai temples were unskilled foreign workers with poor Korean proficiency. The immigrant women who were married to Korean men accounted for 7.6% of the total visitors, showing no significant difference when compared with the figures published in 2016 by the Immigration Office of the Ministry of Justice.²⁴ The said publication explained that married immigrant women accounted for 7.9% of the total number of Thais living and staying in Korea.

What is noticeable is the figures of laborers. The Immigration Office officially announced the number of Thai legal workers who came to Korea with an E-9 visa via the Employment Permit System for Foreign Workers (EPS system) was only 23,278 in 2015. This number represents only 25.8% of the total Thai legal resident, not include illegal immigrants. However, the result of this survey reveals that 78.2% of the participant were laborers. The percent is closer to the estimation of the Thai Embassy in Seoul rather than Immigration Office. The Thai Embassy in Seoul estimated that the total number of illegal and legal immigrant workers could be around 60,000.²⁵ Therefore, it could be assumed there are still a large number of illegal Thai immigrants and the most of them are laborers.

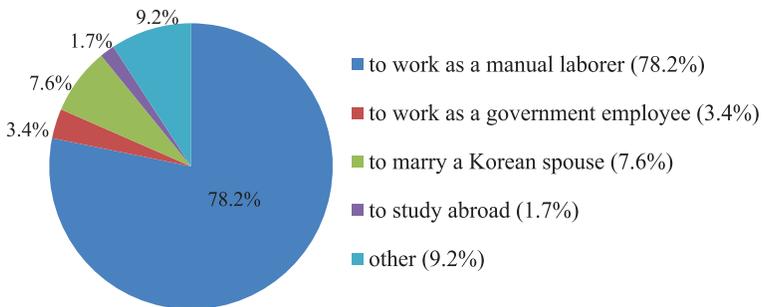
Previous research has found that international marriage migrant women in Korea were forced to follow the Korean tradition since the significance of their maternal culture was not recognized and due

²⁴ The Immigration Office of the Ministry of Justice; Korea Immigration Service Statistics.

²⁵ <http://www.mfa.go.th>.

to the assimilation model of multiculturalism in Korea.²⁶ Through previous research, numerous scholars have suggested that both the Korean government and society should acknowledge the maternal culture in multicultural families. As such, the previous research mentioned found it necessary to maintain and respect the maternal culture of international marriage immigrant women. Therefore, it can be expected in this context that the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea would play a more vital role.

What was your reason for coming to South Korea?



When the respondents were divided according to how long they have resided in Korea, 33.6% of them, the largest number, said they have resided in the country for more than four years. This was followed by those who have resided for less than a year at 23%, those who have resided for one to two at 14.8%, and those who have resided for two to three years at 10.7%.

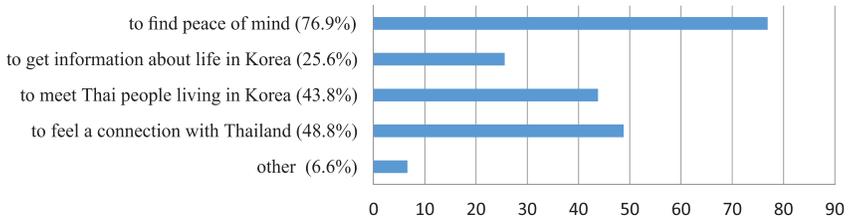
It was found that the Thai immigrants who came to the temple began visiting after a certain period during and after their settlement phase. They came to the temple less frequently after they become accustomed to living in Korea after an early phase. As far as legal workers were concerned, they returned to the temple at the final phase

²⁶ Lee, "A Study on the Characteristics of Socio-Cultural Networks of Female Marriage Migrant", 35-51; Kim, "Cognition of Korean College Students for Six Foreigner Groups", 1-23; Choi, "A Study on the Social-Cultural Adaptation of Foreign Wives in Korea", 141-181; Lee, "Multi-Cultural Experience and Identity-Forming of Women Who Immigrated to Korea by Marriage", 163-186.

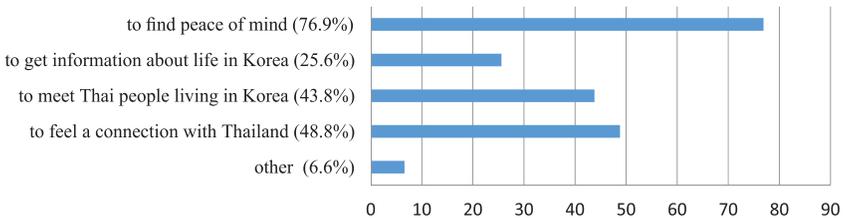
of their settlement. Given that legal foreign workers can reside for up to four years and ten months in South Korea, the response rate of those who have resided for more than four years was high.

This outcome can be connected with the answers to questions 4 and 5, in which 76.9% of the respondents said that they came to the temple for psychological stability, 48.8% said that they came to the temple because they felt that they became connected with Thailand, and 43.8% said that they came to the temple to keep company with other Thais residing in Korea. However, when asked what roles the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea played, 71.7% of the respondents said that they were a place where Thai culture could exist, 64.2% said that the temples were an organization to support religious activities, and only 30.8% said that they were a place for interacting with other Thais.

What was your reason for coming to this temple? (Multiple-choice question)



What is the role that overseas Thai temples should play? (Multiple-choice question)



The immigrants who visited the Thai Buddhist temples came to the temples for religious activities rather than to form a relationship with others or exchange information with one another. In addition, even when they wanted to find an opportunity to exchange information or interact with others, they could hardly find such opportunities.

In conclusion, it can be said that the temples are less important for exchanging information to foster social ties and social capital.²⁷ The reason is that a vast majority of the visitors belong to the working class who did not possess sophisticated skills. As far as legal immigrant workers were concerned, they could stay employed for three years and additionally extend their contract for one year and ten months. Therefore, as they were required to go back to their country after a certain period, they did not have a sincere need to interact with other people.

An interviewee from *Luksit Wat* also explained the reason for this lack of exchange among temple visitors in the same context. Illegal immigrants who stayed in Korea for over four years frequently changed as they either had to go back home or were deported. Therefore, they did not feel that it was absolutely necessary to interact sincerely with others while staying in Korea.

These characteristics cause intimacy, belongingness and solidarity in the community to diminish. Thai people prioritized freedom ahead of anything else and thus hesitate to belong to any formal interest group. In spite of this, while the Buddhist temples are intrinsically different from formal interest groups, the organization of a Buddhist temple does not stray far from the traits of a community wholly composed of Thais. *Luksit Wat*, directly set up by Buddhist followers, is a kind of loose organization that does not forcibly require its members to do anything as anyone who frequently came to the temple for a certain period could freely join. Thus, *Luksit Wat* does not preside over activities, such as member management, official duty assignment and exchange.

²⁷ Social capital (ทุนทางสังคม) is the institution, relationship system, and practice base. The interaction of society in both quantity and quality. See Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, “ทุนทางสังคม (social capital)”.

On the other hand, 25% of the respondents said that they visited the temple to obtain information regarding life in South Korea. This could be largely because the South Korean police prohibit the temples from helping Thai immigrants find jobs. Until mid-2015, visitors to Wat Buddharangsee liberally exchanged information, especially about working places looking for immigrant workers. Moreover, monks who deal with religious and administrative affairs share various information, from job openings to deaths of immigrant workers or health care in the winter. However, sharing information of job openings is completely forbidden under the EPS system.

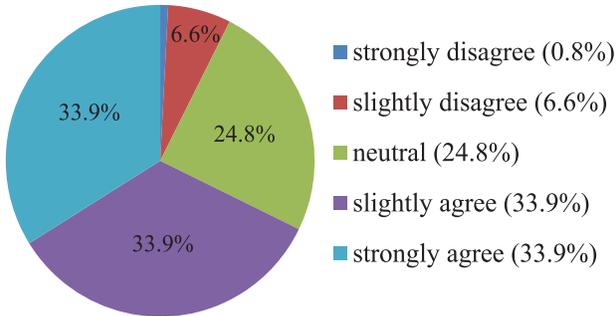
Therefore, since Wat Buddharangsee registered as a religious corporation, careful measures needed to be taken. The police in Hwaseong-si visit the temples once in a while, particularly during the time when Buddhist events are held. Shared information within the temple that could violate Korean rules and regulations disappeared. Moreover, affairs related to daily living were replaced with sermons on the Jatakas and the Buddhist mind-set in order not to violate Korean rules and regulations, with the preaching of Buddhism doctrine now more emphasized.

In this context, when Phra Maha Wirat Chaipanya, the monk who was in charge of the missionary work at Wat Buddharangsee in Sydney, Australia, came to Wat Buddharangsee in Korea, he emphasized in his sermon the magnitude of abiding by the rules and regulations. Through such efforts, Wat Buddharangsee has nearly lost its role as an information exchange plaza as its religious legitimacy became officially recognized.

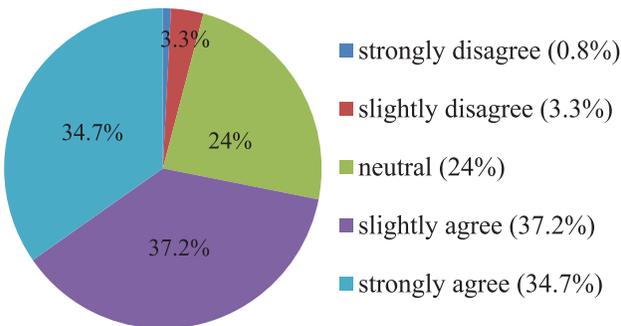
Nevertheless, of the 37.2% who said that the Thai temples could be helpful to their living in Korea, 34.7% said they could positively help. A vast majority of immigrants who came together at the temple hoped that the Thai temples would play a role in supporting religious activities and preserving culture. Therefore, it could be interpreted that the social roles of the temples, if not significant, had a meaningful influence on Thai immigrants. In particular, of the 33.9% who said that they felt connected with Thailand through their activities in the temples, all of them answered that their connection felt positive. As a result, it may be said that the Thai Buddhist temples play a role in

connecting Thai immigrants with Thailand, in addition to supporting religious activities and preserving the culture.

I feel connected with Thailand through the events held by the temple:

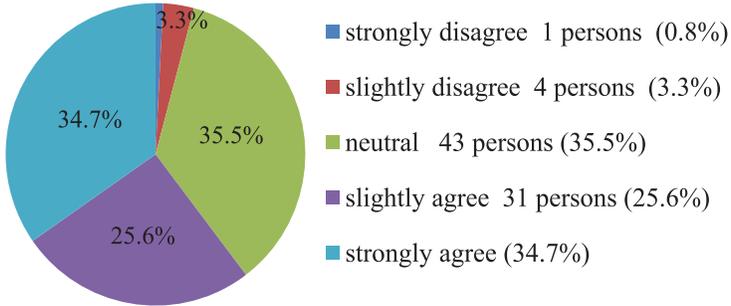


I think the Thai temples in South Korea help with my life in South Korea:

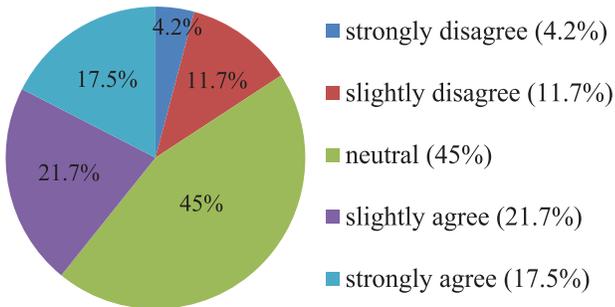


These are the reasons why Buddhists sought to make temple visits as frequently as possible, even when they were not aggressively willing to interact with one another or belong to any formal group. Moreover, they exerted active efforts to take part in events on Thai national holidays organized by the temples. Those efforts have been significant in maintaining the Thai Buddhist temples and would likely continue, although they were still at an early stage of developing a stable religious organization.

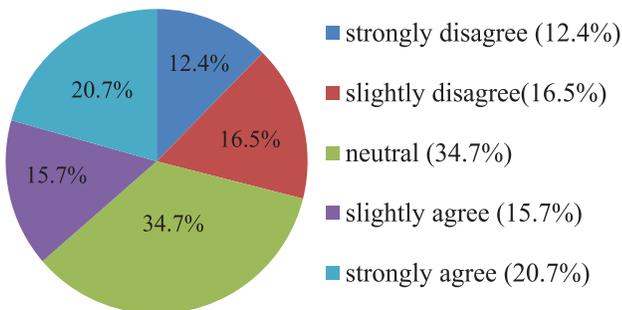
I want to come to the temple as often as possible:



I seek positive participation in Thai traditional events at the temple:



I am aware of and take part in the operation of the temple:



On the other hand, those who said that they were well aware of the way the Buddhist temples were operated, those who said that they were aware of it, and those who said that they were not aware of it were almost statistically identical to one another. However, Buddhists made very small contributions with regard to planning and practicing the new activities of the Buddhist temples. Activities that the Thai Buddhist temples hold during the year can be largely divided into the two categories: Buddhist festivals and Thai-national holidays. While Thai Buddhist temples hold activities, temple visitors, including members of *Luksit Wat*, do not directly organize these activities.

Activities that the Thai Buddhist temples hold during the year can be largely divided into the two categories: Buddhist festivals and national holidays. The Buddhist festivals include Makha Bucha Day, Buddha's Birthday, Triratna Day, Beginning and Closing Day of Vassāvāse (Buddhist Lent), and the ceremony of presenting yellow to the Buddhist monks at the end of the Buddhist Lent. Also, Thai Buddhist temples take part in Buddhist festivals organized by the Korean Buddhist *Jogye* Order according to the Korean calendar. The Thai national holidays include regularly celebrated events, such as the birthdays of the King, the Queen, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, as well as the irregularly celebrated events such as the 70th anniversary of the King's accession to the throne. In addition, Songkran, the Thai New Year's Day according to the Thai lunar calendar, is celebrated. Therefore, the Thai Buddhist temples directly organize five Buddhist festivals and five national holiday events every year and additionally hold events when necessary.

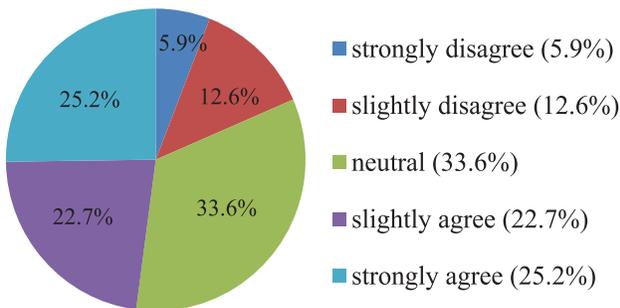
While such events can provide Thai overseas immigrants with a psychological solidarity with their birthplace, these are carried out according to fixed orders as regularly held events. Monks play a leading role in commemorating the Buddhist festivals, commemoration of the national holiday events are funded by the Thai Embassy, the Labor Director Office in South Korea and the Tourism Agency. However, Buddhist followers simply play an auxiliary role, such as food sharing, giving alms, dedication, traditional song and dance performance and organization and clean-up of related articles. This deserves attention since among the total number of respondents, 12.4% said that they

were not aware of the way the temples were operated at all and 16.5% said that they were only slightly aware, both of which represent a higher response percentage compared with the other questions.

Nevertheless, Buddhist followers try to take an active role in the events held by the temples as frequently as possible, convinced that they matter to them. Wat Dhammajetiaram has recently offered a variety of programs for children from multicultural families. In these programs, Buddhist followers can take part in education on Thai language, Thai food sharing and experiencing Thai musical instruments. In addition, they have made efforts to expand their roles by, for example, allowing Buddhist followers capable of teaching these programs to take charge personally.

Unfortunately, Wat Buddharangsee could not put into practice an education program for the Korean language, as proposed by Buddhist followers, since they did not have qualified instructors. In addition, as the followers were mostly workers, they had difficulty in adjusting to the class timetable. However, the roles of Buddhist followers are expected to increase in the future, considering that they have now found it necessary to develop these programs for themselves. Buddhist followers and their children. The temples have also sought a response regarding their demands and the development of those programs.

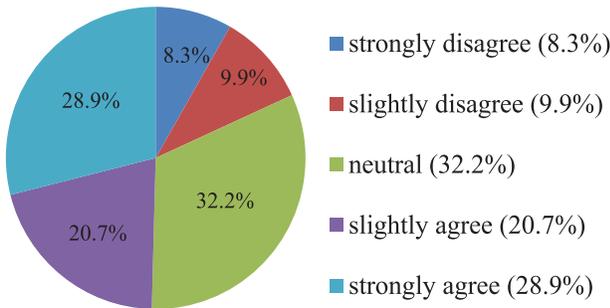
I think the Thai government agencies can play a crucial role in constructing and maintaining the overseas Thai temples:



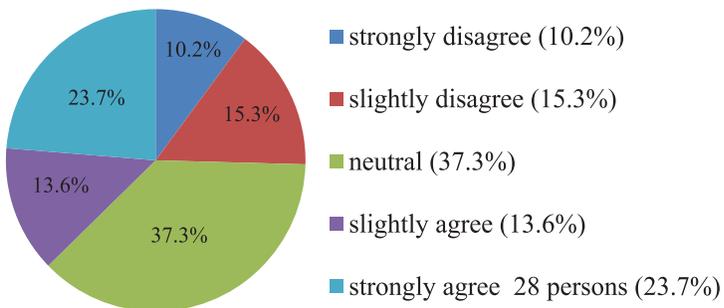
An analysis at the macro stage found that Thai government agencies have become directly and indirectly involved with their own

vision in helping the Thai Buddhist temples advance and grow in South Korea. These agencies continue to maintain a close relationship with the temples by, for example, organizing national holiday events at the temples. Accordingly, the survey shows that Buddhist followers realize how crucial Thai government agencies are in constructing and maintaining the Thai temples. Asked whether they thought that Thai government agencies should play a pivotal role in constructing and maintaining the Thai temples, 25.2% said they aggressively should do so, 22.7% said that they should do so, which represents a much higher percentage compared with the other figures showing that 12.6% said that they should not do so and the 5.6% that said they should not do so at all.

I have donated to overseas Thai temples through the temple:



I have donated to Thailand through the temple:



According to the interviews with the monks who dealt with religious and administrative affairs, alms giving by Buddhist followers in Korea were not enough to operate and develop the Thai Buddhist temples, along with purchasing sites on which a temple could be built and constructed. The monks also said that they still found it difficult for those followers to be involved in dedication and donation.

On the other hand, according to the survey, a large number of respondents said that they had never given alms to Thai Buddhist temples in either Thailand or other countries through the temples in Korea. For example, of those who said that they had given alms for overseas Thai Buddhist temples through the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea, 28.9% said that they had actively done so and 20.7% said that they had done so sometimes. These represent three times as high as the other figures showing 9.9% who said that they had not and the 8.3% who said that they had never done so.

Among those who said that they had made a contribution for Thailand through the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea, 23.7% said that they had actively done so and 13.6% said that they had done so only sometimes, which represents a slightly higher percentage compared with other figures showing the 13.6% who said that they had not and the 10.2% who said they had never done so.

It should be noted that the reason why more people said that they had given alms aimed at helping overseas Thai Buddhist temples instead of Thai society itself was because the overseas Thai temples could collect and deliver contributions to help one another and a network in which they could help one another has been established. Moreover, as previously mentioned, at the middle phase, the close network among overseas Thai Buddhist temples may do a lot of good in the development of the temples.

Results and Conclusions

The research on existing overseas religious organizations for immigrants, the analysis of the results of the survey and the interview with the Monk's Attendant Group showed that Thai Buddhist temples in Korea still play a role in supporting Theravada Buddhism in Korea,

help maintain the national identity of Thai immigrants, and provide a sense of psychological stability by making Thai immigrants feel a connection with Thailand.

Buddhist followers were keenly aware that Thai Buddhist temples in Korea were meaningful to them and showed their willingness to visit them continuously, illustrating the likelihood that Thai Buddhist temples in Korea could be developed consistently in the future. As the existing research mentions, the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea show certain limits in that they fail to play a role in creating social capital for information exchange, formation of new relationships and provision of opportunities for a better life to the followers.

As most of the Buddhists who gathered were unskilled workers, significant discrepancy in the size of their social capital was found. In addition, international marriage migrant women chiefly belonged to the poor sector in Korea and were engaged in simple laborer work when they had jobs. This meant that they could provide better social capital for one another. On the other hand, it could be interpreted that almost all of the visitors did not feel a strong necessity to form close relationships as they were supposed to return to their homeland after a certain period rather than permanently settle in Korea. Another possibility is that the current situation in which Buddhist followers fail to draw a new plan for independent activities and merely act as a marginal person would gradually change as the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea provide them with more opportunities and ordinary Buddhist make their voices heard.

Phra Praphas Wattnakompratip, the permanent secretary for the Executive Committee of the Northeastern Monks Group at Wat Bowonniwet Vihara, said that second-generation Thai immigrants born in Japan were in charge of religious and administrative affairs at the Thai Buddhist temples in Japan. Therefore, they could provide solutions to some of the problems arising from residence visa for monks, language barriers and disparities between the Japanese and Thai culture. It may be expected that the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea could eventually follow the footsteps of their Japanese counterparts, extending and developing the scope of the activities of Buddhist followers.

However, it remains to be seen whether the Thai Buddhist temples in Korea will be able to make further development as they are still at an early stage and their activities are mainly organized by temples, monks and the Thai government agencies in Korea. Phra Arun Aruno, a senior Buddhist monk at the Steering Committee of the Overseas Missionary Monks Executive Office, said that the Thai Buddhist temples in Taiwan – where most of the Buddhist followers were temporary workers as in Korea – suffered also from limitations and similar patterns. For example, when monks who independently played a leading role in constructing the temples went back to Thailand, the temples declined in prosperity, and when a new group of Buddhist followers emerged, the temples were constructed again.

The Thai Buddhist temples in Korea will soon face a situation where a generational shift of Buddhist followers may occur as the four-year term of their stay as legal workers passes since the temples first opened. However, it remains to be seen whether the Thai Buddhist temples will be able to progress in a direction different from that of the Thai Buddhist temples in Taiwan because Wat Buddharangsee and Wat Dhammajetiyaram were mainly constructed by the Thai Embassy in South Korea, while Wat Bhavana was mainly constructed by its holding temple, Wat Phra Dhammakaya, and the Buddhist followers did not positively participate in the process.

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