

Chapter Two

The Founder of The Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4

Phra Mae is an honorific title given to the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Kuan-Yin for her role as the savior and child giver by the followers of the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4 (hereinafter referred to as the Tamnak) a religious group established as a tribute to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, where the main object of worship is the Bodhisattva herself. Sharing the same honorific title is Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, the founder, leader, and the abbot of the Tamnak for her being seen as the reincarnation of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, with her reputed ability in fulfilling the role of the Bodhisattva.

Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, as the living Bodhisattva of Compassion, is currently a nun while at the same time, the *guru* and also the *prophet* in Weber's concept, to all of her followers. As the *guru*, to her followers, she is the teacher who transmits special knowledge which could possibly belong to a divine being, the Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin since she is "not institutionally educated". As the *prophet*, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng has

succeeded in establishing her authority with the authentication of the charisma and practices divine healing and counseling. By pursuing the religious life and being ordained as a nun in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition where the compassionate Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin is much adored and worshipped, she becomes the leader of a religious group named as the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4 to ensure its continuous prosperity and development as an organized institution.

For the development of the Tamnak to proceed even after her death—without and beyond her, and if she is to continue to live on some manner among large numbers of the laity, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng knows that she must herself become the object of worship. This means she must become the incarnation of a god, and presumably, as the reincarnation of the Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, the mission of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva as stated in the scripture of the **Dharani of Great Compassion**¹ has become hers to be accomplished.

In becoming a reborn divine being and a nun, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng differentiates herself from and puts herself into contrast with a sorcerer, a prophet, also a religious functionary. By her reputation gained through the Tamnak activities and devotion of followers, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng is

¹ Jen-Wen, ed., *The Interpretation of the Dharani of Great Compassion*. (Year: unknown). Bangkok: Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4. P.198.

confident that the group will attract more followers to the mission of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and their devotion toward the most loved Bodhisattva is going to provide for and ensure further the development and continuity to the group.

2.1 Kuan-Yin, the Goddess of Compassion: Her Genesis, Function, and Iconographic Form

Kuan-Yin or 觀音², is the Chinese name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, the Sound-Observer, who originated from India as the spiritual son of Amitabha Buddha, born from the light that sprang from the right eye of the Buddha of Infinite Light³. The Bodhisattva had accumulated a vast amount of merit, attained enlightenment, and voluntarily postponed entry into Nirvana, the highest religious plane, until all living beings enter. As a folk deity, Kuan-Yin also embodies in herself, Miao Shan, a princess in the Chinese legends and a vegetarian from birth, and whose sole ambition was to attain perfection⁴.

² 觀 means *observe* . and 音 means *sound*. Therefore, 觀音 is the *Sound-Observer*.

³ Ibid. P.203-4

⁴ John Blofeld, *Bodhisattva of Compassion. The Mystical Tradition of Kuan-Yin*. 1978. Colorado: Shambhala Publications, Inc.

Bodhisattvas, are regarded as highly advanced beings with pasts rooted in human experience, and in fact they often function as deities within the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. In the case of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, as noted by Weber, she is often represented as a higher ideal than a Buddha, because the Bodhisattva forgoes her own entrance into Nirvana, which has only exemplary significance, to prolong her universal function in the service of mankind. (Weber. 1922). Name and functions of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, also reveal some fundamental Buddhistic responses to the most basic human concerns.

Kuan-Yin or Avalokitesvara, the “Bodhisattva Who Heed the Cries of the World,” as the compassionate savior from life-threatening distress, ills, comforter in times of need, a Healing Deity, thus possesses all the power similar to those of the Healing Buddha who heal all ills and pain, and if her name is called in the moment of danger, the danger will pass regardless of those guilty or innocent⁵.

In the male form, known as Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva is always seen seated on a lion. Lotus, while in Avalokitesvara’s hands, symbolizes the wheel of the law of perpetual cycles of existence along

⁵ Jen-Wen, ed., *The Interpretation of the Dharani of Great Compassion*. (Year: unknown). Bangkok: Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4. P.198.

which all unenlightened sentient beings are destined to pass⁶. The principal form of Avalokitesvara could be summarized as in the following Table 2.1:

Table 2.1

The Principal Forms of Avalokitesvara (Kuan-Yin) Bodhisattva

One Head	Human Form	1 Avalokitesvara or Kuan-Yin 2 Padmapani 3 Avalokita as Buddha 4 Avalokitesvara 5 Nilakantharyavalokitesvara 6 Trailakyavasamkara-Lokesvara 7 Hariharivahanodbhava
	Human Form	1 Avalokitesvara with emanations of twelve crowned Buddhas 2 Simhanada-Lokesvara with emanations of five Buddhas
	Four arms	1 Form incarnate in the Dalai Lama 2 Upper hands: mudra namahkara Lower hands: mudra dhyana (meditation) holding begging-bowl 3 Mudra: dharmacakra (turning the Wheel of Law) 4 Rakta-Lokesvara
	Ten to eighteen arms	1 Ten arms 2 Padmanartesvara
	Twelve arms	Dogmatic form of Avalokitesvara
	Six to twenty arms	
	Three Heads	
Five Heads		Third eye, twelve arms
		Third eye, twenty-four arms

⁶ Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism. Their History, Iconography and Progressive Evolution through The Northern Buddhist Countries. With a general Introduction on Buddhism* tr. From J. Deniker. 1914. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Eleven Heads	Six to eight arms 1,000 arms 1,000 arms	(if eyes in palms * 1,000 eyes*) - two upper hands hold sword and shield
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Notes:

- Other names referring to Avalokitesvara
- Avalokitesun in Thailand
 - Lokesvara in Indo-People's Republic of China (outside Thailand)
 - Kuan-Yin/Kuan-Shih-Yin in People's Republic of China
 - Kannon in Japan

For her common iconographic form, Kuan-Yin is always seated on a giant lotus holding a vase and a willow branch or a lotus petal. Lotus is the symbol of purity, and also the Buddhist symbol of par excellence. The vase symbolizes harmony and in Kuan-Yin's hands is said to contain the Dew of Compassion, the elixir of immortality, the remedy for all ills; and the willow branch in one of her hands is the Buddhist symbol of meekness, with the power of expelling demons and illness.⁷

Of the many of her iconographic forms, as Kuan-Yin or in her original form as Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva is also described as having one thousand eyes or one thousand arms and eleven heads. But in People's Republic of China, Japan, Thailand and the neighboring countries nowadays, female depiction's of Kuan-Yin par excellence, predominate, is generally in idealized human form with one head and two arms, with bare

⁷ *The Interpretation of the Dharani of Great Compassion*. p.208

feet, usually wearing white robe, with white cape and hood or with crown, with or without ornaments. And when depicted as “giver of children,” she would hold a child in her hand while in standing posture, or on her lap when sitting.⁸

Kuan-Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion in Mahayana Buddhism, is also referred to as Chao-Mae Kuan-Im in the Thai language, or the Reverend Mother Kuan-Yin, and to followers of the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4, she is Phra Mae Kuan-Yin or simply referred to as Phra Mae, the Reverend Mother.

By the side of Amitabha Buddha, as the savior of the world, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, with a branch of willow in one hand and a vase filled with sweet dew in her other hand, she showers the world with her compassion that relieves all sentient beings from all sufferings. Also, according to the **Dharani of Great Compassion**, she is especially dear to those living in the east and would respond to wishes of those who sincerely call out her name and recite the incantation of the **Dharani**⁹. Being convinced of the result of

⁸ Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism. Their History, Iconography and Progressive Evolution through The Northern Buddhist Countries.* With a general Introduction on Buddhism tr. From J. Deniker. 1914. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁹ Jen-Wen, ed., *The Interpretation of the Dharani of Great Compassion.* (Year: unknown). Bangkok: Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4. P.198.

recitation of the **Dharani** that the Tamnak has attracted an increasing number of followers.

As a folk deity, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, also embodies in herself, Miao Shan, a princess in the Chinese legends, a vegetarian from birth, and whose sole ambition was to attain perfection. One of the versions of the story, revealed by a monk, Tao-Shan, is as follows:

Miao Shan, a princess in People's Republic of China, refuses to marry according to his father's arrangement, told her father that she would consent to marriage only to a physician, and explained the reason, "my wish is to heal all human beings of all its ills I wish to equalize all classes, putting rich and poor on the same footing, to have a community of goods, without distinction of persons." Eventually, she persuaded him to allow her to retire to the White Sparrow Nunnery. There she was given the hardest and most menial jobs on her father's, the king's orders. However, Gods and all beings came to the rescue. Discovering this, the king ordered the entire nunnery to be burnt. Miao Shan, with Heaven's help, extinguished the fire. Further attempts at execution had also failed. Sadden by all this, she committed suicide. Death, she said, was preferable to her father's hatred. Her soul descended to Hell which she soon transformed into a Paradise of Joy. A memorial was sent up to Heaven saying "since it has always been decreed that in justice there must be both a Heaven and a

Hell, if she remains here, there will no longer be a Hell but only a Heaven.” Returning to life she was immediately transported by Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of the West to the Island of Pho-Tho-Sua.

At the Tamnak, the charismatic founder of the Tamnak, before her ordination, had commissioned for a statue of her own to be built —sitting in a lotus position on a full bloomed lotus, wearing white robe, with a similar hair style but wearing a five leafed crown— and placed in the meditation hall for followers to worship. The statue is as shown in the following Illustration¹⁰ 2.1.

¹⁰ Adopted from *Collection of Photographs* published by the Tamnak.

Illustration 2.1

The statue of Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, before her ordination.



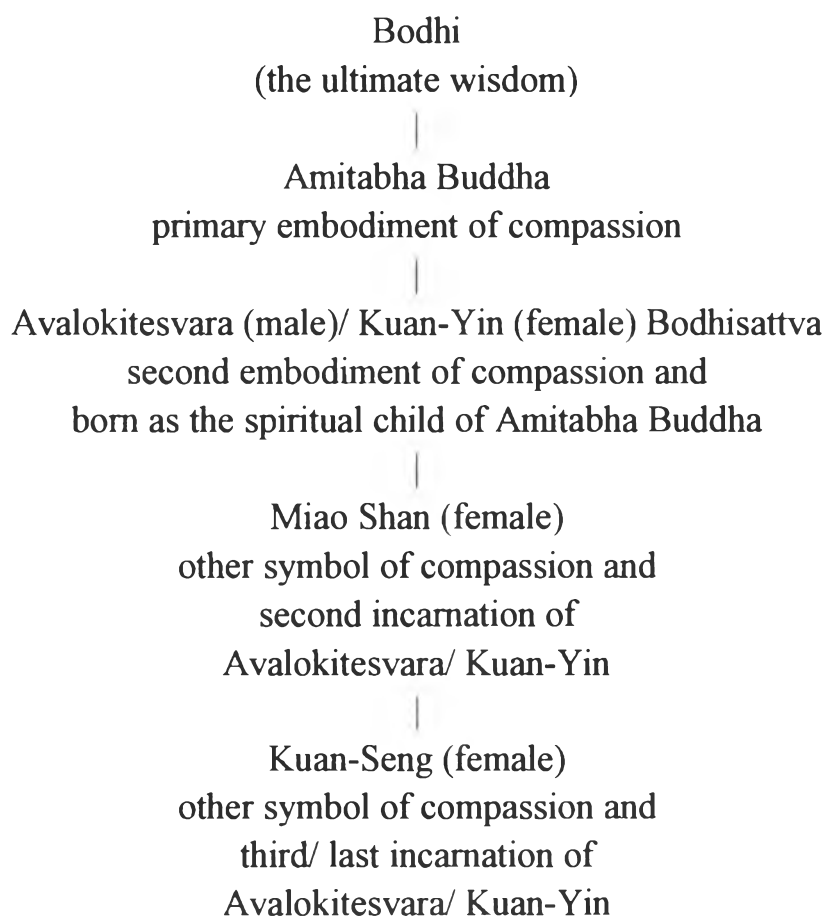


The statue of Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, before her ordination.



2.2 The Founder: Phra Mae Kuan-Seng

Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, a former housewife and a mother of two sons, said she has finally been convinced that she, herself is in fact another incarnation of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, destined to save all sentient beings, especially those in Thailand. Therefore, she left the secular world to pursue the perfection of life which is to follow the path of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva to complete the mission as the savior of the world. According to the Tamnak, her lineage, is as follows:



To followers of the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva was “reborn” in Thailand as Tang Sai Ngek, in 1941, in a slum in Klong-Teoy area of Bangkok. She is said to have shown clearly the compassionate quality that could have owned by the Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, and is said to have been very much different from other children at a very young age. She was married at the age of 23. At the age of 40, she had then been referred to as “Ong Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Maha Bodhisattva”, the medium of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva. Later she claims to be the other incarnation of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and that she was told by Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, the divine herself that “the reason for her to be chosen as another form is because *‘educated person always mean trouble.’*” Due to her “Kuan-Yin qualities” and the charismatic power she has shown through her financial achievement and her ability in maintaining a happy family. Also through miracles performed for peoples around her on many different occasions, a group was formed for the first time with her as the leader and was called as the Disciples of Phra Mae Kuan-Yin. When the group expanded with the number of members increased, it is given the name as the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4.

As the founder of the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4, the “reborn” Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva then was ordained and became Phra Mae⁶ Kuan-Seng, or better known as Phra Mae to her followers.

The passage of her life through the transformation into a charismatic leader and a Mahayana Buddhist nun, based on her own account of her life story, is divided into different stages: first, as Khun Waraphon Lesrangsi, a housewife and a working mother; as Phra Mae Waraphon, known as the medium of the Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin; as Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, a Mahayana Buddhist nun; and finally as the living Bodhisattva of Compassion, Kuan-Yin.

2.2.1 As Khun Waraphon Lesrangsi

Born as Tang Sai Ngek in a family of eight siblings, she was the third child among the six daughters and two sons and had lived in a slum near the present Klong Teoy market where once there were railways and a canal near the house. Her father and mother, Tang Chui Seng and Ngo Peek Hiang were vendors. Her parents could not remember the exact date that she was born, but remembered that it was in 1941.

She was told she was born plump and had not stop crying until her father named her “Ang Mui” or “Nu Deng” which means Red Child in the Chinese dialect of Tae-Chiew and in the Thai language because her body was red. Later her father gave her a formal name, Tang Sai Ngek. Tang is her family name. Her parents had migrated from People’s Republic of China and were said to have like Thailand although they had not understood

the Thai language and had decided to settle down in this country because Thais are people with true heart.

According to her grandmother, she said, when she was a four year old, in 1944-5, Thailand was in World War II. And to take refuge, the whole family had to move to Minburi area of Bangkok. As a child, she was told that she had been bright and different from other children. Whenever there was bombing in the city, other children would cry but she would kowtow to Heaven and Earth to pray for safety. She said her grandmother had wondered if it was because of her prayer that bombs had seemed to have fallen on other neighborhood.

She was also told that as a child she has known to have compassion and the willingness to sacrifice for others. She would give her share of sweets to other children and have always been helpful to everyone. She attributed this to her father's influence without her knowing it because she remembered how he had been to others and had always told them to be kind and to share whatever that they had. According to the publication of the Tamnak, the following is her story:

One day, I broke a bottle and had thrown the broken pieces to the canal. When father heard of this he went down to the canal to pick up the broken glasses so that no one would get hurt. Later he came home with a leech on the private part of his body and was confined to bed for

that whole week. I was frightened and thought that father would beat me. But he did not. He even told mother not to scold me ...

He had always been proud of himself saying if he die he would die doing good deeds. He told me not throw things down to the canal for there were other children who always went down to play in the canal ...

I also remember how father had shown us to love our relatives and neighbours, and how he had taught us that actions that harm others would lead to ill effects to ourselves ...

He had always been a person who gives without thinking of himself. And I have always believed that it is due to the merits father had accumulated that my brothers, sisters, and I have attained the prosperity that we enjoy in this life¹¹ ...

There was another occasion, she said,

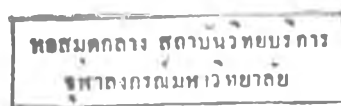
When a neighbour, Lung, came to borrow money. His barber tools were stolen. As the coming Chinese New Year might bring in more money, he promised to pay back then. Father had to admit that we had not yet even have the money to buy food for the New Year's eve the next day. Later, Lung visited several neighbours to try to borrow money but had been without luck. I was seven or eight years old then. When I heard of this, I gave Lung my piggy-bank and asked him not to mention this to father. Several days later, Lung returned the money although I had not expected him to. I remember how Lung had hold my hands and was in tears. I had been surprised and asked if the money not enough and said I would save more for him¹² ...

¹¹ Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, *The History and Construction of Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4*. Publication in Thai language. (Year: unknown) Bangkok: The Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4. P.4

¹² Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, *To My Children*. Publication in Thai language. (Year: unknown) Bangkok: The Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4.

Being in a poor family, she had never had the chance to go to school. She learnt to read and write from the tailor living downstairs. At the age of seven, she had to begin helping her parents at their stall. At twelve, she started working at a basket shop making bamboo basket. On her first pay-day, when she handed in her first wages, she said her father had moved to tears. At thirteen, she went to work as a domestic help but left after a month because she was not happy having been blamed for something that she did not do. She then worked at a cloth factory for sometime. Later, she helped her father selling fabrics at his stall until she married Semsak Lesrangsi at the age of twenty three and adopted her husband's last name, Lesrangsi. After that she started working with her husband as street vendor selling fabrics.

When life became better and their first child was born. Phra Mae Kuan-Seng said that they had planned to have two children, to save enough money to provide them with good education and for the family to go around the world. They bought a shop house and had started as a barber shop, "Lesrangsi Barber", in the area between Klong Toey and Prakanong. They had thought that once they got started then they would receive the nun without further investment. They employed barbers, with her working at the cash register while selling fabrics in the same shop, and her siblings worked at the stalls in front of the shop. She was happy that everything had gone on smoothly.



When they had had enough savings, while taking care of the fabric business, they started to invest in Song Taew (a kind of mini buses). They first bought 3 Song-Taew and started to operate on the routes that ran between Klong-Teoy and Rong-Muang. Later they bought taxis. They increased the number of taxis by one or two cars. Finally they had owned about ten taxis. There was time when that one taxi number plate would sell for 60,000 bahts. Then they would sell the car cheaper and kept the money in bank savings account.

In 1973, their fabric businesses showed signs of alarm. Despite the increases in sales, they were falling deep into debts. Then she started a *Kuatiao-ladna* noodle stall by buying the materials on credit. One year after that, her father fell ill, “At first what was thought to be inflammation on his shoulders was later found out to be tumor that was caused by years of carrying heavy loads of fabrics on his shoulder.” Although they had tried to keep the news from him, he somehow found out that he was very ill and told her to look after the family, she said, “Before he died, he showed me a thumb sign. I did not understand it then. Later I was told that in the last minutes before a person dies he could foresee the future and that a thumb sign means a good future. A fortune teller told us that father would sit on a

golden chair when he reaches the age of sixty. I had not believed this. But then I have seen it with my own eyes.”¹³

After the funeral, she followed her father’s advice and closed the noodle stall. Then she started learning tailoring. In a week, she had started working. Later she opened a custom tailor shop called “Suphaphon Design” working long hours including teaching tailoring classes. They later bought a shop-house at Premrethai Market and bought Song-taew buses, 4-wheel and 6-wheel trucks for resale by giving credits. As they were in the market area, they also operated buses. She sold drinks while managing bus routes. Both her husband and she worked hard and saved up all they had earned. She said, “We were lucKuan-Yin Bodhisattva then. Our businesses were blooming. We had even been able to own a detergent manufacturing factory. My husband, while helping in all the works, imported engines from Japan to be sold here.”

By chance she had started buying and selling land, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng said, “When I tried to acquire a plot of land at the Ladprao area in Bangkok, I was advised not to for there grew a large tree where a beautiful Divine Being resides. But I had different thought in mind. I knew for the good deeds that I have done and would always do, I would be

¹³ Ibid

protected. I bought the land. I again found myself to be in luck. Any plot of land that I put my hands on had brought in money. Then, in 1981, Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva (Avalokitesvara) came into our family.”

2.2.2 As Phra Mae Waraphon

According to the Founder, she attributed her successes and happy family to the merits accumulated in past lives and by performing good deeds, and her willingness to “give.” She said, “I have always believed that there is a reward for every good deed. And to me, ‘giving’ has been a way of life. Friends also referred to my family as a model family.”¹⁴

The transformation period started when she reached the age of forty. It was in 1981, when she began experiencing a sequence of miraculous incidents, dreams, and oracles, revealing of her being as one of the incarnations of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, the savior of the world. While also acting as the medium of many other spiritual beings, the “Kuan-Yin qualities” in her had made her to be known as Phra Mae Waraphon and

¹⁴ Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, *The History and Construction of Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4*. Publication in Thai language. (Year: unknown) Bangkok: The Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4.

finally the founder of the religious community formed by the people surrounding her.

She first received the sign – she dreamt of visiting heaven, “There were many Buddha images in the sKuan-Yin Bodhisattva and gold mountains. I also saw a golden pagoda with people wearing yellow robe making pilgrimage walking encircling the pagoda. I had wanted to stay, but the Buddha spanked my back and told me to come back only after I have cleaned off myself of all the human excrement all over my body. Once I said, ‘I would clean off myself and bring a lot of people here.’ I woke up and found myself on the hospital bed with relatives crying over my death by my bedside. There were human excrement all over my body. They told me that I had stopped breathing and my body had become stiff, and all of a sudden there were lots of human excrement.”¹⁵

Phra Mae Kuan-Seng said that the nurse had wanted to help clean her body but she insisted on doing it herself and had refused to stay at the hospital for treatment. Turning to the doctor she started preaching, “Please perform good deeds. Take good care of the patients. Do not raise the prices of medication if you do not want to go to hell.” She said the doctor told her relatives to take her to a mental hospital and her relatives had also

¹⁵ Ibid. p.5

thought that she had become insane. After that incident, she started to preach to everyone she met.

Also, she had dreamed of seeing Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva with a very young child. She said she hurriedly told her friend to pay respect. Then she woke up. Later she found out that the child is the male attendant of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, the Red Child, Ang-Hai-Yii.

In another dream, she saw her youngest son in a bus. She told him not to leave and had tried to get on the bus but in vain, “There were three monks sitting in the bus. One of the monk extended his hand to me. I was shocked at how a monk could touch me, a woman?¹⁶ And yet I could not get on the bus by myself. The monk extended his hand again and I reached out. In an instant I was in the bus. I paid respect to the monk but were told that, ‘There is no need for that. Because you are Phra Mae Kuan-Yin.’ I was astonished. Then I felt myself lifted to the sky, higher and higher. Below there were crowds of people looking up at me. I warned myself not to fall and prayed to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva for help. At that moment, I found myself standing on a branch of willow. All of a sudden, I woke up. After this, I fell ill at the smell of meat dishes and vomited at the sight of what had been my favorite meat dishes. Since then, I had stopped eating meat and

¹⁶ Ibid. p.7. In Thai Theravada Buddhist tradition, a monk is not to touch a woman.

had begun to get up at 03:30 in the morning to recite the Buddhist Scripture in the Chinese language although I had known nothing of the language. Even until then, I had never followed the religious practices of the Buddhist tradition and we were Christian then. My husband took me to the mental hospital.”¹⁷

She mentioned that she had also been wondering if she had become crazy. But instead of being examined, she preached to the doctor. Her husband was ashamed of taking her to the doctor again. And she lost interest in doing businesses but only in meditation and reciting the scripture. She talked to an old lady who told her that there must be a high ranking spiritual being residing in her body and took her to see a monk. Incense sticks were put up in four directions surrounding her. But all had fallen apart toward the four directions. The monk confirmed what she was told. She had not believed it. She said, “The monk told me to pray. I prayed to be able to sleep at night and I did. But after that night I started to have those strange feeling again. My husband visited the monk for advises who told him to held a ritual on a specific day to dominate the spiritual being. Immediately before the beginning of the ritual, I suddenly rose to my feet and questioned the monk, ‘Who are you? Dare trying to dominate me?’

¹⁷ Ibid.p.8

And declaring at that point that, ‘I am Kuan-Yin. The time had come to promote Buddhism and to release all human beings from all sufferings.’¹⁸

Her husband was shocked for they had never been religious. Sometime after her father passed away, her mother wanted to summon for his soul. Failing to persuade her to let him rest in peace, she accompanied her mother to visit a medium. At the seance, she said, she thought the medium was giving bad reputation to Buddhism and had wanted to call the police. Her mother cried and she had to comply by taking her to another medium in Chonburi Province. She described the process saying she felt as it was like having her father himself present, although she was still thinking, if by chance, this medium could perform better but did not dare telling her mother. On the contrary, she had become a medium.

Knowing that she herself had become a medium even involuntarily, and was chosen by Kuan-Yin Boddhisattva, she said:

I was so ashamed of myself that I had not wanted to see anyone. Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva assured me, ‘if you believe in me, I would let you see the truth.’ I confided in my friend, Orawan to find out a way to know if Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva is really residing in me. Then at that instant, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva had come to warn Orawan’s husband of a promise he made, ‘ten years ago, you had made a promise to me. Now the time has come.’ Phra Mae said.

¹⁸ Ibid.p.9

Hia-Hong, Orawan's husband was shocked because he had never told anyone about the matter. Ten years ago, Orawan was predicted to be able to live for another ten years and to save her Hia-Hong had prayed to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva following the advice to a medium. Once Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva reminded him of his promise, he was convinced that the divine being residing in my body is Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Maha Bodhisattva (Avalokitesvara).¹⁹

“But I had not yet been fully convinced.” She continued.

A few days later, at night, different voices were heard at the neighborhood where Orawan lived. And she dreamt of people coming to take her away. When the neighbour mentioned the voices, Orawan knew it was on the same night that she had the dream. Frightened, she came to me. As soon as I told her that she must have taken too much food during the day that she had the dream, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva called on us.”²⁰

After performing a ritual for Orawan, at the seance, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva in Phra Mae Waraphon, advised Orawan to invite neighbours and twelve monks to perform a merit making ceremony, and to stay at the Tamnak during that period. After this incident, Orawan and her friends would come to visit the Tamnak to recite scripture. Her husband was said to be very angry. He told them the house while also being a company office, was not a place for recitation and they should have gone to the temple instead. No one had listened. Her husband was furious and closed the factory to take her to People's Republic of China.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.10

²⁰ Ibid.p.10

At Keng-Chiew, People's Republic of China, she heard Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva telling her, "Saassi-kim-meng-lhai-kau-chi," which means, "Born three times and come here."²¹

At Keng-Chiew, she could see things clearly without eyeglasses which she had been wearing for the past twenty years because of shortsightedness and strabismus. She described it as having had the eyes "opened". She then found herself uttering, "Each part of the body of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva is in each part of my body."²² A monk travelling with them was said to have told them, "When in meditation, I saw Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva on her forehead."²³

At Nam-Hai in the People's Republic of China where Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva attained enlightenment, she mentioned in her book that there she had had different encounters but had not yet dared to reveal. Returning to Keng-Chiew she tumbled and fell again and had to look for her eyeglasses. When they were in Hong Kong, she said she felt so well that she had enjoyed all meals.

²¹ Ibid.p. 10

²² Ibid.p. 10

²³ Ibid.p. 10

Arriving in Thailand, she became unwell again and had the urge to visit India. By visiting Buddhist sacred places and meditating under the Bodhi tree, she said she had come to understand the perception of impermanence better. While staying at the Phuttakaya Temple in India, the abbot told them, “The lemongrass flowers are in full bloom. This indicates the visit of someone with divine charisma. And this is the first time in the twenty years of my stay in India, that I have seen lemon grass flowers blossom.”²⁴

Coming back from India, the disciples invited friends and relatives to come to pray and recite scripture. Only her husband was said to have yet looked for a way to cure her insanity. He tried to nun her to visit America for treatment but she refused to go. He had then told her, “When I return and you have not yet recovered, I would look for a new wife.” Then she assured him that they could go back to doing business again when he came back. And she told Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva of her decision.

One night, she told those who were present of her decision and to recite scripture at their home. They strongly rejected the idea. Finally she made up her mind to continue pursuing the religious goal, “If I am to help in promoting Buddhism, to follow Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva’s instruction to build

²⁴ Ibid.p.12

Tammak, Meditation Hall and Vegetarian Hall, I do not want to be involved in the management of funds collected for this purpose of merit making, because I do not want to be suspected of swindling the funds if later on my children or siblings become prosperous.”²⁵ Everyone agreed. She then picked up incense sticks and went outside the house. To Heaven and Earth, and to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva she took the oath, “If I am the Phra Mae Kuan-Yin as you have told me, please let me be the True One. I would live to serve the religion and would have nothing to regret because I would not ruin the reputation of religion. But if I am not the True One and was cheated, after I die, I would appeal to demand justice.”²⁶ That night, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva told her, “Your prayer has echoed to Heaven and Earth.” And, “ Three days from today, your husband would come back and become a monk.”²⁷ As predicted by Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, her husband came back from America telling her that he was convinced that Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva really exists and two days later, he was ordained to become a monk.

Phra Mae Waraphon left for Taiwan, according to Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, it is to follow Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva’s instruction. She said she had suggested Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva to choose someone else because

²⁵ Ibid.p.13

²⁶ Ibid.p.13

²⁷ Ibid.p.14

she does not speak and read Chinese language. But Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva told her, “Those who can read, the more they read the more they think they have the knowledge, while some knowledge are facts and some are not. They often question things and always hold doubts. Therefore, I prefer someone who cannot read. I would teach you myself.”²⁸

Several days after her stay in the temple, during meditation, she heard voices saying “Sem-Arahang”²⁹ coming from far away but had not seen anyone around, except there were wind, water and mountains.

One day, she felt like eating rice noodle. Later that day, a bhiksuni³⁰ brought it to her without her asking for it. Another day, she wanted to eat a mango, and she had had the mangoes too. Again one night, as she was thinking of Chinese pears and persimmons, a disciple came visiting and had brought her some pears and persimmons. She was amazed at how her wishes had been materialized. One month later, on the birthday of Phra Ajarn Bunles³¹ birthday, she came back to Thailand for the merit-making ceremony.

²⁸ Ibid.p.15

²⁹ Ibid.p.15

³⁰ A *bhiksuni* is an ordained woman in the Mahayana tradition.

³¹ A Theravada Buddhist monk. Ibid.p.15

Back in Thailand to make merits, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva told her, “Let’s build a new Tamnak. Because the present Tamnak is too small. Soon more people would come that the sKuan-Yin Bodhisattva would be darken.”³² Several disciples had wanted to provide land for the new Tamnak. But Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva told her not to accept the offers but to build the Tamnak in the Ladprao area where in that particular plot of land at the present location of the main Tamnak, the Green Dragon, Chao Pu Mangkorn Khiaw has been residing for thousands of years waiting for this particular event—the construction of a Tamnak for Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva. She also described how other divine beings had come to give them blessing and support.

To bring them prosperity, she mentioned how Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva instructed them to build the statue of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva standing on the back of the Sacred Toad, holding a vase in the right hand and a lotus stem in the left hand while saying, “crossing water and sea to bring gold mountain to the Tamnak.”³³ Phra Mae Waraphon said, “Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva also told us that in this form she has come to help all in Thailand to avoid entering the cycle of reincarnation and for her to accomplish another form.”³⁴ Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva existing in Phra Mae

³² Ibid.p.16

³³ Ibid.p.16

³⁴ Ibid.p.16



Waraphon had also encouraged everyone to work hard. Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva in Phra Mae Waraphon said, “*It is important for those with money to contribute money, those with strength to contribute strength.*”³⁵ Although the committee had never had the experience in working on such a big project, somehow things had gone on so smoothly that within a year the main Tamnak costing 40 million bahts was built at the present location and in the way how Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva had foretold, ‘*easier than drinking a cup of coffee.*’³⁶

Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva was said to have also given them instructions to hold an eleven-day festivities although she had tried to argue that it would be better to celebrate for three days and save up the money for the construction of the Tamnak. During this festive period, she had known to have performed miracles when in trance. Disabled people who came were cured in that instant. A patient who had been in an ICU for twenty four days had left the ICU two days after she had given him an amulet when the patient’s family came crying for help because the doctor had told them to give up hope. There have been many other miracles. She said:

Then on 28th August 1984, an auspicious day as according to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, following Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and her attendant’s instruction, we, a group of 32 persons left for a 50-day

³⁵ Ibid.p. 16

³⁶ Ibid.p. 16

pilgrimage to People's Republic of China. During the journey although we had suffered from the cold weather, no one had complaint. An elderly told me that she had not been able to kneel down to pray for the past 30 years. But once she climbed the sacred mountains with her weak legs, she has been able to kneel down as others.³⁷

Then the revelation followed:

On the 28th of September, while I was alone in my room, I felt as if Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva was telling me to make a statue of myself wearing similar white dress as Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva had worn on one of her visits to Thailand.³⁸

She said she had at first been feeling uncomfortable and had wondered if this had been her own imagination,

To confirm this I asked Mae-Nom, a nanny in the family to accompany me to the assembly hall of the temple. On the way, I prayed silently, 'Usually at this hour, if there is no recitation, the door of the hall would be closed. If I arrive at the hall and could not enter the hall to pray to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, then it must have been my own imagination.' The door was closed. I thought I was wrong. Turning to leave, we heard voices coming from the hall. Then the door to the hall was opened and a monk walked out. With his permission, we entered the hall. As a response to my prayer, I felt that my body was ascending to the air, higher and higher.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.p.17

³⁸ Ibid.p.30

³⁹ Ibid.p.31

Again that night, Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva herself had come to confirm my belief and to give me encouragement. Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva's child attendant had also come to reveal that, according to the heavenly record that I am in fact another form of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva who had come to be reborn here to relieve human being of all sufferings.⁴⁰

Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva had also suggested those who are in doubt to offer incense sticks to confirm this matter without having had to worry if this would be an offense.

Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva had told me three years ago that she had been able to reincarnate to be born in a human form in Thailand to accomplish another form of hers. The purpose is to help all living beings in understanding religion.⁴¹

She said at first she had not been fully convinced. In the three years that followed, through her observation and the responses to her prayers, she knew that all messages were in fact had come from Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva.

On 18th October 1984, she returned to Thailand from the pilgrimage, quoting her "together with all other Divine Beings."⁴² All her disciples were said to have been in line along the lane to Tamnak for hours to kowtow to her while offering flower garlands despite the heat to receive her and all the Divine Beings. She said, "I had prayed to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva to let me build temples in all provinces in Thailand and to be able to become

⁴⁰ Ibid.p.31

⁴¹ Ibid.p.31

⁴² Ibid.p.31

Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva's attendant after I die to help in the work to release all living beings from sufferings.” Three years later, she became the medium of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and since then has been referred to as Phra Mae Waraphon with similar honorary title of *Phra Mae* given to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, the Goddess of Compassion.

Before becoming a nun, when performing rituals, she had often been seen wearing a five-leafed crown, similar to the crown worn by Avalokitesvara, who in Simhanada form, also wears a five-leafed crown and a Lamaist nun who when conducting the religious ceremony of the “Obtaining of ‘Long Life’” of Lamaism also wears a similar crown. The difference is images on the leaves of the crown. On the crown of “Ong Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva” at the Tamnak Maha Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4 are images of five skeletons in yellow robes, one on each leaf. On the crown worn by Lamaist nun are images of five Buddhas; while the Buddha image on Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is Amitabha Buddha.

2.2.3 As Phra Mae Kuan-Seng

In 1991, at the age of 50, Waraphon visited the People's Republic of China to be ordained as a bhiksuni, a nun in Mahayana Buddhism, at Nam-Hai Pho-Tho-Sua, following the legendary path of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva. As Nam-Hai Phu-tho-Sua is a place where according to

Chinese legend is where Avalokitesvara, or Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, and Miao Shan attained enlightenment. Therefore, the founder explained that, it is important to visit the place to answer to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva's call. After the ordination, she was given the name "Kuan-Seng". Since then, she has been referred to as "Phra Mae Kuan-Seng" or "Phra Ajarn Yai Kuan-Seng" or "The Reverend Mother Kuan-Seng" for her position as the abbot of the Tamnak or simply "Phra Mae".

Phra Mae Kuan-Seng said that the reason for her choosing to be ordained as a nun, is that "As the Buddhist Religious Institution of Tamnak Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva Chokchai 4 is expected to continue and develop into one of the world renown and one of the largest Buddhist religious institutions in the future, it is necessary to have someone to foster the religion. For this reason and for my determination to devote myself to Buddhism, it is important for me that I am to be ordained as a bhiksuni at the Kuan-Yin Temple at Namhai Pho-Tho-Sua in the People's Republic of China."

"Being a monk or a nun ordained under the Buddhist Mahayana school of the Chinese tradition," she explained, "we follow the path of the Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, to be compassionate, and to release all living beings of all sufferings. Bearing this in mind, we are not to exploit or eat animals or the meat of all living beings, and thus to become a vegetarian for life."

In the Thai language, while the word “Phra” is normally a title referring to a Buddhist monk “bhiksu”, there is no equivalent title for a nun in Thailand except for the word “mae-ji” which somewhat expresses a different meaning in the Buddhist culture of Thailand. She was given the title of “Phra Mae”, for the combination of “Phra”, as a honorific term, “Mae” or “Mother” the honorific title for an elderly woman and for her well known compassionate quality of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, which also considered to be the quality usually found in a mother, and thus a “Reverend Mother”. Kuan-Seng, would sometime identify herself as “Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva” and some other times refer to herself as “Mae”. In daily life, she is always called by disciples or followers as “Phra Mae.”

Together with her, there were several others who were ordained as monks or nuns. The group left Bangkok on the 18th of June 1991 for Kwangchao in Kwangtung Province in South of the People’s Republic of China. There were a total of seven three disciples who had attended the ordination ceremony. At Nam-Hai Pho-Tho-Sua-Sua, on the 21st of June 1991, together with five disciples who were to be ordained, the group visited the temple. The ceremony was performed at 08:00 in the morning, witnessed by about two hundred disciples of the temple. The temple abbot, a senior monk called Miao Shan, an eighty year old Vice Chairman of the Buddhist Organization, also a member of the committee of the Buddhist

Association, performed the ceremony. Miao Shan was said to be very happy for the occasion. He said, “this ordination ceremony would be recorded in the history of the temple. As this is the first time that foreigners have visited this temple for ordination since the revolution.” After the ceremony, only those who were ordained, monk and nun, and young novices stayed on for a few days to learn the religious practice. Later the group left for Hong Kong to have the symbolic marks tattooed on their head.

To commemorate the occasion, according to Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, and to show their strong determination in following the Kuan-Yin’s path, they had come back to Thailand in 1991, on the enlightenment day of the Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva following the Lunar calendar. Phra Mae Kuan-Seng said, “Many disciples have come to receive us. All of the disciples and I are sharing the same determination, which is to work harder, to totally devote ourselves to Buddhism, so as not to disappoint all who have given their support.”⁴³

⁴³ Ibid.p.31

2.2.4 As the Third Incarnation of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva

Either as Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, or when she was Phra Mae Waraphon, she has been known by her devotees for having the “qualities” or “charisma” that were attributed to the Compassionate Bodhisattva, Kuan-Yin, the savior of the world. This is also the reason for her gaining the similar title of “Phra Mae” with Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva. The summary of extraordinary events in her life makes her claim that she is the reborn Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva in the eyes of her followers as the notions of the Kuan-Yin qualities have existed in her.

1. Qualities as Natural Endowment

Having been able to acknowledge the present of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva by recognizing the “Red Child” who is the male child attendant of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng, after she was born, was given the name equivalent to that of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva’s child attendant. This may be said to be the first notion that made her followers believe that she is the reborn Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva.

In addition, her being illiterate and not institutionally educated also shows her pure and innocent quality—free from the worldly influences, the

same way Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva is also known for being the symbol of purity. Being illiterate has also meant she acquired her knowledge or power solely from Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva. According to the followers, her living body was chosen as a manifestation of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva who will appear to meet her devotees because “those who can read often question and always show hesitation to believe in the divine existence.”

Phra Mae Kuan-Seng has always shown her compassionate quality since her childhood such as giving up her piggy-bank savings to help a neighbor, sharing her food and sweets with other children. Also, she naturally knew to pray to the authority of “Heaven and Earth” for others’ safety without being told of. However, the most important thing is that she has been known, for the past several years, to stay up late and spent a lot of time to meet with visitors so that she can help them and heal their illnesses. All of these show her devotion to accomplish her mission and to perfect her role as a savior.

2. Revelation in Dreams and Oracles



Another reason for her followers to believe that Phra Mae Kuan-Seng is the reborn Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva is her revelation which occurred in her dreams and oracles such as the one happened in the hospital. She was told that she had died and come back to life, and a few moment later she

had started preaching, unconsciously, according to her, followed by committing to be a vegetarian and following religious practices that she had never learned. Another dream of hers is when Phra Mae Kuan-Seng was told by a monk that it is not necessary for her to pay homage to him because she herself is in fact Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva.

The incident marking her first appearance as Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva is when she reminded Hia-Hong, a friend of hers, of a promise he made to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva ten years ago to save his wife's life. This promise had been known only between Hia-Hong and Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva.

On a pilgrimage to Keng-Chiew, the People's Republic of China, she was told by voices that, she knew, belong to Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, "Born three times and come here." At that point Phra Mae Kuan-Seng realized that she is the third incarnation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion after Avalokitesvara and Princess Miao Shan. Also, in the same journey, she experienced the sense of oneness with Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva in her body. She told members of the group that, "I have had each part of Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva's body in each part of me." To confirm her words, a monk in the group had also told of seeing Phra Mae Kuan-Seng with Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva on her forehead when sitting in meditation.

Dreams and oracles of similar incidents has been continued to convince the followers of her ability to foretell incoming events and help others to avoid dangers, to communicate with the soul of the deceased, and, on top of that, to heal illnesses.

3. Her Ordination

Being confident of her true identity as the reborn Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng chose to pursue the religious life by being ordained in the Mahayana tradition and giving up living with a happy family and in financial prosperity. Her own words show the significant purpose of her ordination as follows:

To gain trust and to convince people that every word that I have said is true and for the development and continuity of the Tamnak and its tradition, also with great determination to devote my life to Buddhism.

To her followers, this action has implied her sincerity and devotion to lead them to a more meaningful life by serving Buddhism, saving mankind from reentering the life cycle of suffering, and giving services to the society at large to a full extent.

4. The Constructin Projects ⁴⁴

Three main construction project are now under the patronage of Phra Mae Kuan-Seng: the main Tamnak at Chokchai 4, the Tamnak on Ramindra Road, and the Tamnak in Chiang Mai. She began to build the very huge main Tamnak by following the instructions of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva. When facing the problem of funding, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng has shown no sign of discouragement. Instead, she has encouraged the followers to provide any kind of support for the cause. “Those with money are to contribute money, and those without money are to contribute strength,” she said.

A tall statue of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva standing on the venerable toad, the symbol of prosperity, was also built with the blessing from Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva through Phra Mae Kuan-Seng (before her ordination). “Crossing water and sea to bring gold mountains to the Tamnak.” This, according to the followers, also has given them the expectation and confidence that Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva has come to bring prosperity to the Tamnak and its followers.

According to the followers, the best examples showing Phra Mae Kuan-Seng’s charisma is the completion of the main Tamnak. For even

⁴⁴ Details of the Construction Projects is in the following Chapter 4 of this thesis.

without the supervision of specialist for such a significant project, the Tamnak was completed within a year. To the devotees, the completion of the Tamnak has proven the words Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva had given them, “for me, building the Tamnak would be easier than drinking a cup of coffee,” to be true. After the completion of the main Tamnak, the devotees have become more determined in following Phra Mae Kuan-Seng to accomplish the mission of compassion, and a religious group became known to the public as the Tamnak Phra Mae Kuan-Yin Chokchai 4.

In conclusion, we can say that her strong personality and financial successes in her adulthood while being born poor and uneducated are important factors attributed to her followers’ belief that she possesses the charisma to launch her mission. While stressing the need to perform good deeds and making merits to improve her karmic condition which she regarded as reasons for her successes, the financial achievement has made her life story a legend which is believed to have happened only through the assistance of divine power. This has also attracted more and more people coming to her for advises in seeking financial prosperity.

The background of a happy family and the implication that she is able to lead a successful career while maintaining a happy family life (before her ordination) is also one of her special qualities that attracts people to come and consult with her in time of family crisis. It also helps

explain the reason for her pursuit of a religious life and not to seek refuge or to escape from realistic problems.

As her mission of saving mankind follows Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva's instruction to build a new Tamnak in Ramindra area, a twenty-one story pagoda at the main Tamnak, and temples in all provinces in Tamnak, Phra Mae Kuan-Seng made a clear statement that she will not getting involved in the management of funding for her personal use. Having declaring her clear intention to help relatives only with her own personal property, she has received further support from her followers. Witnessed by her followers, she also made a vow to demand justice even after her life in this world ends if she was not the incarnation of the true Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva and was cheated. This vow has also gained more trust from the followers.