



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
THE STATUS AND ROLES
OF
THERAVADA BUDDHIST
AND
ROMAN CATHOLIC NUNS:
A CASE STUDY
IN
THE COMMUNITY OF BANGKOK
BY
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Thesis Title: A Comparative Study of the Status and Roles of Theravada Buddhist and Roman Catholic Nuns: A Case Study in the Community of Bangkok.

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Abstract

This thesis is related to the study, analysis and comparison of nuns' status and roles in Theravada Buddhism and Roman Catholicism. There are two parts to this thesis; the first is the presentation of the position of women in Buddhism and Catholicism which includes the religious and social relationships of women in both religions. This part also includes the history, origin and goals of both kinds of nuns, the reasons for becoming nuns, the courses of training involved, and the rules of governing nuns as well as the history of them in Thailand. This part is based upon documentary research.

The second part is a comparison of the status and roles of Theravada Buddhist nuns (Mae Chees) and Roman Catholic nuns. For purposes of comparison, the information from the first part is related to the report of the field survey done at selected wats in Bangkok.

The objective of this thesis is to compare the status and roles of Mae Chees and Catholic nuns by focusing on the supporting and limiting factors which influence the similarities and differences in their respective roles and status.

According to the documentary and field research, it is clearly indicated that Mae Chees and Catholic nuns are not female priests. The former have their status as "ordained female lay disciples" (Upasikas), the latter as "religious women" (Nak Boach Ying). The status of both of them is higher than that of ordinary lay people because of the serious devotion of their lives to practising their religion in a religious environment.

Even though it is difficult to compare their roles because of their different status, it is necessary to do this because generally people consider nuns in both religions to be "religious specialists in the sacred world." Thus, they are expected to have useful roles in their religions and community. According to the field study, Buddhist Mae Chees perform fewer roles than Catholic nuns, but they do take part effectively in most of their activities in the propagation of their religious belief, in education and in social welfare the same as the latter. Many factors affect the similarities and differences of their life, status and roles, such as, the religious teachings, the stated objectives

for ~~ordination~~ or profession, their education and training, including the recognition and support from the society they receive. When we compare their roles, therefore, we will note these different factors in order correctly to evaluate their success in assuming them.

In conclusion, it may be said that Buddhist Mae Chees would like to consider themselves as "spiritual aspirants". The Path in Buddhism supplies them with a way of achieving personal serenity as well as being a spiritual refuge to others. Society, on the other hand, would like them to play more of a role as "social workers" who produce material and cultural services to others. Buddhist Mae Chees need to be trained and supported more in this latter role which is similar to that of Catholic nuns. Therefore, it depends on a social consensus to consider which role is the most necessary and important for the society. Then the roles of Buddhist Mae Chees should be developed in accordance with such agreement.