

# **Three Core Values (Religion, Family and Language) of the Chinese in Thailand**

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This paper examines three core values (religion, family and language) of the Chinese and part Chinese in Thailand with the help of a small study. It appears that, compared with the Thai, the differences in these core values are fewer than in the past. Both Chinese and Thai respondents worship the Buddha in Thai temples; serve in the Thai priesthood; and offer food to Thai monks. Many Chinese and part Chinese respondents have lost the preference for large families, patrilocal residence, and their strong regard for ancestry and lineage. Many have experienced language shift to Thai and even though they are interested in learning Chinese, it is for utilitarian reasons and not for use in the home. There is, however, evidence of differences between the Chinese and the Thai in the present day. A small number of Chinese and part Chinese respondents worship deities of Chinese origin in the home; voice doubt about Thai religious practices; and speak varieties of Chinese. All in all, the data points towards assimilation rather than maintenance. I believe that the similarities in core values give the Chinese and the Thai a sense of cohesion and solidarity.

## **Introduction**

The concept of core values was originally proposed by J. Smolicz and M.J. Seacombe in their studies of minority cultures in Australia (Smolicz 1981,1992,1993; Smolicz and Seacombe 1985,1986,1989). Core values are the most fundamental components of a group's culture, symbolic of the group and its membership; they enable social groups to be identified as distinctive cultural communities. The core values which act as markers of a group's identity are ethno-specific language, family structure, religious beliefs and love of the homeland, among others.

One of the reasons why this author has been drawn to the concept of core values is that in some contexts, 'comparative studies are particularly apposite since they help to illustrate cultural variation across ethnic groups' (Smolicz 1981:75). Despite

numerous claims of assimilation of the Thai Chinese, including my own (Morita 2003a), I recently pondered whether the Thai Chinese were identical to the Thai in every respect. In this paper, I provide background and comparison of three core values (religion, family and language) of the Chinese and of the Thai in the past; followed by hypotheses about the present with the help of a small study. The reader will be introduced to the study in the next section.

### **The study**

I was once told by a Thai student at Nagoya University that there were about 40 Thai students here. My initial plan was to restrict my sample to them only, for obvious advantages of proximity to the subjects. One advantage I had hoped for was face-to-face interviews; that hope was later dashed by lack of response and enthusiasm.

Unfortunately, only 23 Thai nationals agreed to co-operate and completed the questionnaire I developed. Potential respondents were contacted in various ways: my research assistant<sup>1</sup> approached his friends; I sent messages using e-mail addresses listed on a website for Thai students in Nagoya; those who had completed the questionnaire asked their friends; and a colleague and I approached our students. Four of the respondents are undergraduates, 15 are postgraduates and one is a lecturer (three declined to provide the information). 17 respondents are at Nagoya University; and four are at universities in other parts of the country such as Tokyo and Osaka (two did not provide the information). Most of them (20) are aged between 22 and 30; one is 37 years old; one is 38; and one, 46. They are from different parts of Thailand, ranging from Bangkok to Chiang Rai. They are in Japan on a temporary basis and they completed the questionnaire in reference to what they would ordinarily do in Thailand.

Before I proceed, let me emphasise that this is only a pilot study carried out for providing direction in my future research. The value of its findings is qualitative rather than quantitative. Although the statistics derived are hardly representative, many questions in the questionnaire are open-ended and the respondents have written extensive answers, revealing attitudes that are previously little-known. Smolicz *et al.* (2001:153-4) too prefers to allow his respondents free expression; his data is in the form of memoirs.

Based on the response to the question concerning ethnic background, the respondents are divided into three categories: Thai and Chinese<sup>2</sup>, Thai(I) and Thai(II).

Table 1. The respondents

	Thai and Chinese (N=12)	Thai(II) (N=6)	Thai(I) (N=5)
Male	3	3	3
Female	9	3	2

Most of the respondents who chose ‘Thai and Chinese’ claim to be of mixed Thai and Chinese ancestry and they cite the ethnic origin or country of origin of older family members as the ground for their claim. Responses such as the two below are common (light editing has been performed on the answers quoted in this paper to improve grammar and spelling):

‘My grandparents on my father’s side were immigrants from China. My grandmother on my mother’s side was a daughter of Chinese parents but she was born in Thailand. My grandfather on my mother’s side was a son of a Thai mother and a Chinese father.’

‘... my mother’s father (my grandpa) is Chinese while my father is Thai.’

Also in an earlier work (Morita 2003b:5-6), an overwhelming majority of the respondents cited origins of older family member(s) as the reason for considering themselves Chinese. This is in contrast to Boonsanong’s (1971:3) study of the Chinese in Bangkok, in which he emphasised that ‘a Chinese person in Thai society is defined as “a person born and raised in a family in which both of his parents speak (any dialect of) Chinese as their native language”’. The respondents in my studies seem to think otherwise. Only a small percentage of the Chinese and part Chinese undergraduates said they thought they were Chinese because their family or they themselves spoke Chinese (2003b). Origins appear to be a more important defining characteristic of being Chinese than language is.

The next category, which I have named Thai(II), is composed of respondents who choose to be Thai despite being of Chinese ancestry only (3 respondents) or being part Chinese (3 respondents). Examine the responses below:

‘My grandparents from both sides were Chinese who immigrated from the mainland (they have all already passed away). My father spoke Chinese fluently (he passed away 20 years ago), but not my mother. We do not speak

Chinese in our home. I consider myself Thai, not Chinese.’

‘My grandfather is Chinese and he married my grandmother who is Thai. I always think I’m Thai because I can only speak the Thai language and my family isn’t strict about following Chinese traditions. They did not tell me or teach me about China (and the Chinese language) and I don’t want to be Chinese too.’

Such comments are not entirely new. It has been reported that in the past, some Chinese in Thailand (the Chinese elite and Thai-born Chinese) identified with the Thai rather than with the Chinese (Morita 2003a:492-3). The Chinese elite did so for material advantages while the Thai-born Chinese’s choice was due to rejection by China-born Chinese. Amyot (1972:87) also notes that the number of individuals of Chinese descent who have achieved positions of eminence in Thai society today is impressive, and there is no doubt of their loyalty to the Thai nation. They refuse to consider themselves to be anything but Thai, but they take pride in their Chinese ancestry as representing a source of vigour and acumen lacking in ‘pure’ Thais.

I have named the final category Thai(I). Respondents in this category appear to be of Thai ancestry only. They justified their choice of being ‘Thai’ with comments such as the following:

‘My grandparents’ roots are Thai.’

We begin discussing the first core value, religion, in the following section.

## **Religion**

Let us first compare the religion of the Thai masses with that of the Chinese immigrants<sup>3</sup>. The Thai are followers of the Hinayana school of Buddhism, which emphasises that salvation is ensured by one’s meritorious deeds. The Chinese, on the other hand, have been strongly influenced by the Mahayana type of Buddhism (plus its transformation in accordance with Taoism and Confucianism), and appear to stress prayers to deities.

The Thai worship in Thai-style temples (wat) with an image of the Buddha therein; the Chinese worshipped in their own deity temples. The Thai worship the Buddha while the Chinese worshipped a variety of deities depending on one’s speech group. The Hokkien worshipped Tian Hou Sheng Mu, the Holy Mother and Empress of

Heaven; for the Hainanese, it was Shui Wei Niang; and for the Teochius and Hakkas, Ben Tou Gong. Temples dedicated to Guan Gong, the God of War, drew worshippers from all speech groups. Differences in object of worship among speech groups declined after World War II.

Traditional Chinese days of worship are the first and fifteenth of each lunar month and the majority of people visit temples on these days. Holy days (wan-phra) for the Thai come weekly at the phases of the moon.

In addition to visiting temples, 'virtually every overseas Chinese home' (Coughlin 1960:103) worshipped deities such as the God of the Earth, the God of the House, the God of the Kitchen and the God of the Sky. Small pieces of red paper representing them were pasted to walls and doors. The most common corresponding practice of the Thai seems to be the worship of Buddha images in the home.

The Thai consider temporary service in the monastic order prestigious and ideal for all men; almost all Thai men entered the priesthood as novices or monks sometime in their lives. For the Chinese, only a very small minority serves in the order. Both Thai and Chinese monks shave their heads and are bound to observe similar rules of austerity, avoiding worldly pleasures and comforts. The Thai may remain in the order for a brief period and may marry before they enter or after they leave the order; Chinese monks take vows of celibacy and service for life. Almost all Chinese monks were recruited from China. Compared with the Thai, there were relatively few Chinese monks and monasteries, an indication of the differing importance of the monastic order to the respective ethnic groups (Coughlin 1960:97).

A further difference lies in the way each order is supported. Chinese monks receive their subsistence from the temple to which they are attached; Thai monks depend on daily food offerings from the devout, gathered every morning at their doorsteps. Almost all Thai householders offer food to monks as an essential part of their religious life and as a means of making merit; the Chinese householder only rarely did this, and Thai monks usually by-passed Chinese settlements on their daily rounds (Coughlin 1960:105)<sup>4</sup>.

Despite the differences discussed above, many of the fundamental values of the Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhist sects are sufficiently alike for the Thai and the Chinese to recognise themselves as religiously akin. Both sects counsel tolerance towards others, including religious tolerance (Coughlin 1960:92). The similarities also helped the Chinese accept Thai practices without difficulty or contradiction in values. In addition, Thai Buddhism is an inclusive religion that does not demand

absolute allegiance. Consequently, the Chinese found it easy to incorporate Thai elements without making fundamental changes to their beliefs and habits (p.104). An example of the preceding discussion is cited below.

Some Thai places of worship were popular with the Chinese. In as early as 1830, Crawford noted that the Chinese visited Thai temples (p.220). One type of wat, San Bao or Sam Kuo Khoon ('Three Treasures'), were major places of worship for the Chinese<sup>5</sup>. The Chinese also adopted objects worshipped by the Thai and believed to have power. A case in point is an animistic Thai shrine called Lak-mueang ('Pillar of the State' or 'Stone of the City'). The Chinese worshipped Thai objects in the same way they did with images in their own temples. In short, they extended the usual range of objects to include powerful deities and spirits peculiar to their new environment.

For Thai-born Chinese, the gap between their religion and that of the Thai was even smaller. They worshipped in both Chinese temples and wat. In most Thai shrines to spirits (phi) and to Lak-mueang, local-born Chinese worshipped as frequently as the Thai. Some, especially those with Thai mothers, even served in the Thai priesthood (Skinner 1957:313).

Results from my study may shed some light on the present-day situation:

Table 2. Religion and worship

	Thai and Chinese (N=12)	Thai(II) (N=6)	Thai(I) (N=5)
Buddhist	12	6	5
Worship in <u>wat</u>	12	5 (no response=1)	5
Worship Buddha	12	5 (no response=1)	5
Average frequency of worship (per year) <sup>a</sup>	10.5	12.2	18.17

<sup>a</sup> Individual responses of the Thai and Chinese: 12, 4.5, 12, 12, 4.5, 52, -, 0, 12, 3, 2.5, 1; of the Thai(II): 4, 3, -, 52, 1, 1; and of the Thai(I): -, -, 24, 26, 4.5.

It is hardly surprising that all the respondents claim to be Buddhists. All but one said they worship the Buddha in wat. Only three respondents mentioned objects of worship in addition to the Buddha. Two of them (Thai and Chinese females) are not entirely clear about what they worship; one said 'I don't know the name in English but she is a kind of Buddha in China' and the other alludes to worshipping in shrines. The third (Thai(II) female) hints at 'other gods, whom I am not really sure they exist'. When asked when they visit their place of worship, most answers were

wan-phra, birthdays and the New Year. Nobody mentioned the first or fifteenth of the lunar month. It appears to be common for a Thai to go to wat on his/her birthday as well as on the birthdays of family and friends. The Thai also worship in wat on the Thai New Year (Songkran) and on the first of January. Thai(I) respondents worship most frequently, followed by Thai(II) and then Thai and Chinese. We examine merit-making next:

Table 3. Making merit

	Thai and Chinese (N=12)	Thai(II) (N=6)	Thai(I) (N=5)
Positive attitude towards making merit	11 (no response=1)	6	3 (no response=2)
Respondents who make merit	12	6	4 (no response=1)

Except for three who did not comment, all the respondents display a positive attitude towards merit-making, such as ‘It’s good for us. It helps purify our heart.’ and ‘I think it’s good for myself and the other people (good for everyone).’ All<sup>6</sup> but one<sup>7</sup> claim to make merit. I did ask about the frequency of such meritorious deeds but unfortunately the responses are incompatible. Some answers counted deeds in relation to wat and to Buddhist monks only (e.g. making donations to wat and offering food to monks); others considered merit-making in an everyday sense (e.g. helping a friend). In future work, the definition of making merit needs to be specific in order to facilitate meaningful comparison of responses.

Table 4. Becoming a Buddhist monk temporarily

	Thai and Chinese (N=12)	Thai(II) (N=6)	Thai(I) (N=5)
Positive attitude towards becoming a Buddhist monk temporarily	11 (no response=1 <sup>8</sup> )	3 (ambivalent=1; no response=2 <sup>9</sup> )	4 (no response=1 <sup>10</sup> )
Male respondents who have been a Buddhist monk temporarily	2 (out of 3 male respondents)	0 (out of 3 male respondents)	2 <sup>11</sup> (out of 3 male respondents)
Male respondents who plan to become a Buddhist monk temporarily	2 <sup>12</sup> (out of 3)	2 <sup>13</sup> (out of 3)	2 <sup>14</sup> (out of 3)

Most respondents hold a positive attitude where entering the Thai monastic order temporarily is concerned, for example, ‘It is a good training. That person will learn something from this experience.’ and ‘It’s good for those who have a chance to learn Buddhism and practise meditation.’ However, a Thai(II) female seems to feel ambivalent and she has interesting opinions:

‘I disagree of this practice if that person does it for the sake of his parents (his parents ask him to do it). This is because he can learn and practise Buddhism without being a monk, and being a monk temporarily does not guarantee he will learn anything much, especially when becoming a monk in a temple in Bangkok. Conservative-thinking parents want their son to become a monk even for a short period of time because they believe they can go to heaven because of their son’s act.’

Incidentally a Thai(II) male did say that entering the priesthood will please his parents and although he has not had the experience, he plans to do so. One other Thai and Chinese male expresses concerns about being driven into the order by the culture. He has not become a monk before and he does not intend to do so. I must confess that the number of male respondents is so small that it is difficult to detect any pattern in the table above.

Hill (1998:136) observes that Yunnanese Chinese men in Chiang Mai serve as novices in the monastic order to make merit on behalf of deceased parents. Both Table 4 and Hill tell us it is no longer unusual for Chinese or part-Chinese men to become Thai monks.

Table 5. Giving food to Buddhist monks

	Thai and Chinese (N=12)	Thai(II) (N=6)	Thai(I) (N=5)
Positive attitude towards giving food to Buddhist monks	10 (ambivalent=2)	6	4 (no response=1 <sup>15</sup> )
Respondents who give food to Buddhist monks	12	6	5
Average frequency of giving food to Buddhist monks (per year) <sup>a</sup>	19.75	23.25	165.75

<sup>a</sup> Individual responses of the Thai and Chinese: 4, 4.5, 2.5, 52, 3, 52, 55, 4.5, 4, 52, 2.5, 1; of the Thai(II): 4, 0, 2.5, 130, 1, 2; and of the Thai(I): -, 130, 12, 156, 365.

Attitudes towards providing food for monks are mostly positive, such as:

‘It’s necessary for the monks because they cannot find food by themselves due to religious regulations, so we can do good things by giving them some food in the morning.’

‘It’s a good thing to do because monks depend on people’s contribution. It’s a way to support Buddhism.’

However, two Thai and Chinese females<sup>16</sup> have doubts about the practice:

‘It is one kind of merit-making. I do so because my mother wants me to do so. If not, I prefer donation for charity.’

‘Formerly, we gave food to monks because they had obligations neither to have meals that no one gave them (including fallen fruits) nor pay for food. That’s OK. But today, monks gain more money than us, so I just wonder if these obligations to give them food are proper or not.’

I wonder if higher education has prompted them to question conventional wisdom. The first view belongs to the only working professional among the respondents; and the other is written by an ex-student of mine (postgraduate) who I remember as intelligent and discerning. There may be a relationship between educational attainment and attitude towards religious practices. This is certainly worth exploring in future work. It is also worth noting that in addition to a positive attitude, three Thai and Chinese females alludes to concerns about giving to the genuinely poor and in one case to ‘real and good’ monks. I wonder if it is merely a coincidence that all the respondents who voice doubts are Thai and Chinese, or could there be a relationship between ethnic background and attitude? The interesting fact that emerges is that regardless of attitude, all the respondents offer food to monks.

It is now common to give food to monks in temples in addition to at one’s doorstep. A pattern similar to that of frequency of worship emerges: Thai(I) respondents are the most frequent givers of alms, Thai(II) comes in next and Thai and Chinese, last. We must bear in mind that it was and still seems to be the householder who provides the food. The majority of the respondents (18) live with their parents and therefore have probably little or no say in the matter. I examined carefully the cases

where the respondent is likely to be head or co-head of the household but it is too early to tell whether there might be a difference between such households and those where someone older is in charge. Two Thai and Chinese females live alone: one of them offers food ‘almost every wan-phra’ (there is wan-phra every week); the other does so three times a year. Another case is that of a Thai(II) female who lives with her husband: they rarely give alms.

Table 6. Worship of spirits and gods at home

	Thai and Chinese (N=12)	Thai(II) (N=6)	Thai(I) (N=5)
Respondents who worship spirits or gods at home	8	3	2
Respondents who worship Buddha at home	5	1	2
Respondents who worship other spirits or gods at home	3 (Goddess of Mercy=1; ‘Chinese spirit’=1; respondent does not know=1)	2 (Goddess of Mercy=1; God of Heaven and Earth + ‘Thai spirit’=1)	0

The Chinese deities worshipped at present are somewhat different from those described by Coughlin in 1960. The Goddess of Mercy (Guan Yin or in Japanese Kannon) is no doubt Chinese in origin and popular with other overseas Chinese (e.g. in Singapore). It is remarkable that one Thai(II) female worships both the God of Heaven and Earth (Tian Di Fu Mu, Chinese in origin) and a Thai spirit (phi). As with giving food to monks, decisions concerning home worship are made mostly by householders. A Thai and Chinese female, when asked whether she worships any deity or spirit at home, replied:

‘Not myself but my mother. I do sometimes when my mother tells me to do so.’

This is the same respondent who does not know the object of her worship. After reading her answer, I began to wonder if there might be a shift away from home worship for succeeding generations. It is unlikely that the above respondent will continue worshipping the object she seems to take little interest in when she sets up her own household. At least for the respondents in this study, there may be some maintenance of the tradition of home worship. Among the 13 respondents in Table

6 who worship at home, two Thai and Chinese females (one worships the Buddha; the other, the Goddess of Mercy) are in charge of their household and are likely to have made a conscious decision concerning the worship.

Coughlin (1960:93,95) observed that among the Chinese, participation in religious activities is of interest primarily to women, and that men are either too busy with business affairs or too little concerned with the spiritual realm to take a direct and regular interest. Today, Chinese and part Chinese men and women take part in religious activities, as we can see in wat in Thailand and in the responses above. Perhaps this is in part due to assimilation: Thai men are active in religion, maybe more so than Thai women, since men enter the priesthood and women do not.

The Chinese and part Chinese respondents show a high degree of assimilation in religion. In the public sphere, most of the respondents worship the Buddha in wat; visit wat on wan-phra, birthdays and the New Year; make merit; serve in the Thai monastic order (men only); and offer food to Thai monks. As far as outward appearance in public is concerned, there is little qualitative difference among the three categories (i.e. Thai and Chinese, Thai(II) and Thai(I)). However, there are quantitative differences in the frequency of worship and of giving alms; Thai(I) respondents are the most frequent, followed by Thai(II) and then Thai and Chinese. Craig Reynolds (1991) is right in observing that anyone seeking legitimate status and authority in Thai society must associate to some degree with the symbols and institutions of Thai Buddhism. In attitudes towards entering the priesthood and providing food for monks, a few Thai and Chinese and Thai(II) respondents show doubt. In the private sphere of the home, a small number of Thai and Chinese and Thai(II) respondents worship Chinese deities and spirits although more worship the Buddha. Such a high degree of assimilation in religion is rare in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, where few Chinese convert to Islam.

## **Family**

The Chinese immigrant regarded the family as the keystone of society, and saw it as extending back into time for innumerable generations. The ordinary Chinese stood in a temporal continuum of kin: he was not only grateful to his ancestors for what his immediate family had, but was responsible to them for what he did to further the fortune of his family lineage. His primary goal was not individual salvation, but lineage survival and advancement (Skinner 1957:92-3). Kinship ties extended far beyond the immediate family and constituted large and cohesive groups of people

bound together by loyalty and mutual obligations.

On the other hand, the common Thai had little sense of lineage and feeling for ancestry; he had little interest in or knowledge of kin beyond his immediate living relatives. There was no kin responsibility outside the immediate or extended family. In fact, the Thai masses did not even use family names until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>17</sup>.

The Chinese family is patriarchal and descent is traced along the male line, as is the Thai family. Traditional Chinese values such as filial piety and respect for one's elders were taught and practised throughout the community. Parents were especially respected and honoured<sup>18</sup>. Children submitted to their parents' wishes in matters of education, vocation, courtship and marriage. Women's duties were those of housewife and mother and they held an inferior position in the family. Few women were educated at higher levels or worked outside the home.

The Thai, on the other hand, despite recognising the pre-eminence of men, gave their women considerable freedom and authority, albeit informally. Many Thai women ran businesses, owned property and entered university; and some rose to high places in business and government.

The Chinese kept alive the ideal of a large family while the Thai tended to settle on a lower number of children. The Chinese favoured polygamous arrangements within the same household; the Thai preferred to set up their minor wives in separate residences. As a result of these differences, the size of the Chinese household was larger than that of the Thai on average (Skinner 1957:312).

For the Chinese, marriage within the kin group is prohibited. While the Chinese followed a patrilocal pattern of residence whenever possible, the Thai had a strong preference for matrilocal residence after marriage. Elopement, separation and divorce were common among the Thai but rare among the Chinese.

Local-born Chinese tended to follow patterns different from those of the immigrant generation. Many Thai-born Chinese sons set up a separate household due to overcrowding. They were more concerned about well-being and were prepared to limit family size in the interests of higher living standards. More second-generation women worked outside the home, although the percentage was still small. Many men of wealth kept Thai mistresses in conformity with the Thai pattern rather than with the traditional Chinese type of outright polygamy.

Let us now examine the current situation:

Table 7. Family

	Thai and Chinese (N=12)	Thai(II) (N=6)	Thai(I) (N=5)
Average number of siblings <sup>a</sup>	2.92	2.17	1.2
Nuclear family	9	3	4 (no response=1 <sup>19</sup> )
Other family types	3 (nuclear+sister-in-law=1; live alone=2)	3 (nuclear + wife=1; respondent + husband=1; nuclear + grandmother=1)	0
Responsibility towards family and relatives	11	5	5
Polygamy	1	0	1

<sup>a</sup> Individual responses of the Thai and Chinese: 2, 0, 1, 3, 5, 1, 3, 1, 8, 7, 2, 2; of the Thai(II): 1, 3, 4, 1, 1, 3; and of the Thai(I): 1, 0, 1, 3, 1.

On average, Thai and Chinese respondents are from the largest families; Thai(II) respondents are from smaller families; and Thai(I), the smallest. Among the responses from the Thai and Chinese, two stand out from the others: the first is a 46-year-old female from a family of nine. This individual is the oldest respondent and she is married to a Japanese with two daughters. Although it is too early to tell, the relevant literature and my data together seem to indicate a shift from large families to smaller ones among the Chinese and part Chinese. There is however one exception: the second response which stands out belongs to a female in her twenties who is from a family of eight.

Most of the respondents live in nuclear family units; a few Thai and Chinese and Thai(II) respondents are from extended families. In Table 7, there is evidence of married couples in a separate household as well as of patrilocal residence. Additional data comes from the respondents' siblings. Among the Thai and Chinese respondents, five of them have 15 married siblings in total: only one sibling lives with her husband's family, the rest are in separate residences. Three Thai(II) respondents have married siblings (5): only one lives with her husband's family, the others are again in separate households. The Thai(I) respondents do not have any married brothers or sisters. In the present day, separate residences appear to be favoured over the patrilocal type.

All but two<sup>20</sup> respondents say they feel they have responsibility towards their family and relatives. There does not seem to be any distinct difference among the Thai and Chinese, Thai(II) and Thai(I) descriptions of this responsibility. The fol-

lowing comment is typical:

‘We have to take care of each other and respect each other.’

Some also discussed supporting their parents in their old age. A Thai(I) male aptly puts it:

‘It is a kind of Thai common sense that children have to take care of their parents when they grow up. Some people take care of their family by funding the family. Others may do it in other ways. In my family’s case, all members have their own income so I don’t have to support my family by funding. Maybe assist the members when necessary is enough.’

Only one Thai(II) female appears to be particularly concerned about older family members:

‘We have to take care of grandfather and grandmother.’

There may be less responsibility beyond the immediate family, as a Thai and Chinese female puts it:

‘I am the one who supports my parents financially because I can earn enough. (I am the youngest child in the family.) For relatives, if they need help and I can afford it, I may help them. But my priority is for my parents and my brothers and sisters only.’

It used to be the Thai who had smaller spheres of responsibility. In addition, there is no mention of ancestry or lineage whatsoever in the responses. The Chinese and part Chinese respondents seem to have lost the strong traditional Chinese regard for ancestry and lineage.

Women who work outside the home are common across all the categories. Many respondents mentioned mothers and sisters who hold jobs as well as mothers who are homemakers. By contrast, married Yunnanese women in Chiang Mai do not work for wages (Hill 1998:100). There also seems to be a tendency for housework to be shared among all members of the household, as reported by a fair few respondents, as opposed to it being the sole responsibility of women.

Some respondents mentioned the role of their father or husband as that of a breadwinner, although in other cases both parents hold jobs. Citing the Yunnanese again, it is their husbands who secure the family livelihood.

Only two respondents (a Thai and Chinese female and a Thai(II) male) knows of polygamy in the family. The former's great grandfather had a second wife who lived in the same household; the latter's father has a minor wife who lives on her own.

There appears to be some maintenance of traditional Chinese ideals concerning having a large family and to a smaller degree, patrilocal residence, among the Chinese and part Chinese. However, married couples favour separate residences over living with the husband's family. There is a clear obligation to support elderly parents and to help and respect family and relatives, shared by the respondents across the categories; but there is no sign of regard for ancestry or lineage. Another change concerns women: more Chinese and part Chinese women hold jobs outside the home, alongside Thai women.

Smolicz *et al.* (2001:157,166,168) discusses the Chinese in Australia from a perspective different from that of this paper: he perceives the relationships in the Chinese family to be of the collective type, in which the interests of the group prevails over the interests of the individual. This is in contrast to individualist relationships, in which the interests of the individual prevails over the interests of the group. Smolicz's Italian and Chinese respondents bestow high evaluation on their collective family ties; and it is the Chinese family in its collective form which is the bedrock of Chinese cultural survival in Australia. I had thought of applying the concepts of collective and individualistic relationships to this research but I feel that in order to obtain an accurate picture of the nature of family relationships, I need prolonged observation and interaction with families. This is certainly worth pursuing in future although the questionnaire approach I adopt here is unsuitable. One sometimes hears complaints about young people in Asia such as in Singapore becoming increasingly westernised and individualistic; it makes me wonder where the Chinese and part Chinese in Thailand stand in their family relationships.

## **Language**

The main varieties of Chinese spoken in Thailand in the past and at present are Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese, Hokkien and Teochiu. There appears to be much language shift to Thai and little maintenance of Chinese among the Chinese and part Chinese respondents<sup>21</sup>. Except for one respondent, the rest seem to speak Thai

only at home. The exception in question is a Thai and Chinese female mentioned earlier as the oldest respondent; she speaks Thai and Japanese to her daughters in her home and Hainanese to other family members such as her siblings, parents and grandparents (all not in the same household). She claims to speak Hainanese fluently. Two more Thai(II) females speak Chinese but do not use it as a home language. One of them has basic competence in Mandarin but rarely speaks it; the other speaks easy conversational Mandarin and Teochiu with her Chinese friends and grandfather (not in the same household). There are similar findings in Morita 2003b:6-8: a small percentage of the respondents spoke Chinese and a few used it alongside Thai at home but none spoke it as the sole home language. Most spoke the language poorly and only infrequently or occasionally. The respondents in the present study have also English and Japanese in their repertoire, which they use frequently at university and with their friends.

Table 8. Learning Chinese

	Thai and Chinese (N=12)	Thai(II) (N=6)	Thai(I) (N=5)
Interested to learn Chinese	9	4	4
Interested to learn Mandarin	8 (respondent does not know=1)	4	4

Many respondents from all the categories think of Chinese in utilitarian terms. Many show interest in learning it, mostly citing similar practical reasons such as:

‘It’s an interesting language that is important and useful for globalization.’

‘It is very convenient to be able to speak in Chinese since China has the largest population in the world.’

‘I like to study languages and I think Chinese can broaden my career path.’

In my 2003b study, many respondents were interested to learn Chinese too and they were keen to talk about how important it was in the business world and how much business was being done with China. This reflects the close economic ties between the two countries; China is one of Thailand’s largest trading partner and the Thai economy benefits from Chinese business networks.

Many respondents in both studies show a positive attitude towards Chinese and most of the 2003b respondents said they would feel proud if they could speak it. Most of the other adjectives they used to describe how they feel about speaking the language were equally positive (e.g. 'cool', 'good'). It is understandable that the respondents took great pride in Chinese; it is after all the language of one of the oldest and largest countries and now boasts of having the fastest-growing economy in the world.

Amyot (1972:90) and Boonsanong (1971:14) reported in the early 1970s that some young Chinese were not interested in the Chinese language and would rather learn English or Japanese. Chinese youth might have drifted away from the language earlier but their interest has been rekindled, as we can see in the popularity of schools, universities and other institutions offering Chinese in Thailand and in my data.

The language shift experienced by the Chinese and part Chinese appears to be accompanied by positive attitudes towards their ancestral language. Not every case of language shift in Thailand is so; some Mon-Khmer language communities of Northeast Thailand, for instance, expressed embarrassment about their language and were shifting to Lao and/or Thai (Miller, 1994).

In the present study, only two Thai(II) females made a connection between their ancestry and the Chinese language. One of them said she is interested in learning it because:

'I'm Chinese too so I want to learn more about Chinese and I love Chinese songs and Chinese dramas.'

The other cited utilitarian reasons similar to those above in addition to one concerning her ancestry:

'I have several reasons. It is a beautiful language which gives me joys when learning it. There are so many Chinese in this world, and it is going to be a very important language for business in future. My ancestors are Chinese. I would have more opportunities when searching for a job if I spoke Mandarin fluently.'

This is the respondent who has basic competence in Mandarin mentioned earlier.

Only three respondents (a Thai and Chinese female<sup>22</sup>, a Thai(II) female<sup>23</sup> and a

Thai(II) male<sup>24</sup>) who show interest in learning Chinese specifically listed family and relatives as desired interlocutors after they have learnt it. Their responses are: relatives (not in the same household); grandparents and cousin (all not in the same household); and parents and sister (parents are in the same household, sister is unclear), respectively. None of the few respondents who can speak Chinese at the moment speak it at home; and only one who wants to learn it plans to speak it in his home. The future for the maintenance of Chinese looks bleak: most think of the language in practical terms and few express a perceived relationship between ancestry and language. The importance of speaking a language in the home should not be underestimated; it is possibly the most crucial factor in the maintenance of a language. Fishman 1991 emphasises the significance of intergenerational transmission; only when a language is being passed on in the home is there some chance of long-term survival. Language shift among the Chinese is not uncommon in Southeast Asia: Singaporean Chinese have shifted from Chinese dialects to English and Mandarin; ‘English-educated’ Malaysian Chinese (those who attended English-medium schools) have shifted to English; and Indonesian Chinese who have integrated into Indonesian society have shifted to Indonesian.

The respondents in Smolicz *et al.* 2001:166 differ from mine in some aspects concerning language:

‘The Chinese-background respondents, even those with little or no knowledge of Mandarin, generally demonstrated a desire to get to know the language, and particularly to acquire literacy which links all the regional languages to Mandarin. ... Notwithstanding any utilitarian connotations associated with Mandarin, the general tenor of many memoirs, both from parents and students, revealed the symbolic significance which they associated with the language as one of the basic elements of their Chinese identity.’

There are clear differences in the motive for wanting to learn Chinese and in the association between language with identity. The data I have presented so far points towards the assimilation of the Chinese and part Chinese into Thai society rather than maintenance. The reason behind the above differences is likely to be that the Chinese in Australia show a high degree of maintenance of their identity while most of the Chinese and part Chinese in Thailand have lost that identity and become part of Thai society.

## Discussion

One question I had at the beginning of this project was whether there were any differences between the Thai and Chinese respondents' core values and those of the Thai(II). One difference we have discussed is the frequency of worship in wat and of offering food to monks; another is family size. In these three aspects, Thai(II) occupies a position intermediate between Thai and Chinese and Thai(I). Thai(I) respondents worship and give food most frequently, and Thai and Chinese, the least; Thai(I) respondents are from the smallest families, and Thai and Chinese, the largest. This shows that to some extent, Thai(II) respondents are more assimilated into Thai society than the Thai and Chinese are; this does not come as a surprise since Thai(II) respondents are those who choose to be Thai.

Another question I had was whether there was any difference between those who are Chinese and those who are part Chinese in the Thai(II) category<sup>25</sup>. There is one difference concerning home worship: two<sup>26</sup> of the three Chinese worship deities of Chinese origin but one of the two part Chinese worships the Buddha. The part Chinese in this category do not worship Chinese deities in their home. Another difference is that two Chinese speak the Chinese language but none of the part Chinese does. Two<sup>27</sup> Chinese associate the language with their ancestry; none of the part Chinese does so.

I was also interested to compare the three older respondents (age 37 (male), 38 (female) and 46 (female)) with the rest. There does not appear to be any significant difference apart from the oldest respondent coming from the largest family already discussed above.

The data in this paper supports the view that the Chinese and part Chinese have assimilated into Thai society<sup>28</sup>, although the assimilation is not complete. Amyot (1972:83) claims that although more Chinese may have immigrated into Thailand than into any other country in Southeast Asia, their assimilation into the host society is also the greatest (except in Singapore, where they are the majority). This is due to Thailand's policy and practice (Morita 2003a), and is fostered by Thai people's lack of rigid exclusiveness, especially when strangers take on some symbols of Thainess. The Chinese in Thailand hardly experienced the harassment met by the Chinese in the Philippines; nor did they contend as a distinct ethnic group for the government like the Chinese in Malaysia did; and they did not evolve a distinct local but Chinese culture as the Chinese did in Indonesia (Amyot 1972:76). The dominant note of ethnic relations in Thailand goes from co-operation to assimilation. This is in stark

contrast to the situation in Indonesia, where the Chinese are discriminated against. Both in Indonesia and in Malaysia, intermarriage with native men and women is uncommon and the rate of assimilation is low.

Amyot (p.84) explains that in the self-view of the Thai, Thainess is defined mainly in linguistic and cultural terms: a Thai is a person who speaks a Thai dialect without accent and who lives in a Thai urban or rural style of life. It is thus easy for a Chinese born in or with many years of residence in Thailand to become Thai in this sense. Since all the respondents in my two studies speak Thai as a native language, it is very likely that they are accepted as Thai.

I believe that the ‘inner cohesion’ and ‘solidarity’ Smolicz (1981:82,84-5) refers to apply to the Chinese and part Chinese in Thailand:

‘Different cultures can, however, be grouped into civilisations which possess an inner cohesion that is absent in a random cultural aggregation. This is due to the fact that the constituent national or ethnic-groups of a civilisation share certain fundamental core values, which then acquire supra-ethnic significance. They can then be regarded as over-arching values for the whole civilisation.’

‘the collective group identity which members feel on account of sharing such values and which, following Durkheim, Parsons (1972:34) labels as that of ‘solidarity’. This effectively differentiates between members and non-members and indicates that the collectivity in question has some kind of definite identity.’

Ordinarily, it is difficult to distinguish those of Chinese descent from those of Thai descent since there has been considerable intermarriage. In addition, the two socialise freely with each other and there are frequent genuine friendships (at least among university students). This cohesion and solidarity is likely to be due to the similarities in core values and the Thai and the Chinese must feel that they share membership in a larger entity.

### **(Endnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Tewich Sawetaiyan, a research student at the Graduate School of Languages and Cultures, Nagoya University, for his invaluable assistance.

<sup>2</sup> I avoided using the term ‘Thai Chinese’ to the respondents since Hill (1998:128-9) claims

that similar labels have no currency in everyday conversation. Instead, I have used ‘Thai and Chinese’, which I think is more transparent and implies that one has both ancestries.

- <sup>3</sup> A rough approximation of the beginning of Chinese mass immigration is likely to be the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the end, the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- <sup>4</sup> In an earlier work, Crawford (1830:220) expressed a different view in ‘[the Chinese adopt] the Buddhist form of worship, ... giving the usual alms to the priests’ (quoted in Skinner 1957:129).
- <sup>5</sup> This was due to a chance similarity of name to a type of temple in China. See Skinner 1957:129-30.
- <sup>6</sup> Two respondents who did not answer the question on attitude towards merit-making claim that they make merit.
- <sup>7</sup> This Thai(I) respondent omitted answers to both questions on attitude towards merit-making and on whether one makes merit. He left many parts of the questionnaire unanswered.
- <sup>8</sup> This is a female.
- <sup>9</sup> One is male and the other, female.
- <sup>10</sup> This is the same person as in note vii.
- <sup>11</sup> One of them is the individual referred to in notes vii and x.
- <sup>12</sup> They have both become monks before.
- <sup>13</sup> They both show a positive attitude towards becoming a monk.
- <sup>14</sup> One of them has become a monk before and the other has not.
- <sup>15</sup> This is the same individual as in notes vii, x and xi.
- <sup>16</sup> The first claims to give alms 55 times a year and the second, once.
- <sup>17</sup> King Vajiravudh introduced surnames and coined names for hundreds of families as part of his efforts to exhort the people to act and live as modern people did in the West.
- <sup>18</sup> See Hill 1998:101 for an illustration of the preceding point in the present day.
- <sup>19</sup> This is the person mentioned in notes vii, x, xi and xv.
- <sup>20</sup> One is a Thai and Chinese female and the other, a Thai(II) male.
- <sup>21</sup> The Yunnanese described in Hill 1998 on the other hand show a high degree of maintenance, which could be due to different patterns of migration. Among other differences, the Chinese and part Chinese in my study appear to be descendants of Chinese who arrived in Thailand during the period of mass migration referred to in note iii; the settling of the Yunnanese is comparatively recent.
- <sup>22</sup> This is the respondent who already speaks Hainanese and she is interested in learning Mandarin.
- <sup>23</sup> This is one of the two respondents who associates ancestry with language above. She is the one who is particularly concerned about her grandparents mentioned earlier in the section on family. This reminds me of Smolicz *et al.* 2001 on the interaction between family and language and I wonder if her family ties strengthen her will to learn Chinese.

- <sup>24</sup> Incidentally, this is the respondent who said he always thinks he is Thai and he does not want to be Chinese. Refer to the last quoted response on p.2. Perhaps this hints at the lack of connection between Chinese language and identity. One possible explanation is that this individual thinks that one can speak Chinese without being Chinese (cf. discussion on language and identity in Morita 2003b:12-13).
- <sup>25</sup> One Thai(II) respondent did not reveal that he is Chinese or part Chinese.
- <sup>26</sup> One of them worships a Thai spirit at the same time.
- <sup>27</sup> One speaks Chinese and the other does not.
- <sup>28</sup> The view that the Chinese have assimilated is challenged by Hill (1998); she claims that the Yunnanese Chinese in Northern Thailand have maintained their identity. She stresses that many of the variables relevant to the continued assimilation of the Thai Chinese have changed or differentially affected Northern Thailand.

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