



## CHAPTER II

# WAVES OF THE CHINESE IMMIGRATION IN THAI HISTORY AND CHINESE MAHAYANA TEMPLES IN BANGKOK

In exploring Chinese religion in Thailand it is important to understand the history of Chinese migration, the various dialect groups and the status the Chinese have gained within the country. Temples and religious life are sanctuaries and spiritual refuges for immigrant communities. As noted later in this study, Chinese shrines and places of folk worship can be found all over Thailand, and often predate officially recognised Chinese Mahayana temples. This is because Chinese labourers and traders have been present in Thailand since the earliest times. The wealth and status of the Bangkok temples, Mangkorn and Phoman can be attributed not just to the influence of powerful groups like the Teochius and Hakkas, and not just to the numbers of Chinese that migrated to Thailand but also to Thai government policies. Phibul's anti-Chinese measures and the Second World War, led to Chinese in rural areas being forced into the city, adding to high density Chinese populations in urban areas; thus increasing the temple's support base.

### 2.1. Chinese Dialect groups

It is indisputable that the Chinese are the dominant ethnic minority in Thailand. By the 1930's, according to a census taken at that time, Thailand was considered to have the largest overseas Chinese community in the world at over 3,000,000 (Landon, 1941). These Chinese, although part of a common Chinese culture, should not be seen as a monolithic block with a single identity. This is particularly the case in overseas Chinese communities where the tendency is to view themselves in their specific linguistic groups. Over 95 per cent of the Chinese in Siam came from the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien. The most significant and pervasive division in the overseas Chinese are those among speech groups, principal of which in Thailand are: Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese, and Hokkien, Teochiu. Out

of all Chinese in Thailand Teochiu account for 56 per cent, the Hakka for 16 per cent, Hainanese 12 percent, Cantonese and Hokkien 7 percent (Shen, 2002). What these groups have in common is that they all originate in places with poor agriculture, and have a history of commerce. The Hakkas are unique in having a history of internal migration. Migratory communities of Hakkas are scattered across southern China.

Teochius, who originate from the delta of the Han River in north-eastern Kwangtung, are the biggest Chinese group in Thailand. As such they are spread very widely throughout Thailand, although most of them are in Bangkok. They also have the longest history in Thailand. The Hokkiens populated part of Fukien province. In the eighteenth century, Hokkiens were the principal Chinese speech group in Siam (Skinner, 1957). The emigrant communities among the Cantonese came from Kuangchou-fu. The Hainanese emigrant communities largely originated from the north-eastern part of the Hainan Island. In much lesser numbers people also migrated from Yunnan Province to the north of Thailand, most of them stayed in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai.

It is important to note that generally the various Chinese groups became involved with and associated with specific professions and trades. For example the Hokkien, having arrived in Malaya first, went to the south of Thailand, in order to grow rubber. Many of this group moved to Phuket for the Tin mining (Shen, 2002). During the nineteenth century, cotton was produced for export primarily by Hainanese. In 1860's and 1870's, Hainanese engaged in extensive cotton cultivation in Jungle clearings of Middle and North Siam (Skinner, 1957). This division may give relevance to a study conducted in 1953 by Cornell University, indicating occupational specialization in the cities. Teochius made up most of the bankers, rice merchants, gold and jewellery merchants, Hakkas the newspapermen, tailors, silversmiths, Hokkiens, rubber exporters, Cantonese printers, and Hainanese the pharmacists (Skinner, 1957).

## 2.2. Factors of Migration

There are several factors that caused Chinese migration into Thailand. One of the core political reasons was the Qing ascendancy itself. As the Manchus took power from the weak Ming dynasty many Chinese were displaced and fled the new Manchu rulers. Two of the main Chinese groups in Bangkok, the Teochius and the Hokkiens, have migratory origins in this upheaval, arriving in other parts of Siam around the year 1645. Teochius to southeast Siam, near Bangplaso, and Hokkiens to southern Siam, around Songkhla (Skinner, 1957). These two groups are of interest not only because of a strong anti-Manchu local character but also because they exemplify the kind of geographic and economic factors that lead to Chinese immigration.

A geographic cause can be found in the very landscape of southern China. The hilly landscape of Kwangtung and Fukien (They are also the major places the Chinese migrants came from) were unsuitable for rice cultivation, as a result of a lack of farmland the inhabitants of this region were forced into developing trading skills, which ultimately enabled them to move overseas to places like Siam. As a measure to improve the agricultural prospects of Kwangtung, the Manchu had introduced new crops such as sweet potato. Initially a success, which caused rapid population increases, the area became prone to various agricultural blights and famine. The floods, droughts and famines caused many deaths and forced the people to leave their motherland and look for a better place to live.

Siam, on the other hand, had almost no experience of total crop failure and famine through climatic factors and blight, because of the flat, fertile land and the relatively low population. Siam was an attractive prospect for a people fleeing overpopulation and food collapse. In light of the general similarity of climate and culture, it was easy for the Chinese to adjust in a Buddhist country where rice and fish were the staple foods. The Siamese state, in Ayutthaya and later in Bangkok, encouraged trade and foreign contacts. It is not hard to see how the once refugee Chinese flourished in Siam. By the nineteenth century Siam was undergoing rapid economic development, it was a stable and modern looking country. A final, though small factor, attracting immigrants was the low cost of travel to Siam by boat. Indeed

during certain years there was a spike in migration due to the lowering of the boat ticket price (Skinner, 1957).

### **2.2.1 Pre- Ayutthaya Chinese migration**

Political and economic ties between the early Thai states and China have a long history, dating back at least to the Sukhothai period. Official relations, between the Kingdom of Sukhothai and China, were established during the reign of King Ramkamhaeng (1279-1298)(Chinvanno, 1992). According to Wyatt in *Siam in Mind* in the twelfth century the Chinese were profiting from the surge in local and international trade by trading foodstuffs and fine ceramics (Wyatt, 2002). In the thirteenth century the Chinese traders were already established in the ports of the Gulf of Siam(Skinner,1957). Chinese also influenced Thailand's art works. King Ramkamhaeng had imported Chinese artisans from China for improving the works in Siam. He requested Chinese potters from the Yuan Court and was surprised when the Chinese Court approved (Promboon, 1971).

In 1536 a Chinese presented scholar Huang Zhong (黃衷), wrote a book *Hai Yu* (海語) which indicates clearly that Chinese had been settled in Siam for several generations: “ the Chinese in Thailand only kept their last name in the first generation but after that they gave up their Chinese last name and used the Thai name” (Hiba, 1995). In the early seventeenth century, the position of Chinese traders in Siam was much more significant especially during the reign of King Ekathotsarot, 1605-1620. According to a Dutch observer in 1616 and a Chinese source published the following year the Chinese residents far outnumbered the native population (Skinner, 1957).

### **2.2.2. Ayutthaya Period Migration**

The story of Chinese migration is overwhelmingly one of the Chinese at sea. It is clear that the Chinese had expertise as sailors (Martin, 2003); during the Ayutthaya period many of the Siamese government ships were manned by Chinese sailors and officers. Migrants overwhelmingly arrived by sea, as did trade.

If the main waves of Chinese migration occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century then it was during the Ayutthaya period that foundations were laid for this mass movement. It may have been due to the efforts of the Ming dynasty, and their famous navies, establishing contact along the maritime trade routes. In the early fourteenth century the Chinese traders were found around certain areas in western Siam especially Suphanburi, Ratchaburi, and Phetchaburi and ceramic trade was one of their many interests which brought them to the valley of Tha Chin River. Due to increased trade by the seventeenth century, the ethnic Chinese population of Siam rapidly increased and was concentrated in Ayutthaya and in the provinces around the head of the Gulf of Siam; in areas of economic and political opportunity. Chinese population tended to cluster around transportation routes, first canals and trails, and much later, railroads (Wyatt, 2002). “As a resident alien community, the Chinese may be said to have had political influence by assisting various court factions to expand their wealth or to make diplomatic connections abroad.”(Wyatt, 1984:67). The bulk of the Ayutthaya Chinese community also was made up of merchants and traders, but also other occupations, there were Chinese pig breeders around the city, Chinese artisans, actors, scholar-officials and physicians as well (Skinner, 1957).

### **2.2.3. Migration during the Thonburi Period**

The Chinese also had a strong connection with the ruling elites in Siam. There is speculation that the Ayutthaya king Ramathibodi I's father was a Chinese merchant of Phetchaburi. The Thonburi king Taksin is known to have had a Chinese father, a Teochius and a Siamese mother. This King mastered both the Thai and Chinese language, and ruled Siam for over fourteen years (1767-1782). The Teochiu Chinese trading community made a considerable contribution to Taksin's success. They supported Taksin with foodstuffs and goods needed for the war with Burma (Wyatt, 1984). During his reign he attracted many Teochius to his Capital and his policies clearly favoured the Teochius and made it easier for the Chinese to stay in Siam. An eyewitness Yurpin, commenting on the first years of Taksin's reign in 1770, states: “The Chinese colony is the most numerous and flourishing, by the extent of its commerce and by the privileges which it enjoys.”(Skinner, 1957:21)

#### 2.2.4 The Chakri Dynasty

A important factor attracting migration was the founding in 1782 of the new capital, Bangkok. This new capital was to be a commercial hub in which the Chinese were welcomed for their labour and commercial skills (Shen, 2002). According to Walter F. Vella (1957), 7,000 Chinese arrived annually at the end of the reign of Rama II (1809-1824), and 15,000 annually during the reign of Rama III (1824-1851) (Wyatt, 1984:140).

In the reign of Rama I the country's greatest revenues came from the Chinese junk trade. The population of Chinese was still increasing and these ships were either built in Bangkok or provincial areas outside the capital. They were loaded with merchandise to be sold in China every year and came back to Siam with huge amounts of Chinese labourers. The profits of this junk trade were tremendous. When King Rama I built a new palace on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River, the land he chose was occupied by many Chinese merchants. These Chinese merchants had to resettle outside the walls of the palace and move to Sampheng Road in 1782. Charoenkung Road the major road in Chinatown was built in 1861.

In early 1822, during the reign of Rama II the annual fleet from China comprised approximately 140 boats. The fleet carried products from China to Bangkok which included massive amounts of crockery, tea, brassware, copperware, silk, sugar candy and dried vegetables and the vessels would often carry large numbers of people who came looking for work. The fleet would carry rice, black pepper sugar, cotton, tin, cardamon, hides, feathers, ivory, various woods for furniture making, sapan wood, mangrove bark, swallows' nests, and sea cucumbers. The goods exported to China were much more valuable than those brought from China to Bangkok, and the Chinese had to make up the difference in money (Terwiel, 2005). The direct traffic from China to south Siam lasted well into the twentieth century, consisting of Junk trade from Hokkien, Hainanese, and Cantonese ports.

The Chinese were instrumental in the urbanisation of Thailand. They brought skills and capital into the cities, as well as into the regional centres. In Bangkok the location of its China-town to the rest of the old city, close to the grand palace and government buildings, illustrates how important the Chinese were in establishing the

new capital. Chinese merchants built shops and warehouses along the Chaophraya River to the South. Rama III hired Chinese to build a new fortress and to dig canal 54 kilometres long from Bangkok to the Bangpakong River. There was a large supply of Chinese labour as Siam was still regularly receiving Chinese immigrants eager to work, the annual intake of Chinese in the late 1820s is estimated at more than two thousand (Terwiel, 2005).

During the reign of Rama V there was a dramatic increase in the Chinese population in Thailand. The best estimates indicate that the Chinese minority grew from about 230,000 in 1825 to 300,000 in 1850 and 792,000 in 1910. The largest numbers were located in the provinces immediately surrounding Bangkok and at the head of the Gulf of Siam. One can say that they gathered in areas that had strong opportunity for commerce and employment (Wyatt, 1984:218).

#### **2.2.5. The Chinese in Thailand after King Rama V**

According to a leading scholar, the year of 1910 was a turning point in the history of the Chinese in Siam. It saw the death of King Chulalongkorn, a friend to the Chinese, and the enthronement of his son, Vajiravut, a romantic nationalist and proponent of anti-Sinicism (Skinner, 1957:155). After the reign of King Rama V, Chinese started to face many different kinds of difficulty in life. The process of national identity creation was enacted and enforced throughout the late 1930s and 1940's by the government of Pibul Songkram. Pibul's aggressive policy forced the Chinese to accept Thai culture and undergo a high level of integration in the new society. Ultimately these policies speeded up the process of assimilation, because they left the Chinese with no choice. They either have to become Thai or leave. After the World War II the assimilation of the Chinese can be seen to progress very fast. After Pibul Songkram's policy the number of Chinese schools was reduced and they were barred from taking certain professions. In order to have the life they had before the Chinese started to change their nationality and attend Thai schools, since there were not many Chinese schools left in Thailand. According to Skinner there would be no fourth generation of Chinese-Thai because they would by then be all well assimilated into Thai society. Nowadays they are so well assimilated that it is very difficult to

ต้นฉบับ หน้าขาดหาย



The small Chinese folk shrines are significant because they show the relative wealth and dominance of their related dialect group and the development of worship of various deities. The large number of Hokkien temples and shrines from the pre 19<sup>th</sup> century periods reveal the strength of the Hokkiens, which later diminished. Lee (2006) states that there were many Chinese shrines and temples built by Hokkien from the Thonburi period. He also states that the Hokkiens did not build any temples after 1850. Since after 1850 the Teochius had become the most powerful group.

Of the Hokkien shrines it can be seen that they mainly worship TianhouShengmu (天后聖母), Guanyin (觀音) and Guandi (關帝). TianhouShengmu is the patron deity of sailors, the Goddess of Sea. Guanyin is the most popular and well known goddess in the Buddhist pantheon, the Goddess of Mercy. Statues of Guanyin can also be found in some Thai temples. Guanyin was originally a Buddhist male god, Avalokitesvara, he was slowly transformed into a female deity some centuries after his arrival in China (Purcell, 1965:48). Guandi is another popular god among the overseas Chinese, the God of War. Guandi is one of the main characters in the famous Chinese novel *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*. He is the warrior who is loyal to his friends and his King. In Chinese culture each craft or guild has its own patron. Guandi, in his capacity of God of Wealth, has become a patron for tradesmen (Purcell, 1965).

Whereas the Hakkas mainly worship the God of Wealth, the Teochius mainly worship BentouGong (本頭公), a local god, and his wife BentouGongma (本頭公媽). There were many temples that worship BentouGong and BentouGongma built by Teochius between the reigns of King Rama I and King Rama V that are found mainly around the Sampheng area. The oldest of the BentouGong temples was built in 1786. Skinner (1957:139) points out that BentouGong (本頭公) had a distinctively prominent role in the establishment of the Chinese Mahayana temples in Thailand. BentouGong was mainly worshipped by Teochius and Hakkas. He also states that after 1850 the number of BentouGong temples increased in the Teochiu dominated area of central Siam.

In Chuimi Ho's (1995) work, she listed 38 Chinese temples and shrines that are located in Bangkok. There are 12 temples and shrines that were built before the Chinese Mahayana temples. Because there are no documents available, Ho estimated the date of year that the temples had been built by the epigraphic material, that were available at the time of the survey. Out of 38 shrines and temples, there are six temples that have the Buddha as their main deity. In four temples, the main deity is Guanyin. There are also four shrines whose main deity is Guandi. Three of the shrines are for Bentoukong. Most of these gods can all be found in Mangkorn temple. The list shows that Chinese religion offers many different choices when it comes to worship. It is part of Chinese culture to worship many different kinds of deity. Ho (1995) states that while Teochius' temples appear along Sampheng area, Hokkiens' temple mainly along the Chao Phraya river. The Hakkas lived along the river bank as well on Sampheng area as the neighbours of the Teochius.

The Vietnamese Mahayana temples were instrumental in the recognition of Chinese Mahayana in Thailand. These Vietnamese temples were established before their Chinese counterparts under the reign of King Taksin. The Vietnamese were granted land by the King to build their own residences and temples, where they held religious ceremonies. Vietnamese Mahayana is an offshoot of the Chinese tradition. Originally Vietnamese Mahayana was spread into Vietnam by the Chinese in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When the Manchu invaded China, monks fled from Kuangtong and Kuangxi and Chinese Mahayana Buddhism spread to Vietnam and become a leading religion. Since the Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhism originated from China, most of the styles of the temples and religious ceremonies are basically the same. The prayer book is also written in Chinese characters but pronounced in Vietnamese. Before the Chinese Mahayana temple was built there were many Chinese that joined the temple events and supported the temple financially. The Vietnamese temples were popular for a period of time due to the strong support by both Vietnamese and Chinese lay people. The Vietnamese temples allowed Chinese monks to stay over in their temples (Luo, 1999; Kosittanakiat, 1995.)

### 2.3.2 Chinese Mahayana Temples and Monks

The structure of the Mahayana Buddhist institutions is rather loose. There is no equivalent of the Pope, the Dalai Lama or the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. However the greatest degree of cohesion within Chinese Mahayana temple network is found in the example of Mahayana in Thailand. Since the reign of King Rama IV, it has been the practice for the Thai monarch to receive the head of the major Chinese temples in his kingdom and to confer on them religious titles, ecclesiastical ranks and other honours and they derive a certain degree of authority. Chinese Mahayana abbots have established good relations within Thailand, gained the blessings of the King and the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, which enable them to exercise influence over most temples belonging to their respective communities. This helped to eliminate the laxity in some small temples and break the bad image of the monks in Chinese Mahayana temple in Thai opinion. People tend to think that Chinese Mahayana temples observe less strict rules than those of the monks in Thai Theravada temples, for example Chinese monks are able to have three meals a day. This perceived laxity is an unfair assumption and is based in part on differences of climatic and social factors. In fact the Mahayana version of the Vinaya contains approximately 250 regulations, actually a few more than those contained in the Theravadin version (Blofeld, 1971:50).

The Chinese Mahayana monks are very strict vegetarian, as are some of the lay people. It is because of the belief that eating an animal's flesh is not considered an act of Bodhisattva. Onion, garlic, spring onion, Chinese chives are avoided in a meal of Chinese a monk because these vegetables are regarded as sexual stimulants. Chinese monks do not go out in the morning and receive the food from people. They cook their own food in the kitchen. In China only beggars walk in the street to receive food and it was not in the Chinese culture to offer food to monks. Due to the climate difference if the monks in China only took two vegetarian meals a day in the cold weather they could suffer health problems. Chinese monks are allowed to take three meals a day. The dinner is considered a meal of medicine, because the food is taken to heal the body in order to do many jobs in the temple that require physical strength (Personal interview with Venerable Hui Xi, 2009).

### 2.3.3. Discussion

There has been a connection between the different waves of Chinese immigration and the Chinese shrines and temples. Chinese often built the shrine and temple close to their resident area and often live around the temples. Landon (1941) points out that Chinese religion is a mixture of many religions as a result of there being many different kinds of deities in Chinese culture. Each of the speech groups often worships different kinds of deities. The temples' architecture and size also indicates the wealth of the community. When the Hokkiens were in power their temples were located in large compounds with luxurious architectures and furnishings. After 1850 the prosperous Teochius rose to become the most wealthy among the groups, temples dedicated to Teochius' popular deity BentouGong started to appear and their number increased in the areas Teochius moved into. Since the Chinese culture is closely bound up with religious ceremonies, the existing old temples reveal the history of each speech group, the areas they dominated and their economic power in each period of time. The importance of rituals in Chinese life even led the Chinese to pray in Vietnamese temples, before the Chinese Mahayana temple was established in Thailand. The Chinese worshipped in the Vietnamese Mahayana temples which were already established and were as close as possible to their own tradition. During the reign of King Rama V, Chinese immigration increased sharply. The first Chinese Mahayana temple was finally established in 1871. As Payutto (1984) points out, the fundamental principles of Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism are the same but only different in the emphasis and interpretation. The Chinese Mahayana temples were able to be accepted by the Thai government and become rooted in the Thai Kingdom.