Constructing 'Legitimacy':

A Multimodal Case Study of *Bhikkhuni* Communities

in Thailand

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Abstract

The research explores how the meanings of 'legitimacy' are interpreted and constructed by two *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand, namely *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam*, through multimodality. Thailand is the biggest (*Theravada*) Buddhist country, and it is believed that the Buddha had allowed women to be ordained as members of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies in order to sustain Buddhism. However, currently, the existing *bhikkhuni* are not considered as part of the official Thai monastic order as chiefly demonstrated via the mainstream discourse of Thai religious authorities.

This project refers to Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006), to (i) provide a comparative analysis on how notions of 'legitimacy' are interpreted and (re)disseminated; (ii) identify similar and disparate utilisation of employed multimodal resources in the meaning-making of 'legitimacy'; and (iii) discuss how this study can link the ideas of 'multimodality' and 'legitimacy' in the localised Thai context.

The thesis mainly analyses the multimodal discourse of 'legitimacy' constructed via Facebook websites, excluding audience comments, in the three major Buddhist events in 2012, 2014, and 2016 - 2017, in connection with their offline communication consisting of (i) publications, (ii) speeches; and (iii) activities organised and attended by them for the same timeline, along with interview, focus-group discussion and participatory observation.

Songdhammakalyani interpret their 'legitimacy' as being 'the first Thai *Theravada'* *bhikkhuni* community; and mainly rely on linguistics to win over the debate on legitimacy of (*Theravada*) *bhikkhuni* ordination. *Nirodharam* define their 'legitimacy' as being '*bhikkhuni sangha:* a member of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies'; and mainly rely on visual and gestural resources to serve as a role model of female '*nak buat*' who perform the functions of the Buddhist community. The chosen modes justify their 'legitimacy' in negotiating with the mainstream discourse in Thai Buddhism. The project underlines how multimodality helps in manifesting the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* communities, who are considered as a non-mainstream group, to sustain Buddhism locally.

Keywords

Multimodality, Social Semiotics, *bhikkhuni* communities, Thai Buddhism, Facebook

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Non-English and Buddhist Technical Terms

In this research, most of the non-English Buddhist technical terms are Thai words which have their origins in Pali or Sanskrit.

For the case of specific Pali words that have already been transcribed and received in roman alphabet, I will put them in capital, and follow with their meanings/ explanations in English when they are mentioned for the first time and then use the Pali words for the rest of the thesis, e.g. *Tipitaka* is explained as [The Buddhist Canon] and then repeat as *Tipitaka* for the rest. However, if such resources are applicable, I will use English terms/ meanings through the paper then put the Pali using italic roman alphabets thereafter in bracket without plural form. For example, the word 'Buddhist community' is followed by [*sangha*], or 'female monk community' is followed by [*bhikkhuni sangha*].

For common Thai words such as name of people, places or titles, etc., I will transliterate them into Romanized version complying with rules of the Royal Thai Institute except for some certain cases. For these exceptional cases I will accept transliterated version(s) drawn from their processors e.g., the name 'Nirotharam Arama' appears in some English texts as 'Nirotharam' if it represents the community name; and (www.facebook.com/nirodharam) for link to community's Facebook. The Pali terms are transcribed by consulting Buddhist Dictionaries by P.A. Payutto (2002); Phramaha Prayuth 2002; and notes from Chamsanit 2006. Following is the 'a-z list' of the selected words used in this thesis.

Non-English: Pali / Thai	English word/ meaning	Thai script
Arama	temple or monastery	อาราม
Anagami	Non-returner	อนาคามี
Arahanta	worthy one; one who has attained *Nibbana*	อรหันต์
Bhikkhu	male monk(s)	ภิกษุ/พระสงฆ์
Bhikkhuni	female monk(s)	ภิกษุณี
Bodhisattva	A Buddha-to-be	โพธิสัตว์
Buddha Jayanti (T)	Buddha's Victory Celebration Year	พุทธชยันตี
Caga	generosity	จาคะ/การบริจาค
Chedi	pagoda	เจดีย์
Dhamma (P)	1.Buddhist doctrine, teachings of the Buddha; 2. law, nature; 3. the Truth, ultimate reality; 4. righteousness, virtue, morality; good conduct, right behaviour; 5. condition, cause	ธรรม/ ธรรมะ
Dhammacakka	the wheel of the Doctrine; the wheel of Truth	ธรรมจักร
Dhamma Yatra (T)	a peaceful walking group of Buddhists who commute to disparate venues and communicate certain messages to create change in certain aspects	ธรรมยาตรา
Dhukkha	sufferings	ทุกข์
Kalyanamittata (P)	Companionship, good friendship	กัลยาณมิตร
Lokiya	worldly	โลกียะ
Lokuttara	beyond worldly	โลกุตตระ
Mae-chi (T)	White-robed Buddhist female ascetic	แม่ชี
Maha	large	มหา
Mahayana	The School of the Great Vehicle (of Salvation)	มหายาน
Mantra	charm, spell, verbal formula used as incantations in the magical sound	มนตรา/ มนตร์

Non-English: Pali / Thai	English word/ meaning	Thai script
Mahatherasamakhom (T)	Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council/ Thai Sangha Council of Elders	มหาเถรสมาคม
Nibbana (*P*) *Nirvana* (*S*)	Buddhist enlightenment; the extinction of greed, hatred and ignorance; the unconditioned; the extinction of all defilements and suffering	พระนิพพาน
Nirodha (*P*)	The end / cessation or extinction of suffering	นิโรธ/ ความดับทุกข์
Panna	wisdom	ปัญญา
Pabbajja (*P*)	Having lower ordination as a novice; adhering to 10 Buddhist precepts	บรรพชา
Pandakas	Effeminate homosexual men	บัณเฑาะก์
Parinibbhana	The complete extinction of all passions; the final release from the round of rebirth; the Great Decease of the Buddha	ปรินิพพาน
patimokkha (*P*)	The fundamental precepts/rules of the *sangha* order; the recitation of the disciplinary code. The bhikkhu *patimokkha* has 227 rules, while the *bhikkhuni patimokkha* has 311.	ปาฏิโมกข์
Pawattini	A female monk who is legitimized to conduct a *bhikkhuni* ordination; a female monk who trains the to-be-ordained women	ปวัตตินี
Phra (*T*)	Buddhist monk(s)	พระ
Phra Buddha Sihingkha	An old Buddha statue bestowed to the King of Sukhothai by King Asoke of India in the old time; one of the replica statues is placed in *Nirodharam*'s *Vihara.*	พระพุทธสิหิงค์
Phra Paisatcha Karu	The Medicine Buddha statue at *Songdhammakalyani*	พระไภษัชยคุรุ

Non-English: Pali / Thai	English word/ meaning	Thai script
Ratanattaya (P)	the Triple Gem; Three Jewels Buddha: comprising the Buddha; the Dhamma; the Sangha; the Order	รัตนตรัย
Sacca	Truthfulness	ศรัทธา
Samanera (P)	Buddhist novice(s)	สามเณร/เณร
Samaneri (P)	female Buddhist novice(s)	สามเณรี
Sangha (P)	Buddhist monastic order; monastic community of at least four Buddhist monks or nuns	พระสงฆ์ / คณะสงฆ์
Sikkhamana (P)	Buddhist probationary trainee nun	สิกขมานา
Sila (P)	moral precept, moral code, rule of morality; moral conduct	ศีล
Theravada (P)	Buddhist tradition that commonly practiced in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia	เถรวาท
Theri	a female senior member of the Order; a senior female monk	เถรี
Tipitaka (P)	The Buddhist Canon; the three 'baskets' of the Buddhist Canon.	พระไตรปิฎก
Ubasika, Upasika	A female lay devotee; Buddhist laywoman/ laywomen	อุบาสิกา
Ubasok, Upasaka	A male lay devotee; Buddhist layman / laymen	อุบาสก
Upasama	peace	ความสงบ
upasampada (P)	Full or higher ordination; full admission to the *sangha* ordination ceremony of a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhuni*	อุปสมบท

Non-English: Pali / Thai	English word/ meaning	Thai script
Vassa	the Buddhist Lent; the Rain-retreat period of the monks	พรรษา/ เข้าพรรษา
Vihara	a dwelling place for monks	วิหาร
Vinaya (*P*)	Monastic discipline; The basket of discipline; monastic code; monastic discipline in the first book of the Buddhist Canon	วินัย/ พระวินัย
Wat (*T*)	Temple-monastery, especially residences for male monks	วัด
Watr (*T*)	Daily practice/ duties of monastic members. This term is euphemistical with the word 'wat' which means a monastic residence for male monks. In this study it is used for 'Watr *Sonngdhamkalayani*'.	วัตร

Abbreviations

Admins	(Facebook) Administrators
FB	Facebook
N	*Nirodharam*
S	*Songdhammakalyani*
SNS	Social Network Sites

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides introductory information to my research project. It will begin with (1.2) justification how I have come to work on this project; followed by presentations on (1.3) the significance and originality of the study; (1.4) the objectives of the study; (1.5) the research questions; (1.6) the research contributions, and (1.7) the definitions of terminologies used in the study. The chapter will conclude with (1.8) a description of how this thesis is structured.

1.2 Justification

The thesis explores how the meanings of 'legitimacy' are interpreted and constructed by the two *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand: *Songdhammakalyani* in Nakhon Pathom and *Nirodharam* in Chiang Mai through their multimodal means of communication in the three major Buddhist events, covering the period of 2012, 2014, and between 2016 and 2017. It mainly explores the two Facebook websites: (i) www.facebook.com/ thaibhikkhunis of *Songdhammakalyani*; and (ii) www.facebook.com/nirotharam of *Nirodharam*; along with their offline media channels including selected publications, speeches and activities. It particularly aims to understand the extent in which (i) their comparative meanings of 'legitimacy' are interpreted; (ii) how their employed multimodal resources are articulated in the meaning making of their 'legitimacy'; and more importantly, (iii) how the knowledge of 'multimodality' is linked with 'legitimacy' as exemplified by the selected case study of *bhikkhuni* communities in Thai Buddhism.

I decided to work on this project because Thailand is the biggest (*Theravada*) Buddhist country with 94% of Thai citizens identified as Buddhists (National Statistical Office of Thailand, 2018). Although Buddhism is not officially declared as the national religion in the Thai constitution, state authorities play a vital role in supporting and overseeing Buddhism-related matters and organisations through the Thai *Sangha* Council (Sulak, 2002). Despite all these facts, women aspiring to become *bhikkhuni* or fully ordained (*Theravada*) nuns in Thailand have faced challenges in terms of their 'legitimated status'

and 'recognition' from the society, not to mention that *bhikkhuni* had previously existed in the Buddha's time. This is due to the existing (re)enforcement of the 1928 Buddhist Supreme Patriarch Decree, mentioning that *bhikkhuni* ordination must be conducted by members of both *bhikkhu* (male monks) and *bhikkhuni sangha*[1]. Since the *bhikkhuni sangha* has not officially been established in Thai Buddhism, *bhikkhuni* ordination and the revival of the *Theravada bhikkhuni* lineage in Thailand is not permitted (Seeger, 2008).

Figure 1.1 The map of Thailand with two *bhikkhuni* communities: *Nirodharam* in Chiang Mai and *Songdhammakalyani* in Nakhon Pathom. (*Source:* Map of the world. Accessed 02 July 2016. Available from: http://www.mapsofworld.com)

The debate on *bhikkhuni* legitimacy in Thai Buddhism is not just emerging in the 21st century but could be traced back to the years 1927 and 1928, when the female ordination was officially rejected by the Thai religious authorities. This period is considered as the starting point when discussing the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand. The

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[1] There must be at least four monastic members in order to form a *bhikkhu* and a *bhikkhuni sangha.*

contemporary debates in the country occurred between 2001 and 2003, upon the returning of Ven. *Dhammanandha* to Thailand after having had a lower ordination as *samaneri* in 2001; and a full ordination as *bhikkhuni* in 2003 in Sri Lanka. Settling to live in *Songdhammakalyani* in Nakhon Pathom, she asserted herself as 'the first (*Theravada*) *bhikkhuni* in the country' and fully performed her duties as 'Thai *bhikkhuni*' from this point onwards. Her case has created an influential impact for more and more women who gradually followed the same path. Given constant increases in the number of fully ordained women, the current approximately 300 members of *bhikkhuni* communities, scattered in more than 20 provinces nation-wide[2], are not considered as part of the official Thai monastic orders, but rather *bhikkhuni* according to 'foreign' traditions.

Mainstream discourse seemed to highlight the 'illegitimacy' and 'unofficial' status of these existing *bhikkhuni* according to the supremacy of the canonical *Theravada* scriptures and the fact that majority of Thai *sangha* members negated the revival of *bhikkhuni* lineage nor the establishment of a female monastic order in Thai Buddhism (Seeger,2008). However, the controversial debate goes on the bright side reiterating the necessity of *bhikkhuni* ordination in the Thai context in reference to the Thai constitution, and textual criticism on the historical *Theravada* canon. From this point of view, their 'legitimacy' is claimed as fundamental women's human rights. The recent movement on *bhikkhuni* ordination therefore is seen as an empowering process to counterbalance gender inequality, which not only transforms patriarchal values in Thai society, but also enhances their economic and social status (Seeger, 2008; Tomalin, 2009). Moreover, the essential of female monasticism is noted to role-model the society as a preacher, teacher, counsellor and soul soother, particularly in guiding lay and female practitioners and to complement what could not be previously fulfilled by their male counterparts (see Bodhi, 2012).

From these controversial debates on *bhikkhuni* ordination and the quest of their 'legitimacy', I believe the modern Thai state has proved its endeavour to achieve international commitments, especially on the enhancing of women's rights through its national strategy on effective implementation of agreed international obligations. The country has also ratified important Conventions and Commitments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);

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[2] According to *Bhikkhuni Dhammanandha* (2019), the figure represents both *samaneri* with lower ordination and *bhikkhuni* from full ordination.

the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and recently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly for SDG5 in achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The country has demonstrated its commitments to maintain constructive participation in the agreed international norms-setting (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019, pp.3-5). At national level, various measures to promote gender equality have been included in the series of 5 Year-Cycled National Development Plans. In addition, gender equality principles have been embedded in the 2017 Thai Constitution, including a provision that Thai citizens - men and women - are fully protected against any State's derogation of their rights or any detriments to their benefits enjoyed in adhering to and practicing a religion or following a religious sect.

Although Thailand has made a remarkable progress in promoting gender equality in several developmental fields such as in education, health, and employment, including their commitment with the current SDGs,(Office of National Statistics and Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2008; Royal Thai Government, 2008), I argue that the currently lacking official monastic status of fully ordained Thai women is a manifestation of the modern Thai state's failure to demonstrate its efforts in alleviating the prevailing socio-cultural factors that undermine the 'legitimacy' of the existing *Theravada bhikkhuni* in the country. Apart from the state's limited actions taken on this matter, the coverage of the issue by Thai mainstream media has also been restricted; often as one-sided stories and with insufficient in-depth investigations on the issue[3]. The reproduction of mainstream discourses tends to reinforce the 'illegitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism (*Bhikkhuni Dhammanandha*, 2010). Recent studies on *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand have indicated gender inequality and male patriarchy as predominantly embedded in Thai Buddhism and society, and thus being claimed as the closely knitted and root cause of the de-factor *bhikkhuni*'s 'illegitimated status' (Varaporn, 2006; Kakanang, 2018).

On a more optimistic note, however, the rising significance of the *bhikkhuni* in the modern Thai state derives from domestic demands for having *bhikkhuni sangha* in addition to such factors as: the steeply falling number of male counterparts; the declining faith in Buddhism due to misconducts by *bhikkhu sangha*; the more qualified Buddhist

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[3] Based on my preliminary studies on this project to observe Thai mainstream media coverages on *bhikkhuni* issues between 2012 and 2014 retrieved from selected TV programmes and newspaper (See 4.3.5.).

women who intensively engage in Buddhism-related activities; as well as the transnational Buddhist movement and network as an external factor (Phra Paisal, 2003; Tomalin, 2009; Delia,2013; Itoh,2013).

Shifting to contextualise the 21st century communication landscape which justifies the relevance of my research in multimodality, I see the rise of digital media as having had a great impact on global and local communication, apart from their roles that are differentiated from those of traditional media[4]. Adami and Kress (2014) also mentioned more modal resources which matter in developing meaning and interpretation within certain socio-cultural settings brought about by these computer-mediated platforms. Kress (2004, 2009) further highlighted a core shift in the means of knowledge and power dissemination whereby individuals are given 'authority' to produce their own 'subjectivity', 'authenticity' and 'identity' in their own interests; and within their comprehensible socio-cultural semiotic production. This phenomenon has further extended power in a more 'horizontal' and 'cooperative' domain, creating an emergent 'public space' where audiences actively acquire knowledge or are being educated and cultivated (Habermas, 1962; Williams, 1982). More importantly, marginalised groups can also construct their own discourses conflicting with those of the mainstream; and in some successful cases they are able to gain support and recognition from the public (Salter, 2013).Whilst the study of Wilson et al. (2012) pointed out a drastic change in political movements through social media platform like Facebook which facilitates protesters in organising and fuelling the Egyptian bottom-up insurgency to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak.

Apart from social media's role in creating radical changes, Salter (2013) pointed out its role in accommodating gradual progress in elevating women voices which are not apparent in mainstream media. His study underlines how girls and women made use of virtual extrajudicial spaces to appeal against sexual violence cases. Their voices are eventually perceived and spread through mainstream media reportage and have influenced court outcomes. As with Salter's, the study by the European Parliament (2013)

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[4] The total figure of social media users is 280 million around the world, whilst the world's top three most visited websites are Google, YouTube and Facebook (Wearesocial, 2019).

revealed social media's impact for gradual change in promoting women's involvement in politics, especially amidst the prevailing barriers such as the absence of women in decision-making bodies and the masculine dominance of elected government organisations, etc. The study of Zeng (2018) underlined the gradual impact of the anti-sexual violence and anti-sexual harassment campaign in China which was firstly initiated in educational institutions and then spread to other parts of the society, with a series of counter censorship strategies in various cultural contexts and across variety of media platforms.

Venzo and Hess (2013) also explored the role of social media to fight 'social exclusion' from media representation of homophobia in Australia. The results demonstrated proactive utilisation of social media across platforms by sexual minorities as a main strategy to carry out their goals rather than being passive victims. For a similar case in Asia, Yang (2018) indicates social media impact in allowing LGBT in China to promote their contents and information which are more publicly visible, despite state censorship for cumulative circulation. It also manifests how these marginalized groups utilize social media in the course of their fight with the state mal-administration of homophobic textbooks, particularly to educate the public the gradual process of their struggle for equal rights through legal structure.

Social media also plays a vital role in facilitating participation, interaction and networking among broad-based communicators in real time (Zappavigna, 2012); this pattern of power goes far beyond face-to-face communication and gives rise to the 'virtual community', or a group who shares mutual attentiveness and interacts via codes of conduct through technological mediation (Preece, 2000; Lee et al., 2003). For 'virtual religious communities', which are central to my research, Campbell (2012) has concluded that the boundary of their communication goes beyond religious and geographical limits. These highlights both the advantages of new media which is composed from embedded communal traditions, and the distinctive features of its members and their media users (Campbell, 2012). The study of Prebish (1999) revealed findings similar to what Campbell (2012) has found. He mentioned the functions of 'virtual Buddhist communities' as a platform to unite Buddhist members worldwide; and to serve as a communicative tool to achieve religious goals in 'eliminating suffering' of members throughout the world. However, I argue that these global conditions may not be entirely good for explaining the

prevailing context of 'virtual Buddhist communities' in Thailand, where my project has its focus.

Although we are now living in the transitional period with the dominance and omnipresent roles played by social media, Chadwick (2017) highlighted the term 'hybrid media system', arguing that there is no entirely replacement of older media by social media. It underlines the intersection and the co-existent relationship between the social media and the older media practices, particularly printed media and broadcasting media, particularly in the political communication context where concerned parties (re)negotiate their 'power relations' in the more interdependent and complex settings across traditional and new media convergence. The term 'power' in this aspect is exerted by those who are skillful to create information flows to serve their goals across the range of old and social media environments (Chadwick, 2017).

I perceive Thailand as a part of the global media landscape[5] where the role of social media currently is omnipresent. The contemporary survey on global digital statistics (We are social, 2019) also shows the figure of active social media users in Thailand is as high as 51 million. The country was ranked eighth in social media penetration at 74%[6], and for daily time spent on social media platforms, at 3.11 hours. Among their Asian counterparts, Thailand is also ranked top in using social media for online purchasing, business and banking through Facebook and Instagram which correspond to Thailand 4.0 agenda[7].Especially Facebook is considered the most favourable platform among Thai users (National Science and Technology Development Agency, 2014; Wearesocial, 2019). Its impacts include being a research community for educating virtual members; being social platform for exchanging ideas and information; and being a channel to spread information which could mobilise changes in the society. For example, recent studies have indicated the utilisation of Facebook to mobilise the country's political changes in 2010; and its extended impact to negotiate offline jurisdiction through virtual practices and investigations of Facebook users (Singhakajorn, 2013; Frederickson and Mala, 2016) Moreover, its specific features proves to be useful in time of crisis as it could indicate a

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[5] The word 'global' is used here to explain the overall trend of medial landscape in many countries around the world.
[6] Whilst the global average rate was 45%
[7] Thailand 4.0 is an economic model that aims to unlock the country from several economic challenges resulting from past economic development models which place emphasis on agriculture (Thailand 1.0), light industry (Thailand 2.0), and advanced industry (Thailand 3.0). Its four objectives are: (i) economic prosperity, (ii) social well-being, (iii) raising human values, and (iv) environmental protection (see Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C.)

specific location where help is needed. In many places, Facebook also serves as an effective tool to mobilise donations or types of social support. Whilst conventional media, especially digital TV and printed media still proves its significance to a certain extent (Somkiat and Worapoj, 2010; Kanjana, 2011).

The compositions of more modal resources in the meaning-making process via digital platforms (Adami and Kress, 2014), together with a shift in disseminating power and knowledge by individuals in the horizontal domain with their own semiotic productions (Kress, 2010), as well as the exploration on gradual impacts of social media and the concept of hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017) have all led to the development of my research project, in which multimodality is centrally focused. From its origin as a concept in the late 20th century, multimodality has been universally recognised as a substantial structure in analysing multimodal semiotic resources available via digital platforms. These semiotic resources appear in various forms such as textual, visual, verbal, gestural, audio, gazes, spatial, three-dimensional, coloured, typological, sizes, etc. in the 21st century (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Inspired by former structural semioticians like Saussure (1959), Strauss (1970), and Barthes (1977) who established approaches to the understanding of how signs and structures of semiotic rules generate meanings, multimodal social semioticians like Halliday (1985) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have extensively investigated how social semiotic resources are (re)negotiated in the process of meaning-making; and how they are interpreted within the specific social context and practices (Kress, 2004; van Leeuwen, 2005; Bezemer, 2012). The selected modal resources provide different potential meanings developed through different modal interplay (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). Modes have been socially and culturally shaped, within different speech communities (Kress, 2006), whilst meaning is attributed to power (Vannini, 2007). Thus, interpretations require backgrounds in understanding the (re)negotiation of power and the grammar of sign-making within that specific socio-cultural context (Kress, 2006; O'hallan, 2006). To understand the complex social phenomenon in the local Thai context where my research is undertaken, multimodality is inducted as an analytical framework to explain how marginalised religious groups (re)located their 'authority' through multimodal discourse available mainly via online by not overlooking their offline platforms; or in other words, how meanings of their power are authenticated through the interplay of employed semiotic resources in the specific scenario of Thailand.

With this emergence of new technology, there are new forms of communicating 'legitimacy', which have increasingly become a focus of attention by state and non-state actors at global and local levels (see for example, Fairclough, 2006; Hong and Druckman 2010; Brassett and Tsingou, 2011; Ba, 2013). Multimodality, as a communication approach, has been extended to cover wide-ranging scholastic fields, including the debates and studies on social legitimacy. Legitimacy, in broad definitions, concerns 'the quality of being legal, the quality of being reasonable and acceptable in terms of law, in relation to the ruling system'; whilst, in the state-related context, 'legitimacy' is commonly associated with the features of 'hierarchical power relations' between the ruling institutions and the ruled, which allow the ruler the right to govern, exercise power over, and order for collective compliance of the ruled (see Weber, 1978; Suchman, 1995; Hurd,1999; Billerbeck and Gippert, 2017). In the modern world, 'legitimation' is perceived as the continuous collective process implemented within specific contextual environments to fulfil certain societal and cultural values, as applied by state and non-state parties to gain support and avoid failure and sanction from the society (see: Suchman, 1995; Berger et al., 1998; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999; Erkama and Vaara, 2010). They develop and implement certain mechanisms to show their voluntary compliance with societal expectations, norms, values and rules of law. I see that the process of globalisation has strengthened the significance of 'legitimacy' towards state and non-state actors at local as well as global levels.

From these definitions, there are kinds of actors, such as political parties, NGOS, active groups, individuals, etc. relying on sophisticated ways to support their legitimacy. However, we know very little about legitimation process of religious communities in developing countries. Thus, my project which is dealing with the concept of 'legitimacy', from female Buddhist communities in localised Thai perspective will help improve this knowledge. From disparate interpretations of 'legitimacy, in this research, I find it challenging to further ask: 'whose legitimacy is it?', and 'what are the interpretations and references it is built on?' Since these points are still under examination in this research, the project, through the multimodal analysis approach, will investigate how the 'marginalised' female religious groups, the *bhikkhuni* communities, understand and interpret their own legitimacy in the context of Thai Buddhism to negotiate with mainstream discourse, and what their references are for those meanings.

From the aforementioned rationales that have substantiated the structure of my research, I believe that multimodality analysis can be used as a functional framework to understand this complex social phenomenon in the localized Thai context. My study aims to explore the relations between female marginalised groups and their utilisation of social media and its possible connection with traditional media, which provide a much wider opportunity to construct their own influential and conflicting discourse with the religious authorities' views. It particularly aspires to understand how multimodality is applied as their communication strategy across online and offline platforms and through their employed semiotic resources for gradually negotiating their 'official status' as 'Thai *bhikkhuni*' in the contemporary Thai society.

1.3   Significances and Originality

Recent literature (see Chapter 2) on multimodality and contemporary studies of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand has identified research gaps in the following prominent aspects. First, the existing studies in Thailand do not adequately demonstrate multimodality functions as seen in the global media landscape; including (i) use of multimodality as a substantial framework in analysing multimodal semiotic resources which matter in meaning making (Adami and Kress, 2014); (ii) a shift in disseminating power and knowledge in more horizontal domains with the users' own semiotic productions (Kress,2010); and (iii) the hybrid media system with the rising significance of 'legitimacy' for the modern state. Within the localised Thai context, apparently there are no research studies which have applied multimodality as a framework in analysing multimodal texts available via online and offline platforms to address the issue of 'legitimacy', particularly in relation to those who are marginalised. The existing studies which provide analytical arguments are based only on material retrieved from online multimodal resources, rather than exploring the interplay of modes within and across platforms. In addition, the existing multimodality studies in the Thai context rarely address the issue of 'legitimacy' of any marginalised Buddhist communities. The other vital gap related illustrates the non-existence of any investigation from a multimodal perspective, neither as conceptual framework nor research methods, to thoroughly understand the complex issue of

bhikkhuni in Thai Buddhism. The existing studies of *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thai society are rather text-based, ethnographic studies, and offer a limited illustration of top-down arguments, with incomplete representations from *bhikkhunis*' own perspectives. Most importantly, there is no existing research on the contemporary 'Thai' *bhikkhuni* communities' endeavour to communicate their 'legitimated' status from their own 'interpretations' through their mediated communication channels; and own semiotic productions in order to negotiate with the existing mainstream discourse.

Based on these gaps, my research is designed to fill in the missing landscape of *bhikkhuni* studies at the present time by adopting 'multimodality' as a comprehensive lens with which to look into and understand this perplexing situation. The research design clearly proves the originality and significances of my project for the three following reasons. Firstly, it essentially refers to multimodality as a framework for understanding how the marginalised *bhikkhuni* communities utilise multimodal resources via online and offline convergence in constructing their 'legitimacy', which provides a comprehensive impression of how interplay of modes in each and across platforms contribute to the meanings of their 'legitimacy', within the specific Thai societal context. Secondly, it is the first to further extend the significance of multimodality studies, to functionally embrace multimodal means of research methods through the analysis of multimodal textual elements constructed via online and offline platforms; participatory observation, interview and focus group discussion; in order to gain an insight into the project. Lastly, my research is the first to provide a comparative analysis on how the first *bhikkhuni* community, *Songdhammakalyani,* and the largest *bhikkhuni* community, *Nirodharam*, construct their 'legitimacy' through a 'multimodality' approach. This eminently accentuates originality of research on *bhikkhuni* studies in the twenty-first century Thai context.

1.4 Research Objectives

This interdisciplinary project on 'multimodality', 'legitimacy' and 'the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in contemporary Thailand' is designed with the following objectives:

(I). to provide a comparative analysis on how the meanings of 'legitimacy' are interpreted and (re)disseminated by two *bhikkhuni* communities to negotiate with the prevailing discourse in the Thai context;

(II). to identify their similarities and differences in utilising multimodality by their employed semiotic resources within Facebook platforms; and their multimodal means of communication from traditional platforms in constructing their 'legitimacy';

(III). to find out how this project can link to the knowledge on 'multimodality' and 'legitimacy' through the case study of the two existing *bhikkhuni* communities in the localised Thai context.

1.5 Research Questions

In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, the following set of research questions has been developed to guide the study.

I.   How do *bhikkhuni* communities interpret their meanings of 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication?
     a). What are their comparative interpretations of 'legitimacy' in Thai Buddhism?

II. How do *bhikkhuni* communities construct their 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication?
     b). How does the interplay of modes construct their 'legitimated meanings' conflicting to mainstream discourse?

By asking these questions, I aim to understand how the two *bhikkhuni* communities interpret their 'legitimacy', conflicting with that of the mainstream discourse in Thai

Buddhism; and how this case study contributes to knowledge on multimodality and legitimacy in this specific Thai socio-cultural context.

1.6   Research Contributions

My research sheds light on 'multimodality' studies with regard to the changing landscape of social media communication; and also on the existing impact of traditional media in Thailand which will strengthen the knowledge we have on (i) potential meanings of employed multimodal semiotic resources in the meaning-making of the *bhikkhuni*'s 'legitimacy'; and (ii) the interplay of modes employed via online and offline platforms in constructing such meanings in the localized Thai context.

This project extensively broadens the knowledge on the studies of *bhikkhuni* communities in contemporary Thai society, especially in reflecting the comparative pictures as to how the de-facto *bhikkhuni* communities, exemplified by the first and the largest ones, are engaging with different actors, via online and offline platforms, in negotiating their legitimacy with the mainstream discourse.

It additionally promotes dialogues and interchangeable discussions on how 'legitimacy' is constituted through multimodality, particularly on how their employed legitimation strategies could bring better understandings in the studies of multimodality, gender, and Buddhism within the Thai ethnographic community.

Last but not least, my project paves the way for further research and practicality on how multimodality brings social recognition, particularly on the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thai Buddhism; and it could potentially be applicable to those marginalised in other socio-cultural contexts.

1.7   Definitions

1.7.1   Multimodality

I define multimodality as the key term in my project in a three-fold manner. First and foremost, it is a structure in analysing the interplay of 'social semiotic resources' employed through Facebook websites of the first (*Songdhammakalyani*) and the largest (*Nirodharam*) *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand, ranging from verbal, visual, gestural,

audio, and spatial modes. I also refer to modal resources such as time, temporal, colour, facial expression, three-dimensional, etc. as a subset utilised in constructing their 'legitimacy' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Throughout the thesis, I use the word 'semiotic resource(s)' interchangeably with the term '(multi)modal resource(s)'.

Secondly, multimodality refers to an analysis of their constructions of 'legitimacy' through offline communication platforms, including rhetoric and written discourse from their publications, broadcasting media, activities and monastic elements.

Lastly, I apply 'multimodality; as a research methodology, encompassing multimodal research techniques to gain an insight into the project (See Chapter 4). These combined methods of data collection and analysis provide comprehensive knowledge of the complex 'legitimacy' issue of *bhikkhuni* communities in the modern Thai state through a multimodal lens.

1.7.2   Legitimacy

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2019), 'legitimacy' refers to (i) the quality of being based on a fair or acceptable reason, and (ii) the quality of being allowed and acceptable according to the law. The Cambridge Dictionary (2019), meanwhile, defines legitimacy as the quality of being legal; the quality of being reasonable and acceptable. 'An online dictionary (2019) defines 'legitimacy' as: (i) conformity to the law or to rules; and (ii) the ability to be defended with logic or justification; validity.

In this research, I define the 'legitimacy' of the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand as the 'quality of being allowed and acceptable as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies established since the Buddha's time'.

1.7.3   Construction VS Communication

The words construction and communication are interchangeable terms in referring to how the two *bhikkhuni* communities convey meanings of their 'legitimacy' to audiences in Thai society through multimodal means of communication.

1.7.4   *Bhikkhuni*

In the broad Buddhism context, *bhikkhuni* refers to a member of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies believed to have been established by the Buddha. And specifically, in the

contemporary Thai context, *bhikkhuni* refers to the *Theravada* Buddhist nun(s) who had received full ordination according to *Theravada* lineage from Sri Lanka Buddhist tradition.

1.7.5   *Bhikkhuni* Communities [*Sangha*]

In a broader sense, *bhikkhuni* communities refer to groups of women who receive full ordination mostly from the Sri Lanka *Theravada* lineage and reside in Thailand. In a more specific meaning, the term refers to (i) a group of *bhikkhuni, samaneri* (female novices) and monastic members, e.g. *mae-chi* (white-robed nuns) residing in *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam*; and (ii) lay community members of the two communities who participate in and support their work.

As the meaning of 'community' has extended to encompass the term 'virtual community' - a group of people who share mutual attentiveness, benefits, objectives; and interact via the agreed norms or codes of conduct through technological mediation (Porter, 2004), the members of *bhikkhuni* communities in this study extensively include those who regularly engage in online activities with these two *bhikkhuni* Facebook websites; and those who are physically present and participate at the monasteries on a regular basis.

1.7.6   *Bhikkhuni* Ordination

The word *bhikkhuni* ordination [*bhikkhuni upasampada*] refers to the process of full ordination conferred on *sikkhamanana*[8] to become *Theravada* Buddhist nuns, who observe 311 monastic disciplines specifically assigned to *bhikkhuni*; whilst the term female ordination is occasionally used and refers in a limited sense to (i) a lower ordination [*pabbajja*] as a female novice [*samaneri*]; and (ii) an ordination as *mae-chi* (white-robed nun), which latter is considered as an optional female monastic vocation only available in Thai Buddhism.

1.7.7   New media, Social Media and Digital Media

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication (Watson and Hill, 2012), the term 'new media' refers to 'a broad range of computer-based media platforms which

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[8] To-be-ordained women who strictly observe the 8 or 10 precepts for at least two years as a preparation stage to become *bhikkhuni*

soften the distinct line between mass and interpersonal communication.' It is a broad term embracing other media genre subcategories e.g., social media, digital media, etc.; and is often used when highlighting its distinction from 'old media', such as newspapers, television and radio. 'Social media' is defined as a 'variety of media genres', e.g. web 2.0, Facebook, Twitter, Weblogs etc., which facilitate social interaction and networking among groups of people, whether they are known to each other or strangers, localised in the same place or geographically dispersed (Watson and Hill, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012). The term is used to emphasize networking and interactive features based on the utilization of new media. Whilst 'digital media' is explained as 'digitized content that can be transmitted over the internet or computer networks, including text, audio, video, and graphics'.

In this research, however, the terms new media, social media, and digital media are used interchangeably as synonyms. I will use the term new media when referring to a broad range of computer-based media distinguished from old media. Social media in this research project specifically refers to a subset of new media genres that requires interaction and facilitates networking, including Facebook, in particular.

1.7.8   Facebook

Facebook is a no-fee website functioning as 'social media' to facilitate social networking and interactions among participants. It allows users to post any message on their own 'walls' or to their Facebook friends' walls. These messages will be exhibited either only to their Facebook friends or to the general public, depending on their privacy settings. Facebook features also include functions such as photo uploading, searching of previous posts and feedbacks, importing and searching of friends' contacts.

In this research, Facebook refers to the Facebook websites of the two *bhikkhuni* communities: www.facebook.com/thaibhikkhunis by *Songdhammakalyani*; and www.facebook.com/nirodharam by *Nirodharam*.

1.7.9   Local, National and International Audiences

The word local audience refers to monastic members or lay disciples who physically live within the geographical vicinity of the two selected *bhikkhuni* communities, which in this case are people in Chiang Mai and Nakhon Pathom. The national audience means

monastic members, lay disciples, organisations, state agencies and the general public (Thai and foreigners) who physically live within Thailand. The international audience refers to Buddhists and non-Buddhists who are interested in the issue from all over the world and who live outside Thailand.

1.7.10 Global, International, Foreign and Western

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Online) defines international as 'involving two or more countries', or occurring between countries,' whilst the term 'global' is defined as involving the entire world'. Both of these are delineated/ portrayed by their scope. In this study I refer to the former when mentioning the narrower scope, especially to pinpoint relationship between Thailand and other specific group of countries in complying with certain standards. Whilst the latter is used for illustrating the wholistic picture of certain phenomenon/ experiences worldwide. In addition, the word foreign describes state of origins for particular incidents which are external, outside or non-native from the Thai context. Whereas, the word western is rather specifically referred to those Western countries, particularly situated in Europe and Northern America.

1.7.11 'Marginalized' People

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word 'marginalize' means 'to treat a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral'. The Collins Dictionary also defines the word 'marginalize' as 'to relegate to the fringes, out of the mainstream; make seem unimportant.'

The word 'marginalized people' in this study refers to a group of people who are treated or considered as out of the mainstream in that society. In particular, I see *bhikkhuni* as having a 'marginalized' status as they are not only excluded from being a part of mainstream Thai Buddhist institutes but also are being under-recognized by many Thai Buddhists.

1.8   Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into two parts: (i) Chapters 1-4 which are the foundation of this project; and (ii) Chapters 5-8 which are a multimodal analysis of the two *bhikkhuni* communities. Chapter 1 highlights what has prompted work on this thesis, contextualised by the 21st century global media landscape, and the notions of 'multimodality' and 'legitimacy' in this contemporary era; including localised contexts which constitute the controversial 'legitimacy' debates on the fully ordained *Theravada* nuns in present Thai Buddhism. The chapter also presents significances and originality, objectives, questions, contributions, and definitions in this research, including thesis structure. Chapter 2 involves a literature review which examines relevant studies of *bhikkhuni* in modern Thai Buddhism, particularly on the extent of multimodality and legitimacy to indicate research gaps which this project aims to fill. Chapter 3 focuses on theoretical backgrounds that form the conceptual framework as analytical tools in answering the research questions, including: Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis; legitimacy theory; gender ideology in Thai society; and the functions of the Buddhist community. Chapter 4 is about the research methodology which illustrates justifications of the research design, research methods, process of data collection and samples of how the data were analysed.

The second part deals with the empirical findings from the two communities' multimodal communication, presented in Chapters 5 to 8. Chapter 5 introduces the multimodal monastic resources of the two communities which comprehensively illustrate the backgrounds in interpreting their meanings of legitimacy in the successive chapter. Chapter 6 reflects the two communities' interpretations of legitimacy from multimodal perspectives in response to the first research question. Chapters 7 and 8 respond to the second research question by portraying how *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* construct their 'legitimacy' through multimodality, mainly focusing on their constructions via Facebook websites in three major Buddhist events. An overview of their offline constructions on the same occasions is also included. The thesis ends with a conclusion in Chapter 9, to summarise the findings and bring together 'multimodality' as the core analytical framework, with relevant notions of 'legitimacy' and *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand, to discuss the project's contributions, limitations, and further possible applications.

The next Chapter proceeds to the literature review, which summarises relevant studies which my project is situated.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.   Introduction

This chapter provides Information on relevant literatures about *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thai Buddhism, which forms the foundation of this project. It particularly explores whether and how the existing studies have mentioned the extent in which *bhikkhuni* communities struggle to negotiate their 'legitimacy' with the mainstream discourse through multimodality. It also investigates relevant studies on multimodality and on those marginalised, especially female religious groups in constituting their authorities in both global and local Thai contexts. These relevant studies are examined so as to elucidate the research gaps which this project aims to address.

2.2   Literature Review

2.2.1   The Current Studies on *Bhikkhuni* Communities in Thailand

Currently, there are quite a number of studies on *bhikkhuni* communities in the Thai context from various perspectives. Most of the existing studies addressed the issue of 'legitimacy' through top-down and institutionalised perspective by overlooking multimodality strategies.

Varaporn (2006), in her 'Reconnecting the Lost Lineage: Challenges to Institutional Denial of Buddhist Women's Monasticism in Thailand', studied about the first *bhikkhuni* community: *Songdhammakalyani*, and adopted an ethnographic and historical approaches. Her study aims to investigate the complexity of women's monasticism and their recognised status within the monastic order from gender and Thai Buddhism's institutional perspectives. Her findings reveal that the rigid nature of the monastic order, historically and traditionally influenced by the male dominant *sangha,* is a major constraint to institutionalising fully ordained monastic women. As a result, women seeking to engage in a monastic vocation tend to adopt different forms of women's monasticism which are complying with institutional Buddhism so as not to be perceived as openly transgressing the institutionally monitored gender roles for women. The emergence of lower ordained *samaneri* and fully ordained *bhikkhuni* in Thailand in constantly increasing numbers, therefore, is something she has summarised as a challenge to institutional Buddhism with regard to the accepted gender conception. I see

her project as being rather at the forefront in offering a constructive background for the following examples of scholarship on *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thai Buddhism. However, unlike my project which is a comparative study of two *bhikkhuni* communities through a multimodal approach, her study was seemingly designed to explore the 'legitimacy' and 'power' of the current *bhikkhuni* communities from a top-down and vertical structure, as it closely scrutinised the institutionalised geo-political and societal factors that constrain the revival of *bhikkhuni* lineage in Thailand. Her research does not manifest how these marginalised groups endeavour to communicate their legitimacy and power to negotiate with mainstream power and discourse. My own research is different in that it refers to her study as a comprehensive background, whilst further exploring the extent to which these *bhikkhuni* interpret their 'legitimacy' and (re)disseminate their horizontal power structure through multimodal means of communications across their own social media and traditional media platforms.

The study by Tomalin (2006) on 'The Thai *bhikkhuni* movement and women's empowerment' has explored the *bhikkhuni* issue from a gender and development perspective to examine how the recent movement of *bhikkhuni* ordination transforms patriarchal values in Thai society, as she sees the lower status of Thai women as a part of their subordinated status in Thai Buddhism. Her study suggests the notion of *bhikkhuni* ordination as an empowering process to counterbalance this gender inequality, as well as to enhance women's human rights, and the development of their economic and social status. Despite optimistic remarks on *bhikkhuni* ordination proposed by this study, my research assumes that the de-facto *bhikkhuni* communities are still struggling to negotiate their 'legitimated status' and horizontal power structure in Thai society.

Another study by Wutthichai (2007) on 'Status and Roles of *Bhikkhunis* in Thailand' aims to study the status and roles of Thai *bhikkhuni* and Thai Buddhists' attitude towards *bhikkhuni's* status and roles by combining textual analysis and a questionnaire survey on fieldwork research. His documentary studies reveal that *bhikkhuni* was established as one of the four Buddhist assemblies, judging from historical evidence appearing in China, Taiwan and Sri Lanka. However, the lost lineages and their non-existence in Thai Buddhism make their status unclear in Thai society and technically rejected by the Thai *Sangha*. At the same time there are rising expectations towards *bhikkhuni's* role in providing spiritual support and guidance to solve societal problems, especially those related to women. His field research also discloses somewhat similar results on the

perception of people towards *bhikkhuni* across the four regions of the country. The majority of the interviewees from these regions accepted the status of current (Thai) *bhikkhuni*; and expressed positive expectations toward their roles in Thai society. They also believed that the current unofficial status of *bhikkhuni* could be changed in the future. Wuttichai's study is dissimilar to my project, which engages with multimodal research techniques in analysing the multimodal discourse available via online and offline media outlets as well as with fieldwork research through participatory observation, interview and focus group discussion. His study neither emphasises the issue of 'legitimacy' and power of the current *bhikkhunis* nor does it look at the issue from *bhikkhuni*'s perspective, but rather offers a review of historical documents and an analysis of different parties' views regarding the repercussions of *bhikkhuni* emergence. The focus of my own research is different. It looks into *bhikkhuni*'s self-construction of 'legitimacy' from a multimodal perspective through virtual and non-virtual platforms; and into their potential engagement with lay members in both local and international domains.

Seeger (2008), in his textual Buddhist study of 'The *Bhikkhuni*-ordination controversy in Thailand', provides representative argumentations from two confrontational dichotomies that support and oppose the revival of the fully ordained *Theravada* nuns in the country. In his study, the arguments supporting the establishment of Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* are drawn from various sources and strategies, including Western-influenced textual criticism on the historical *Theravada* canon; reference to Thai constitutions; and persisting debates on women's rights and gender inequality. The other side, however, referred to the authority of canonical *Theravada* scriptures and the fact that majority of Thai *sangha* seemed not to accept the revival of *bhikkhuni* lineage, not to mention the lack of any huge demand for the establishment of a female monastic order in the country. This study provides a framework on discourse related to the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* ordination in contemporary Thai Buddhism, whilst reflecting the equally balanced negotiation regarding their 'power relations' between those who support and oppose *bhikkhun*i ordination. These 'legitimacy' arguments are also at the core of my interdisciplinary study. While Seeger's conclusions point out a broad consensus and rethinking on the part of all parties involved, and mention the perhaps non-necessity of introducing Thai '*bhikkhuni*' as long as the existing female clerics could more or less fulfil *bhikkhuni*'s monastic duties, my project goes beyond these conclusions to further examine and explore how the existing *bhikkhuni* communities as 'non-official Thai

monastic members' seek to find their own solutions so as to interpret and construct their 'legitimated status' through multimodal resources and communication.

Following her prior studies in *bhikkhuni* movement (2006), another study by Tomalin (2009) on Buddhist Feminist Transnational Networks, Female Ordination and Women's Empowerment mentioned a 'transnational Buddhist Feminist network' operating through international conferences, charity and award ceremonies etc., as a global strategic process which has an implication on the empowerment of Buddhist women locally, especially in a campaign to revive *bhikkhuni* tradition. Her study is considered vital in providing a comprehensive framework in transcending Feminist-related strategies at the global level designed to alleviate the socio-cultural and geo-political constraints dominating at the local level. However, this proposed strategy is considered as the Outside-In approach explained at a global level, whilst my research mainly investigates multimodal constructions of female cleric communities on their 'legitimacy', within a confined local Thai Buddhism context.

The study of Ito (2012) on 'Questions of ordination legitimacy for newly ordained *Theravada bhikkhuni* in Thailand', focuses on the issue of 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism, just like my own thesis. Her scope is to explore whether the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* ordination really depends on the 'right ordination procedures', particularly when it is done by the less formative foreign *sangha* which is hardly considered as valid ordination in Thai Buddhism. Unlike Seeger's recommendation (2008), her study argues that *bhikkhuni*'s 'legitimacy' does not depend on 'right ordination', but rather on the re-statement by religious authority – Thai *Sangha* Council to 'legitimate' *bhikkhuni*'s official status. Ito's research clearly mentioned the inferior power relations of *bhikkhuni* in Thai Buddhism; and suggested that *bhikkhuni* could negotiate their 'power' with the mainstream in a two-folded way. First, as individuals, they should perform clerical responsibilities to underline the value of female renunciates; and as a group they help to strengthen the female monastic order so as to bring about endorsement measures and more newly ordained members. I refer to her findings as a background in explaining the current 'marginalised status' of the de-facto *bhikkhuni* communities and will further and more intensively explore how this controversial issue of their 'legitimacy' is raised and publicised to the society through multimodal means of communications in Thai society.

Lai's anthropological and postcolonial scholarship on 'Engendering Buddhism: Female Ordination and Women's 'Voices' in Thailand' (2011) focuses on the case of *Songdhammakalyani*. Using a Feminist ethnographic approach, her research underlines Asian women's fluidity; and it also signals Asian Buddhism as a changing 'tradition' exemplified by the case of *Songdhammakalyani*'s counter-narratives in constructing women's monastic status, demonstrating changing gender relations in Thai *Theravada* Buddhism. Likewise, Itoh's (2013) and Delia's (2014) studies on *Nirodharam* from the anthropologist's perspective using ethnographic studies do not provide any comparative analysis of the community with other existing *bhikkhuni* communities, as my project has done. Itoh's study (2013) on 'The Emergence of the *bhikkhuni-sangha* in Thailand' aims to understand the phenomenal development of Thai women in becoming *bhikkhuni* or *samaneri*, through the historical evidence and her ethnographical study at *Nirodharam.* Her research reveals the importance of *sangha* in offering a suitable framework and environment for women to practice; and how monastic rules function to protect and train their wakefulness and allow them to live harmoniously as a community. From Itoh's research, she suggested that the 'power' of the existing *bhikkhuni* communities could be built with the external support from the *sangha* and from their adherence to monastic rules. My project, on the other hand, aims to explore how their 'legitimacy' which could also be interpreted as part of their authority is built from their own initiatives.

As with Itoh's, Delia's research (2014) on 'Mediating between Gendered Images of 'Defilement' and 'Purity' Continuity, Transition' focuses on the agency of female Buddhist novices [*samaneri*] and fully ordained *Theravada* nuns [*bhikkhuni*] at *Nirodharam* contextualised in the non-existent official monastic status of Thai women. Her study reflects an interplay of intra-personal spiritual inspiration and inter-personal relations with monastic members and lay communities in encouraging women to become *samaneri* or *bhikkhuni* at *Nirodharam*. Existing socio-cultural factors in Thai Buddhism, however, reinforce both the narratives and practices of women's inferior religious status; and the modifying of women's religious recognition by the laity, which counterbalances the previous female merit-deficiency.

In addition to the two aforementioned studies of Delia (2012) and Itoh (2013) on *Nirodharam*, Manita's research on 'Why choose to become a Bhikkhuni Nun: Is it a transformative learning experience? (2017) also explores relations between the transformative learning process and the *bhikkhuni* ordination using Conversation Analysis

from educational and psychological perspectives. She conducted in-depth interviews with three monastic members at *Nirodharam*. Her findings indicate transformative learning as a vital process that moves women to explore life options through monasticism; and perspective transformation could not be completed without *bhikkhuni* ordination. As Manita did not explore the power aspect on the issue of *bhikkhuni* in Thai society but focused on the essential nature of *bhikkhuni* ordination for the transformative process, this ethnographic study on *Nirodharam* does not cover the originality of my project.

From the angle of communication studies, Pongphan (2017) has conducted a research project on 'Discourse, Power and Communication about Thai *Theravada Bhikkhuni*', to justify discourse communicated by *Theravada bhikkhuni* in the country, particularly in terms of their 'power relations.' Unlike my project, his study employs a Critical Discourse Analysis framework, referring to Michel Foucault's 'power' concept and using secondary data from the National Archives, with documents, and in-depth interviews with 7 *bhikkhuni* nationwide. My own study, however, emphasises both digital discourses retrieved from Facebook website and discourse available via their offline media archives of *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam*, with multimodal research technique (See Chapter 4), using Kress and Van Leeuwen's 'Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis' (2006) as a framework for data analysis. Pongphan provides a comprehensive conclusion on strategies to communicate *bhikkhuni*-related discourse including explanation, argument and reproach, power enforcement, organizational and institutional power, violence, obstinacy, through mass and social media, academic activities, social contribution activities, ritual practices and law enforcement. Whereas my study deeply scrutinises the extent in which the meanings of *bhikkhuni*'s 'legitimacy' are interpreted and constructed through textual discourse and multimodal forms of discourse available on their traditional and social media platforms. Moreover, his study does not provide a comparative multimodal analysis on how the first and the largest *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand select different online modes and other offline multimodal means to construct their 'legitimacy' in Thai society.

The recent study of Kakanang (2018) on 'The Values of Ordination: the *bhikkhuni*, gender, and Thai society', provides a comparative analysis of the two *bhikkhuni* communities, *Nirodharam* and *Songdhammakalyani,* on social impacts of contemporary Thai *bhikkhuni* on the values of ordination and their gender relation to the laity. The study adopted a 12-

month fieldwork programme through participant observation, interviews, and questionnaires. Although she includes both *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* in her study, the focus and methods of the study are different from mine. Her findings underline the value of temporary and full ordination as a way to authorise lay women by arguing that female monastic engagement in Buddhism can result in positive changes in gender relations and ideologies in the society due to their upgraded status as 'ordained persons'. My thesis aims to investigate beyond the gender issue by also asking how the two communities understand and interpret their 'legitimacy' as fully ordained women and how they construct their 'legitimacy' through multimodality. The study will employ multimodal research methods including multimodal analysis of their Facebook websites, and offline media archives, on top of fieldwork studies through participatory observation, interviews, and focus group discussion.

2.2.2 Multimodality, Legitimacy, and 'Marginalised Female Religious Communities' in the Global Context

The current studies on multimodality have insufficiently indicated the issue of 'legitimacy', particularly, on those marginalised female religious communities. To date, the relevant multimodality studies at the global level are rare and have only partially included these three aspects. For example, the study of Stork (2011) has somewhat envisaged the link between multimodality and the (il)legitimation process on the classic case of the Arab Spring. The study accentuates the public triumph achieved by utilising multimodal means of communication via social media convergence through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Weblogs as primary sources, and utilisation of mainstream media and scholastic documents as secondary sources in engendering political mobilisation, especially in rendering a management structure, functioning as a free press, and updating and reporting on the ongoing insurgence at the domestic and international levels. Apart from the crucial role of social media in a political movement, Wilson et al. (2012) also unveiled Facebook as a crucial platform to facilitate protesters in organising and fuelling the Egyptian bottom-up insurgence to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak. Although the study of Stork (2011) and that of Wilson et al. (2012) revealed a triumphant movement relying on the crucial roles of social media outlets and convergence of new and old media as the key to a successful (il)legitimation process , in the same way that Chadwick (2017 mentioned the importance of the hybridity of the media system, these studies did not deeply scrutinise, for example, the inter-semiotic relationship across Social Networking

(SNS), as well as on the interactive modes across mainstream and social media. Most importantly, the studies do not explicitly mention the issues of 'multimodality' and 'legitimacy' as central issues, as my project aims to do.

Similarly, the existing multimodality researches on gender issues insufficiently embrace concerns on legitimacy and religious communities. For example, Salter (2013) indicated the use of multimodal communication via online and offline channels to elevate women's voices in the mainstream media and to appeal sexual violence cases through virtual extrajudicial spaces, which had eventually influenced court outcomes. Similarly, the study by the European Parliament (2013) revealed that social media can help elevate the involvement of women in politics, especially amidst the prevailing barriers from offline communication channels which are male dominated. Another study by China (2018) exhibits the connection between multimodality and gender issues in the contemporary era. She explores the inter-semiotic relationship across the three Social Networking Sites (SNS) of Twitter, Tumblr and Pinterest through multimodal discourse analysis (Kress, 2009), looking particularly at how visual and linguistic choices operate semiotically across the three SNS with varied affordances and constraints in constructing meanings of the African American 'feminist' singer Beyoncé. Her study reveals the fluid identity and multiple meanings of the female singer which link to varied visual and linguistic expressions of employed semiotic resources across a number of interactive modes. According to the study, the meanings of this feminist singer are (re)interpreted as a 'cultural object' by the audience through various type of racist, sexist, hegemonic, liberation and resistant discourses. China's study on Beyoncé is not regarded as 'marginalised', but rather a selection of mainstream feminist case studies. Although these studies illustrate the inter-connection between multimodality and gender issues, they did not precisely outline the issues of legitimacy or of religious communities, as my own project seeks to do.

In addition, the existing studies on marginalized groups do not explicitly demonstrate the gradual changes rendered by the inter-link between social media and traditional media. For example, the study of Zeng (2018) explored #MeToo, an anti-sexual violence and anti-sexual harassment campaign in China. Based on a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analyses upon the theory of connective actions to study how convergent of social media platforms shift the way in which feminist activism, the research underlined the gradual impact of the campaign which was firstly initiated in educational institutions

and then spread to other parts of the society, with a series of counter censorship strategies in various cultural contexts and across platforms.

Venzo and Hess (2013) explored the capacity of sexual minorities in Australia to proactively utilise social media as a platform of interactivity, networking to fight back 'social exclusion' from homophobia from mainstream media representation using the theory of 'symbolic annihilation'. Based on the inquiry technique, its results demonstrated their expansion of using various media across platforms to carry out their goals rather than being passive victims from media representation. Its application is also worthwhile for other marginalised groups who are socially excluded to renegotiate their 'power relations' within and across other regions, whilst showing the limited interdependence between social media and old media. For a similar case in Asia, Yang (2018) explores the interplay between the empowerment of sexual minorities in China through social media and its ramifications in negotiating their 'power' with the State. The study indicates social media impact in allowing these groups to promote their contents and information which are more publicly visible, despite state censorship for cumulative circulation. It also manifests how these sexual minorities utilize social media in the course of their fight with the state mal administration of homophobic textbooks, particularly to educate the public the gradual process of their struggle for equal rights through legal structure.

For those marginalised groups in Africa, Iwilade (2013) underlined the dominant role of social media as an effective tool in providing public sphere for youth in Africa to renegotiate their positions with the dominant patterns of authority, whilst allowing them to continuously mobilise their protest discourse through this non-conventional oppositional platform in negotiating their 'power' with the State. Whilst in Asian context, Yeo and Chu (2017) reveal how Facebook is used as platform for young people in Hong Kong in exchanging their sexual health and intimate relations by implying content analysis from 2186 anonymous Facebook posts. The study shows gender balanced participants including sexual minorities as virtual members in sharing their experiences both in the form of storytelling and advice seeking, with more supportive rather than non-supportive responses. Whilst the findings demonstrate unique nature of Facebook as a social media platform in engaging youth to speak out their genuine interests and demands as well as to accommodate sexual health intervention through this virtual social network. However, these studies all underline the missing link between the marginalized groups in the global

context in struggling for negotiating their 'power relations' and the intermingling effect of social media and traditional platform that could render such changes.

Shifting to research exploring in detail relations between 'multimodality' and 'legitimacy', the recent studies of Mikkola (2017) and De Vaujany and Vaast (2018), have nothing to do with female religious communities. Whilst the first study mainly focused on business enterprise, the latter revolved around the context of international co-operation. Mikkola's study, which explored how multimodality is utilised in negotiating co-operation announcements, reveals the important role of the textual element in the (de)legitimating process through discursive (de)legitimation strategies, mainly by rationalisation and authorisation features. De Vaujany and Vaast's work, which focused on the legitimation process of international institutions through iconographic visual analysis in the meeting venue context, indicates the relevance of visual practices, particularly image-screen and image-object iconographies, in validating legitimacy. Both studies neither correlate with a marginalised female religious group, nor unveil the inter-semiotic relations that contribute to the meanings of effective legitimation strategies.

If we move on to explore research on multimodality and marginalised female religious communities, we find there is no explicit research mentioning such relations. However, there is a body of literature indicating that different religious members have utilised multimodality to achieve their religious missions on a global level. Cheong et al. (2011) mirrors how several religious members efficiently employ new media to suit their religious aims. Several churches make use of textual, visual, and auditory forms as a combination of online media to extensively attract members beyond the textual content of their religious websites. Apart from conventional face-to-face meetings, online communities also provide an extensive communication channel that church leaders believe can visually characterise their communities despite the remaining higher influence of offline interaction and communication. Additionally, religious affiliates also enjoy the privileges offered by the multimodal elements of new media to strengthen relationships with their members. 'Mega' or popular churches differentiate themselves through video self-branding, audio-visual materials, architectural visualisation and spatial narratives that simulate real and imagined places, as well as interactive functions that allow more horizontal relations with their members. The study summed up that virtual religious communication could extend beyond religious and geographical limits. Therefore, the internet is used not only to pass on religious and communal information

but also to share community experiences that are enhanced by audio- visual and geographic responsiveness.

Campbell (2012), also revealed how religious groups before the emergence of new media, in the 19th century utilised and refurbished different multimodal means of technology to accommodate their religious goals whilst attempting to prevent their members from engaging in unscrupulous acts. Various types of media are often used or adopted, which can be seen in the case of Christians - the first and dominant group to use steam-powered printing presses for the mass production of religious tracts. There was also the case of Gospel preachers who enjoyed the privilege of radio broadcasting even in its earliest stages in the 1920s (Campbell, 2012).

After social media's emergence, there was a massive change to the utilisation of media platforms. An inseparable tie between social media and religion is evident in the development of 'digital religion'. This is a contemporary religious form which is performed and articulated online. The term also encapsulates the extent to which digital media shapes and is shaping religious practice (Campbell, 2012). The early use of the internet among religious members began in the 1980s (Lochhead, 1997, cited in Campbell, 2012, p.22) and in 1983 when religious discussion was first introduced. The 1990s marked an increasing landmark for online religious groups and email discussions, as well as the emergence of the first cyber-church in 1992. Until 2000 those new forms of religious ritual and practice were more popularly provided online, with later concerns by religious members about the drawbacks of the exposure to secular values and sexual content. Following the trend is the utilisation of new media and social media platforms such as MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube, etc. Campbell points out that in relation to religion, the internet plays certain functions as a spiritual network for sharing spiritual experiences between community members; a worship space, a place for ritual and religious activities; a missionary tool that promotes certain religious beliefs; a religious identity that builds up or maintains one's religious identity; and a functional technology that renders useful practices for religious communities.

In the exploration of different religious groups, such as Jews, Muslims and Christians, in relation to new media, Campbell, (2012) has clarified distinct factors that shape how each religious group utilises technological channels to construct their messages. Firstly, employment reflects their comprehension about religious missions and communities;

and their historical communal relation to communicate with different genres. To illustrate, Christians who are the dominant media users for religious purposes regard virtual and physical communities as a place to facilitate their religious life and missions. The next factor to consider is the rapid re-interpretation and re-shaping of fundamental religious values so that they may be compatible with the modern world. In the case of Islam, the internet is regarded as a crucial tool for building and decentralising networks, requesting and gathering knowledge, re-emphasising Islamic precepts, and reconnecting to the lost sacred religious documents (Campbell, 2012, p. 34). Another factor in utilising technology for religious purposes is how leaders/ members agree within their religious communities as to when is the appropriate time to communicate via media channels, or when to refuse to do so. To illustrate, there was a controversial debate among religious members in Judaism about the use of the internet. Some members of ultra-Orthodox communities regarded it as a threat and a gateway to the secular world and to problematic values, whilst this opinion is more compromised when some communities see its benefits and the communities embrace the internet as functional, work-related resources, which highlight the negotiation of authority in the use of the internet by particular groups of religious members. Social media is, therefore, composed from embedded communal traditions, and from the distinct features of its members and their media users (Campbell, 2012). As the heart of my research is the exploration of *bhikkhuni* communities and their employment of new media, and in the next section, I would like to move on to the question of how global Buddhist communities and their members have used new media through different timeframes. I would also like to draw on the functions and examine how worldwide Buddhists benefit from online communities.

The study of Zaytoon (2017), focusing on 'multimodality on religious profiling and Islamic phobia', indicates textual roles in reducing tension and elaborating socio-political positions; whilst various employed semiotic resources proved their own grammar to fulfil the three meta-functions of communication. I reckon that his research contributions could be potentially applicable within the Islamic context, which is dissimilar to that of Buddhism.

To specifically define relations between multimodality and the Buddhist communities, it is evident that Buddhists worldwide also take advantage of the emergence of the internet and engage with online activities similar to members of other religions. In its early stages, online Buddhism platform provided textual resources of Buddhism, *Dhamma* teachings

and some discussion forums. Web forums and chat rooms were increasingly prominent in the late 1990s. The term 'cyber-*sangha*', which refers to virtual Buddhist communities comprising Buddhist teachers, practitioners, and others interested in Buddhism (Prebish, 1999, cited in Ostrowski, 2006), emerged in response to two-way communication on the internet. Prebish (2004) has also disclosed three basic types of practitioner-oriented online Buddhist communities: i) scholar web pages mostly initiated by American Buddhist groups; ii) virtual temples initiated by members of the Buddhist *sangha*; and iii) the cyberspace that only virtually exists. Among these three types of cyber communities, the cyber-*sangha* which does not physically exist tends to decline rapidly from the survey in the 1990s. This may reflect the necessity for face-to-face communication between members of a religious community.

A study (Prebish, 2004) on organisational structures of online Buddhist communities from five eminent Buddhist websites, namely DharmaNetInternational, [9] WWW Virtual Library, [10] Buddhist Resources File, [11] BuddhaNet, [12] and H Buddhism[13], which explores the functions of new media in Buddhist circles worldwide, points out that virtual communities educate, cultivate and encourage participation and discussion among online Buddhists and non-Buddhists from all over the world through vast and systematic access to Buddhist teachings and practical resources presented in both academic and non-academic capacities. To illustrate, DharmaNet International appears to be 'a popular and stimulating gateway to Buddhism', encompassing 18 distinct categories of Buddhist Studies, e.g. Buddhist networks and online Buddhist centres, Buddhist academic and non-academic resources. WWW Virtual Library also provides vast research materials to academic journals, such as Buddhist Studies, with specific bodies of knowledge according to different Buddhist traditions, e.g. *Theravada*, Tibetan, Zen, etc. Additional interactive features like chatrooms are also included. Buddhist Resources File attempts to balance the interests of scholars and practitioners, whilst BuddhaNet focuses on 'Buddhist practitioner experiences. The H Buddhism creator, who coined the term 'budschol', has emphasised the sophisticated availability of online Buddhist texts to subscribers (see Prebish, 2004).

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[9] www.dharmanet.org
[10] www.ciolek.com/WWWVL-Buddhism
[11] www.Arcane archive.org/faqs/ref.buddhsm.9509.php
[12] www.buddhanet.net
[13] www.h-net.org/~buddhism

Virtual Buddhist communities work as a mechanism to unite Buddhist communities worldwide and serve as a communicative tool to achieve religious goals in 'eliminating suffering' among members throughout the world (Prebish, 1999, cited in Ostrowski, 2006). Online Buddhist communities also function in diverse ways. Kim (2005) identifies their functions in Korea in four different aspects. First is as a 'beliefs community' where Buddhist beliefs and practices systems are allocated through virtual communities. The next function is 'relational communities' where people can relate to other virtual members at certain levels. 'Affective communities', the third function, refers to the online Buddhist community where people's identities are conclusively defined. And lastly, 'utilitarian communities' means communities where resources are organised. The same study also reveals that online Buddhist communities in Korea have been developed to respond to increasing demands for the 'individualised world'. My project could forward for further studies on how the 'virtual' *bhikkhuni* communities have rendered any of these aforementioned functions and how each of these functions helps community members to comprehensively perceive the roles and relevancy of *bhikkhuni* in Thai society.

It is clear that Buddhist communities worldwide, like other religious bodies, have taken advantage of new media to achieve their religious missions. It is worth exploring whether the new media are also utilised by Buddhist communities in Thai society to support the revival of *bhikkhuni*. Although *bhikkhuni* ordination has been successfully revived in Sri Lanka with support from international Buddhist Feminist networks, it is arguable that transferring global success to another local context with the same success is not as simple. To transfer the 'Sri Lankan Revival Model' to Thai Buddhism requires more than support from international Buddhist Feminist networks. In fact, it requires strong support from national and local Buddhist communities in Thailand as well.

2.2.3 Multimodality, Legitimacy, and 'Marginalised' Female Religious Communities in the Thai Context

Whilst in the western hemisphere, there are quite a number of research studies on multimodality, legitimacy, and religious communities as already mentioned, none of them has included the three concepts and their inter-relationships in a single study. In this section, I will explore the availability of such three-part researches in Thailand.

To date, existing studies on multimodality in Thailand are quite limited, and none of them focuses on the same theme as my project. Knox et al., (2011) studied 'Multimodal discourse on online newspaper home pages: A social-semiotic perspective' which focuses on multimodal discourse available via three online English-language newspapers: the Bangkok Post (Thailand), the English-language edition (translated from Chinese) of the People's Daily (China), and the Sydney Morning Herald (Australia), between three different timelines from February-April, 2002; September-November, 2005; and January-April, 2006. The study included interviews conducted with senior editors from the Bangkok Post and the Sydney Morning Herald. His research used Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA), and a 'visual grammar' of home pages building on the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). His study unveiled that, by its nature, an online newspaper is characterised by shorter texts which cannot fully communicate the values and ideology of news institutions as printed newspapers have previously done. However, news institutions have introduced visual modes in expressing such values and ideology through the design of newspaper home pages, and readers become familiar with the meanings of this online news design. This existing topic reveals the importance of visual semiotic modes in constructing the values and ideology of a newspaper; however, it does analyse the design of other modes, as my study aims to do.

Another relevant study by Benjawan (2016) on 'Identity Construction of Thai University Website: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis', explores how Thai universities construct their 'social practices' and 'identity' through their English websites; and how multimodal texts are employed to interact with online audiences, by referring to Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006); Systemic Functional Perspective as core framework analysis; Wenger's (2008) Social Constructivism on Community of Practice; and Goffman's (1986) Frame Analysis. Her research is based on multimodal analysis of eight Thai university websites which she had observed over a twelve-week period from March to June 2016. Although Benjawan's work also employs multimodal analysis, the scope of her study is narrower than mine and her methodologies less complicated. Her multimodal analysis covers only Thai universities' websites, whereas mine covers multimodal analysis from both online and offline media platforms of *bhikkhuni* communities, including participatory observation, interviews and focus group discussion with key informants. Benjawan's work covers a relatively shorter period -12 weeks; mine studies the employment of offline and online media of the two communities over a longer time span and at three different intervals, i.e. in 2012, 2014, and between 2016 and 2017.

The results of Benjawan's study show that both verbal and visual texts are used together in order to frame historical narratives and images of Thai universities. The results of my study will further elaborate how other different modes apart from verbal and visual texts, i.e. audio, gestural, and spatial modes, are used to supplement each other in order to communicate/construct their legitimacy to the audiences.

Moving now to the relevant studies on multimodality and religious communities in the Thai context, currently there is no such research which explores the inter-relationship of these two concepts. In addition, there are no studies seeking to compare the use of social media and traditional media by different religious actors in Thailand. Although Taylor (2003) has done a study on 'cyber-Buddhism', or cyber-monastic communities which have emerged as brand-new features of urbanised Buddhist communities in Thailand, his publication was released well before 2008 when Facebook emerged in the social media landscape.

The study of Intra-Udom (2013), focusing on how well-known Thai monk Phramaha Wuttichai utilizes Web.2.0 as a media strategy for *Dhamma* dissemination, among other existing online and offline media channels, has revealed high satisfaction among virtual members who see this website as a convergent form of media to share a variety of *Dhamma* content which is responsive to their interests in Buddhism. However, these studies do not consider conducting Facebook analysis as a popular social media among Thais. Besides, there has not been any study which focused specifically on the use of new media by *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand to communicate their understanding and interpretation of 'legitimacy' in the existing Thai socio-cultural context, which is at the heart of my own project. Thus, my research is the very first in moving beyond the analysis on website and the Internet in Thailand to the more complex and interactive engagement system such as Facebook by providing a comparative analysis of how the first and the largest *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand have utilised it to communicate ideas about their legitimacy with the audience.

The next study of Praditsilpa (2014) on another famous activist monk, Phra Paisal Visalo, reveals an 'innovative religious communication' approach by integrating both secular and religious knowledge to his *Dhamma* teaching conveyed through new media along with other diversified media strategies to propagate *Dhamma* messages. Although this study clearly underlines the media convergence strategy employed by a famous Thai Buddhist

monk, my project is the first to focus on the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand who are considered as 'marginalised' in Thai Buddhism, to explore how they have employed available resources of both new media and conventional media platforms to communicate their 'legitimacy' to Thai society.

The study of Saisena (2016), focusing on various online media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, E-books, and the websites provided by the two well-known Buddhist monks in Thailand, discloses that online members benefit in participating in these virtual communities through simple linguistic elements, metaphoric and verbal expressions in summarising *Dhamma* essences as they can apply the knowledge to many life situations. Although this study is related to Facebook usage, it overlooks other forms of non-virtual communication, especially as constructed by female Buddhist communities.

2.3 Research Gaps

2.3.1 Lacking Empirical Research on *Bhikkhuni* Communities Utilising Multimodality to Construct 'Legitimacy'

First and foremost, there are no multimodality studies showing how de-facto *bhikkhuni* (female Buddhist clerics) have endeavoured to construct their 'legitimacy' to negotiate with mainstream discourse in contemporary Thai society. Most studies have explored the *bhikkhuni* issue from ethnographic, Buddhism, gender, as well as psychological and educational perspectives, and have overlooked the application of a multimodality analysis.

In addition, the prevailing research studies have paid huge attention to how the 'legitimated status' of Thai *bhikkhuni* is constrained by Buddhist institutional rules and societal norms but have paid limited attention in examining this issue of legitimacy from *bhikkhuni* perspectives. Furthermore, there have been no comprehensive studies on the efforts of present-day *bhikkhuni* communities in (re)negotiating and (re)disseminating their power in a more horizontal domain through multimodal means of communication via social media and traditional media platforms.

2.3.2 Lacking Multimodality Research on 'Legitimacy' and 'Marginalised' Female Religious Communities at the Global Level

There is no relevant literature which brings forth the tri-angular relationship between 'legitimacy', multimodality and 'marginalised' Buddhist communities similar to my research at the global level. The existing studies have addressed the relationships between either 'multimodality' and 'legitimacy', 'multimodality' and 'gender' or 'multimodality and 'religious communities'. Nonetheless, there are no studies which comprehensively offer any precise linkage between these three aspects which are central to my project.

2.3.3 Lacking Multimodality Research on 'Legitimacy' and 'Marginalised' Female Religious Communities in the Local Thai Context

Most importantly, the results show a very limited number of multimodality studies, particularly as a comprehensive lens to understand the complex issue of 'legitimacy' in relation to *bhikkhuni* communities who are considered as marginalised in mainstream Thai Buddhism. The existing studies are mostly related to how certain multimodal resources via online platforms help in constructing identity of educational institutions; maintain ideology and communicate the newsworthiness of online newspapers, whilst those conducted in relation to Thai Buddhist organisations emphasised how Buddhist monks utilised multimodal resources via online platforms as well as in integrating online and offline strategies to communicate *Dhamma* teachings to laypeople; and engaging with more Buddhists through these convergent religious strategies.   However, the existing research underlines the missing landscape of multimodality studies in relation to *bhikkhuni* communities as (Thai) female Buddhist agency in utilising such strategies to construct their 'legitimacy' in conflict with those of the mainstream discourse.

2.4   Conclusion

This chapter reviews existing researches regarding the *bhikkhuni* studies in Thai Buddhism, and the tri-angular relationship between multimodality, legitimacy and marginalised female religious communities in both global and Thai contexts; to reflect how the relevant literatures have shown the attempt of de-facto *bhikkhuni* communities

in constructing their 'legitimacy' through multimodality to negotiate with mainstream discourse. The results of the review indicate the missing scholastic landscape of *bhikkhuni* studies in this specific aspect in the contexts of both global and Thai Buddhism.

The current literature on *bhikkhuni* studies insufficiently illustrates how multimodality could be rendered as a comprehensive lens in understanding this complex phenomenon in which the existing *bhikkhuni* communities struggle to prove their 'legitimacy' in Thai society. The very few existing researches did not sufficiently provide a comparative analysis on *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* with regard to their construction of 'legitimacy' via the multimodal perspective, neither as conceptual framework nor as research methods to thoroughly understand the complex issue of *bhikkhuni* in Thai Buddhism.

From a global perspective, the existing research on multimodality which has mentioned the interdependence between legitimacy and the marginalised female religious community is non-existent. Besides, the existing multimodality studies in the Thai context are predominantly trying to understand a social phenomenon through 'multimodal discourse analysis' on the meaning-making process and overlooking the integration of multimodality as a substantial framework in analysing multimodal texts available via online and offline media channels; and as research methodology. And the studies do not adequately address the issue of 'legitimacy', particularly in relation to those who belong to marginalised female Buddhist communities.

Thus, my interdisciplinary research is the first to use multimodal analysis to make a comparative study on how *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand use both online and offline media modals to construct their legitimacy. In the next chapter I will discuss the theoretical background which lays the conceptual foundation of my research.

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical background that forms the foundation of this study. This includes (3.2.1) Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) which is the core analytical framework in this thesis; (3.2.2) legitimation theory; (3.2.3) gender ideology in Thai society; and (3.2.4) functions of the Buddhist community, all of which supplement each other in providing a conceptual framework to answer the research questions. I will also discuss (3.3) the practical application of these aforementioned theories in my project.

3.2. Theoretical Background

3.2.1 Multimodal Social Semiotics Analysis

The first prominent aspect of multimodality which I found relevant to my research is of course that theorising and empirical multimodality studies have denied that language is the only predominant entity in constructing meaning, as communication is multimodal, combining varied semiotic resources (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Jewitt, 2009; Bezemer, 2006; Adami, 2017). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) meanwhile indicated the monomodal as the previously dominant communicative form in Western culture. Ventola and Kältenbacher (2004, p.1) argued that although multimodality has seemingly been overlooked as a distinct scholastic field, it is prevalent in most contexts of communication studies on human engagement.

Considering that the 21st century communication setting involves more modal resources matters in the meaning-making process (Adami and Kress, 2014) as well as a shift in disseminating own 'power' and 'knowledge' in the more horizontal domain (Kress, 2010) and the 'hybridity of media system' (Chadwick, 2017), I see the significance of multimodality as a structure in comprehensively investigating communication. This includes analysing how social semiotic resources, such as the visual, aural, gestural, spatial, temporal, etc., are regulated in the process of meaning-making and how they are interpreted within the specific social context and practice (Kress, 2004; Van Leeuwen, 2005; Bezemer, 2012).

Grounded in the work of structural semioticians (see, for example, Saussure 1959, Strauss 1970, Barthes 1977) who proposed approaches to understanding 'how signs and structures of semiotic rules generate meanings', social semioticians (Halliday, 1985; Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) have extensively investigated the social dimensions to explain 'how people make, use, and renegotiate semiotic rules in communication in three aspects'. These include the relation of form and meaning being motivated, not arbitrary; sign is shaped by the environment in which it is made, place in that environment; and each mode offers certain potentials for meanings, specific affordances (Bezemer and Kress, 2016). Meaning is constructed through inter-semiotic relations or the so-called the interplay of semiotic resources employed in certain communicative artefacts (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Adami, 2017). Thus, the interplay of modes - functions of each mode plays an equally crucial role in constructing specific meanings in each scenario. And this is also crucial in my project, as I aim to explore how the meaning of *bhikkhuni*'s 'legitimacy' is articulated through multimodal resources in the online meaning-making process and across online and offline platforms.

Kress (2006) also critically highlighted 'semiotic modes' which have been socially and culturally shaped and developed overtime through day-to-day interactions and societal norms until becoming a 'legitimate recognised form' of communication within different speech communities. In other words, Adami (2017, p.6) mentioned semiotic modes as 'resources that social groups have developed to fulfil functions in their social organisation, including their 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual function' adapted from Halliday's meta-functions (see explanation below).

Multimodal text as defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, p.177) refers to 'any text whose meanings are realised through more than one semiotic mode'. According to Snell-Hornby (2009, p.44), multimodal text involves different verbal and non-verbal modes of expressions, comprising both sight and sound. This should not be confused with the term 'multi-media text' or the so-called 'audio-visual' text, which concerns technological and electrical media. Meanwhile O'Sullivan (2013) pointed out the significance of varied frameworks in analysing text in relations to mediated-channel modes which produce sign systems. She defines materials from different mediums which embrace signification modes of visual, acoustic, and graphic sign systems, such as those produced through film, television, drama, opera or comics as multimodal text (2013, p.6).

From multimodal perspectives and significance, the first challenge to apply this communication approach is according to multimodality's extensive function which is not limited only within the study of semiotic resources in the repertoire of meaning-making processes, but to embrace how semiotic resources are used in discourses across contexts and forms of media, including the relationship between and across modes; and its function which covers research methods for digital data collection and analysis within social research (Jewit, 2009; Kress, 2009; Bezemer, 2012). The latest challenge also includes how multimodal studies provide a sufficient analytical framework and methodology to thoroughly understand communication studies in relation to the emerging requirements of the modern states in both local and global scenarios. Hence, apart from understanding the comprehensive concepts entailed in the multimodality semiotic approach, I would like to further investigate multimodality as the core analytical tool in the next section to boost my understanding on *bhikkhuni*'s construction of legitimacy through online and offline platforms.

3.2.1.A   Multimodal Analysis

The four grounding elements of multimodal analysis are mode, semiotic resource, modal affordance and inter-semiotic relations. Mode, as aforementioned, is a specific socio-cultural product arising from people's day-to-day societal interaction. Semiotic resources display relationships in how people resort to different materials in making meanings. Modal affordance, meanwhile, concerns the different potentiality of mode in meaning-making from the socio-cultural aspect; and inter-semiotic relationships are concerned with how modes are configured in particular contexts. These four concepts provide the starting point for multimodal analysis (Bezemer, 2012).

Another vital aspect in multimodal analysis is meaning. Whilst, Vanini (2007) pointed out 'meaning' is attributed to power, Adami (2017) regarded it as fluid and contextual. Thus, interpretations require mutual literacy backgrounds in understanding an author's motivations; the (re)negotiation of power; and the grammar of sign-making within that specific socio-cultural context (Kress and Benzemer, 2003). In addition, meanings could be read and interpreted not only by the visual grammar of how depicted elements are combined as visual statement, but more importantly how socio-culture specifically makes the notions of meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006)

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│    Multimodality Analysis   │
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(I). Social Semiotic Mode	(II). Semiotic Resources	(III). Modal Affordance	(IV). Inter-semiotic relationships
a specific socio-cultural product from day to day of people's societal interaction	how people resort to different materials in making meanings	different potentiality of mode in meaning making from socio-cultural aspect	how modes are configured in particular contexts

Figure 3.1: Four Elements of Multimodality (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, which are referred to as main analysis in this thesis

❖ **Grammar of visual representations**

Barthes (1977, p.37) proposed the concept of visual meaning as a floating chain of the 'signified', which required societal techniques to fix this floating chain to counter the terror of uncertain signs. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) further extended the grammar study of visual communication to cover two prominent natures: (i) in describing explicit and implicit knowledge of social resources and their uses of a particular social group; and (ii) a rather contemporary design of 'western cultures', consisting of implicit and explicit knowledge of resource practices, which they see as cultural variations and as interacting with locality.

Whilst, Barthes (1977) identified image-text relations in three feasible aspects: 'anchorage' as verbal texts extending the meaning of the image; 'illustration' as images communicating predominant messages; and 'relay' when the two elements are equally predominant in constructing meaning. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), proclaimed that text and image are independently organised messages; and each mode has its own possibilities and limitations in making meaning (p.17).

Kress and Van Leeuwen, from their endeavour to develop multimodal social semiotics as an approach going further beyond the interpretation of linguistics analysis, see that the convention of writing varies according to the historical and specific usages of each

culture, as there is no general application of semiotic principles and processes in the meaning making. They pointed out that written texts appear as the official communicative, assessment and evaluation form in Western culture, whilst visual elements which were previously subservient play a more vital role and are incorporated with written texts and with other graphic and sound elements in today's mass media (pp.16 – 17).

Adami (2017, p.4) mentioned notions of modes through, for example, the hand gesture as a point of direction, or the handshake as negation, a smile as notion of embarrassment, gaze for focusing, touch as solidarity, and distance by body language and position, whilst clothing could assert people's identity and font type to create professionalism, etc.

❖　　　　　**Representation structure**

The two terms representing how participants are connected by a vector, are 'narrative' and 'conceptual' patterns. Whilst the former presents the vector and unfolds actions, events and process of change, the latter precludes vector and presents participants in terms of their class and structure of meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.59).

'Narrative process' describes actions between participants in which vectoral lines indicate patterns of their relationship. It also involves action and reaction processes, in which relations between 'actor', 'goal' and 'participants' are depicted (pp.59-74). The 'actor' is the participant at which the vector departs, whilst 'goal' is the participant at which the vector points. Action process consists of transactional and non-transactional processes. The former is done by the 'actor' to the 'goal', whilst participant in the latter has no goal or aiming at no-one and nothing (p.63). Reactional process concerns the structure in which the vector line is made by an eyeline of the represented participants. In this case, Kress and Van Leeuwen mentioned 'reactor' and 'phenomena' in place of 'actor' and 'goal' (p.67). In addition, there are two types of participants: 'interactive participants' are participants who receive the messages by reading, listening, or viewing the image, whilst 'represented participants' are those who are represented in the image or speech (p.48). There are three interaction patterns of participants in the meaning-making process: (i) relations between represented participants; (ii) relations between interactive and represented participants; and (iii) relations between interactive participants (p.114).

For 'conceptual patterns', Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) noted another three processes comprising of 'classification', 'analytical' and 'symbolic' in explaining meaning-making processes. 'Classification process' concerns how depicted elements in the frame categorise and differentiate participants; and how these affect their relations with other participants (pp.79-87). Another conceptual pattern is 'analytical process'. It portrays a part-whole relationship in which the small parts refer to 'possessive attributes' and the whole part is the 'carrier' (p.87). 'Symbolic process' illustrates the participants' meanings or state of being. The process consists of 'symbolic attribute' representing two participants, one representing identity in relation to the other; whilst 'symbolic suggestive' involves one participant and depicts overall mood and environment rather than details of specific action (pp.105-109).
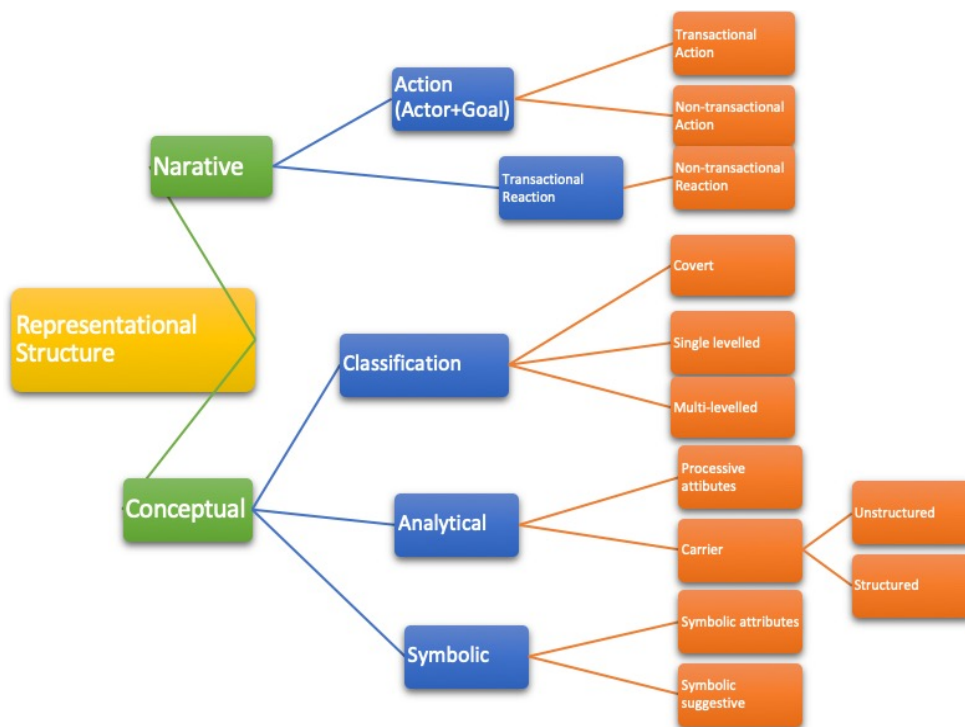
Figure 3.2 Representation process adapted from Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006).

In addition, 'multidimensional structural embedding' explains the complex elements of visual represe
ntations which embrace different processes, including (i) classification process; (ii) analytical process; (iii) symbolic process and (iv) transactional processes (p.107-108).

❖ **Meta-Functions of communication**

By adopting the theoretical notions of Halliday's three meta-functions of communication, Kress and Van Leeuwen indicated that visual representations and all semiotic modes have to fulfil representational and communicational requirements. The three meta-functions, which identify how the sign-producers shape and associate with reality and themselves, constitute power relations, and select textual relations in the communicative environment as described below:

(I). Ideational meta-function is the ability of semiotic modes to represent objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system or in the semiotic system of a culture (p.42). If represented participants directly look at the viewer's eyes, contact is established. However, there is a case that the viewer is not an object but the subject of the look, so then no contact is established (p.119). Based on Halliday's SFL (1978), there are four types of textual interactive functions communicated with the audience: (i) to offer information (ii) to offer goods and services; (iii) to demand information; and (iv) to demand goods and services (p.122). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) also indicated interactional patterns between represented participants and interactive participants by using the term 'offer' and 'demand' relations, which illustrate how the represented participants connect to the viewer. Whilst the former requires less engagement degree between represented participants and the viewer, the latter is the scenario in which the viewer is directly addressed. In this case, there is communicative power and a sense of direct involvement between the two participants (pp.120-121).

(II). Interpersonal meta-function is the ability of semiotic modes to convey social relations between the sign producer, the viewer and the represented object. The depicted person could either be addressed directly or as an absence of interaction (p.43).

Three Meta-Functions of Communication
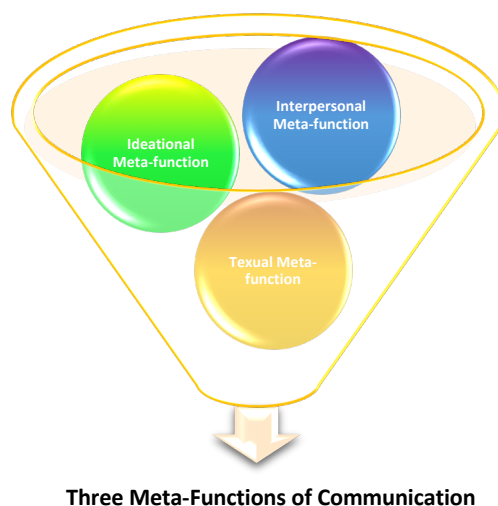
**Figure 3.3 indicating the three meta-functions of communication adopted from Halliday's Meta-functions
by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) pp. 42-43**

(III). Textual meta-function is the ability of semiotic modes to form text which is coherent internally within itself and externally with the produced context. The three inter-related compositions of textual meta-functions are: (i) information value represented by textual positioning, e.g. different areas portrayed in the image: left or right, top and bottom, centre and margin, etc. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p.186) what appears on top of the axis of the page could be interpreted as 'ideal' information, whilst what appears at the bottom of the page is regarded as 'real' information. Horizontal and vertical structuring also provide different dominant interpretations. Whilst vertical elongation created a more significant prominence of the top part, and the less valued information of the bottom. Horizontal elongation also constructs 'given' and 'new' information to the audience. Whilst information located at the left side of the image represents what is already known to the viewers, the right-side element is regarded as 'new' information which is unknown to them. In addition, what appears at the centre attracts the most attention, or is considered as the most vital information. What appears at the margin is regarded as less valued (pp.187-196); (ii) Salience explains how the elements are designed to engage audience, e.g. contrast of tone, size of object, foreground and background, etc.; and (iii) Framing means how the depicted elements are connected and disconnected as well as unified or disunified (p.177).

Margin Given Ideal

Margin New Ideal

Real Given Margin

Real New Margin
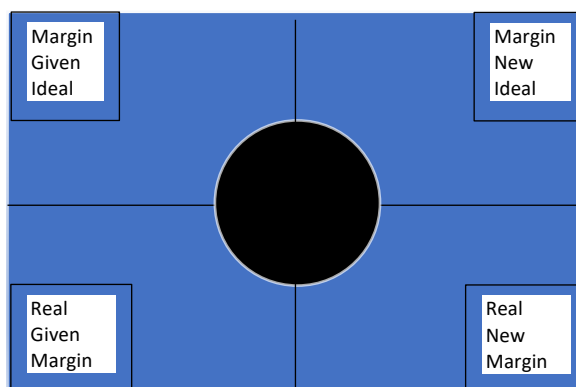
Figure 3.4 Spatial elements adapted from Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), pp.187-196

3.2.1.B. Multimodality and Legitimacy

As Bitektine (2011) asserted legitimacy as a vital concept in contemporary studies of organisations and institutions, communication theorists (such as Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999) also apply the concept of legitimacy in their work. Baschet (2008) mentioned an expectation of the media in conveying signs and meaning. The classic communication theorists like Weber (1964, p. 325), also highlighted that language is the most vital resource in constructing legitimacy, particularly in transmitting human experiences. This is the case in which Van Leeuwen (2007) elaborated that legitimating experience is constructed through vocabulary.

However, recent studies also unveil the relationship between verbal and non-verbal elements in constructing legitimacy by mentioning the subordinated role of visual and audio modes in complementing the verbal mode, which plays the most vital role in constructing legitimacy (Henderson, 2007; Schroder, 2013). For example, Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 107) in his study pointed out music as modal resources of audio text in escorting representations of social practices to demonstrate moral evaluation and legitimation. Schroder (2013) meanwhile mentioned spatial resources in constructing legitimacy.

3.2.1.C Multimodal Analysis on the Facebook Website

Lemke (2002) mentioned that Facebook's website consists of visuals/signs as a form of multimodal discourse, whilst the predominant modes are visual, verbal, textual and audio. According to Shin et al. (2013, p. 70), the Facebook website, in which multimodal

resources including the visual, audio, and verbal are made available, provides its audience with promotions on product or institutional information, special events information, news or updating information, and public service information. In addition, institutions / organisations tend to communicate/ update their information by utilising a convergence of textual, visual and audio links, plus text, whilst responding mostly with the textual element.

Lemke (2002) and Pauwels (2012), who conducted a multimodal analysis of the website, commented that multimodal resources are considered a vital influencing factor in demonstrating both producer's intended purpose of communication and audience participation via the online platform, and could be assessed via multimodal discourse. Lemke and Pauwels also commented that textual and visual elements are historically and culturally shaped in constructing meanings, and modes always function in contact in communicating meaning. Lemke (2002) also introduced the three semiotic functions in meaning-making, including: presentational meaning, which describes action state; orientational meaning, which is demonstrated through the relationship of participants within a communicative scenario; and organizational meaning, which is considered as the setting of a communicative act and governs a more specific meaning of presentational and orientational meanings. Whilst these three functions in meaning making can be perceived verbally, visually, audibly, gesturally and spatially through online multimodal resources.

3.2.2 Legitimacy and Legitimation Theory

Legitimacy is the next core concept in this project. Broadly speaking, the term 'legitimacy' is normally defined in relation to political and societal aspects. It is commonly associated with the features of 'hierarchical power relations' between the authoritative body and the sub-ordinated, particularly in a state context that allows the former to rule and exercise power over the latter for collective compliance (See Weber, 1978; Suchman, 1995; p, 575; Hurd, 2007; Billerbeck and Gippert, 2017). Hurd (2007) suggested that the term 'legitimacy' does not necessarily coincide with 'legality' as not all legal acts are considered legitimate. The two terms could hardly become one when the ruler, institution or actor cannot prove their own legitimacy, and social regulation is considered more difficult and costly (Taylor, 2001, p.416).

'Legitimation' is considered a collective continuous process, performed as a mechanism to show voluntarily compliance in fulfilling certain societal and cultural expectations, norms, values and rules of law, in gaining support, and avoiding sanction from society (see Suchman, 1995; Berger et al., 1998; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999; Erkama and Vaara, 2010). Both in a state-related context and in broader studies of legitimacy, legitimation is divided into two strands: subjective and objective.   Subjective model believes in the relations between the rule and external moral standard. It is considered relational as it concerns a people or audience's individual or collective view or acceptance on the leader's or administration's as legitimated or having the right to govern (Weber, 1978). The objective model emphasises the quality of the rules or principles itself. In other words, the objective approach is assessed on a normative standard as to whether the ruler or administration fulfil the moral requirements of people (See Bodansky, 1999; Buchanan, 2003; Keohane, 2006).

Likewise, Habermas (2007), also suggested that legitimacy is assessed by how a rule or institution benefits people. On a contrary, the inability of a rule or institution to protect and benefit their people is a source of their de-legitimation. However, Locke in his democratic theory (1980), believed that legitimacy is put forwarded by people's consenting to the rule or institution which is depicted as a voluntary process in transferring people's authority to the institution. Taylor (2001), however, proposed another legitimacy model commenting on the right procedure at the heart of legitimacy. This means that, although people may see the rule or institution acting or deciding against their will or interest, the legitimacy is yet sustained as long as the procedure is right. Furthermore, Hurd (2007) mentioned strategies to legitimise and de-legitimise power to use the existing norms and values of society to justify one's position (p.3)

According to Van Leeuwen and Wodak (2007, p.92), there are four legitimation strategies: (i) authorisation by referring to the authority of tradition, custom and law; and of persons in whom institutional authority;(ii) moral evaluation by referring to value systems; (iii) rationalisation by referring to goals and uses of institutionalised social action, and the knowledge of society that has been constructed to endow them with cognitive validity; (iv) mythopoesis, by referring to narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions.

Legitimation Model	Process	Assessment	Representative Theorists
1. Subjective	Based on standard of rules, regulations and (external) moral requirements	Concerning individual's or collective's views in accepting the leader's legitimacy in consenting and voluntarily transfer their authority to the rule	For example, Weber, 1978; Locke, 1980
2. Objective	Based on the quality of rules, regulations and principles itself	Concerning normative standard whether the ruler or administration fill in moral requirements of people; protect and offer people benefits	For example, Bodansky, 1999; Buchanan, 2003; Keohane, 2006
3. Right procedure	Based on the right procedure	Concerning the right procedure as applied by the rule or institution, although this goes against people's will and interest	For example, Taylor, 2001

Table 3.1 Legitimation models adapted from 3.2.2

I see these varied perspectives and interpretations of 'legitimacy, are rather built upon the prominent context of 'whose legitimacy is it?', and 'what are the interpretations and references it is built on? Thus, I would like to investigate how the 'marginalised' group of female clerics in Thailand referred to these process(es) in constructing their own interpretations of legitimacy in negotiating with mainstream discourse through multimodal approaches.

3.2.3   Gender Ideology in Thai Society

The next reference is gender ideology in Thai society, which I would also like to see how it is closely knitted with the controversial debate on 'legitimacy' of the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand. As aforementioned in Chapter 1, mainstream discourse (re)produced by Thai religious authorities appears as a prominent factor in illegitimating *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism. Thus, I would firstly explore gender ideology in Buddhism which to some extent concerns the explanations of gender beliefs in Thai society. Then I proceed to gender ideology which has been predominantly persisting in Thai society from classic right through to contemporary Thai society.

3.2.3.A.   Gender Ideology in Buddhism

Two vital stances in interpreting gender ideology in Buddhism are those mentioned 'gender patriarchy'; and 'gender neutral'.

To begin with, gender patriarchy refers to certain discourses pointing out lower status of women in Buddhism as compared to men's, which to some extent is argued to have association with women's inferior role in larger Thai society (Tamolin**, 2006**). These discourses refer to Pali canonical texts, mentioning the Buddha's reluctance to allow women to be ordained at the very first place, and his successive issuance of 'the eight *Garudhammas*' for *bhikkhuni* to follow. This is argued to put them in a lower position to *bhikkhu* regarding how they relate to each other (*Bhikkhu* Analayo, 2014). As mentioned in the texts, there were at least more than three times that the Buddha had declined Queen Pajapati's – or his stepmother's request for ordination[14]. Although the reason for this was unclear, it was mentioned in different early Buddhist texts that he was concerned that by allowing women to be ordained as *bhikkhuni* and being part of his *sangha* would shorten the life of his religion by half (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha 2014).[15] The discourses seemingly highlighted the unintentional will of the Buddha in establishing *bhikkhuni sangha* as part of his fourfold assemblies. It pointed out that only after the insistent requests of Ven. Anandha in allowing Queen Pajapati to be ordained as (the first) *bhikkhuni* in Buddhism that the Buddha gave permission but under certain condition that she agreed to adhere to the *Garudhammas.* The name represents the eight heavy rules which are additional requirements adhered by *bhikkhuni* beyond the monastic rules that are commonly applied to male *sangha*. For instance, these rules require that, *bhikkhuni* who has been ordained even for a hundred years must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, and do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day; and *bhikkhu* must not be abused or reviled in any way by *bhikkhuni* (Phra Payutto, 2011). The fact that *bhikkhuni* have to adhere to 311 monastic disciplines [*Vinaya*], whilst *bhikkhu* only adopt 227 monastic rules, were also claimed that the male *sangha* are positioned in a more superior status and *bhikkhuni* are slightly represented as inferior (see for example, Phra Payutto, 2011; *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2011; *Bhikkhu* Analayo, 2014).

Apart from these arguments from Buddhist canonical texts, the so-called 'gender patriarch' discourses continue to discuss the implications of gender-biased attitudes and rules in Buddhism which have continued and evolved over the time and, at some points,

[14] The text claimed there were three requests from the Queen for *bhikkhuni* ordination and then Ven. Anandha who was believed to be a mediator in this course had asked for the Buddha's permission for at least three times. And until the last request from Ven. Anandha that was believed that the Buddha then gave permission but with certain conditions, especially the adherence to the eight *Garudhammas*.
[15] This reason, however, has been argued extensively in contempory movements for *bhikkhuni* ordination both in Thailand and internationally, which will be discussed in a later part of this section.

reinforced the seemingly 'lower status' of women in Buddhism. *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha (2011) pointed out general beliefs among Buddhists against women ordination, all of which clearly demonstrate gender-biased attitudes in Buddhism. For example, it is commonly quoted that by admitting women into *sangha*, the social structure will be weakened and by having too many women, the *sangha* will be weakened. There is also a general belief that the best form of merit making is ordination, and only men can enjoy this from birth.

Moreover, the among the others is the issue on legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in contemporary era. Although it was believed that the Buddha had established *bhikkhuni* as one member of his fourfold communities, those who opposed the revival of *bhikkhuni* ordination in the present-day *Theravada* tradition argue that *bhikkhuni* lineage, in *Theravada* tradition has died out since the 13th century and subsequently, the reviving *bhikkhuni* ordination these days is technically impossible as the ordination requires the engagement of dual *sangha* involving members from *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha* (Seeger, 2018, p.26). These statements pinpoint the seemingly 'gender patriarch messages', as argued by for example, *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha (2014), commenting that this is actually a technical problem, if the revival is impossible, we can of course initiate it as the lineage is already established 2600 years ago by the Buddha.

According to Tomalin (2009), although women are denied full ordination rights in many Buddhist contexts, they can opt to live a religious/monastic life; but across the board, these options are limited in terms of the status and opportunities that they offer to women. In Thailand, for instance, the only formal religious option offered to women is the life as *mae-chi*, a white-robed nun who also shave their heads and eyebrows as a sign of detachment from their physical appearance.For the fact that they normally adhere to 8 or 10 percepts, live in the monastery and provide services such as cooking, cleaning for monks, their status is regarded as much lower than that of a monk or *bhikkhuni* (Pranee, 2019). As their main duties reinforce women's traditional role as 'housekeeper' but in the monastic realm, only a smaller number of them are empowered to do charity work and teach meditation to lay people. Muecke (2005) mentioned that in *Theravada* tradition, *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* are regarded as 'blesser' as they accumulate merit by practicing a very high number of precepts, thus are eligible to bless lay people with the power of their merit. Whilst, *mae-chi*, on the other end, is regarded as 'merit seeker' who only train themselves with fundamental precepts. In some places, *mae-chi* are regarded as having

a social status that is even lower than that of ordinary women (Seeger, 2018). In a more negative scenario, *mae-chi* could also be claimed as 'harmful' to the purity of monkhood. Officially, status of *mae-chi* is interpreted differently by different ministerial laws/orders which are not in conformity, leading to their limited opportunities and rights to participate fully in public services and to get due support from religious authorities.

Shifting to discourse on 'gender neutral' in Buddhism, on a contrary, it argued that gender prejudice or male patriarchy interpretation of the Buddhist teachings was a later addition (Murcott, 1991; Sponberg, 1992; Shaw, 1994; cited in Tomalin, 2014, p.88) which should be considered as non-true Buddhism (Chatsumarn, 1991: 31–34; Kunlavir 2006: 2, 8–10). According to these discourses, Buddhist ultimate truth reaffirms an equal human ability to complete different stages of spiritual development regardless of biological qualities or gender attributes (See *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2011). Thus, both men and women should have equal opportunity to practice towards the attainment of such awakening stages. To argue with the 'gender patriarchy' discourses, they claim that the Buddha had envisaged from the very beginning that he would establish *bhikkhuni sangha* as part of the four core pillars of his religion (*Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, 2014) and the issuance of the eight *Garudhammas* was a 'protective mechanism' to guide male and female *sangha* on monastic codes of conduct which will help them function harmoniously within the pre-existing patriarchal societal context. Some Buddhist scholars with 'gender neutral' attitudes further argue out that ultimate goal for ordination is freedom from defilement incumbent on reaching full awakening where any prejudice based on caste, social standing, race or gender should be left behind.

Bhikkhuni Dhammanandha (2014), provided anti-arguments on some general beliefs against women ordination in Buddhism. According to her, there are myths surrounding the inclusion of women in the *sangha*. Having a full understanding of the cultural context of these myths helps to demystify some of these seemingly gender-biased beliefs and to work towards the advancement and empowerment of women through ordination. For example, the most prevalent myth which is repeatedly refered to, probably, is the Buddha's statement: 'by admitting women in the *sangha*, the life of the religion will be shortened'. As she explained, this statement appeared in the converstation the Buddha had with Ven. Anandha after admitting women to be part of his *sangha* order. Having made the statement, the Buddha followed with the laying of the eight *Garudhammas* for *bhikkhuni* to follow, actually for prevention and protection, just like a man building a dam

to prevent a flood. Logically, it would be absurd for the Buddha to establish the *bhikkhuni* order knowing full well that it would cause an early decline in the Buddhist teachings. Therefore, this interpretation is the result of reading his statement out of context, causing such a myth to be sustained.

Other arguments in support of gender neutral message in Buddhism refer to, for example, inclusion of numerous passages in the Pali canonical texts where women are depicted in a favourable light and many specific outstanding women, both lay and monastic, are highly praised and reported to have achieved high levels of spiritual attainment and super human-power (Seeger, 2018). Seeger (2018, p 21) also refered to the observation made by *Bhikkhu* Analayo, claiming that the Pali canonical passages voicing attitudes of negativity towards women appear to be later additions or at least require contextualisation.

3.2.3.B. Gender Ideology in Thai Society

There is an increasing discussion on the need to understand the role that religion plays in shaping gender ideology in a particular society. Tomalin (2006) mentions that within the field of 'gender and development', an understanding of the influence that religious traditions have on women's social status or economic opportunity is increasingly being recognized as an important factor in the pursuit of female empowerment.

There are two different views regarding relationship between Buddhism and gender ideology in Thai society. The first group, as influenced by feminist thinking, claim that gender ideology in Thai society is predominantly influenced by the embeded gender inequality beliefs and values in Buddhism, and thus it tends to be patriachal. The other group, including Hanks (1963) and Tannenbaum (1999) argued that explaining gender ideology in Thai society through major debates in Buddhism alone is insufficient as it lacks ethnological perspective especially when referring to Buddhism as the sole influence on the whole cultural domains. This latter group added that the common portrayals of gender equality in Southeast Asian countries tend to be more flexibly negotiable between the two ends-gender patriarchy and the evolving gender equality and complementary thinking. As most of Thailand's socio-cultural norms and practices are associated with Buddhism (Errington, 1991; King and Wilder, 2003), I believe that gender ideology in Thailand is to some extent influenced by 'traditional' Buddhist beliefs and ways of life.

Yet, in the light of modernisation and globalisation processes, these beliefs and values are altered towards more 'gender-balance' direction in many aspects.

To begin with, the studies of Tannenbaum (1999) claim that status and power are the values of main concern in Thai society, which could be observed through the gender frame. Ancient Thai literatures influenced by gender ideology in Buddhism reflect values of male patriarchy in Thai society. For example, *Tri Bhumi Phra Ruang*, the oldest religious-based literature in Thai history, mentioned that women had subordinated role due to what they have done in the past life, especially their sexual misbehaviours and misconducts which brought them to be reborn as 'women' in this life. Being born as a man is believed to be privileged in many ways, including having the chance to be ordained (see, for example, 1980; Runjuan, 1994). In addition, Rabiabrat (2003) also mentioned several other literatures from the old days[16], which explained the codes of conduct for noble and aristocratic Thai women in similar message that women will be dignified through their respectful and loyal conducts towards their husbands.[17] This derived from precept number 3: refraining from sexual misconducts*,* that a good Buddhist is expected to practice.

Whilst Deliah (2014) and Komkrit (2016) additionally indicated a mythological narrative from Buddhist scripture underlining women undergoing menstruation as being rendered impure, and this impurity is considered to be the consequence of their ill karmic conducts. In addition, there exist 'unsaid prejudices' in connection with the belief in the polluting powers of women (Somrit**,** 2015; Seeger**,** 2018). In some temples, there are signs forbidding women from entering specific areas such as the inner area of the relic *stupa* or the sacred wells as the menstrual blood could magically pollute or interfere with the wholesome powers of the relics or the holy water. In some temple mural paintings**,** women are often depicted as obstacles for men pursuing the path to *nibbhana*.

Tomalin (2006) and Seeger (2009) argued that the missing historical evidence and the long absence of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thailand play a major role in reinforcing male patriarchy in both Thai secular and sacred realms. Although Buddhism traditionally allows both forms of *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* ordination, only men are legitimately allowed to enter lower and full ordination in Thai Buddhism these days. In the old days, status of

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[16] For example, *Krissana Son Nong, Supasit Son Ying, etc.*

boys who were ordained as novices and educated within monastic realms would be upgraded while girls would not have the same chance and were kept at home to practice their handicraft and household skills (Wutthichai, 2007). Although this has gradually changed and today both boys and girls have equal access to formal compulsory education, it is still common that in many families, boys are treated with more privilege than girls and the 'unsaid gender prejudices' still exist. School textbooks also appear to commonly reinforce gender stereotypes.

It has long been a tradition that Thai men who reach their twenties are expected to enter monkhood through full ordination in order to become a 'learned' or 'ripe' man. The value of ordination in Thai society is highly placed, as the Thai word '*buat*' which refers to ordination, means an action of purifying one's soul in order to eradicate evil from the mind (Kakanang, 2018). Manita (2017) added that full ordination is a vital transitional step for young men before entering adulthood and assuming worldly responsibilities such as earning a living, getting married, etc. More importantly, men entering monkhood are normally praised by society not only for the merits that they make for themselves but also the gratitude that they pay back to their parents. It is believed that the merit generated from the ordained life will lead their parents' souls to heaven after death. In fact, ordination can also mean 'attaining the heaven through the sacred yellow robe' (see for example, *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017; Kakanang, 2018). As this tradition is applied only to men, it appears that women in general do not have any equal opportunity to become a 'learned and ripe' person through ordination, so knowledge and power gained through the monastic system remains with men.

Phra Paisal (2003) and Linberg Falk (2007) underline that major roles of Thai women in Buddhism are thus confined as lay devotees and supporters of male monastic members, in providing monks and novices with food and other necessities, cooking, cleaning as well as performing other miscellaneous tasks to support monastic activities. Kirsch (1985) claimed that these burdens obstruct women from participating in spiritually empowering monastic activities on the same level to men. Keyes (1984), however, argued that although Thai women may appear to be inferior to men in this regard, their ability to attain spiritual awakening is by no means not different from men's. Pranee (2019, p. 168), further elaborated that through their traditional roles, women particularly those in rural areas, are far more committed to religious activities than men. For example, they give alms rounds to monks, listen to *Dhamma* teachings, and practice five to eight

precepts more regularly than men do. Besides, the food they cook and prepare for the male *sangha* and the support they provide for their son's ordination are regarded as a huge contribution and devotion for Thai Buddhism.

Nithi (2002) stated that the portrayal of women as the 'heart' of the family as the happiness of family members depend largely on the roles of women as wives, mothers, grandmothers, etc. is a blessing on them. This upgrades their status to be equally important to men's. King and Wilder (2003), mention these traditional roles of Thai women as 'gender-complementary' role, similar to what takes place in other Asian countries.

As already discussed in the earlier section, another form of compromising role of women in Thai Buddhism is *mae-chi* – a white robed nun who observes eight or ten precepts. This option of ordination form is specifically available for women in Thai *Theravada* since hundreds of years ago. Generally, *mae-chi* are claimed to have a much lower status than men in the Thai religious sphere (see for example, Van Esterik, 2000). Despite these negative views, some recent studies have come up with findings on the improved status of *mae-chi* in Thai society. The studies of Seeger (2010 and 2013) pointed out certain cases of *mae-chi* who achieved a high stage of spiritual awakening without having full ordination. In another study (2018, p. 28), he also mentioned the observation by Lindberg Falk (2007) that an increasing number of nunneries in Thailand in recent decades has empowered *mae-chi* as they can govern themselves independently from monks and they have become more visible in the local communities. Lindberg Falk (2007) also revealed the improved status of *mae-chi* by indicating their better educational opportunity and status.

❖ **Societal factors contributing to changes in gender ideology in Thai society and to the revival of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism**

In addition to the Buddhist-related beliefs and values, I also see modernisation as another important factor influencing changes in gender ideology in Thai society, beginning from the reigns of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) onwards. It has laid a foundation for modern Thai citizenship, including the movement on *bhikkhuni* ordination and its legitimacy in later years. These are exemplified by vital reforms during King Mongkut's period (1851-1868), when the foundation of a new Buddhist sect

'*Dhammayutthi Nikaya*' was introduced, emphasizing the refrainment from worldly matters and strict confinement to spiritual and moral practices. This initiation created a paradigm shift in Thai Buddhism from the 'faith-based' towards more rationalized practices. During King Chulalongkorn's reign (1868-1910), the establishment of a modern schooling system, reinforced by the issuance of the first Primary Education Act in the early years of King Rama VI's reign (1910-1925) had legally provided equal access to education for both boys and girls based on the modern secular system. Consequently, women had more employment opportunities, although in limited careers. There also emerged Thai media and movements that fitted well with the lifestyle of middle-class Thai women.

These included, for example, women's magazines and women's collective action to fight for their own rights, such as through petition to have their own choices of marriage life (Litaliean, 2011). Many of bureaucrats at that time were educated in the West, hence modern thinking and living styles were gradually introduced into traditional Thai society, including on women's roles. However, women still retained a lower status in the religious sphere and were not allowed to be fully ordained to acquire a 'learned person' status. When the first Thai woman entered a medical school in 1927, it was the same period that Narin Pasit called for a reform for *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand (See Chapter 1).

I found this seemingly improved status of Thai women during the periods of King Rama IV and V was extensively remoulded since the reign of King Prajadipok (Rama VII-1925-1935) when Thailand was changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, and 'citizen rights' were at the heart of public policy. In 1961, Thailand had its first Socio-Economic Development Plan which geared towards modernisation and growth-oriented development. Since its 8th National Plan (1997-2001), I see the country has gradually shifted to a more balanced holistic and people-centered development approach and gender equality has been one of the prioritized agenda.

According to the gender development report by the National Statistical Bureau and the Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development (2008), Thailand had a mixed experience in promoting gender equality. It was rather clear that while the country had enjoyed constant economic growth since its first National Development Plan, which has consequently lifted its status from 'developing' to 'middle-income' country, inequality still exists in many sectors, including with regard to 'gender and development'. It was reported that whilst girls and boys have had equal access to basic education, at the tertiary level more men have been enrolled in subjects such as engineering and

manufacturing which are regarded as 'high income' areas. And although women's participation in the workforce has increased, it still remained lower than that of men. A large number of women were in the agricultural and service sectors, family businesses and producers' cooperatives, whilst men worked as employers, government employees, private employees, and workers on their own account. Women also had slightly less opportunity for self-development and learning after the age of 29 years due to their household responsibilities as wives and mothers. It is worth noting that percentages of single women-headed families were constantly on the rise and that their representation in political decision making bodies at almost all levels was much lower than that of men. The only exception is at community organisation level where almost half of their leaders nation-wide were women (The National Statistical Bureau in collaboration with the Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2012).

In addition, women were also reported to have higher risk associated with unsafe sex, and this may have to do with men's patriarchy attitude as Tomalin (2009) mentioned that there is a link between Buddhist patriarchy, women's social status and abuses such as domestic violence and sex trafficking, as well an increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. And this point will be needed to be further explored. The report also indicated that women had higher risks of mental illness, but more men committed suicide and that women lived longer than men, consequently, there were more elderly women and many of them lived alone.

Despite these mixed results, it is evident that the modern Thai society has offered more opportunities for women to become self-reliant and independent, including in practicing their rights and freedom to pursue religious faith and practices which are protected under the constitution.

I see that these changes are influenced by both modernisation as well as globalisation processes. So is the change in gender ideology in the Thai society. I argue that gender ideology in contemporary Thailand is an interplay between the growing belief in 'gender equality' as increasingly upheld by literate urbanised Thai women and the traditional belief on 'gender complementary role' which is still persistently upheld among Thai rural women. With regard to gender in Thai Buddhism, Van Esterik (1996) also pointed out the change in attitude of urban Thai women who believe in a person's ability to attain awakening beyond gender. Meanwhile, Pranee (2019) mentioned that Thai women in

rural areas see their inferior status in leading and performing rituals and religious traditions could be negotiated, not as 'equal' but 'complementary' role to that of men.

In addition, I believe religious movements nurtured by the shifting in contemporary Thai Buddhist thoughts; and the international movements on the establishment of *bhikkhuni sangha* in the latter half of the 20[th]century, have created fertile soil for the existing *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thailand to be firmly rooted and constantly growing.

The changing landscape in modern Thai Buddhism which proliferates the blooming of *bhikkhuni* communities is determined by a combination of factors, including the emergence of contemporary charismatic monks who have demonstrated protestant attitudes; and the increasing demand of modern Thai Buddhists searching to access spiritual training experience through insight meditation led by reformist monks who follow a non-orthodox path[18]. This also includes women with non-conformist lifestyle longing for spiritual training outside the traditional male *sangha.* (Phra Paisal, 2003). There is also the more blurring line between the religious and secular realms. There are increasing numbers of qualified lay people, especially female in both realms who are able to understand the 'beyond worldly' *Dhamma* essences and teach and practice it among themselves without necessarily depending on the male *sangha* (Phra Paisal, 2003, pp. 175-191). Itoh (2013) and Delia (2014) also claimed that this increasing potential of female lay persons is due to socio-cultural and political-economic factors which have allowed for 'more fluid' characteristics of the charismatic women in Thai Buddhism, when compared to their other Southeast Asian peers. Lastly, the emergence and blooming of the *bhikkhuni* communities in the country were said to be associated with the declining faith in Buddhism due to the misconducts of some male *sangha* as well as the declining roles and importance of male monastic members (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014).

Apart from the enabling factors within the Thai context, another contributing factor arises from international movements, particularly Fo Guang Shan, *Sakyadhita* International Buddhist Women's Association and International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), which have immensely supported the establishment of *bhikkhuni sangha* worldwide. According to Tomalin (2009), transnational networks play an increasingly important role in initiatives within the Buddhist tradition that aim to transform the tradition in order to enhance women's empowerment. To be more specific,

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[18] For example, Phra Buddhadhasa *Bhikkhu*

'transnational Buddhist Feminist network', is considered as a global strategic process in transcending feminist-related strategies at the global level designed to alleviate the socio-cultural and geo-political constraints; and to empowering Buddhist women locally, particularly concerning the revival of *bhikkhuni* tradition. This endeavour included the revival of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Sri Lanka, Taiwan, USA, Germany, Indonesia, and Thai Buddhism where the emergence of *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha and *Songdhammakalyani* as the first *bhikkhuni* community in the country has created a repercussion impact on the blossoming of *bhikkhuni* community in Thailand; and later on in other Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2013).

I believe these determining factors in the local and international environments are key drivers to the emergence of *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thailand. Although monastic women seem to be excluded from the official *sangha* from historical evidences, a number of Buddhists see the benefits in having *bhikkhuni sangha* in addition to the male *sangha* as the numbers of monks are monumentally descending (Phra Paisal, 2003). In this regard, women are alternatively shifting from an immersed historical lay donor to be a more pro-active ascetic Buddhist practitioner or as an active member of a female monastery. It is also argued that the *bhikkhuni sangha* could respond to the specific needs and problems of lay women in a more appropriate way than the *bhikkhu sangha.*

Gender Ideology	Feminism/ Gender Inequality	Gender Neutral	Gender Complement
In Buddhism	Commenting on gender imbalance and male patriarchy evidenced by the Buddha's repeated rejections to *bhikkhuni* ordination at the first place, and the issuance of the eight *Garudhammas* which appear to put *bhikkhuni* in an inferior status to *bhikkhu,* claiming that the Buddha was unwilling to include *bhikkhuni* in his *sangha*.	Commenting that the eight *Garudhammas* were issued as protective rather than oppressive mechanism, and that gender prejudice and male patriarchy interpretations were later attached and are considered as 'non-true' Buddhism.	Commenting on equal ability of men and women to attain spiritual awakening, and the Buddha's intention to include *bhikkhuni* as part of his fourfold *sangha* where each of the four groups has complementary roles, which are equally important in supporting and sustaining his religion.
In Thai Society	Commenting that gender prejudice and male patriarchy in Thai society is predominantly influenced by patriarchy in Buddhism.	Commenting that explaining gender ideology in Thai society by referring to the debates on male patriarchy in Buddhism from feminism perspectives alone is insufficient as it lacks ethnographical perspectives.	Commenting that gender ideology in Thai society to some extent reflect common portrayal of gender ideology in Southeast Asian countries and tend to be more flexibly negotiable between gender equality and gender complementary roles.

Table 3.2 indicates gender ideology in Buddhism and in Thai society from 3.2.3

Despite these positive aforementioned factors in Thai Buddhism, the Thai *Sangha Council* who has the authority to propose or withdraw certain legislations to support or control concerned issues and parties in Thai Buddhism, opted out to withdraw but to reinforce the 1928 Decree of the former Supreme Patriarch underlining their consistent stance in not accepting the existing *bhikkhuni* communities as part of the official Thai *sangha*. This also poses difficulty in the reviving of the *bhikkhuni* lineage and the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism. This reflects how *bhikkhuni* are perceived as 'marginalised' by the mainstream discourse reproduced by the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council.

3.2.4 Functions of the Buddhist Community

As the existing group of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand did not acquire official status as part of the Thai monastic order, I proceed to explore the functions of traditional and emerging virtual Buddhist communities to understand how these marginalised female clerics fulfil these aforementioned functions to construct their 'legitimacy' in negotiating their official status with mainstream discourse in Thai Buddhism.

3.2.4.A   Definitions of Religious Community

Bartle (2011, p.2) has characterised the meaning of 'community' as 'a group of people who live within a geographical vicinity, interact with each other and play a part in mutual values, interests, or common practices. These people are socio-culturally bonded with races, ethnicities, cultures and religions. They are 'enculturated' or 'acculturated' by patterns of values, codes of conducts, good practices, etc. These applications eventually shape their perceptions and ways of life. Community also relates to the term 'dynamic' which I see the dynamic feature as a balancing force as helps communities to adapt to changes and move forward; and retains and passes on 'community values' to later generations.

In contemporary studies, Bartle (2011, pp.5-7) also re-defined 'community' with more functional interpretations than geographical demarcations. The term encompasses a gathering of people who share similar attentiveness, in particular, subjects, issues or values; and tend to act in accordance to protect or aim for the shared treasures. Religious

communities - as functional communities, which I would like to add here, in a broad sense, refer to specific groups of people bonded by certain religious beliefs, faiths, teachings, ideologies and practices. This type of community is frequently engaged with religious members through organised religious activities and frequently endeavours to secure and maintain their mutual goals or interest. Although religious communities may operate in similar ways, each religion has its own understanding of the term 'community'.

3.2.4.B   What is Buddhist Community?

In Buddhism, the term 'community', has been replaced by the word '*sangha*'. The three connotations of this word are as follow. The first and confined meaning implies groups of ordained people: monks [*bhikkhu*] female monks [*bhikkhuni*], male novices [*samanera*] and female novices [*samaneri*] governed by monastic disciplines. The second and specific sense, refers to a part of the Triple Gems [*Ratanattaya*] - the fundamental Buddhist doctrine embracing i) the Buddha, ii) the *Dhamma* – his teachings and iii) the *sangha* - monastic order or laypeople who enter any stage of 'enlightenment'[*nibbana*]. The other broader meaning encompasses the four members of Buddhist assemblies, including male monks [*bhikkhu*], female monks [*bhikkhuni*], laymen [*ubasok*], and laywomen [*ubasika*] (Phra Payutto, 2002, p. 119).

3.2.4.C   Functions of Buddhist Community

The functions of Buddhist community were two-fold: i) to render appropriate environmental conditions for monastic members [*Sammutisangha*] to stay away from the external faulty society so that they can train their minds and attain different levels of spiritual development through the Threefold Learning [*sikkhattaya*] comprising of morality [*sila*], concentration [*samadhi*] and wisdom [*panna*]; and ii) to role-model the society to follow the right path of his noble *sangha* [*Ariyasangha*] in order to sustain Buddhism.

The aforementioned functional purposes of *sangha* were also paralleled by the two levels of its meanings. The first level was 'social-constructed community' [*Sammutisangha*] comprising of *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha*; whilst the second level was 'noble community' [*Ariyasangha*]. Furthermore, Buddhist scripture also mentioned two vital duties for clerical persons in (i) studying and being competent in *Dhamma* essences and

other apparent contents in the scriptures [*kantha thura*] within their own proficiency; and (ii) applying what they have learnt in the scripture for spiritual practice in eliminating sufferings (*Dhukkha*); gaining insight into the noble truth; and attaining the awakening stage [*Vipassana thura*] (Nirodharam, 2012). Besides, to sustain the Buddha's religion and adherence to the four noble truths, clerics need to carry out five principal duties: i) studying *Dhamma* essences; ii) propagating *Dhamma* essences which they have learnt or heard to others; iii) acknowledging others of *Dhamma* essences which they have learnt or heard; iv) describing *Dhamma* essences which they have learnt or heard to others; and v) reconsidering *Dhamma* essences which they have learnt or heard.

Buddhist community	Meaning	Function
Traditional community	For confined meaning, Buddhist community refers to groups of ordained people who are male monks [*bhikkhu*] female monks [*bhikkhuni*], male novices [*samanera*] and female novices [*samaneri*] governed by monastic discipline. For broader meaning, Buddhist community means the Buddhist four assemblies', including male monks [*bhikkhu*], female monks [*bhikkhuni*], laymen [*ubasok*], and laywomen [*ubasika*] who are Buddhist practitioners. This broader meaning highlights the inter-reliance and companionship of clerics and laity.	1. To render an appropriate environmental condition for monastic members to stay away from the external faulty society so that they can train their minds and attain different levels of spiritual development through the Threefold Learning [*Sikkhattaya*] comprising of morality [*Sila*], concentration [*Samadhi*] and wisdom [*Panna*]; 2. To role model the society to follow the right paths of his noble Sangha [*Ariyasangha*] in order to sustain Buddhism.
Virtual community	'a group of people who share mutual attentiveness, concern, benefit, objective; and interact via the agreed norms or codes of conduct through technological mediation encompassing i.e. computer, mobile phones, etc.' Members of virtual communities do not have to always interact only via online contact but possibly via face-to-face communication.	1. to unite Buddhist communities worldwide and serve as a communicative tool to achieve religious goals in 'eliminating suffering' of members throughout the world; 2. to share Buddhism-related beliefs and practices systems; 3. to establish relation between community members; 4. to explicate/ identify people's identities; 5. to communicate message through multimodal resources available in specific platform.

Table 3.3 indicates functions of the Buddhist community for traditional and virtual aspects, adapted from 3.2.4

In addition, the scripture also mentioned the close relationship between members of the Buddhist community, comprising both clerics and laity. The prominent responsibilities of clerical persons are to (i) help laity to understand *Dhamma* essences which they have not yet understood ; (ii) protect them from doing bad deeds or stop them from having a wicked mind; (iii) guide and train them through the virtuous path; and (iv) let them have a chance to develop merit. Laypeople, meanwhile, are required to support clerics by providing food, services, and other patronage support in return.

3.2.4.D. Virtual Buddhist Community

Buddhist practitioners and laypersons are not restricted to those who appear or participate in Buddhist physical communities but also include those who take part in 'virtual communities.' 'Virtual communities' or 'online communities' are facilitated by a social media platform which allows for interactive participation among communicators beyond the conventional face-to-face communication to include 'two-way' communication of the virtual communicators in real time.

As the world has become an 'information technological society', the term 'virtual community' has emerged to define 'a group of people who share mutual attentiveness, concern, benefit, objective; and interact via the agreed norms or codes of conduct through technological mediation encompassing i.e. computer, mobile phones, etc.' (see Lee et al., 2003, cited in Porter, 2004; Preece, 2000, cited in Porter, 2004).   Members of virtual communities do not have to always interact only via online contact but possibly also via face-to-face communication (Virnoche and Marx, 1997).

Prebish (1999) has identified virtual Buddhist communities as a means to unite Buddhist communities worldwide and serve as a communicative tool to achieve religious goals in 'eliminating suffering' of members throughout the world. Kim (2005) identifies the functions of the virtual Buddhist community in four different aspects. First, it is considered as a 'beliefs community' where beliefs and practice systems are shared. The second function is 'relational communities' where members relate to each other at designated degrees. The next function is 'affective communities' where people's identities are conclusively defined. The last function is 'utilitarian communities' where multimodal resources are organised.

3.3   Practical Application

This section aims to reflect how the core theoretical backgrounds proposed in the previous sections are compatible as a conceptual framework in analysing and answering the three research questions asked in this project.

3.3.1   Multimodality Application

I see the analytical structure of the Multimodality Social Semiotic Analysis described in 3.2.1, as a relevant and adequate tool in understanding the extent in which *bhikkhuni* communities utilise multimodal resources available via their Facebook website and other offline archives in constructing their meaning of 'legitimacy'. It is a sufficient and effective analyzing structure in comprehending how *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam*, negotiate to construct their power structures in horizontal and participatory domains. Particularly, I aim to refer to multimodal analysis in recognizing how the meaning(s) of legitimacy is interpreted and constructed through an ensemble of multimodal semiotic resources, in the meaning-maKkng through their Facebook platform. It is also considered as an adequate analytical lens to understand communication in which more modal resources are employed in the meaning-making process.

Multimodality is additionally regarded as an effective lens through which to understand the re-location of power structures and re-dissemination of knowledge in the horizontal dimension, especially in encouraging the audience to be educated and cultivated in the new-constructed information and value related to the extent of their 'legitimacy' through the available utilised multimodal resources, for example, in acquiring new knowledge through verbal/linguistic communication; whilst the employed visual/ audio modes could also attract a number of users and convert to debate, which turns the platform into a dialogue through these virtual Buddhist communities.

Another practicality is its compatible structure in analysing multimodal constructions through the 'hybridity media system'. This highlights the convergence of online and offline platforms which I select in investigating how the meanings of 'legitimacy' are relocated and constructed by the two selected *bhikkhuni* communities. As aforementioned multimodality is a sufficient structure in analysing online multimodal construction, it is additionally considered as a vital approach in understanding how multimodal semiotic resources are articulated via other offline media channels of the two *bhikkhuni* communities.

Its practicality in this research include its extensive function as a research methodology in gaining an insight into the emergent societal issues as well as techniques in conducting research in the social sciences. Multimodality offers a variety of methods in collecting, transcribing, managing and analysing data and a comprehensive lens to understand the complexity of a social phenomenon by not over-looking the prevalence of a multiplicity of types of media, communication and contextual environments which are utilised in the meaning-making process within specific communicative setting.

Last but not least, I foresee the impact in applying multimodality in my project in three aforementioned aspects: (i) to unveil the role of social media in constructing the meaning of legitimacy, particularly through the Facebook platform - the most favourable social media platform in Thailand; (ii) to contribute better understanding of an impact of media convergence in proliferating room for 'marginalised' female Buddhist communities to construct their own discourse conflicting with those of the mainstream, which will more or less contribute to ongoing debate on the significance and relevance of *bhikkhuni* in Thai society; and (iii) to highlight how multimodality could be added as an effective research methodology in gaining an insight into the complexity of interdisciplinary issues in the contemporary local context which could more or less contribute to further global applications.

3.3.2   Application of Legitimation Theory, Gender Ideology in Thai Society and the Functions of the Buddhist Community

In addition to multimodality, I also refer to the concepts of legitimacy and legitimation theory, gender ideology in Thai society and functions of the Buddhist community as conceptual framework. Firstly, the issue of 'legitimacy' is central to my project as the existing *bhikkhuni* communities are not considered as part of the official Thai monastic order according to mainstream discourse produced by state and Buddhist authorities. In understanding how the existing *bhikkhuni* communities negotiate with the mainstream discourse through their multimodal constructions; the concept of legitimacy and legitimation is referred to as a framework. The analysis will include (i) how the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand interpret their own meanings of legitimacy, and (ii) what legitimation process the two selected *bhikkhun*i communities apply in constructing their meanings of 'legitimacy' within Thai society.

Understanding gender ideology in Thai society is another crucial factor, particularly in explaining how the issue of 'legitimacy' becomes a controversial debate in Thai society. Similarly, theories related to functions of the traditional and virtual Buddhist communities would be useful in analysing how 'offline' and 'online' *bhikkhuni* communities have conformed to any of these functions and how these functions help them to fully engage with their members in constructing their 'legitimacy'.

These three theoretical backgrounds compounding with the multimodality analysis as the main analytical framework in this research make up the conceptual framework used in understanding this complex phenomenon of the issue of 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* communities in Thai society. In a nutshell, the analyses based on this inter-related theoretical framework will portray how the two *Bhikkhuni* communities utilise and take advantage of multimodal constructions through both online and offline channels to achieve their religious missions.

3.4   Conclusion

This chapter aims to explore the relevant theoretical background so as to provide an adequate conceptual framework to guide the research, particularly as to how multimodal analysis contributes to the understanding of how the selected *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand construct their '*legitimacy'* through multimodal constructions. It introduces Multimodal Social Semiotics Analysis of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) as the core framework for analysis, including grammar of visual representations, representation structure, meta-function of communication, the connection between multimodality and the concept of legitimacy, legitimacy and legitimation process, gender ideology in Thai society, and functions of the Buddhist community. The chapter ends up with highlight on practical application of these frameworks in answering the two research questions in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

The next chapter explains the research methodology to explicate how this conceptual framework is integrated for research design, methods and data collection, including the data preparation.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses in detail the process followed in answering the two research questions by presenting (4.2) the conceptual framework, (4.3) the research design, research methods and data collection, (4.5) the data preparation and analysis, and (4.5) the conclusions.

4.2   Conceptual Framework

This section introduces integrated conceptualisations drawn from the key theoretical backgrounds presented in Chapter 3 as a foundation in answering the research questions. In figure 4.1 (below), I apply the Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) as the core analytical framework in understanding how the existing *bhikkhuni* communities interpret and construct their meanings of legitimacy through multimodal constructions via their Facebook website and their offline media archives. Multimodality also provides an analytical framework for the communication environment in which there is a (re)-disseminating of 'knowledge' and 'power structures' by individual and marginalised groups to produce their discourse conflicting with those of the mainstream within their own interest with their semiotic productions.

In addition to multimodality as the core analytical framework, legitimacy and legitimation theory (see 3.2.2) is also referred to in understanding the extent in which the existing *bhikkhuni* communities have demonstrated such a concept and the strategies they use to gain acceptance as a legitimated institution by individuals or collective groups. Additionally, the concept of gender ideology in Buddhism and in Thai society, as well as functions of the Buddhist community both in traditional and virtual forms, are integrated as the founding conceptual structure to understand this interdisciplinary and complicated issue of the 'illegitimacy debate' on *bhikkhuni* ordination and the existing status of *bhikkhuni* in the Thai context.

1. **Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis**
    • Facebook Analysis
    • Offline Media Analysis

    Legitimacy Construction
    • Legitimacy construction from multimodal discourse
    Gender Ideology
    • Gender ideology in Buddhism and Thai society
    Functions of Buddhist community
    • Functions of traditional and virtual communities

Thai Context

2.*Bhikkhuni* **Communities' Facebook and Offline Media Analysis**

4.
(4.1) Meanings of legitimacy (legitimation model)

4.2 Modal resources and inter-semiotic relations in constructing legitimacy

3.

Participatory Observation

Interview

Focus Group Discussion

5. Multimodal Construction of Legitimacy (Facebook and offline platforms) by the marginalised Female Buddhist community in the Thai context.

Figure 4.1 Conceptual Framework in this project

The arrow emanating from the point no.1 to no.2 shows the focal analysis aspect at the centre of the diagram. This is contextualised (as seen circled in the diagram) by socio-cultural factors in Thai society as the project is aimed to understand multimodal constructions of the current *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand who are considered 'marginalised' and not being part of the mainstream Thai monastic order. No. 3 presents additional research methodology to multimodal analysis on the two *bhikkhuni* communities' Facebook website and their offline media archives, combining participatory observation, interview and focus-group discussion with monastic and lay community members of the communities. These helps reflect a more comprehensive insight into the study. No.4 is the research output consisting of: (4.1) the legitimation process/ model that grants the meanings and interpretations of the two *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand; and (4.2) the extent in which multimodal resources are ensembled and

interplayed to construct 'legitimacy' by these two marginalised female Buddhist communities. Lastly, no. 5 indicates the contributions of this research on the studies of multimodality, and *bhikkhuni* communities in Thai Buddhism, particularly on how multimodality could impart the issue of the 'legitimacy' of the marginalised female Buddhist group.

4.3   Research Design

This study requires a framework for understanding how the existing *bhikkhuni* communities construct their meanings of 'legitimacy' through multimodal resources of communication via online and offline platforms. It also involves an analysis through traditional and social media which have distinct engaging levels. Traditional media, on the one hand, are rather message-oriented and applied in a vertical and one-directional dimension, recurring within fixed time and material. Social media, on the other hand, reveal a more interactive networking dimensional with their flowing, horizontally distributed, self-organizing, performance-oriented, multidirectional, and virtual approach (Anderson, 2012: p.10). According to these rationales, the research design is, therefore, crucially important.

Research methodologies also closely related to epistemology – the study of knowledge which reflects how people understand and interpret the world around us. This also constitutes how an argument is developed and how methods are designed in order to unveil our understanding and knowledge. In conducting research in media and communication studies, Anderson (2012) has pointed to four varieties of methodologies, including (i) metric empiricism, (ii) interpretive approaches (iii) critical-cultural hybrids, and (iv) mixed methods. However, in this section, I aim to provide a rationale for my selection based on a comparative discussion only on (i) metric empiricism, and (ii) interpretative empiricism by not including critical-cultural hybrids and mixed methods, which are currently claimed as non-secured and not sufficiently representing good practices.

❖   **Metric empiricism VS interpretative empiricism**

To understand the constructed world, metric empiricism concerns an objective attempt to explain material reality by the non-alignment interaction with evidences and

substances; and systematic identification on assigning quantitative values of variables and the procedures (pp.27-31). It is interested in the characteristics of variables by assuming that everything is connected and creates cause-effecting chains. Thus, learning about these variables will provide more knowledge about the world. In other words, this approach is outlined to identify, assess and explore the connection of variables, and to reach conclusions on their function(s) in some structure.

Berger and Luckmann (1967), on the other hand, argued that the knowledge production does not depends on objective reality alone but also on what people do to produce it; and the affirmation remains as long as the practices sustain it. Thus, according to Anderson (2012), 'interpretive (qualitative) empiricists' commented that objective characteristics of metric empiricism only explain a part of the truth but not the whole of it. Whilst knowledge changes from one community to another, there is no universal explanation. Hence, interpretive empiricism believes that knowledge is socially constructed, and interpretation depends on the logic of narrative and the analysis of our experience, with a reference to the conventions of the research community.

4.3.1   Research Strategy

From the two aforementioned courses, in this project I rely on the interpretative (qualitative) empiricism method (Schutz, 1973; Weber, 1978; Schwandt,1994) as it is the most apt research strategy in answering the three research questions for the following reasons.

First, the focal characteristic of my project is dealing with qualitative rather than quantitative data. It does not begin with any hypothesis or an attempt to prove whether certain theoretical framework(s) provide the right or the wrong explanations. Quite the opposite, the project aims to explore the specific extent in which the meanings of legitimacy are interpreted by the two *bhikkhuni* communities to negotiate with mainstream discourse in Thai Buddhism, which currently 'illegitimates' their official status as part of the Thai monastic order. Therefore, it requires a methodology that could clearly analyse substances related to their understandings of their legitimacy based on a wide range of sources of multimodal discourses via online and offline media channels.

Besides, as its emphasis is multimodal analysis, the project aims to explain how the two *bhikkhuni* communities constructed such meanings through multimodal means of

communication. Hence, it goes further, beyond explaining the corpus and quantification of employed multimodal resources by the two *bhikkhuni* communities and in fact elaborating how these resources are articulated in the meaning-making; and explicating the interplay of employed semiotic modes to construct such meanings. Although the data is explored and gathered across multi-modes and platforms, the range of data is rather limited to the theme 'legitimacy' as interpreted by each community within the timeframe under study: in 2012, 2014 and between 2016 and 2017 which are considered as the major Buddhist events in Thai Buddhism (see 4.3.3.B.). An analysis involves neither quantifying large numerical data nor presenting loads of statistical outcomes. It will mention numbers only to a limited extent to illustrate how the two communities resorted to different multimodal resources in constructing their meanings of legitimacy.

In addition, I select interpretative empiricism (Schutz, 1973; Weber, 1978; Schwandt,1994) as it matches well with the nature of my multimodal study project, which is conducted within the specific socio-cultural context of Thai Buddhism, based on specific themes/ major events in Thai Buddhism, and within a specific timeframe. As an interpretive approach prioritises logic with narrative based on contents and discourse analysis conducted and interpreted within a specific research community, the new knowledge on multimodality and *bhikkhuni* communities emanates from the specific socio-cultural context of Thai society and requires specific research guidelines, ethical practices and implementation specifications applicable to the localised Thai society. In this case, the broader guideline of empirical studies drawn from the Western and international research community is also taken into account, when it is applicably relevant to the project.

Last but not least, my focal platform of analysis contains both analyses on (i) Facebook as a social media platform; and the convergence with an analysis on (ii) the traditional media platform. This study requires recently developed methods in understanding and an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the new knowledge. Interpretative empiricism (Schutz, 1973) suits with this condition by responding and providing sufficient methods to meet these demands of the project.

For all of these reasons, I believe that interpretative (qualitative) empiricism (Schutz, 1973; Weber, 1978; Schwandt,1994) is most suitable for this research and will yield the best interdisciplinary explanations. I have not chosen metric empiricism as it relies on quantifying observation by figures and numbers, which is not the case with my project.

4.3.2   Selection of Research Methods

This section explains the justification and selection of research methods. Qualitative research mainly involves three approaches: (i) ethnographic studies, (ii) case study, and (iii) grounded theory studies (Chai, 2011). While ethnographic research is considered as the broad umbrella, case study fits as one type of ethnographic qualitative studies and acquires a slightly distinct feature. It focuses on the interpretation of one case in a particular context (Hale and Napier; p. 92). Lincoln (1985) defines case study as a study of a specific case in one specific issue, or number of issues occurring within a specific scope and/or specific timeframe. Yin (1993) and Creswell (1998) define case study as a study which is specifically designed for a specific scope and timeframe, and within a specific context. Similarly, Stake (2000) indicated that case study research emphasises not so much the research method but rather the researcher's interest in the case study itself. Grounded theory is considered the most recent approach in ethnographic qualitative research. Based on systematic inductive methods and rather flexible methodological strategies in collecting data, grounded theory aims to formulate new theory from analysed data in explaining the studied empirical occurrences (Charmaz, 2004).

4.3.3   Justification of Case Study

4.3.3.A   Case Study

According to Chai (2011 p.148-149), ethnographic case study is compatible in (i) searching a new breakthrough in a specific case and scenario; (ii) searching new knowledge for the specific case and issue; and (iii) searching explanations, for a complicated phenomenon or societal issue that currently cannot be explained or clarified. Thus, in this project, I select the case studies research method for the following reasons.

First, case study research is suitable for the studied timeframe of a PhD project, whilst ethnographic qualitative research requires relatively longer periods of time. Besides, as I selected two *bhikkhuni* communities as a case study, I cannot allocate a sufficient timeslot to conduct an ethnographic study in both places. In addition, applying grounded theory is not suitable with my research project as it requires a corpus of precursory empirical studies to produce a ground-breaking re-percussion of the project. Case studies, then, best suit with the design of my project to gain an insight into how multimodal resources are employed to construct the meanings of legitimacy of the

existing *bhikkhuni* communities in Thai Buddhism through a multimodal lens. Although Chai (2011) has mentioned limitations in applying an ethnographic case study in that it requires socio-cultural background knowledge, I am confident in implementing case study research and fulfilling this aspect, as I am a Thai female and has long been active as a Buddhist practitioner who is familiar with the female Buddhist community. I can conveniently gain access to resources for data collection both in Thai languages such as Buddhist scriptures, and documents related to *bhikkhuni* studies in Thailand; as well as from relevant English literatures which highlighted the advantages in conducting an ethnographic case study.

Accordingly, the grounds in selecting the two *bhikkhuni* communities, *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam*, as a case study in this project are due to LeCompte and Schensul's (1999) criteria for selecting case study which are three-fold. First, they mentioned (i) quality of case study that is either inclusive or exclusive of the researcher's planned criterion. The next rationale is (ii) sufficient resources for data collection; and lastly (iii) commodious environment for data collection. *Songdhammakalyani* is selected because it is the first *bhikkhuni* community in Thailand, whilst *Nirodharam* is chosen due to its currently largest number of monastic members in the country. These two communities together make up the majority of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand at the moment. Selecting *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* as case studies is justified as one of them is the first and oldest Bhikkhuni community in Thailand, whereas the other is the largest.

In addition to these aforementioned reasons, *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* are also chosen due to their strong and grounded foundations, particularly with regard to the qualifications of their abbesses, their objectives and administrative arrangement, and communication policies and strategies. All of these provide affluent information for in-depth investigation into their interpretation and construction of 'legitimacy' (see Chapter 5). Thus, I believe these two communities, could provide substantial information as a case study of the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand as in selecting a case study for qualitative research, it is suggested that a small quantity of case study, irrespective of sampling number, could be selected to potentially provide a wealth of information and explain specific circumstances/ incidents (see Aita and McIlvain, 1999, p. 258; Charmaz, 2003, p.265; Gerring, 2007, pp. 21-22). Besides, it is a duty of the skilful researcher in observing, interpreting and presenting some sampling data in a systematic order with notable quality as a representative of an extensive population (Battaglia, 2008, p. 524; Duff, 2008, p.30). The two communities are considered as a relevant sampling case study

that could render a rich and broad range of information in understanding the complex phenomenon of *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand.

4.3.3.B. Theme of Analysis

According to Cresswell (1998); and Stake (2000), everything can be chosen as a case study depending on the researcher's interest in conducting an in-depth investigation regarding that specific issue by defining the specific scope of study, and scope of analysis. In this project, theme of analysis is determined by remarkable events related to *Theravada bhikkhuni* communities and Thai Buddhism which took place in the years 2012, 2014 and between 2016 and 2017. I see these three themes as interesting ones that could potentially contribute to my knowledge and understanding of how the current *bhikkhuni* communities interpret and construct their legitimacy through multimodal constructions via online and offline channels, based on the following reasons.

❖ ***Buddha Jayanti***

The year 2012 celebrated the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment, which represents his victory over defilements or the stage to end sufferings. This special occasion is called '*Buddha Jayanti*', which was celebrated worldwide throughout the year, but more intensively in May which is the month of *Vesak*- a traditional Buddhist holiday that stands for the prominent events of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away. All of them are believed to have happened on the same day. In Thailand, there were various celebrating events such as sessions on *Dhamma* preaching and discussion among Buddhist organisations, international conferences and seminars on Buddhism, establishing networks in scholastic Buddhist sphere, city pilgrimage, Buddhist Film Festival, meditation training, and special ordinations of *bhikkhu*, and male and female novices for both Thai and non-Thai people from governmental and private sectors.

❖ ***Bhikkhuni Ordination* in Songkhla**

The next vital event took place in 2014 when there had been an increased public debate specifically on *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand. On December 2, 2014, senior male monks, including Ven. Mahindavamsa –the Supreme *Mahanayaka* of *Amarapura Nikaya* of Sri Lanka; and other top-ranked female monks from Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Indonesia

were invited to give ordination to 8 *sikkhamanana* [19] and 47 *samaneri* at *Thippayasathan Bhikkhuni Arama*, in Songkhla (Daily News, 2014). On this occasion, the abbess of *Songdhammakalyani* and other governmental officials from local provinces were also invited to attend the ceremony (Kom Chud Luek, 2014). On December 11, 2014, the ordination was announced as 'illegitimated' by the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council's Reinforcement of the 1928 Decree issued by the former Thai Supreme Patriarch - Kromluang Chinawon Siriwat to disallow monks and novices from giving ordination to women in Thailand (Daily News, 2014). On the same occasion, the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council also collaborated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not to issue visas to all foreign monks who would attend the *bhikkhuni* ordination ceremony in Thailand in the future (Daily News, 2014). This incident stimulated widespread debates and controversial arguments among Thai people, including coverages on mainstream media. There were also a number of movements, including those led by *Songdhammakalyani*, to call for the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council to reconsider their decision (Kanjana, 2014).

❖ **Royal Funeral and Cremation of the late King *Bhumibol Adulyadej***

The last major event chosen in this project occurred between 2016 – 2017 after King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX) passed away on 13 October 2016, and up until the Royal Cremation Ceremony held on 26 October 2017.As the King was highly admired, loved and perceived as one of the 'Thai Trinity' representing 'Thai national pillars' comprising the nation, religion(s), and monarch, Thai people from both local areas and abroad organised special events in paying tribute and showing gratitude to him during this whole one- year period. There were major events taken place in Thailand in tribute to him. For example, Thai TV channels broadcast 24-hour special programmes about the King's multifarious duties to depict his invaluable devotions and contributions to Thais through his initiatives and implementations of his 4,685 Royal projects, etc. for 30 days from October to November 2016. Most Thais also changed their social media profile pictures to a black screen so as to express their mournful mood over his death. Monastic communities countrywide also arranged special activities and events such as ordination, chanting, meditating and praying to offer merits to the late King. People from all over the place had also paid respect to his Royal Urn at the Royal Palace[20]. Furthermore, from October 2016, individuals and groups of divergent occupants were organized into

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[19] A female novice in training to become *bhikkhun*i
[20] The daily figure was very high around 100,000. There were 110,889 people attending the event on the last day of 6 October 2017, which marked 12.73 million people in total for 337 days.

volunteer groups to offer services to accommodate people coming to pay homage to the Royal Urn and the upcoming Royal Cremation ceremony. There was free food; free rides to and from the nearest spots of the Royal Palace to bus stops and public transport; traffic staff; information and reception sectors; first aid and basic life support; cleaning; security; construction and decoration; public services, etc., which at least 4 million people participated in these volunteering activities. The actual Royal Cremation Ceremony took place on 26 October 2017 at Thung Phra Meru - Sanam Luang, Bangkok. There were also the replica ones held at every provincial city hall all over the country to let Thai people from all walks of life attend the ceremony and present sandalwood flowers to pay a final tribute to the King.

These three aforementioned themes are considered vital major Buddhist events in Thailand. Being a part of Buddhist community, albeit lacking official status as part of the Thai monastic order, *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* had played a role in all of these events. Thus, I aim to understand how the two communities negotiate their meanings of legitimacy with the mainstream discourse through multimodal constructions in relation to these major events.

The year 2012 is considered the major Buddhist event celebrated worldwide, and I would like to explore content related to this theme via the two communities' Facebook websites, particularly how they represent themselves in fulfilling the functions of the Buddhist community both traditionally and virtually. I also see the 2014 incident as central to the debate on legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in contemporary Thai Buddhism, as explained in Chapter 1. Thus, I question whether this topic was communicated via the two *bhikkhunis*' online and offline channels in relations to the meanings of their legitimacy. For the last selected theme between 2016 to 2017, I would like to explore how the two communities construct their 'legitimacy' by showing their connection with the late King of Thailand, who stands for one of the core elements of the Thai Trinity comprising of the nation, religion(s), and monarch. If so, what resources are employed and how does the interplay of modes construct the meanings of legitimacy within the Thai socio-cultural context; and how do such constructions fulfil the meta-functions of communication and stay in line with the communities' objectives?

4.3.4   Scope of Analysis

With the aforementioned selected cases and themes of study, I aim to understand how multimodal constructions via Facebook and offline media are utilised by the two cases (*bhikkhuni* communities) to construct the meanings of 'legitimacy' in Thai society. I applied Multimodal Social Semiotics Analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006), as a core analytical framework to investigate (i) how *bhikkhuni* communities employed multimodal resources, in relation to the meanings of their legitimacy within the specific context of Thai Buddhism; and (ii) how these employed modes, represent the interplay of modal resources as configured in this specific context of Thai Buddhism (Bezemer, 2012). The study also explores representing structure including narrative and conceptual patterns which explain actions, relationships between, and classifications of participants in the represented frame of the meaning-making process. It additionally aims to explain how semiotic modes are employed by *bhikkhuni* communities via their multimodal constructions to fulfil representational and communicational requirements in three aspects: ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions.

In addition, the concept of legitimacy and legitimation theory is integrated, particularly to explore the aspect in which *bhikkhuni* communities are referring to a specific legitimation process in indicating their meanings of 'legitimacy'. The concept of gender ideology in Buddhism and Thai society, as well as functions of the Buddhist community, are additionally referred to in order to explain their strategies in constructing their legitimated status in negotiating with mainstream discourse in Thai society.

4.3.5   Methods for Data Collection

According to Chai (2011, p.158), a case study research should combine divergent means of data collection in order to gain a comprehensive insight into the study. In this regard, my project also relies on multimodality as a research technique to thoroughly understand the complicated debate of *bhikkhuni* legitimacy in contemporary Thai Buddhism, by adopting multimodal analysis on the Facebook website, offline media archives, participatory observation, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion, as presented below.

4.3.5.A.   Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis through the Facebook Website

I rely on multimodal social semiotic analysis as the main data collection in this thesis; and in order to answer the research question I have selected Facebook of the two *bhikkhuni* communities' namely: *Thaibhikkhunis* of *Songdhammakalyani* (www.facebook.com/thaibhikkhunis) and *Nirodharam* of *Nirodharam* (www.facebook.com/nirodharam) as a main analysing platform. The first rationale is due to the pervasive impact of social media in constructing discourse conflicting with that of the mainstream, particularly for marginalised groups. Kress (2010) also mentioned the re-dissemination of power structure and knowledge in more horizontal and participatory domains by any individuals because of the emergence of social media, which goes further beyond proliferation of power structures from vertically top-down domains dominated to an extent by authority groups or mainstream media. In addition, Facebook is chosen over other social media platforms as it is the most favoured social media channel in Thailand, accounting for 19% of overall social media usage in the country; including interactive features which can facilitate participation and interactions among users, which conforms to the concept of a virtual community, whilst for example, Web 2.0 is rather considered one-way communication. Last but not least, Facebook generates a multiplicity of types of digital data and hyper-texts, a fact which accommodates multimodal analysis collected from their multimodal discourse.

Moreover, as my project aims to understand the entire components of how these two *bhikkhuni* communities utilised multimodal resources in the meaning making of their 'legitimacy',   I see Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis as the most applicable approach in answering the two research questions in comparing with, for example, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Systematic Functional-Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA), which rather emphasise on linguistic elements of their discourse construction; and, it will at some point demonstrate limited explanations of this complex issue.

In this regard, I observe selected data available from their Facebook platform concerning the three themes of the Buddhist major events in 2012, 2014 and between 2016 and 2017 mentioned in 4.3.3, excluding audience comments, over a nine-month period from February to September 2018. I collected 32 postings of *Songdhammakalyani*'s and 20 from *Nirodharam*'s Facebook websites, which marked the total number of 52 postings from the two communities. I make screen grabs, download specific pages and contents

to examine what messages are popularly constructed; and to what extent they construct their legitimacy in relation to the aforementioned themes. The findings unveil the extent in which online multimodal constructions, particularly via the Facebook website, could serve to promote the 'legitimacy' of non-mainstream female Buddhist communities in Thailand.

4.3.5.B.   Multimodal Analysis via Offline Platform

I conduct a complementary analysis on multimodal discourse available via their offline media platforms on the same themes in order to answer the two research questions in addition to multimodal analysis on the Facebook website, which is considered the core study in this project. This is according to Chadwick (2017) 'hybrid media systems' highlighting on the convergence of social and traditional media as a complex communication setting in this 21st century. Thus, my project opts to aggregate an analysis of the two communities' offline multimodal constructions to understand the all-inclusive impressions of how the existing de-facto Thai *bikkhunis* negotiate to construct their own meanings of legitimacy amidst their current 'illegitimated' status assigned by the Thai religious authorities and mainstream discourse. I see that viewing their multimodal constructions to a limited extent via social media or Facebook platforms by overlooking their other utilised offline channels may not be sufficient to produce a comprehensive answer in the specific context of Thai Buddhism.

Hence, the study analyses social semiotic modes employed in constructing the two communities' meanings of 'legitimacy' through *Songdhammakalyani*'s and *Nirodharam*'s (i) in-house publications; (ii) personal communications delivered by their abbess, monastic and community members of the two communities; and (iii) events organised by the two communities in relation to the theme of legitimacy. These marked the total number of 15 offline media archives, which have been observed during the parallel period with observations on their Facebook websites.

4.3.5.C.   Participatory Observation

Participatory observation is additionally applied to complement the two aforementioned methods in order to answer the first research question: how do *bikkhuni* communities interpret their meanings of legitimacy? According to Chai (2011), participatory

observation is considered part of data collection for case study research, which falls under the broad umbrella of ethnographic research. Whereas ethnographic research requires a longer period in staying within selected communities and concluding research findings, participatory observation lasts for a shorter and specific timeframe as defined by the researcher, and could provide a fruitful opportunity to gain a comprehensive insight into the project, particularly for those small number of selected case studies (p.160). However, to prevent any prejudice that may occur in applying participatory observation, I clearly define my research position in this project as being neutral; not by representing myself as a party to or supporter of each of the *bhikkhuni* communities under study, but only as a participant who is in pursuit of participating in their organised activities like other Buddhists and general lay participants who may involve themselves in their activities and benefit from them.

I conduct a participatory observation through my visits to *Songdhammakalyani* in Nakhon Pathom; and *Nirodharam* in Chiang Mai for two occasions: December 2016 – January 2017, and September – October 2017. The first time was considered as a stage of the preliminary study to survey the two communities to ensure research feasibility; and to ensure that these two selected communities as a case study in this project could yield substantive information for both in-depth and comprehensive understanding for the study. The next visit focused on data collection. I went to both communities to observe the monastic environments and geographical locations, decorations, constructions and materials to represent their monastic meanings and identifications. In addition, I participated in their religious activities held at the community, such as chanting, practicing meditation, attending *Dhamma* sessions, attending *samaneri* ordination ceremony, giving alms rounds and offering food to monastic members, and also cleaning the monastic areas. The findings from my participatory observation as a part of multimodal research technique contribute to my understanding of how the two *bhikkhuni* communities substantiate their legitimacy to audiences in Thai society via their multimodal communications of diversified arranged activities and representations of monastic constructions and materials.

4.3.5.D. Semi-Structured Interview

In addition to participatory observation, I also conducted a semi-structure interview with key informants of the two *bhikkhuni* communities in order to answer the research

question: how do *bhikkhuni* communities understand and interpret their meanings of legitimacy? There are three types of interview in qualitative data collection: structured, semi-structured and non-structured interview (Kvale, 1996). Whilst the structured interview is considered a too strict and non-flexible approach, a non-structured interview is regarded as too loose and too relaxing a frame for my research project, particularly in following the research objectives. Thus, a semi-structured one is rather more suitable and flexible, accommodating the researcher's freedom to adjust questions in accordance with the responses provided by key informants.

Thus, in this project, I apply a semi-structured interview with two groups of participants from the two *bhikkhuni* communities; including the two abbesses and their monastic members, regarding (a) their prospective objectives in establishing their communities, (b) their understanding of their legitimated status, (c) administrative and communication policies of the established communities, and (d) sustainability of the communities. Besides the abbesses and monastic members, I interviewed Facebook administrators and media persons from the two communities, regarding (a) their selected discourse to communicate the meanings of *bhikkhuni'*s legitimacy via their Facebook website, (b) their selection of multimodal resources, and (c) the prospective impact on the Facebook audience. I select these groups of participants as key informants for being interviewed in the project for the following reasons. There are 5 interviewees from *Songdhammakalyani*, 9 from *Nirodharam*, which marked the total 14 interviewees in this project. In this regard, names of interviewees who are already recognised by the public, including the two abbesses and the community's media groups are revealed in certain sections in the thesis. And the researcher has informed them accordingly (see 4.3.6).

According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), I conducted a semi-structured interview method by setting main questions to follow the research objectives particularly in finding answers for research questions, then I ask probing questions to clarify any unclear answers from key informants to help accommodate an in-depth analysis of the data provided by them before asking follow-up questions in order to simultaneously dig down into significant details, which potentially benefits the study in both an extensive and inclusive dimension. In addition, LeCompte and Schensel 1999; Lincoln and Guba, 1995; and Kvale, 1996, all agreed that the good interview depends upon the skills of the researcher, which are improvable by acquiring knowledge on specific issues required for the interview; as well as trainable by getting repeated practice in asking the questions, responding to the answers and picking up main points from the interviewees and integrating them into

probing and follow-up questions to investigate detailed information. Thus, I prepare myself to be a compatible interviewer by conducting intensive preliminary studies on relevant backgrounds on the issue of *bhikkhuni*'s legitimacy in Thailand, the two communities objectives, the abbess, and their monastic members and administration, the overview of their media landscapes, via both online and offline platforms, as well as how they are portrayed through the Thai mainstream media which reflect their seemingly marginalised status in Thai Buddhism. In addition, I conducted a pilot project to practice my interviewing skills on a group of Thai Buddhist participants before conducting the actual interview with selected key informants, in order to verify the validity and practicality of the prospective questions which would be asked in the session. (Please see appendix 3).

The findings from these semi-structured interviews with the two abbesses and media persons of the two communities reflect these key members' self-perception of their own legitimacy.

4.3.5.E.   Focus Group Discussion

The next data collection method is a small-scale focus group discussion with lay community participants of the two *bhikkhuni* communities to supplement other data collection methods. Morgan (1988) indicated the focus group discussion as a freshly introduced data collection method in qualitative research which could continue its significance in social sciences research in the future (See Steward and Shamdasani, 1990; Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). Its advantages in this project are as follows. First, it is a time-efficient method which enables the researcher to deal with participants with different backgrounds at once, which is of course less time-consuming than interviewing them individually one by one (Chai, 2011). In addition, based on their turn-taking in collaborating and exchanging views in responding to specific topics/ themes as defined by the researcher, focus group discussion allows participants to participate in the session with a more relaxing and free manner than when being interrogated and controlled by the researcher.

Thus, I conducted a focus group discussion with two groups of lay participants comprising 6 participants from *Songdhammakalyani* and 8 from *Nirodharam*, which marked the total of 14 participants in the focus group discussion sessions. In combining with 14 participants from the interview sessions, there are 28 participants altogether in this

project. This is to create a discussion /information exchange about their overall impressions and perceptions about their legitimacy as well as their contributions to the Thai society and how these are communicated through their multimodal channels. Chai (2011) also mentioned a vital remark in proliferating a dynamic conversation and turn-taking discussion of participants as a challenge in applying focus group discussion in qualitative research. As a researcher I have accommodated this by allocating to myself the central seating position; and then encouraging all participants to take turns in their discussions and managing their discussion timeslot and topic in a balanced way. Furthermore, the enquiries consist of 4-5 open-discussion forms, allowing participants to have sufficient time to reply to each question with their spontaneous answer. The session lasts from one and a half to two hours. (Please see appendix for participant name-list and details). In this regard, the names of participants in the sessions are kept anonymity.

Findings from focus group discussion of lay participants help to shape my understanding of how they perceive the interpretations of legitimacy by these two selected *bhikkhuni* communities and how these communities construct their meanings of legitimacy to the audience in Thai society at the local as well as national levels in their day-to-day activities and communication.

4.3.5.F   Non-Participatory Observation on Thai Mainstream Media Archives

Relevant researches on the media landscape in Thailand reveal that television and newspapers are the two dominant mainstream platforms existing before the pervasive impact of social media in Thai society (See 1.1). In a preliminary stage before conducting the research project, I selected TV programmes to observe on the Nation channel, which is one of the quality television channels in Thailand as well as the content in Matichon newspaper, which is considered a quality Thai newspaper for the period of one month. The purpose was to explore whether their publicized contents were related to the legitimacy issue of the existing *bhikkhuni* communities; and to what extent. In addition, I explored how and to what extent the Thai mainstream media portrayed the *bhikkhuni* issue in relation to gender ideology in Thai Buddhism; and what explanation could be implied by the absence of their coverages on the *bhikkhuni* issue. This preliminary study could reflect the status *of bhikkhuni* in Thai society, as portrayed through the mainstream media, as well as help to define the scope of the study.

4.3.5.G. Transcribing Data from Interview and Focus-group Sessions

After completing interviews and focus group discussions with key informants in this research on a daily basis, the researcher has transcribed data taken from the fieldtrip by accessing the recorded conversations in the voice recording machine which was set as encryptions allow only a researcher to access and add details from notes taken during the sessions.

Firstly, themes of the scripts are carefully defined by the contents provided by key informants. The major groups are classified by main questions asked to answer the research questions; and the results are imminent thematic groups emerging during the sessions which are potentially used for an analysis. After the transcriptions are all completed, the processes of close reading and then theme coding are applied to ensure that all relevant data are included in the analysis and added to build up a comprehensive insight into the core findings of the project.

To ensure that this project is conducted in accordance with UK ethical standards of research practices in the social sciences, I will explain the ethical practices applied in this project in the next section.

4.3.6   Ethical Practices

In terms of research ethics, I apply the following principles in the process of analysing the two communities' Facebook, offline media and communication channels, as well as data obtained from the participants. For Facebook and media channels, I collected data from the two selected Facebook discussion boards without informing Facebook administrators or the communities themselves what specific postings I referred to, in reference to Facebook policy, mentioning that any setting for 'public contents' can be used without permission (Facebook, 2020). With the same justification, any contents publicised by in-house or commercial publications of *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* (see Chapter 5) can also be used and referred to in this thesis without prior permission to the communities.

With regard to the process of engaging research participants, I have followed the requirements of the University's ethics reviews to ensure that (1) all interview questions are documented and followed in the fieldwork, and (2) research consent forms are

provided and participants are well informed about research objectives, procedures, benefits, as well as their rights to withdraw from the project. They were ensured that their anonymity with regards to personal information would be respected to ensure that the participants are aware of their roles and rights in participating in the project. And only those who are already known/ recognised in the public that their names are mentioned in the thesis, including the two abbesses, the senior monastic members, and key media persons of the two communities (see chapter 5). Whereas, the rest of the interviewees and participants are granted anonymity to assure their right and freedom to express their opinions towards the topic. From this rational, I see some participants who are already known/ acknowledged by the public are rather thoughtful in expressing their opinions towards the sensitive issues or those related to religious authority, by applying self-censorship strategy to control any potential negative information from their side. Whilst I see those who are guaranteed their anonymity in the research are rather free to express their opinions.

In this regard, prior to the fieldwork in Thailand, my application for Leeds University's ethical requirements has been approved by the University committee (see Appendix), which is compatible with the UK ethical practices. In addition, after the fieldwork, the committee has contacted me to re-examine whether the researcher has followed the application guidelines, and I have re-affirmed to the community the status regarding my project's ethical compliance to the University's conventions.

4.3.6.A. Role of Researcher

In analysing the media contents and in engaging with monastic and lay participants from *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam*, I put myself in a neutral position. In an analysis of online material, I do not comment, respond to, discuss or lead opinion on any topics on Facebook Walls. However, I carefully observed the comments of virtual members responding to selected online discourses during the specific period of study. I have taken pictures and made screen grabs to explore the extent to which the audience have engaged in the discussions, convey messages, or responded to activities in the virtual communities. Additionally, during my visit to the two communities, I made observations as an external observer and not as a member of the monastic communities. Hence, the information obtained is not influenced by any prejudiced stances.

## 4.4	Data Preparation

### 4.4.1	Research Procedure

There are 7 relevant steps which have been managed to complete the project, including:

(I). preliminary studies on relevant literatures and documents; defining focal scope and research objectives; and exploring media outlets, both online and offline platforms;

(II). data collection which covered (i) a 9-month period of exploring multimodal resources communicating key features on the two FB sites focusing on legitimacy construction of bhikkhuni communities in different timeframes and on different themes; and (ii) reviewing media archive materials;

(III). assigning codes for communities and multimodal modes; summarizing frequency of modes and semiotic resources, and collecting and summarizing key findings for an in-depth content analysis;

(IV). data analysis which concerns analyzing visual representations of the two communities' Facebook website and offline media archives according to the Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006); and part of Halliday's Meta-functions (1985); and synchronizing the results retrieved from online and offline channels;

(V). data interpretation, which mainly relies on interpretations and explanations of research outcomes by referring to a conceptual framework; and synthesizing multimodal constructions of legitimacy in relations to the existing 'legitimacy' debates in Thai society; (VI) fieldtrip visit, which concerns preparation of ethical documents to be approved by the University of Leeds Ethical Committee to ensure conformity to UK ethical practice when conducting research with human participants in the Social Sciences; paying actual visits to two bhikkhuni communities: *Songdhammakalyani* in Nakhon Pathom and *Nirodharam i*n Chiang Mai to conduct participatory observation, interviews and focus group discussion with monastic and lay community members; and transcribing data collected from the fieldtrip as encrypted data and consolidating key findings for further analysis;

(VII). Discussion of results from multimodal analysis of the Facebook websites and offline media archives; comparing and contrasting results of their utilisation of multimodal resources from each and across the platforms; discussing the similarities and differences as well as additional perspectives.

4.4.2 Research Validity and Reliability

This research applies multimodality as the research technique of data collection comprising of multimodal analysis on the Facebook website, offline media archives, participatory observation, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion in answering research questions. In addition, the project also adopted multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006); the legitimacy and legitimation theory; gender ideology in Thai society and functions of the Buddhist community to integrate as a conceptual framework in answering the research questions and understanding the complex phenomenon of the legitimacy issue of *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand. Denzin (1978) mentioned research validity by referring to triangulation technique in implementing disparate methods of data collection as well as relying on divergent theoretical backgrounds for the best attempt to explain the specific case study. Therefore, the application of triangular methods in this project verifies its validity and the credibility of the findings.

4.5   Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the research methodology applied in answering the two main and affiliated research questions in this project, consisting of the conceptual framework, research design, methods and data collection, as well as data preparation. The research employs a qualitative method emphasising case study, and multimodal analysis mainly on the Facebook website, in complement with offline media platform and multimodal research techniques. The chapter also discusses ethical concerns, data preparation and analysis.

The chapter ends the first part of the research, which presents the foundation of this thesis. Next, I will proceed to the second part, which sets forth the empirical findings, beginning with Chapter 5 - multimodal communication of the two *bhikkhuni* communities

CHAPTER V: MULTIMODAL MONASTIC RESOURCES

5.1   Introduction

The previous four Chapters present the foundations of this project, consisting of introduction, literature review, theoretical backgrounds, and research methodology. The last five Chapters (Chapters 5-9) demonstrate the empirical findings and then the conclusion from this research.

Before answering the first research question regarding how *bhikkhuni* communities understand and interpret their meanings of 'legitimacy' in the next chapter (see Chapter 6), this chapter aims to provide a comparative overview of how the two communities have established themselves in terms of their objectives, physical setting, administrative arrangements, communication policies and platforms as well as media strategies. The comparison is done through analysis of selected multimodal resources of their monastic elements that make up the meanings of each community. Presentations and discussions in this chapter are drawn from multimodal research technique of data collection (see Chapter 4).

5.2   Findings

This section portrays a comparative outlook of the two communities' multimodal resources of monastic elements in three categories. The first group consists of verbal mode representing community's title and visual, temporal, and spatial modes identified by their geographical locations as well as monastic constructions and materials. The next group is multimodal resources of the two abbesses' personal attributes and monastic administrations illustrated through visual, verbal, gestural and audio modes. The last group is related to their multimodal means of communication and media platforms. In presenting the findings for every category, I begin with *Songdhammakalyani* (S) and then *Nirodharam* (N).

5.2.1   Monastic elements: titles, locations, constructions and materials

5.2.1.A. Monastic Titles

To understand their selection of verbal mode in labelling their communities' titles, I ask how the employed lexical choices reflect their meanings as a female Buddhist community in contemporary Thai society; and how these lexical choices relate to their objectives. Interestingly, I found that the 'linguistic elements' in naming the two places reflect disparate views for community's objectives and their self-perception as female Buddhist communities in Thailand.

Tracing back to the year 1960, *Songdhammakalyani* was originally founded by *Bhiksuni* Voramai Kabilsingh (mother of *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, the current abbess) on her 6-Rai[21] private plot of land in Nakhon Pathom. The name *Songdhammakalyani* comes from the full title as *Watr Songdhammakalyani*. This comprises three compounding terms literally means 'a place where women dignifiedly practice their *Dhamma* duties.' '*Song dhamma'* is a verbal phrase functioning as an adjective in the full title. It means 'dignified with *Dhamma*' while, '*kalyani*' refers to 'ladies' in Thai. The word '*Watr*' here comes from Sanskrit, meaning 'practice(s) as routines'. In their absence of official monastic status, it is interesting that *Songdhammakalyani* use the word 'watr' in front of their title to vocally resemble the word 'wat' in Pali which means temple or Buddhist monastery in Thai[22].

Figure 5.1 Monastic title of *Songdhammakalyani* in Nakhon Pathom

Nirodharam has two campuses in Chomthong and in Doi Saket districts, Chiang Mai. The place in Chomthong was established in 1995 by *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, the abbess. The original 6-Rai plot, which later was expanded to cover the area of 30 Rai, was allocated by a lay woman who benefited from the *Dhamma* teaching of the abbess and would like

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[21] This is the minimum required amount of land in building monastery in Thailand.
[21] The word 'watr' was firstly initiated by Narin Phasit for the same meaning and perhaps *Songdhammakalyani* applied this term to their monastic title.

more people to benefit like herself (*Nirodharam*, 2017). The second location in Doi Saket was established in 2003 on a piece of land donated by a retired doctor and university professor together with other beneficiaries of the abbess' *Dhamma* teaching, basically to accommodate the increasing number of monastic members in *Nirodharam*. The name '*Nirodharam*' comes from the word '*nirodha'* in Pali which means 'ending sufferings' [*Dhukkha*]. It was combined with the term '*Arama'* which means 'a place' in Pali. The full denotation of its title then refers to 'a place to end suffering'. Consistently, '*Suddhajit*', the name of the second campus, is interpreted as 'purified mind' as it comes from two words: *suddha*' which means purified and *'jit'* which means mind or soul.

Figure 5.2 Monastic titles of *Nirodharam* in Chomthong (Left) and *Suddhajit* (Right) in Doi Saket, Chiang Mai

From my reviews of relevant documents and interviews with the abbesses (2017), the primary objective(s) of the two communities appear to be different, although both are specifically intended to provide a place for women to follow the Buddha's footsteps. *Songdhammakalyani*, in the time of the first abbess, was meant to be a place where ordained women could live and practice monastic functions and, at the same time, provide developmental services to communities nearby, for example, setting up a primary school for free education from kindergarten to grade six [23] (Thai *Bhikkhuni*, 2017). *Songdhammakalyani*, in its second generation, however, have learnt a lesson from the late abbess who was ordained from the Taiwanese *Mahayana* lineage that being a lone woman cleric without engagement with other monastic members or community is not sufficient to create their legitimated status. Hence, they have set up clear objectives to establish and legitimise women's status as *bhikkhuni* in the contemporary Thai Buddhism (Suat Yan Lai, 2011); and to strengthen and stabilise *bhikkhuni sangha* network nationwide and gradually worldwide (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017; Kanjana, 2017).

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[23] The school accommodated up to 500 students yearly coming from local communities. It had been operating for more than 30 years before being closed down in 2003 after the retirement of the school manager (Thai bhikkhunis, 2017).

For *Nirodharam*, their focus is to provide women with a proper environment and opportunities to study and practice the core *Dhamma* teachings of the Buddha through their participation in special religious activities (*Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, 2017). The prevailing purpose of *Nirodharam* is to serve as a spiritual training centre to support women's journey through the noble path until they attain enlightenment [*Arahant*]'.[5]

Their lexical choices in designating communities' titles clearly articulate their stance as female Buddhist communities in the Thai society according to the two given functions of Buddhist community: to render appropriate environmental conditions for monastic members to stay away from the external faulty society so that they can train their minds and attain different levels of spiritual development; and to serve as role-model to the society in following the right path of the Buddha.

5.2.1.B. Geographical Locations

The second multimodal resources chosen to be discussed here are visual, temporal and spatial modes representing geographical locations and religious constructions/materials of the two communities. I will start with a discussion of temporal and spatial modes representing their geographical locations, followed by discussions on religious constructions and materials.

According to Jewitt and Stenglin (2012), the term space could be either two- or three-dimensional, i.e. natural, built and virtual spaces. Analysis of geographical locations of the two communities in this chapter will however be two-dimensional, including natural space and built space, both indoor and outdoor.

Comparatively, both communities are located in strategic locations which are easy to access and are historically significant in the Thai Buddhism. S is located in Nakhon Pathom which lies approximately 53 kms south-west of Bangkok and is considered as part of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. It can be reached from Bangkok by highway within less than an hour in normal traffic. Chiang Mai where N is located is approximately 700 km north of Bangkok. Despite the distance, it can be conveniently accessed by both public and private transport. It is well connected to Bangkok and other cities by highway, railway, and particularly airway. Chiang Mai has an international airport with more than 100 domestic and international flights daily.

More interestingly, both communities are located in the cities which are believed to be significant from a Buddhist historical perspective. Nakhon Pathom was historically known as part of 'Suvannabhumi', the area where the two senior monks - *Phra Sona* and *Phra Utara* had landed after a long sea journey from Sri Lanka[24] to situate Buddhism in the 'Suvannabhumi' area[25] (Ministry of Cultures, 2017). The first pagoda in Thailand - *Phra Pathom Chedi* - was also built here and *Songdhammakalyani* is only a 5-minute drive from this historical landmark. Buddhists and tourists who plan to visit this historically famous pagoda can also manage to drop by at *Songdhammakalyani* – the 'said to be' first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community after their visit to *Phra Pathom Chedi*.

Similarly, remarkable, Chiang Mai, the city where *Nirodharam* is nestled, was formerly known as Lanna region where Buddhism had been firmly established for several centuries. As of September 2013, it was reported by the Provincial Office of Buddhism that there were 1,314 Buddhist temples in Chiang Mai, most of which were several hundred years old. This allows quite a big number of Buddhists-locally and visitors-to participate in religious activities organised by various local temples, including *Nirodharam*. Beyond this, Chiang Mai is also well-known as the place where the nobly reputable *Vipassana* (forest) monks[26] such as Luang Phu Mun BhuridattaPuritattho[27], Luang Phu Waen Sucinno[28], and lately Luang Phor Viriyang Sirindharo [29] have resided for years during their spiritual journey. This includes Kru Bah Sriwichai another important Buddhist figure in connection with Lanna identity (Itoh, 2013). *Nirodharam*'s main campus in Chomthong district is about a one-hour drive from Chiang Mai city centre, and only a 10- minute drive from the most locally well-known temple '*Phra Thad Sri Chomthong*', where the remarkable senior Thai *Vipassana*[1] teacher/ abbot Luang Phu Thong resided[30]. In the same way, *Suddhajit* campus in Doi Saket is also only a 10-minute

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[24] According to Buddhist history, these two monks were Buddhist envoys who roamed all the way from that Sri Lanka to establish Buddhism in *Suvannabhumi*.

[25] *Suvannabhumi* means 'golden land', which was believed to encompass the conjunction areas which currently form part of Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

[26] *Vipassana* forest monks normally refers to Buddhist monks who strictly practice spiritually to end the paths of sufferings aka *Dhutanga Kammatthana* monk who adhere to13 ascetic practices in *Theravada* Buddhism.

[27] Ven.Luang Phu Mun Bhuridatto is well perceived among Buddhists as honourable Thai (*Vipassana*) forest monk from *Dhammayuttha Nikaya* and a *Dhutanga Kammatthana* whose strict practice to the *Dhamma Vinaya* exemplary life, serving as a model for monastic and lay disciples nationwide in contemporary Thai Buddhism. In 2019 he was listed as 'the world's eminent personalities' by UNESCO after Buddhadhasa Bhikkhu and the 10th Supreme Patriarch Somdet Phra Mahasamanachao Kromphraya Wachiryanawarorot.

[28] Ven. Luang Phu Waen Sucinno is one of the key disciples of Luang Phu Mun Bhuridatto, whilst King Bhumibol is one of his close devotees.

[29] Ven. Luang Phor Viriyang Sirindharo is Thai *Theravada* Buddhist monk the last generation of Luang Phu Mun's disciple who studied advanced meditation practices from him. With his esteem to teach meditation for world peace and 80 years of experience in practicing meditation, he established 'Will Power Institute' for teaching free meditation course for Thai and people worldwide since 1997, including in where he is internationally renowned as a Master Teacher and a Patriarch for *Dhammayuttha Nikaya* in Canada.

[30] Ven. Luang Phu Thong is another well-known Thai *Vipassana* monk – the abbot of Phra Thad Sri Chomthong, Chiang Mai who is also known for supporting *Nirodharam* and the abbess *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani worKing as female clerics in Chiang Mai. Luang Phu Thong passed away in December 2019, at the age of 96.

drive from *Wat Phra That Doi Saket*, another highly regarded local monastery in the district. In this regard, the locations of the two communities are highly relevant from Buddhist perspectives.

5.2.1.C. Religious Constructions and Materials

From my visits to the two communities as well as my observations and interviews with the two abbesses (2017), I selected three semiotic resources, which are considered significant from each community[31] to discuss their connoted meanings. The three visual elements selected from *Songdhammakalyani* are (i) the *Medicine* Buddha [*Phra Paisatcha Karu Bodhisattva*]; (ii) the *Bodhisattva* Canal; and (iii) statues of 13 *Arahant Theri Bhikkhuni*. As for *Nirodharam*, I have chosen to discuss (i) the wheel of *Dhamma* [*Dhammacakka* wheel]; (ii) the *Sihingkha* Buddha statue (*Phra* Buddha *Sihingkha*); and (iii) the Buddha *Jayanti Chedi*.

The Medicine Buddha is considered as a signature and a unique Buddha statue of *Songdhammakalyani*. According to the abbess (2017), the gigantic aqua-blue statue was moulded and crafted according to what she vividly saw in her dream and then was situated at the centre of the community's *Vihara*. People can ask for blessing, particularly for healing effects. In order to make their wishes come true, they have to recite 108 rounds of a specific *Mantra* every week; observe at least five precepts; and avoid harming living things. According to *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, the Medicine Buddha signifies the great mercifulness of the future Buddha who is believed to currently be *Bodhisattva* [32] (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017).

The next religious construction is the *Bodhisattva* Canal, which again reflects specific meanings according to *Mahayana* tradition. This man-made canal is full of water with a floating *Bodhisattva* boat. It lies in front of the statue of a *bhikkhuni* whose right arm is holding a baby, and left hand is comforting a girl who turns the face to her. There is another boy kneeling down beside the *bhikkhuni* and paying respect to her. According to S's monastic member (2017), the *bhikkhuni* statue resembles the former abbess – *Bhiksuni* Voramai[33] and the boat represents a (large) vehicle. These semiotic resources connote the *Mahayana* principles as *'maha'* means large; and *'yana'* means 'vehicle.

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[31] Selections drawn from the interview with monastic members and lay participants towards their perceptions regarding vital religious constructions and materials at each community.

[32] *Bodhisattva* is believed to sacrifices life for the sake of other human beings and living creatures; to help them ending sufferings [*Dhukkha*] both physically and spiritually before the *Bodhisattva* goes for their self-extinguishing of sufferings [*nibbana*]

[33] Her correct monastic title should be named as '*Bhiksuni* Voramai' according to *Mahayana* tradition where she received her full Ordination from, and as she was not ordained in *Theravada* tradition as '*bhikkhuni*'.

Interpreted from these employed resources, *Songdhammakalyani* see themselves as a large vehicle to carry all living creatures to cross the canal of sufferings to a peaceful shore-a decent life and then the *nibbana.* This monastic element clearly highlights *Songdhammakalyani'*s prioritised mission to lift people out of both worldly [*lokiya*] problems and beyond worldly [*lokutara*] sufferings.

The third monastic construction selected here is the statue of the thirteen *Arahant Theri* (senior enlightened *bhikkhuni*) situated on the second floor of the community's monastic hall[34], underneath a painting of the Buddha and his four male monastic disciples drawn by the son of the current abbess. There is the *bhikkhuni'*s name engraved at the basement of each individual statue. These thirteen *bhikkhuni* were praised by the Buddha for their flawless qualities in different aspects and were said to have reached the highest stage of spiritual training. In the eyes of the followers in the early Buddhist history, they are perceived as genuinely representing the ideal fruitful results from their ordained life. Besides, the statues illustrate *Songdhammakalyani'*s self-positioning as the first Thai *bhikkhuni* community who are committed to continue this *Theravadin* Buddhism heritage of having *bhikkhuni* as the fourfold Buddhist pillars. The placement of their statues in this hall serves as a reminder to visitors the equal ability of women to attain ultimate spiritual awakening stage regardless of biological distinctions from men.

Figure 5.3 The Medicine Buddha (Left) *Boddhisattva* Canal (two central images),
and the Thirteen *Arahant Theri* (Right) at *Songdhammakalyani*

The three semiotic resources of *Songdhammakalyani'*s monastic elements reflect mixed interpretations of the community's self-perception and identity. On the one hand, the community, particularly the abbess, assert that they are the 'first' *bhikkhuni* community

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[34] Where people normally come for offering food and monastic members having their twice-daily meals; and occasionally gathering for group chanting.

according to the *Theravada* tradition in Thailand. Yet, the construction of the *Bodhisattva* Canal with a boat as well as the statue of a *bhikkhuni* carrying children clearly marks the influence of the *Mahayana* core values. In other words, this reflect their non-conformity to any confined particular sub-sects, but rather to Buddhism in a broader sense.[35]

When compared with the three elements of *Nirodharam*, namely (i) the wheel of *Dhamma* [*Dhammacakka* wheel]; (ii) the *Sihingkha* Buddha statue (*Phra* Buddha *Sihingkha*); and (iii) the Buddha *Jayanti Chedi*, it is evident that all of these elements are consistently reinforcing the community's self-positioning as a *Theravada* female cleric community. The wheel of *Dhammacakka*, constructed in the back yard of the community, resembles the *Dhamma* wheel that rolled for the first time 2600 years ago when the Buddha declared his religion through his first *Dhamma* teaching to the first group of Buddhist disciples called the '*Benja Waki*'.[36] This was also the first occasion that the Triple Gems (*Tri Rattana*) which stands for three ultimate Buddhist elements: the Buddha, the *Dhamma* (his teachings); and the *Sangha* (Buddhist communities), had been completely established. The eight spokes of the *Dhammacakka* represent the Noble Eightfold Path towards enlightenment and *nibbana*. It is regarded as an important symbol by *Theravadins* who pay highest homage to nothing but the teachings of the Buddha (*Dhamma*) after his passing away.

The Buddha *Jayanti Chedi* (pagoda) was constructed at the community in 2012 to celebrate the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment. During special Buddhist occasions, such as *Makha Puja, Vesak Puja, Asalaha Puja* or the New Year's Eve, *bhikkhuni* and lay members of the community will make a candle-light procession around the *chedi* for three rounds and chant several mantras as a way to pay homage to the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha* during each round. After the session completes, the abbess normally asks lay participants to stand surrounding the *Chedi*, which contains the Buddha's relics[37] at the top to pray and make a wish in front of the relics. The wish is first of all led by the abbess as a collective action towards the attainment of ultimate spiritual awakening through *Panna* (wisdom)*, Sacca (*truthfulness*), Caga* (generosity), *and*

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[35] However, I believe this is also similar nature to other monastic elements generally found in Thai society with a mixture of *Theravada* and *Mahayana* representations. For instance, people may normally find the *Bodhisattva* Guan Yin who is perceived as 'goddess of mercy' according to *Mahayana* tradition in many Thai monasteries.

[36] *Benja Waki* are a group of people who became the Buddha's first five disciples after his awakening stage. They previously followed his path but departed him before his enlightenment. After the Buddha gave his first *Dhamma* session to them on *Asalha Puja Day*, *Anya Godanya* attained the first awakening stage of 'stream enterer'.

[37] The term 'relics' here are similar to what commonly found in other monasteries or religious places in Thailand, which may not be the authentic ones but rather replica.

Upasama (peace)*.* This process is called *Adhitthana Dhamma.* Afterwards the participants can then make their individual wishes if they want.

The *Sihingkha* Buddha statue located in the monastic hall near *Buddha Jayanti Chedi* is especially known for its asymmetric design with a black figure. According to *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani (2017), *Phra Buddha Sihingkha* statue is a gift originally bestowed from Sri Lanka to Thai Buddhists in the early Sukhothai period through Nakhon Sri Dhamma Raja province before being situated in Chiang Mai since the 20th century at *Wat Phra Singha,* whilst the one at *Nirodharam* is the replica. According to the abbess, this simulating statue has a specific meaning not only in representing the Buddha but in establishing a strong link between *Sri Lankan Theravada* lineage and Thai *Theravada* lineage[38]. I also believe the community selected this statue to be situated in the main hall adjacent to *Buddha Jayanti Chedi* to signify the continuity of *bhikkhuni* lineage from *Sri Lanka Theravada* Buddhism under which most of existing *bhikkhuni* in Thailand had been ordained. In addition to the comments of the N abbess, there is also a chanting *Mantra* relating to *Phra Buddha Sihingkha* in *Nirodharam'*s chanting book, which reflects the significance of this religious material in their perception.
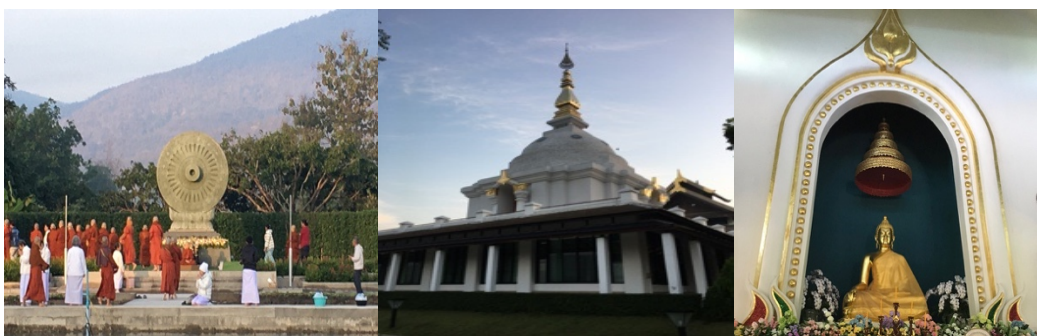
Figure 5.4 Monastic elements at *Nirodharam* consisting of: Wheel of *Dhammacakka* (Left), *Buddha Jayanti Chedi* (Middle), *Phra Buddha Sihingkha* (Right)

5.2.2 The Abbesses' Attributes and Monastic Administrations

The next group of multimodal resources reflecting the two monastic elements are visual, verbal, audio, gestural and spatial modes which illustrate the personal attributes of the two abbesses; and their monastic administrations.

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[38] It was believed to be for encouraging Thai Buddhists at a time when there was a declining number of Thai monks.

5.2.2.A.   Multimodal Resources of the Two abbesses' Attributes

The two abbesses have different backgrounds which, to a certain extent, influence their dissimilar charismatic approaches in monastic administration. From a multimodal analysis through the participatory observations at the two communities and interview with the abbess and community members (2017), *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha - *Songdhammakalyani*'s abbess is praised for her bravery and strong-mindedness in establishing the *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism as she mentioned, the road is not well-paved to pursue her ambition. Despite her rather high age-over 70 years old, and her relatively poor physical condition, *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha has been ceaselessly traveling nationwide and worldwide to attend numerous seminars and conferences to promote the establishment of the *bhikkhuni sangha*, promote *bhikkhuni* status, and strengthen *bhikkhuni* network in Thailand and among other Buddhist countries (Kanjana, 2017). These remarkably groundbreaking actions require her constant courage and relentless effort. Although she is not always warmly welcomed and, in some occasions, is opposed because of her '(il)legitimized status' in the official Thai *sangha*, she has never given up and generally responded to aggressive attacks in a calm manner but with clear-cut explanations. Her acceptance of invitations to take part in media debates, despite knowing that that they could involve threatening attacks by opposing parties, clearly represents *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanadha's courage to confront and reaffirm her own stance and dedication[39].

The abbess commented that her childhood background has largely influenced her to grow up with immense interest in social and advocacy work as well as in scholastic feminism. Born with her lay name of Chatsuman Kabilsingh, she was the only child of a Member of the Parliament (MP) father and a teacher and a journalist mother who later on was ordained as *Bhiksuni* Voramai under Taiwanese lineage. Thus, she had been brought up with a profound belief in the legitimacy and value of *bhikkhuni* and *bhikkhuni* communities [*sangha*]. These were further supported by her educational background-a bachelor's degree in philosophy and Religions from India, her M.A from Canada and a PhD in the same field from India, with a PhD dissertation on the *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha*. Before entering clerical life, she spent more than 30 years teaching in prestigious academic institutions[40] nationally and internationally (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017;

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[39] Additional evidence to show the abbess' courage and determination is when she was invited to present her views on *bhikkhuni* in various media/tv programmes and was occasionally challenged and seemingly intimidated by her co-guests (Kanjana, 2017).
[40] In Buddhism-related subjects including at McMaster University, Canada, and later on at Thammasat University, a reputable university in Thailand

Kanjana, 2015). However, she suggested that the turning point for her ordination had not yet come until 1993, when she was invited to give a lecture in a conference at Harvard University about the future of *bhikkhuni* in Buddhism. Increasingly she came to realise that she was the one who had comprehensive knowledge about the issues of *bhikkhuni/ bhikkhuni* ordination. If she did not take any further action, there would not be any drastic change to situate 'the missing pillar' or *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism and if possible, in other Buddhist countries (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017). She first became a *samaneri* by receiving lower ordination [*pabbajja*] in 2001; followed by her full ordination in 2003 in Sri Lanka and was given the name: *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha. Being the first '*Theravada bhikkhuni'* in Thailand, she aims to act as a pioneer in endeavouring to revive the *bhikkhuni* lineage in contemporary Thai Buddhism.

Figure 5.5: (Left) *Bhikkhuni* **Dhammanandha- the abbess of** *Songdhammakalyani* **in front of a portrait of** *Bhiksuni* **Voramai – her mother and the founder of** *Songdhammakalyani***.   (Right):** *Bhikkhuni* **Dhammanada (sitting on the left) as a speaker at the World Buddhist Conference in Malaysia, (***Source***: Facebook Watr Songdhammakalyani. Accessed 25 June 2016. Available from: www.facebook.com/thaibhikkhunis**

The abbess of *Nirodharam*, *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, born with her lay name as 'Rungduen Suwan', graduated from the Faculty of Sciences, Chiang Mai University. During her university years, she was a member of the Buddhism Club and actively participated in its activities which included *Dhamma* sessions led by various renowned monks. According to the interview (2017), she observed the 'way of life' [*Patipada*] showcased by Thai praiseworthy monks, including famous Thai Vipassana monks like Luang Phu Mun Bhuridatto, Luang Phu Waen Sucinno, Luang Phu Chah Subhadho[41], Luang Ta Maha Bua[42], and others who were believed to have attained the highest level of spiritual awakening through strict adherence to the Buddha's teachings and mindfulness practices. Thus,

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[41] Luang Phu Chah Subhadho is a Thai monk – the former abbot of *Nong Pha Pong* Temple*,* who is well perceived by Thai and foreign Buddhists, particularly in Western countries where most of his foreign disciples become monastic members of his international monastery including in UK, Italy, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

[42] Luang Ta Maha Bua Yanasambanno is a Thai *Vipassana* monk and a disciple of Ven. Luang Phu Mun who learned meditation lesson from him. His reputation includes his initiation of 'Help Thai Nation' project when Thailand faced economic downturn in 1998 which got support from the late King and Queen.

throughout these years she has been inspired to enter the ordained life, and soon after her graduation, she decided to leave her lay life to be ordained as a white-robed nun [*mae-chi*] in 1980. During her *mae-chi-hood,* the now *Nirodharam* abbess had been strictly training herself with the 10 precepts of observation, particularly by not using money, eating only vegetarian food once a day in her alms bowl, and walking bare-foot. These practices are different from those of other *mae-chi* who observe only 8 precepts, still use money, and eat twice a day. In 2006, *Mae-chi* Rungduen received a lower ordination [*pabbajja*] as a *samaneri* in Sri Lanka with support from senior monks in Chiang Mai. According to the interview, *Samaneri* Rungduen did not intentionally aim to be ordained as *bhikkhuni* as she wanted to avoid being in a controversial situation in Thai Buddhism at that time. However, two years later she was strongly encouraged by the senior monks in Chiang Mai and her own *Pawattini* in Sri Lanka to be fully ordained as a *bhikkhuni,* so she received her full ordination in Sri Lanka in 2006 and came back to live in *Nirodharam*.

From the perspectives of her monastic and lay disciples, I see *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, the abbess of *Nirodharam*, demonstrates her courage and determination firstly by leaving her lay life to follow the path of the Buddha and put extraordinary efforts into her practice in order to end all sufferings for more than thirty years. Her supreme endeavour is reflected through her serious self-training as *mae-chi.* In order to understand deeply what the Buddha had taught; she industriously studied the essence of the Buddha's teachings from *Tipitaka.* Although at that time there was no *bhikkhuni* in the country to role-model her, she followed the 'praiseworthy path' of distinguished Thai monks in order to live a qualified ordained life.

Another evidence of *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani's courage and determination is reflected though her constant dissemination of *Dhamma* to audiences from all walks of life, regardless who they are, how far away they live or how hard it is to complete her mission as she truly believes that the teachings of the Buddha could really liberate people from hardships. There was a case during her *mae-chi-* hood that she had walked on uphill roads on her bare feet for several kilometers at mid-day and for several consecutive months to propagate *Dhamma* sessions (*Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, 2017) [43]. Sometimes she was asked to give lectures in English, and she had made extraordinary efforts to make sure that the *Dhamma* is clearly and accurately communicated. Her willingness to accept endless

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[43] A group of Chiang Mai University students invited her to give a *Dhamma* talk in evening sessions of their academic camps. The sessions were organized far from where she stayed, and the organizers did not provide any transportation pick-ups for her.

invitations on *Dhamma* lectures from all places-inside and outside the county highlights the abbess' strong-willed and fearless characteristics.

From these backgrounds and my additional observation, I see another interesting semiotic element which exemplifies the two abbesses' distinct self-interpretations of legitimacy. That is the lexical choice of their own pronouns. Whilst S's abbess selected the word 'Luang Mae' (literally means 'respectful mother') to call herself, signifying her (female) monastic status by imitating the word 'Luang Phor'(respectful father) , which most Thai people use to call middle-aged or senior male *sangha*. She also referred to the word 'Luang Ya', in naming her late mother – *Bhiksuni* Voramai – which again imitates the word 'Luang Phu', which is used for an elder *bhikkhu* in Thai Buddhism[44]. As she asserted herself as the first *Theravada bhikkhuni* in the country, these employed lexical choices by the abbess of *Songdhammakalyani* also added proximity value to the Thai audience who interact with her or listen to her speech as in Thai, *Mae* means a mother, Phor is a father, Ya is grandmother and Phu means grandfather. And I see this as her strategy to legitimize her status from bottom-up. Whilst *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani – N's abbess addressed herself with the word 'Ajarn', a term borrowed from *Pali*, which means a teacher or instructor. Normally Thai people use this word in expressing their high respect to those qualified with expertise and professional knowledge in certain aspects. Thus, N's abbess lexical choice underlines her intention to be perceived as a 'learned person' who performs the function of a Buddhist community by transferring her thorough knowledge in Dhamma to her lay disciples and the public based on her 40-year grounded experience as a *mae-chi* and then, a *bhikkhuni.*

Findings also show that both abbesses are regarded as role models for monastic members in certain aspects. *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha is a role model for her well-rounded scholastic and intellectual qualities as well as for her skill in engendering public advocacy through her concise and meaningful communication (Kanjana, 2017). *Bhikkhun*i Nandhayani, as reflected by monastic members (2017), is a testimonial of a Buddhist practitioner who strictly follows the Buddha's path and acquires the stage of 'internalized happiness'. Her strict compliance to the Noble Path is shown in her simple yet happy way of living.

It could be summarised that the two abbesses came from different backgrounds before entering monastic life, and this is reflected in their dissimilar objectives in community establishment and their monastic administrative approach, which I will discuss in the next section.
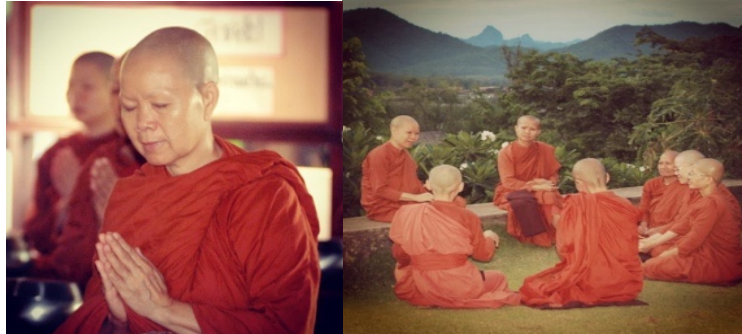
Figure 5.6: (Right) *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani- the abbess of *Nirodharam* - performing chanting as   a clerical duty every morning and evening. (Left) The abbess (left in the higher row) gives *Dhamma* talks and instructions to her monastic members (*Source:* Facebook *Nirodharam*. Accessed 7 July 2016. Available from: www.facebook.com/nirodharam)

5.2.2.B.   Monastic Administrations

❖   **Principles and approach**

Both S and N's monastic members have their full ordination from *Sri Lankan Theravada* lineage, and currently reside in Thailand, which is the biggest *Theravada* Buddhist country. Although they are not regarded as part of the official Thai monastic order, it is interesting to explore if their governing patterns conform to *Theravada* Buddhism or not. And the findings will disclose their prospective self-perceptions as female Buddhist communities in Thailand.[45]

As already mentioned, S clearly declare themselves as the first '*Theravada bhikkhuni* community in Thailand'; however, findings in this research[46] reveal that they adopt a more flexible administrative approach rather than strictly adhering to *Theravada* monastic rules [*Vinaya*]. According to *Bhikkhuni* Dhamanandha (2017), her intention to be ordained in *Theravada* lineage comes from her strong will to establish *bhikkhuni*

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[45] *Theravada* means the doctrine of the elder- insisting that the scriptures should be strictly adhered to, as well as the original teachings and rules of monastic disciplines [*Vinaya*] propounded by the Buddha. *Theravada* is specifically practiced in countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (see Phra Payuttho, 2015; Buddhist Studies, 2008).

[46] From interviews with the abbess, monastic members, as well as my own observation at the community.

sangha in Thailand which is considered as *Theravada* Buddhism as she learnt from experience of her late mother who was ordained as *bhikkhuni* from Taiwanese *Mahayana* lineage that her existence as *Mahayana bhikkhuni* by no means had any impact on the structural and institutional changes in Thai Buddhism with regard to *bhikkhuni* ordination. Nevertheless, S has flexibility in adhering to some *Theravada* rules as the abbess believes that *Vinaya* should be contextualized, as the society has changed dramatically since the time of the Buddha.

For example, S monastic members are allowed to take part in managing, spending and receiving money but it must be for the community's functional purposes not for accumulating their own defilements nor for the sake of their own benefits (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017). S's main financial resources come from international and national donors (Kanjana, 2017). Their flexible financial management enables monastic members to pursue their activities especially those engaged with helping the society. This complies with *Mahayana* principles and the idea of '*Bodhisattva',* in which one is determined to help as many living creatures to get out of sufferings as possible before one continues towards *Nibbana*.

The community also apply 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' principles to hold ordained women to live harmoniously together as a community and to prepare them with comprehensive knowledge and ability to establish new monastic communities in their own localities, if possible (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017). These principles are: (i) spiritually and physically committing themselves to the teaching of the Buddha, (ii) working for the development of others, (iii) creating work, (iv) creating systems to sustain both the works and monastic members, and (v) creating a strong monastic community [*sangha*] (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017);

Nirodharam on the other hand, did not specifically identify themselves either as *bhikkhuni* according to *Theravada* or *Mahayana* tradition as both, according to the abbess, are 'constructed truth' (2008). She elaborated that to strictly adhere to any of them is a sign of attachment, which leads us nowhere in terms of spiritual awakening because the intention of ordination is to detach oneself from all the worldly desires and constructed truth (pp.12-13). However, from my interview with the abbess, monastic members and lay participants as well as from my own observations, I see N's monastic administration rather complies with *Theravada* governance which is based on strict adherence to the *Vinaya*. Any violations of the *Vinaya* will be automatically settled by

due punishments. At the worst, the member committing violations will be disrobed or asked to leave the monastic status (*Bhikkhuni* Nanadhayani, 2017; Kamphu, 2017).

Whilst S allow monastic members to engage with money matters for the good intention, N apply the *Theravada* principle to disallow monastic members from carrying money or engaging with any financial activities of the temple. Financial management falls under the responsibilities of *Nirodharam* Foundation set up and managed by lay disciples to support the operation of monastic activities complying with community's objectives (*Bhikkhuni* Warayani, 2017). The major part of the administrative income is from lay donors who would like to support *Nirodharam*'s greater contributions to the society (Kamphu, 2017). Thus, N's financial management is in line with its prime objective to adhere to the *Vinaya* and not to involve in worldly activities that are not duties of ordained persons, and that could distract them from spiritual practices. I see this clearly underlines N's meanings as a religious community according to *Theravada* tradition.

Similar to S's adherence to 'Socially Engaged Buddhism', N's administrative approach encourages monastic members to pay back to the society as the abbess mentioned they are indebted by the support of the lay community who offer them food and other monastic necessities. Their responsibility is therefore to propagate *Dhamma* so that lay community can also benefit from the Buddha's teachings. Thus, N's administration reflects a balanced interplay between self-training to attain spiritual awakening within the disciplines of the *Vinaya* and contribution to the spiritual well-being of the society.

❖ **Gender considerations**

Another element worth discussing is their disparate monastic selection in relation to gender interpretations in Buddhism. According to the Buddhist scripture, *Theravada* Buddhism debars *pandakas* - effeminate homosexual men - from having full ordination; and if inadvertently one is found to deviate from their accepted sexual norm, he is expelled. However, some Buddhist monastic-related literature says it all depends on the judgement of senior monks who are heads of the respective temple. If the person can conduct himself according to the *Vinaya* or refrain from misconducts, he can be allowed to be ordained. In this regard, S have no specific concern related to 'sexuality' of their to-be-ordained women. In the interview with S's lay disciples, it is interesting that S did not strictly consider the women's background before ordination, believing that ordained life will automatically shed people away from a 'seemingly unrighteous path' as they need to

train themselves to strictly adhere to the monastic codes. As the community aim to establish *bhikkhuni sangha* and its network nationwide, it opens opportunities for as many women as possible to enter an ordained life (Community members, 2017).

N, on the contrary, debar manly, masculine homosexual women or women having same-sex preferences from full ordination (*Bhukkhuni* Nandhayani, 2017; Kamphu, 2017). N strictly adhere to the *Vinaya*, not allowing lesbians to be ordained to prevent sexual-related problems that might emerge within the *sangha* in the future. There was such a case happening once at the community, and the abbess asked both of them to leave monastic life as she aims to build her community very carefully, to be a 'model' for other *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand. This prohibition is also a protective mechanism to prevent further difficulties in *sangha* administration.

❖   **Membership and networking approach**

As of November 2019, S had 10 *bhikkhuni* and 2 *sikkhamanana* as their monastic members. Most of them had been ordained as *samaneri* at the temple before (Kanjana, 2019). According to the interview, some purposefully selected *Songdhammakalyani* for their ordained life because they learnt through the mass media about 'the existence of the first temple for women' in Thailand. Occasionally, for example during the *Vassa* or special Buddhist holidays, foreign *bhikkhunis* from India, Sri Lanka, etc. also visit and stay at the community to attend special training courses (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammawanna, 2017).

For *Nirodharam* in the same period, there were 48 monastic members comprising 24 *bhikkhunis,* 14 *sikkhamanana,* and 10 *samaneri*[47]. Most of these ordained women were from the Northern provinces and the second largest group was from the Central region. There were also *bhikkhuni* from Malaysia and Germany (*Nirodharam*, 2016). *Bhikkhuni* Bhodi Zulian from Malaysia was 66 years old with a PhD degree in Biological Sciences. She spent a month to observe the ordained life at *Nirodharam* before making a decision to be ordained in order to 'live the right life', as she has explained. (*Nirodharam*, 2015).

Monastic members of both communities are mixed groups in terms of their ages. The youngest and oldest members are in their 20s and 80s respectively. Their educational background ranges from primary and secondary education, to bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees as well as vocational training. The biggest group is those with a bachelor's degree. In terms of professional background, ordained women from both

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[47] As of December 2019

communities possess various working backgrounds, including governmental work, private sector work, university instruction, agriculture, hired labourers, freelancers, etc. There are no significant differences in terms of their educational and professional backgrounds between the two communities.

In their early years of establishment, the two communities have slightly different approaches to gain support from lay devotees. As Phra Paisal Visalo, a senior monk known for his in-depth knowledge in Buddhism (2002) has mentioned, patterns of relationship between monastic and lay communities in Thai Buddhism are mirrored in two approaches. First, the monastic's reliance on local habituating support; and second, its dependence on the outer community support that may come from many miles away. *Songdhammakalyani*'s membership structure resembles the second patterns explained by Phra Paisal (2002). The early group of community supporters were mostly former students of *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha and those from her international Buddhist and feminist networks as well as people from Bangkok who learned about the community from Thai mainstream media. There were quite few supporters from the local community in Nakhon Pathom. To be specific, *Songdhammakalyani* adopt an outside-in networking pattern beginning with connection and support from outside the country to gradually include people from Bangkok, and lastly lay communities in local vicinity.

In contrast to this, *Nirodharam* adopt an inside-out pattern of membership/networking. Its membership grows naturally from local laypersons to gradually reach out to people in other regions of Thailand, and then around the world. At the beginning, people who consider themselves as 'committed supporters' of *Nirodharam* were those who have long been disciples of the abbess since she was *mae-chi* Rungduen. This resembles the pattern of primitive Buddhist communities before the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868), when monasteries and local communities were closely interdependent. Over the years, membership has been expanded to cover new groups in Chiang Mai and northern provinces such as school and university students, staff members of governmental organisations and private companies who participated in her *Dhamma* sessions on various occasions. Numbers of members from Bangkok, other provinces as well as abroad (e.g. UK, Germany, USA, South Africa, Czech Republic, etc.) also increase over the years.

❖ **Shared understanding of the community's objective**

From the interviews, members from both communities have gradually developed common understanding about objectives of their communities and have worked collectively to achieve those objectives. S focus on engagement of their monastic members in advocacy and social services activities as key mechanism to achieve the objective to establish, legitimize and strengthen *bhikkhuni* community and to implement the principles of Socially Engaged Buddhism. Meanwhile, N focus is to ensure that the monastic members strictly adhere to the *Vinaya* by complying to the monastic rules and codes of conduct and thorough understanding of the *Dhamma* through their enrollment in formal *Dhamma* classes provided at renown temples in Chiang Mai as well as regular *Dhamma* teaching sessions by the abbess herself.

5.2.3 Multimodal Means of Communication

This section provides comparative outlooks of *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* on their media and communication policies, which reflect their emphasis on distinct platforms of multimodal communication, particularly in the re-disseminating of knowledge and power to their audience; and in negotiating their definite meanings as female Buddhist communities in Thai society. The presentation is based on their multimodal means of communication, which I have reviewed and observed from my visits to the communities in Nakhon Pathom and Chiang Mai; and from my interview sessions with the two abbesses and monastic members; and the focus group discussions with 32 lay participants between September and October 2017 (see Chapter 4).

5.2.3.A. Communication and media platforms

Looking carefully at available communication platforms and media professionals of these two communities is considered vital for the project to understand their effectiveness in communicating their interpretations of legitimacy – in answering the first research question, which will be discussed in the next Chapter.

Qualitative research of Buddhism Communication Strategies of Phra *Dhammakaya* Temple (Nirada, 2015), for example, reflected that using multi-faceted communication and media platforms, particularly through the convergence of mainstream media and internet network, could contribute to more effective communication. Wiratchai (2013) added that the effectiveness of communication is related to a proactive approach by

professional media persons. Organizational management structure should enable joint planning and coordination between the media team and other teams in collecting content for media production. Most importantly, the idea of using social media as a core communication and media strategy is increasingly adopted by many temples.

Although, according to the scripture, monastic members are not explicitly forbidden from utilizing social media platforms as there are quite a number of monastic websites used by well-respected monasteries for religious purposes. However, I see the temples should be very cautious not to use it in a way that is against monastic rules and their holy life; and to use it with good intentions.

Media and communication platforms	*Songdhammakalyani*	*Nirodharam*
Conventional media/communication platforms		
Personal communication by the community's abbess	Yes	Yes
Publications/print media	Yes	Yes
Radio programmes/Audio CDs	Yes	Yes
Library	Yes	Yes
Wall painting, community boards, speaking trees	No	Yes
Social media/communication platforms		
Website	Yes	Yes
YouTube Channel	Yes	Yes
Facebook website	Yes	Yes
Instagram	No	Yes
Non-media communication platform		
Samaneri ordination	Yes	Yes
Communication team	Yes	Yes

Table 5.1: Comparative media outlets and communication platforms of *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam*

Both communities have their own media staff consisting of monastic and lay members with non-professional and professional media backgrounds to work as a team in planning, creating, and producing media content and products. They employ both conventional as well as social media platforms to communicate with the public with varying degrees of intensiveness. The following table provides a comparison of their utilisation of traditional media and social media as well as their communication platforms.

5.2.3.A.i Conventional media/Communication platform

❖ **Personal communication by the community's abbess**

Both communities benefit from the personal communication of their abbess as an important means to convey core messages regarding justification for their existence, their objectives, duties, activities, and contributions to the Buddhist religion as well as the society at large.

Songdhammakalyani's abbess has been internationally and nationally branded as a Buddhist feminist scholar cum activist for over 30 years. She takes the advantage of this to re-educate her audience and the general public with 'proper knowledge' about *bhikkhuni* ordination, the significance of bhikkhuni as one of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies , the significance and potential contribution of *bhikkhuni* to today's Thai society, and the distinct roles of *bhikkhuni* which are irreplaceable by male monks. Based on the principle of 'Feminist Buddhism', *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha also reiterates in many of her speeches the importance of ensuring 'equal status'[48] of women and men in Buddhism. In my opinion, although the abbess's personal communication could potentially create impact on the audience, it also has limitation as it relies on one-way communication with limited opportunities for the audience to respond and interact with the abbess, particularly in the public communication scenarios.

Figure 5.7 The abbess's special lecture for students from Delton University, USA, 2016 (first and second fromLeft) International and National seminars organised by S where the abbess gave a speech to 'advocate' *bhikkhuni* **communities in Thailand and 'strengthen'** *bhikkhun*i **network worldwide (first and second from Right)**

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[48] Relevant quotes are, for example: 'women can also attain awakening as well as men without biological distinction' and 'if ordination is a shortcut to enlightenment why should women be left behind?'

Unlike *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, the abbess of *Nirodharam* focuses less on advocacy for the legitimised status of *bhikkhuni* but more on *Dhamma* propagation from *Tipitaka.* As the abbess has long been a *Dhamma* preacher throughout her ordained life, she adheres to her 'branding' as a *Dhamma* disseminator which I see to some extent becomes part of *Nirodharam*'s identity. From the interview with lay participants in 2017, most of them mentioned the unique and clear-cut style of her *Dhamma* teaching, which is proven to have powerful effects on them, especially in their self-improvements. The abbess conducts *Dhamma* sessions on a regular basis (every Sunday) to lay disciples and delivers *Dhamma* talks on special occasions to special groups as invited, sometimes with non-Thai speaking groups where she had to put extra efforts to communicate in English and make sure that the *Dhamma* is clearly communicated. I see that this interpersonal communication effectively serves the community's intention to be a training centre for self-improvements based on what the Buddha taught.

Figure 5.8 *Dhamm*a camps organised at *Nirodharam* on special Buddhist occasions (Two Left) and N's abbess teaching materials for her *Dhamma* sessions (Right)

❖　　　**Print media and Publications**

S's printed media and publications range from in-house and commercial copies of more than 70 titles, most of which are written by the abbess herself. These cover themes on Buddhism, *Bhikkhuni*, comparative religions, socio-cultural histories from selected Buddhist countries, and biographies. There were a few books written by *Bhiksuni* Voramai as well as Khun Kanjana. Most of these publications are for sale with a small number for free distribution, including the community's quarterly Newsletter.

Figure 5.9: Examples of *Songdhammakalyani's* publications

Most of *Nirodharam's* publications are *Dhamma* books written by the abbess, mostly in Thai language. Some of these written samples are: Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*?*, Techniques for more Happiness*, *New Gen Graduates for Thai Society*, *Recalling the Teachers' Words*, *Quitting Woes-Is it easy?,* and *Ways to end sufferings.* N also provide testimonials of the ordained life through their publications by engaging their monastic members to write books about their own experiences and benefits gained from being *bhikkhuni.* The community also produce a chanting book in Pali with Thai translation, and brochures to invite people to their activities. All of these books and printed materials are available as free copies to people who join the community's activities and visitors.

Figure 5.10: Examples of *Nirodharam's* publications

❖ **Radio programmes/Audio CDs**

S have their own radio programme called '*Dhamma* for new generations' broadcasted via *Chaba Radio*, FM 105.25 Mhz. between 8 and 9 am. daily. The programme normally consists of the abbess' informal talks regarding emerging Buddhist-related issues and also general witty and funny remarks from the abbess and her secretary (Kanjana, 2015). In addition to the radio programme, visitors to the community will get free copies of audio

CDs which are recorded from various occasions of the abbess' talks, lectures, Q&A sessions from S's broadcasted radio and TV programmes, etc.

N also launch a daily radio programme called '*Rom Dhamma Rom Jai*' broadcast via Chiangmai Radio FM. 93.75 Mhz. from 6.00-7.00 am daily. This programme is operated by a reputable DJ in Chiang Mai – Khun Srisuda, who is impressed by the abbess's uniquely humorous and clear-cut teaching, hence asking for her permission to broadcast the abbess *Dhamma* sessions in her radio programme (Srisuda, 2017). The programme is well-received by a great number of audiences. Khun Srisuda eventually has become a volunteer in N's media team and is responsible for producing video clips and audio CDs collected from the lectures given by the abbess of *Nirodharam* on various occasions[49]. These CDs are given as free copies to visitors to community at all occasions. To assure the quality of the reproduction of the abbess's *Dhamma* teachings on various occasions, there is a state-of-the-art studio that has the professional capacity for producing audio records at *Nirodharam*, which is financially supported by lay members who see the utmost benefits in propagating *Dhamma* to the public.

❖ **Library**

Given the abbess's background as an academic, the community's library is well equipped with a wide range of books, printed materials, and publication resources for free access by the public. They are categorized into, for example: a collection of *Tipitaka* (TH); a collection of books by famous Thai monks; a collection of books by *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanada; a collection of books by *Bhiksuni* Voramai; Applied and Comparative Religions; Translated *Dhamma* Books from Original English Versions; (Thai), etc.

Similar to S, N have a small library at both campuses in *Nirodharam* and *Suddhajit*. As most available documents are on Buddhism-related content, it renders N's monastic members to access knowledge to train themselves as qualified monastic members.

❖ **Wall paintings, community's board, speaking trees**

I found wall paintings, community boards and speaking trees[50] at N's two campuses quite conventional but rather unique and interesting as a medium in propagating *Dhamma*

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[49] E.g. during *Dhamma* camp, or events on important Buddhist holy days
[50] Speaking trees are those trees with *Dhamma* quotations, idioms and teaching excerpts normally found in many monasteries in Thailand.

essences. Visitors can find *Dhamm*a quotations scripted on plates and attached to a number of trees, and also explained in diagrams and painted on their building walls. S, however, do not communicate through this same means.

Figure 5.11 Community's wall paintings and speaking trees

5.2.3.B. Social Media and Communication Platforms

Like other religious communities worldwide, after the emergence of social media, S and N also take advantage of utilizing virtual platforms in updating their contents through a website, YouTube, and the Facebook website.

❖ **Website**

S initiated their website 'thaibhikkhunis.org' in 2010 through a former lay disciple of the abbess, and it was available in both Thai and English languages with relatively different levels of detail. The English website provides more detailed information about the community's planned activities. This simply reflects the community's emphasis on foreign audience through their website presentations.

N's website which is only available in Thai was initiated in 2012 by a former *samaneri* at *Nirodharam* who has several educational degrees from prestigious academic institutions. She is regarded as a groundbreaker among N's media team in creating the community's social media platform. The website occasionally added new audio-files and video-clips collected from the abbess's *Dhamma* sessions. However, the *Nirodharam* website now is scarcely ever updated[51] due to the admin's heavy workloads as a university lecturer.

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[51] As of 2017

❖ **YouTube Channel**

S's media team also upload a number of the abbess's talks on various occasions on the YouTube Channel- *Songdhammakalyani Bhikkhuni Arama.* Another YouTube channel-*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha also broadcast S's video clips, most of which are in English.

N's YouTube Channel is called '*Nirodharam*' and contains *Dhamma* sessions by the abbess on various occasions with video clips and 1.99 K subscribers[52]. There is also a YouTube channel which broadcasts content drawn from a local TV Channel, managed by another N's disciple together with the same media team who produce *Rom Dhamma Rom Jai*' radio programme.

❖ **Facebook website**

S's Facebook website: Thaibhikkhunis, was initiated by Khun Kanjana Suthikul – the abbess's secretary who takes care of the community social media outlet. She created S's Facebook profile in September 2012 by selecting a lexical choice of 'Thai bhikkhunis' as their FB's title, intending this FB to represent activities and relevant updates performed by the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand, including *Songdhammakalyani.* At first, FB was intended to supplement the community's existing media platforms but has gradually become its main communication platform until now. S do not have a policy to debar monastic members from utilizing virtual media, but rather encouraging them to make the maximum use of it to promote and facilitate the work of the community.

S's criteria for accepting any 'friends' request' is to give priority to the Thai people regardless of their residential locations, occupations, religions, gender or political and religious stances and whether they are pro or con about the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand. Most of FB content is communicated in Thai. Communication in English takes place occasionally, only when there are events related to international conferences or seminars (Kanjana, 2017). As total number of their FB friends had exceeded 5,000 in August 2018, the FB administrator has changed it to a private FB profile called 'Kanjana Suthikul' which can accommodate more friends.

I found it interesting to see that S's first profile and cover photos in 2012 clearly indicate some connection with the *bhikkhuni sangha* at the time of the Buddha. S selected a profile picture of the four *bhikkhuni* from *Songdhammkalyani* and Songkhla, paying

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[52] As of 2019

homage in front of the *Stupa* in Kusinara, a city where the Buddha passed away. In the first instance, the number of four *bhikkhuni* represents the minimum number to make up a *sangha* in Buddhism. Thus, S declare themselves as a contemporary *bhikkhuni sangha* who continue the lineage of *bhikkhuni sangha* as established by the time of the Buddha. Also, S employed a cover photo of the *Thirteen Arahant Theri bhikkhuni* whose relevance I have already explained in the section about S's employed religious constructions and materials (see 5.2.1). As social media's profile picture tends to demonstrate individual or organizational identity, these two images clearly reflect S's self-perception as (legitimate) female *sangha* (in Thailand).

Figure 5.12 Community 's Facebook website: their first FB profile and cover photos in 2012

Unlike S's FB which was originally set up as 'FB Profile', N's FB was set up as 'FB Page' called '*Nirodharam'* with an intention to allow an unlimited number of public followers to access uploaded *Dhamma* sessions of their abbess. Setting as a Facebook Page, anyone from local and foreign locations can be friends with FB *Nirodharam* without sending a friend request or seeking permission from the administrator. As of May 2019, there were 9,417 followers of N's FB Page. The FB's name coincides with the community's title and its connotations as aforementioned (see 5.2.1).

N's first employed profile and cover photos show a whole group of 50 monastic members from both *Nirodharam* and *Suddhajit* campuses standing in a group with their *Pawattini* from Sri Lanka and N's abbess next to the golden Buddha statue from a horizontal angle. These elements signify N as a big Thai female monastic community which has a firm tie with the (*Theravada*) Sri Lankan lineage. Their cover photo shows a group of N's monastic members paying homage to the wheel of *Dhammacakka* which represents the rolling of the first Buddha's *Dhamma* session, as already explained (See 5.2.1).

Figure 5.13 First employed cover and profile photos of *Nirodharam* in 2012

❖ **Instagram**

In 2019, N started using Instagram as another digital communication platform to update their activities, inform their audience about upcoming events, and disseminate *Dhamma* talks by the abbess on various occasions. Meanwhile, S still focus on using Facebook as its main communication platform and do not have its own Instagram.

5.2.3.C. Non-media communication platform

❖ *Samaneri* **ordination**

Another activity which I see as vitally reinforcing the two communities' objective in legitimizing status of and demonstrating as a role model of qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism is their *Samaneri* ordination.

S organized *samaneri* ordination twice a year in April and December at the community. The ordination provides an opportunity for laywomen to actually enter an ordained life and to get training on Buddhism, *bhikkhuni* history, and related issues through classes and lectures led by the abbess and her secretary. S see that through these processes, more and more Thai and foreign women could potentially become change agents in forwarding knowledge regarding the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination to a wider audience both in Thai society and abroad.

Unlike S whose *samaneri* ordination is organized at fixed periods twice a year, N organize *samaneri* ordination on non-predetermined schedule, but usually on special Buddhist occasions. I see this activity as another communication platform providing laywomen an opportunity to experience the ordained life and support the female Buddhist community. During the period of this study, N organized *samaneri* ordinations for celebrating the

Buddha Jayanti in 2012, and a few times during 2016-2019 to make merit for the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

❖　　**Media team**

Both communities have their own media staff consisting of monastic and lay members with non-professional and professional media backgrounds to work as a team in planning, creating, and producing media content and products.　The media team of *Songdhammakalyani* comprises 3 key persons: two monastic and one lay member who mainly take care of the community's media production. The abbess is in charge of radio programmes while Khun Kanjana takes care of social media outlets. *Bhikkhuni* Dhammawanna, one of S's senior *bhikkhuni* is another key media person. She has a background in Communication Arts and had worked as an economic journalist. *Bhikkhuni* Dhammawanna also serves as administrator of another Facebook website of the community called: '*Watr Songdhammakalyani*'

Nirodharam has two media teams and the abbess is considered the most supreme figure to guide and approve the content of media products of both teams. Production of conventional media (e.g. publications, radio programmes, Audio CDs) is handled by both monastic and lay persons with professional backgrounds in media and communication. Social media team comprises just lay disciple(s) who are voluntarily responsible for administration of the community's Facebook, website, YouTube Channel, and lately Instagram. Monastic members are not allowed to be engaged with social media production/utility, but they help provide advice on the content of the media. The two media teams work independently from each other (*Bhikkhuni* Warayani, 2017; Kamphu, 2017).

5.2.3.D. Comparison of Communication Platforms

❖　　**Responsiveness to organizational objective**

According to Chadwick (2017), although he claimed that we are now living in the transitional period with the dominance and omnipresence of social media, there is no entirely replacement of older media by social media. He highlighted the term 'hybrid media system' emphasising the intermingling association of traditional and social media practices for concerned parties in negotiating or maintaining their 'powers relations'. Thus, from my observations of the two communities' media outlets in the previous

section reveal on the one hand, their different communication purposes are aimed to respond with their different organizational objectives. On the other hand, the media persons are dealing with convergence media across old and social media practices to serve their objectives in negotiating their 'power relations' in the Thai society. To elaborate, S aim to communicate about the legitimacy of the *bhikkhuni* community in Thai Buddhism; the current status of Thai *bhikkhuni* and the need to establish *Theravada bhikkhuni* in Thailand. N, on the other hand, focus on demonstrating to the Thai society a qualified female cleric community through their monastic duties. And these conform with their respective objectives of establishment.

❖ **Potential audience**

Songdhammakalyani aim to communicate with the public to gain support for the establishment of the *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism. Although in their early years, the focus was on international audience through the abbess' network, this has changed over the years. The community now focus on national and local audience whom they believe are key actors to support their objective.

Nirodharam's primary audience are local communities in Chiang Mai and the Northern provinces, as well as lay disciples from Bangkok and provinces in other regions of Thailand. Over the past years, social media has connected them with a broader-based audience, including those from other countries (*Bhikkhuni* Warayani, 2017; Kamphu, 2017).

❖   **Media policies in engaging with mainstream media**

The two communities have dissimilar objectives which in turn affect their emphasis on communication platforms. As *Songdhammakalyani* aim to promote the establishment and network of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism and if possible, in other Buddhist countries, they take every emerging opportunity to engage in mainstream media programmes as invited (Kanjana, 2017). Since their establishment, S abbess had been approached by popular TV programmes in Thailand to talk on issues related to *bhikkhuni* ordination. These include, for example, *Jud Chanuan Kwam Kid* on Nation Channel (2011)[53], *Dhamma Niyama* on Blue Sky TV (2012), Tang Khon Tang Kid on Amarin TV (2014)[54], Kom Chud Luek on Nation Channel (2014)[55], Tob Jod on ThaiPBS (2014)[56], and

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[53] Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gteGs01ovc
[54] Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vofOtyJDSDY
[55] Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6-XYR35QcY
[56] Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHt3cQMZnmY

more recently in Newstalk on New TV (2016)[57]. Most of her talks in these programmes aim to educate Thai society with proper knowledge about the *bhikkhuni sangha* and the necessity to establish and strengthen the *bhikkhuni sangha* nationwide.

Nirodharam are different. Their primary objective is to establish a qualified female clerical community in Thai Buddhism and demonstrate righteous conducts and duties of monastic members as a proof for their legitimated existence. In the early years of establishment, N opted not to take part in any media programmes broadcast on the Thai mainstream media to discuss issues which could probably affect the seemingly cozy relations between them and the male *sangha.* As the abbess explained, *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* are like brothers and sisters who have commentary roles to sustain Buddhism. From my interview, in the first few years, the focus of *Nirodharam's* communication to the public was on *Dhamma* dissemination. To genuinely sensitize the media about the significance and contribution of *bhikkhuni*, the abbess uses techniques such as inviting media to experience the ordained life by themselves.

After a few years of firmed establishment, *Nirodharam* has gradually adjusted their approach to engage more with mainstream media, evidenced by the abbess's allowing the mainstream media to cover the two events of their remarkably important *Samaneri* ordinations[58] locally and nationally.[59] I see this is part of the 'inside-out' approach for long-term sustainability of the community.

Findings in this section illustrate the comprehensive prospect of *Songdhammakalyani*'s and *Nirodharam's* self-perceptions/meanings through multimodal resources of their monastic elements, attributes of the abbess, and multimodal means of communication. These findings will be consolidated with findings from the next chapter, which will then support the answer to the first research question.

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[57] Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzIPf6Zx7AQ

[58] In 2017 there were two held in October. The first one took place in early December to mark the one-year anniversary of the passing away of the Late King Bhumibol, and the other one in late October as part of merit contribution to the King during the Royal Cremation ceremony.

[59] Locally by 'Thai News' a local press in Chiang Mai, and 'Matichon' a Thai 'quality' press in 2017.

5.3   Discussions

Findings from this chapter indicate the disparate monastic elements utilised by the two *bhikkhuni* communities which convey dissimilar interpretations of their self-identifications and contributions in the Thai socio-cultural context. The discussions on their self-identifications will base on analysis of what is presented in the previous section (5.2).

5.3.1   Self-Identifications Interpreted through Their Titles, Geographical Locations and Monastic Constructions and Materials

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), O'Halloran (2006) and Adami (2009), verbal mode is considered the traditionally official means of communication in the Western hemisphere, particularly in registering official status. The findings from my review of the two communities' titles in the Thai socio-cultural context show similar attributes. Verbal construction of lexical choices in their titles reflects their intention to communicate their official objectives, which are also compatible with their own stances as part of female Buddhist communities in Thai society.

For S*,* their full title: '*Watr Songdhammakalyani*' reflects a coherent meaning of the community's objective to serve as 'a place for women to dignifiedly practice their *Dhamma* duties'. The words '*Dhamma* duties' here go beyond the restricted meanings of monastic duties but also embracing worldly duties [*Lokiya Dhamma*] and social contributions.   Similarly, *Nirodharam's* selected lexical choices clearly reflect the community's objective to provide women with an appropriate environment for *Dhamma* practices towards the spiritual awakening stage. *'Nirodharam'* which means 'a place to end sufferings', and its second campus '*Suddhajit*' which means 'a purified soul' both exemplify N's objective towards the ultimate goal of Buddhism, which goes beyond worldly ambition [*Lokutaraya Dhamma*]. In addition, their employed lexical choices of monastic titles also coherently represent the functions of the Buddhist community.

As represented through the spatial and temporal modes of their geographical locations, both communities are strategically situated. *Songdhammakalyani*'s venue in Nakhon Pathom signifies the golden area where the two Buddhist envoys landed to situate Buddhism in Southeast Asia in the ancient Suvarnabhumi period while Chiang Mai were *Nirodharam* is located is regarded as the sacred old Lanna where Buddhism was firmly

settled since the old times and continues to prosper until now, indicated by the number of temples and notably respectful monks in contemporary time.

It is also interesting to find out that their monastic resources mirror paradoxical meanings according to *Theravada* and *Mahayana* Buddhism interpretations. Despite *Songdhammakalyani*'s asserting their position as the first (legitimated) Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community, S adopt mere *Mahayana* than *Theravada* semiotic elements signified by their extensive monastic meanings which broadly embrace 'Socially Engaged Buddhism', a doctrine which offers monastic practices in helping and contributing to society in worldly aspects beyond the confines of monastic duties. The presence of the Medicine Buddha and *Bodhisattva* Canal in the community also conform well to the *Mahayana* rather than the *Theravada* concept (see 5.2.1).

In contrast, the *Nirodharam* who do not want to identify themselves either as *Theravada* or *Mahayana bhikkhuni*, mainly reveal *Theravada* elements through their verbal resource of community's title. Its monastic constructions and materials, i.e. the *Dhammacakka* wheel, *Buddha Jayanti Chedi* and the Buddha *Sihingkha* statue all coherently represent the community's highest respects to the Buddha, which is the core element of the *Theravadin* tradition.

5.3.2 Self-identifications interpreted through the abbesses' attributes and monastic administrations

Interpretations based on the two abbesses' qualities and monastic administration reveal that the two communities have dissimilar perceptions about their stances and significance. Being a Buddhist Feminist and an internationally well-known Buddhist scholar for more than 30 years before being ordained as *bhikkhuni*, the charismatic leader of *Songdhammakalyani* clearly asserts herself as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* who aims to be a trailblazer in establishing and legitimising the *Theravada bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism (see *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017; Somrit, 2015). S perfectly conform to a 'subjective legitimation strategy' as *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha declares the legitimated status of 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*' as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies believed to be established by the Buddha and her legitimated ordination from *Theravada* lineage.

The charismatic abbess of *Nirodharam*, who had been in her *mae-chi-* hood for 30 years before being ordained as a *bhikkhuni* , however, does not identify herself either as Thai

Theravada bhikkhuni or *Mahayana bhikkhuni*, but broadly as a *bhikkhuni* or female cleric who is a part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies, similar to what S mentions. Interestingly, when it comes to a more specific definition, N's abbess perceives herself and other monastic members as 'beggars' or women who live on food given by lay people. Seeing threats in re-incarnations [*Samsara*], these women depart their homes to live an ordained life so as to attain spiritual awakening [*Nibbhana*] without any earnings. Clearly, N conform to an 'objective legitimation strategy', proving their legitimacy through righteous conducts rather than explicitly declaring themselves as *'Theravada' bhikkhuni*. The two abbesses serve as a role model for their monastic members in certain aspects. S's abbess has been a blueprint for her scholastic and intellectual qualities, particularly in Buddhism, gender studies, and public advocacy through her concise but meaningful public communications. N's abbess, in the same way, is highly respected and looked up for by her monastic members as a testimonial of how strict adherence to monastic conducts and rules can reap ordinary people out of sufferings.

Similar to their monastic elements, their monastic administration also reflects paradoxical meanings according to the *Theravada* and *Mahayana* elements. *Songdhammakalyani*, who assert themselves as the first *Theravada bhikkhuni* community in Thailand, apply mere *Mahayana* principles of 'Socially Engaged Buddhism', in their administration which is more flexible in terms of financial arrangements to serve their functions in helping others. This complies with their 'subjective legitimation process' to stabilise and legitimise the *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thailand. The abbess also sees 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' and a more 'compromising considerations in adhering to monastic rules' as a pathway for the community to effectively perform both its clerical and social functions in today's complex and changing world, given that everything is done with good intention.

Nirodharam's abbess, by contrast, does not want to identify the community either as *Theravada* or *Mahayana*. To them, the meaning of being 'ordained women' goes far beyond these two definitions which are socially 'constructed'. Being strictly attached to either of them could obstruct progress towards enlightened minds or the 'ultimate' truth. Given this fact, the findings indicate N's compliance with the *Theravada* monastic governance with a strict adherence to the *Vinaya.* In addition, monastic members are not allowed to engage with any financial matters. This could be explained as 'objective legitimation process' carried out by N's abbess who also aims to stabilise the *bhikkhuni sangha,* not from delivering discourse but from the well-disciplined and righteous

conducts of her monastic members. To stabilise and legitimise the *bhikkhuni sangha*, N's abbess also applies a well-balanced approach between ensuring strict adherence to monastic rules and practices among monastic members themselves and their contribution to lay people's communities through the various channels used for the propagating of *Dhamma.*

Another disparate approach noted between S and N is their monastic selection in relation to gender and Buddhism. S believe in gender equality and provide more opportunity for women to be ordained in Buddhism with no specific concern over their gender preferences and sexuality. They encourage as many women as possible to receive ordination since it is believed that the ordained life will automatically lead people away from a 'seemingly unrighteous path' as they need to train themselves to strictly adhere to the monastic codes. This is also in accordance with their objective in providing laywomen with more opportunities to be part of, and indeed to strengthen the *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thailand. N, on the other hand, comply with the *Vinaya.* They strictly scrutinize the background of to-be ordained women and debar those having same-sex preferences from full ordination at the community by referring to the *Vinaya*. This is also according to the community's objective in role-modelling other *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand and to prevent further difficulties for monastic administration.

In terms of network expansion, *Songdhammakalyani* resemble an outside-in networking pattern. Their early support was first of all sparked from international supporters of the abbess's networks in Feminist Buddhism academic circles, and gradually expanded to include national supporters, and eventually local community as the latest group. This prove S's legitimated status, especially internationally where its significance as the first *Theravada bhikkhuni* community in Thailand is widely acclaimed.

Nirodharam have a different approach. They gradually legitimized their status as female *nak-buat* in Thai Buddhism, initially with support from local people who benefited from the abbess's *Dhamma* teaching and then expanded to supporters from outside Chiang Mai and Thailand. This is seen as an inside-out networking pattern and resonates with a primitive Buddhist community before the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) when monastic and local communities were closely interdependent. In addition, members of both communities also share common understandings about their communities' objectives, which signify their stability in undergoing their communities' missions and advancement.

5.3.3 Self-Identifications Interpreted through Their Multimodal Means of Communication

The two communities' multimodal means of communication do not only reflect their hybridity of media systems by engaging offline and online media convergences, but also their endeavours in authorising their own discourse in negotiating with those of the mainstreams in constructing their legitimacy within Thai society.

Songdhammakalyani and *Nirodharam* have dissimilar communication purposes and media policies. S apply their communication strategy to construct discourse on the legitimacy of the *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism for both international and local audiences. That is why most of their media outlets are available bi-lingually in Thai and English. N mainly focus on role-modelling to the society a proper and well-functioning female clerical community by propagating *Dhamma* contents. In the early years, their focus was rather limited to local and national audience, hence their media were mainly available in Thai. In the past recent years, however, there are more English contents in the abbess's *Dhamma* talk and short video clips from monastic members via YouTube and Facebook platforms.

Before the emergence of social media, both communities heavily relied on the personal communications of their abbesses who have different backgrounds and communication styles. S's abbess has a strong academic background in Buddhism, particularly about *bhikkhuni sangha*, as well as an ability in simplifying academic contents. She normally gives a public talk which engages her audience on *bhikkhuni*-related issues on a grand scale. N's abbess is competent in explaining *Dhamma* thoroughly with clear examples, making it easy to follow and understand. Hence her teaching has a practical impact on the audience who can apply the teaching to their life situation. Consequently, it creates engagement with an increasingly large audience.

Their emphasis on the abbess's verbal communication as the official means of communication also coincides with what Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) found in the Western hemisphere. As the two abbesses have the ability to influence the audience's attitudes, their personal communication could create an engaging impact from the audience. In addition to verbal communication, the speech is perceived visually while the audience watch the abbesses' charismatic personalities and gestural languages used to elaborate the contents. Besides, the audience can also perceive delivered massages

audibly through vocal elements such as their intonations, vocal tones and punctuations, whilst social distance between the abbess and the audience is considered vital in engaging the audience and rendering the communication effective. Thus, the two communities' emphasis on personal communication by the abbess contains multimodal elements which an audience can experience at once and potentially boost their attention and participation with respect to the given speech. However, this communication method also has limitations as it could accommodate only a certain number of participants in each lecture and is considered as a one-way communication method.

In addition to their abbesses' personal communications, printed media and in-house publications are also considered as their important platforms, aiming at different target groups and leading to different levels of engagement by the audience. S and N publications are promoted in order to communicate their specific contents which comply with the communities' objectives and their communication purpose(s). S make it clear at the first hand that it is the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community which aims to establish and legitimize the *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism. Thus, most of their publications are concerned with discourse on the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination and providing in-depth knowledge of the issue from well-rounded perspectives. Meanwhile, N's publications, although limited in numbers, do demonstrate their dedication to disseminate *Dhamma* taught by the Buddha and to provide guideline on righteous conducts for Buddhists.

These two communication platforms of both communities, namely personal communication by the abbesses and publications, employ linguistic elements of speech (verbal) and written texts, as dominant semiotic resources in meaning-making. Similar to other semiotic resources, speech and written texts are socially and culturally shaped, with their interpreted meanings varying across space, time and context. Thus, it is within the ability of the abbess and communicators from the two communities to ensure they share common understanding of a socio-cultural background with their audience in achieving their communication objectives (Benzemer 2012).

The two communities adopt different approaches in engaging with the mainstream media. S have made their stance clear since their early years until now in taking advantage to participate in media programmes nationally and internationally to advocate the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni*, trusting in the ability of their charismatic leader in simplifying such essences for the sake of public comprehension. N in the early years preferred to be low profiled in engaging with any media, particularly in any interview or

documentary programmes regarding the controversial debate on the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand. They believe their legitimated status is assessed by the acceptance of local Thai Buddhists rather than by official discourse from the authority. This reflects an objective legitimation pattern. Given their increased visibility in the society, however, they have in recent years decided to adjust their communication strategy to engage more with a broader audience through participation in public events on selected occasions. This marks the more advanced step of their media and communication stance. Whereas *Songdhammakalyani* has consistently pursued this goal for the last ten years, *Nirodharam* has just recently moved forward in negotiating with the mainstream regarding 'illegitimated' and marginalized status of *bhikkhuni* in the Thai society. This is done after they have established their relationship with, and gain recognition from the Thai society to some satisfactory extent.

In terms of social media, similar to the case of other religious communities worldwide, (Campbell, 2012), they both take advantage of social media platforms in communicating and updating their activities and information through Website, YouTube, Facebook website, as well as Instagram (for N only). Their utilization of social media, and particularly their emphasis on the Facebook site, allows them to exercise authority in publicizing and re-disseminating knowledge and their power in the horizontal domain with no less than 5,000 audience nationwide and worldwide.

S regard the supreme importance of social media, especially the Facebook and community website, as a potential communication device because of its timeless and space- less capacity. It could be reached by the publics without any gatekeeper as an authority body to control or censor contents like with the conventional media. S's focus on SNS is expected to have stronger impact on the advocacy towards the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni/bhikkhuni* ordination in the Thai society. Comparatively, N focus less in utilising social media because the *sangha* does not emphasise the quantity of audience but rather the quality and clarity of the *Dhamma* transferred through media outlets. Only selected *Dhamma* content believed to have high benefits for the audience will be propagated via SNS.

Regarding utilisation of social media, S have not barred monastic members from engaging with social media platforms if it is for good purposes. N, however, are different. They do not allow their monastic members to engage with using Social Networking Sites (SNS) for

fear of its detrimental effects and ability to distract *sangha* members from the righteous cleric path. Yet, they do give advice on the content, if requested.

The quality of their communication products is ensured by engagement of professional media persons in media production although N outnumber S in this regard. The two abbesses are regarded as the key persons in the selecting of publicised contents and framing of the community's media policies. At the time of this writing (2019), Facebook is considered their most salient online platform.

Both communities utilise the website, YouTube and Facebook website as part of their communication platforms, whilst as of the time of writing (2019) Facebook is considered their most salient online platform as they normally update their contents via this virtual platform. Although not allowed to use social media by themselves, N's clerical members, including the abbess, help to review the content of the FB, especially that concerning the abbess's teachings.

Although these de-facto *bhikkhuni* communities are considered marginalised in the Thai Buddhism context, the introduction of social media in convergence with their existing conventional media employment is believed to have improved the effectiveness of their communication to negotiate with the pre-existing message or narrative on their illegitimacy. Besides, as new media play a pivotal role in creating a public space for the 'marginalised' to construct with the mainstream discourse, the study shows the necessity to explore how the two *bhikkhuni* communities selectively employ Facebook as one of the influential social media platforms to construct their legitimacy within Thai Buddhism. (See chapters 7-8).

5.4   Conclusion

All in all, this chapter has offered explanations arising from a multimodal analysis of the two communities which make up their specific meanings as female Buddhist communities in contemporary Thai Buddhism. The ensemble of these selected multimodal resources sufficiently illustrates their self-perceptions and interpretations of their legitimacy in the Thai society. Findings from this chapter will supplement findings from the next chapter (chapter 6) in order to answer the first research question: how do bhikkhuni communities interpret the meanings of their 'legitimacy'?

CHAPTER VI:

'LEGITIMACY' INTERPRETED BY *BHIKKHUNI* COMMUNITIES

6.1   Introduction

The previous chapter has provided some background in illustrating how *Songdhammaklaynai* and *Nirodharam* utilise the divergent multimodal resources of their monastic elements in defining their own stances as part of the female Buddhist community in Thailand. The findings of the previous chapter will supplement the findings from this chapter in answering the first research question 'How do *bhikkhuni* communities understand and interpret their meanings of 'legitimacy' in contemporary Thai society?' More specifically, this chapter aims to find out the two communities' comparative understandings of their 'legitimacy' through multimodal resources, using conceptual frameworks explained in Chapters 3 and 4.

This chapter refers to multimodality as research techniques as well as means of investigations and findings in this chapter are grounded on multimodal discourses as produced by the two communities through various occasions via multi-platforms including: (i) my interviews with the two abbesses, monastic and lay community members in 2016 and 2017; (ii) the communities' literatures and in-house publications in both the Thai and English languages, and (iii) public speeches of the abbess and community's key persons via mainstream media including TV programmes; and online channels. All these linguistic resources both in the forms of speech and writing presented in the findings section (6.2) of this chapter are then interpreted in combination with findings from the previous chapter which reflected their meanings from multimodal monastic elements to consolidate the two communities' understandings and interpretations of their 'legitimacy' in the discussion part (6.3).

Most importantly, the findings in this chapter will reflect how S and N interpret their meanings of legitimacy to negotiate with the prevailing mainstream discourse which currently illegitimate their official status as Thai *bhikkhuni*.

6.2   Findings: *Bhikkhuni*'s Discourses of Legitimacy

This section portrays the comparative outlooks of the two communities' interpretations of their 'legitimacy' by presenting their selected rhetoric and written discourses from various occasions reiterated by their community members, beginning with those of *Songdhammakalyani's* and then *Nirodharam*'s.

6.2.1   *Songdhammakayani's* Discourses of Legitimacy

Songdhammakayani interpret and claim their legitimacy both within the broader Buddhism context and within the Thai Buddhism context.

6.2.1.A. S's Legitimacy in the Broad Buddhism Context

The studies of S's discourses regarding their legitimacy in the broad Buddhism context reflect that S interpret themselves as a 'legitimated *bhikkhuni* community' as intended by the Buddha', justified by the following reasons.

6.2.1.A.i The Buddha's intention to establish the fourfold Buddhist assemblies to stabilize his religion

Songdhammakalyani assert themselves as a legitimated *bhikkhuni* community by referring to 'the Buddha's intention in establishing the fourfold Buddhist assemblies to stabilise and sustain Buddhism. From the abbess's speech in a public seminar which I attended[60], statements of the abbess in mainstream media[61], and S's publications[62], the abbess highlighted that the idea of '*bhikkhuni*' had emerged long-time before the actual first '*bhikkhuni*' had been ordained in Buddhism'. S's abbess indicated that 'the Buddha had foreseen the structure of his religion since the time he was enlightened. He did not accept *Mara*'s invitation[63] to go *Parinibbhana*, stating his strong intention to establish the fourfold Buddhist assemblies comprising of *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhuni*, laymen and laywomen to sustain his teachings. The abbess also pointed out that any allegations, such as 'Buddha's unintentional permission to establish *bhikkhuni sangha* but he could not resist Ven. Anandha's appeal'; or 'having *bhikkhuni* is the harm to Buddhism'; are obviously strong intrusions against him'. She elaborated that these four groups of the assemblies were established with specific duties, i.e. to study and

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[60] At Chiang Mai University in September 2015
[61] My reviews of the community's presences in TV shows: '*Tang Khon Tang Kid* (Amarin TV, 2014), 'Bhikkhuni's (human) rights under Thai Constitution (ThaiPBS, 2014); and NewTV,2017
[62] *Theravada Bhikkhuni Lineage* (2015)
[63] Personification of an evil – whose duty is to bar the Buddha from achieving his enlightenment stage and propagate *Dhamma* teachings to Buddhist for more than 2500 years.

practice *Dhamma*, as well as to protect against any harms that may occur to Buddhism. The absence of any of these groups will make this 'four-legged chair' incomplete, overburdened and could eventually collapse at some point. Thus, all of the four members are equally important.

> 'The Buddha never relied on just one of these groups to continue his religion. And we (Thai Buddhists) should realise equal role of *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* to sustain what was permitted and established by him'.

> *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2015

In response to the mainstream discourse which claimed that the existence of *bhikkhuni sangha* would shorten Buddhism, *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha argued that the Buddha had never mentioned so. According to the Buddha, his religion would decline only when the four members of the assemblies (i) disrespect the Triple Gems*;* (ii) ignore the study of his teachings; and (iii) disregard one another. Also, in responding to the public's query why there should be a need for *bhikkhuni* when there is already *mae-chi* in Thai society, *Songdhammakalyani* argue that there are only two types of ordination in Buddhism: lower ordination as a novice, and higher ordination as a monk. *Mae-chi* is not considered as an ordained person but a white-robed nun who observes only 8 precepts. Unless receiving lower ordination as *samaneri* (female novices), then they will become part of the body of ordained persons in the Buddhist community (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014).

6.2.1.A.ii The principle of *Theravada* Buddhism: what has originally been established and never been withdrawn is still valid

The next reference S use to interpret their legitimacy is related to the core principle of *Theravada* Buddhism. According to the abbess's explanation in the Thai mainstream media (2014), three months after the Buddha's *Parinibbhana*, there was the first '*Pathom Sangkayana'* in which 500 *Arahant bhikkhu* met to officially consolidate the Buddha's teachings. They agreed not to withdraw the existing monastic rules nor add new ones apart from what the Buddha had established to govern the *sangha.* This has become the core principle of *Theravada* Buddhism since then. According to the abbess, as *bhikkhuni* ordination was permitted by the Buddha and has never been withdrawn,

it is eventually considered as the 'original' part of *Theravada* Buddhism. She also argues that the Sri Lankan *Theravada* lineage from which S monastic members were ordained is genuine as it has been revived from the lineage in Taiwan which continued from *Theravada* Sri Lanka; and carried on from *bhikkhuni* lineage in the Buddha's time. Thus, the emergence of *Songdhammakalyani* as *bhikkhuni* community in Thailand is legitimate according to the *Theravada* core principle (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014).

6.2.1.A.iii The history of *bhikkhuni* ordination that was completely legitimated by the *bhikkhu sangha*

S also argued that, according to mainstream discourse which refer to the *Vinaya, bhikkhuni* ordination must be completed both within *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha.* This implies that it is almost impossible for women these days to have a legitimised ordination as there are very few *bhikkhuni sangha* around to perform such function. Towards this, *Songdhammakalyani* strongly argue as evidenced in their publications and interviews given to the mainstream media that from the Buddhist history, the Buddha only gave ordination to the first *bhikkhuni* [64], after then he authorised the *bhikkhu sangha* to conduct and complete *bhikkhuni* ordination. *Bhikkhuni sangha* were engaged only at the initial stage of 'purification' where the to-be ordained women were asked with a few intimate questions considered not appropriate for the *bhikkhu sangha* to ask and some women might refuse to answer. Thus, *bhikkhuni*'s role is not to lead or complete the ordination, but to facilitate a certain process. To support this argument, S refer to the 7th edition of the *Dhamma Vinaya* in the *Tipitaka* which clearly points out the Buddha's statement related to *bhikkhuni* ordination mentioning that 'there is no evidence showing his permission to have *bhikkhuni* ordination to be completed within *bhikkhuni sangha*.' The abbess particularly mentioned, 'It is only a misinterpretation that *bhikkhuni* ordination must be firstly completed within *bhikkhuni sangha*; and later by the *bhikkhu sangha*. If this happens, it will be a double ordination' (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014).

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[64] His stepmother princess *Mahapajabadi*

6.2.1.A. iv. Equal ability of women to attain spiritual awakening but much more difficult without ordination

The last reference for S legitimacy in the broad Buddhism context is about women's ability to attain spiritual awakening through ordination. In a number of TV programmes[65], S's abbess highlighted the beauty of Buddhism as the first religion mentioning women's ability to attain awakening (*Nibbhana*) similar to that of men. 'I am so delighted to see this beauty when studying Buddhist history; and want to keep it alive', she expressed. In one TV programme[66], the abbess replied to a state authority who argued that women could attain awakening without necessarily being ordained that she would believe only to what the Buddha had said and permitted. If the Buddha mentioned that ordination is a shortcut for human being-both men and women- to attain spiritual awakening, why should she not follow this path. This belief was also shared by her three grown-up sons who do not want to see her struggle to reach her goal on a more difficult road of lay person, hence they fully supported her ordination.

6.2.1.B. S's Interpretation of Their Legitimacy within the Thai Buddhism Context

When it comes down to a more practical level within the context of Thai-Buddhism, *Songdhammakalyani* specifically reiterate their legitimacy as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community by referring to the following rationales.

6.2.1.B.i. Their being trailblazer in the studies of legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand with support from the international Buddhist network

In claiming that *Songdhammakalyani* is the first (legitimised) Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*, the abbess referred to her PhD thesis on *bhikkhuni* ordination where she thoroughly investigated into the issue from all aspects and reference sources. She mentioned it was the Buddha's intention since his enlightenment that he would rely on four groups of people to propagate and continue his teachings, including *bhikkhuni.* She mentioned, 'He never said that he would rely only on ordained men or the *bhikkhu* sangha. It is so clear, and we *bhikkhuni* are inheriting his will and continuing his work to our best efforts'.

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[65] In the TV programme, Tang Khon Tang Kid and Kom Chad Luek in 2014
[66] Tang Khon Tang Kid

As such, the abbess stressed her intention and the necessity for her to be a change-agent to 'institutionalise' *bhikkhuni sangha* in the Thai Buddhism[67], which was strongly motivated by the support from the international Buddhism network. According to the interview, her turning point happened after she had given a lecture on 'The future of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thailand' at Harvard in 1983 when she actually realised by that time that she had very thorough knowledge on the topic. She felt prompted to become a change agent in this regard, starting from setting up a network for educating working women on Buddhism related issues. 'If I had not decided to step forward and start it, how *bhikkhuni sangha* could eventually be realised and established?', she said during the interview (2016).

In order to establish the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni sangha*, the abbess studied monastic rules and strictly followed the process of *Theravada bhikkhuni* ordination in order to become a fully 'legitimated' Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni.* Having learnt from the experience of her mother, *Bhiksun*i Voramai that working individually is not the way to revive *bhikkhuni* collectively, she made efforts to institutionalise *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism initially by the support from her international feminist Buddhist network, such as '*Sakyadhita*', and gradually by other international and regional Buddhist connections before expanding to local supporters (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017).

In order to be a pioneer in 'legitimising' *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism, I observe that the community are committed to making the whole process 'legitimated' as Khun Kanjana commented in one TV programme(2014)[68] that *Songdhammakalyani*, since the beginning, strictly followed what the Thai Supreme Council required. As the 1928 Decree disallows monks and novices to give ordination to women in Thailand, the abbess and *bhikkhuni* at *Songdhammakalyani* did not break the rule. They all had their full ordination from *Theravada* Sri Lankan lineage. This complies with what the abbess told me in the interview (2017) that her ordination was all legitimated and could be scrutinised. The process began with the purification stage by the *bhikkhuni sangha* who were her Sri Lankan *Pawattini*; and was completed within the *bhikkhu sangha* who were her Sri Lankan *Upatcha*'. These exemplify their aim to be a trailblazer in establishing and legitimizing Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community as the abbess also mentioned

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[67] I have learnt from my interview with the abbess and Khun Kanjana Suthikul in 2016 and 2017, as well as the abbess speech given to BBC programme in 2016.
[68] 'Tang Khon Tang Kid'

'illegitimated *bhikkhuni* ordination' carried out by some groups of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand by not complying to all the *Theravada* requirements. S see this could be problematic, especially in relation to the 'impurified status' of *bhikkhuni sangha* when performing '*Patimokkha*' with their monastic members. The abbess thus summarised that if Thai women wanted to be ordained as *bhikkhuni* to sustain Buddhism, they have to do it properly according to the *Theravada* principles and *Songdhammakalyani* monastic members could help train them on these protocols.

6.2.1.B.ii The supposedly null-void status of the 1928 Decree of the former Supreme Patriarch

The next reference to explain S's legitimacy as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* is related to the technical problem of the supposedly invalid status of the 1928 Decree. From the abbess' speech on a Thai TV programme[69] (2014), and my interview with Khun Kanjana (2017), they mentioned that the context in which the Decree was declared should be reconsidered. The community argued that the Decree was declared in 1928 by the Supreme Patriarch to respond Narin Pasit's attempt to have his two daughters received *samaneri* ordination. The country was under the absolute monarchy at that time. Since 1932, Thailand became a constitutional monarchy so it is questionable whether the 1928 Decree would still be valid. The abbess also raised another crucial point that the content of the Decree is conflicting to what the Buddha had established within the bigger frame of Buddhism. Therefore, the Decree should be regarded as having 'invalid status'. More importantly, when the *Sangha* Supreme Council re-enforced the 1928 Decree on 11 December 2014 to refrain Thai *bhikkhu sangha* to give ordination to a group of women in Songkhla, this enforcement should not apply to the *bhikkhuni* from *Songdhammakalyani* who have had their ordination in Sri Lanka way before the reinforcement date.

S also refer to Thailand's constitution which clearly provides all men and women with full liberty to adhere to a religion and a religious sect and to practice in accordance with their beliefs, meaning that Thai citizens are fully protected against any State's derogation of their rights. Thailand's constitution is regarded as the broad umbrella to govern the country, thus any legal documents stated by religious authorities which confute its essence is considered nullified.

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[69] *Bhikkhuni*'s (human) rights under Thai Constitution' in 2014

6.2.1.B.iii. Legitimacy by the Buddha's intention but obstructed by gender prejudice

Whilst *Songdhammakalyani* assert their legitimated status as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*, the community also refer to 'gender prejudice' as the major cause which obstructs legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in the Thai Buddhism. In responding to the mainstream discourse by state authorities and the *male sangha* mentioning that the lineage of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism[70] has already been broken, the abbess argued that such saying was distorted as *bhikkhuni* lineage has never been established in Thai Buddhism before. In fact, it has just started. *Songdhammakalyani*'s publications[71] also include discourse related to the 'illegitimated' status of *bhikkhuni* and *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism drawn from 'gender prejudice' which has been systematically concretised in the Thai society. For example, a Thai Buddhist textbook describing the Buddha's cremation ceremony which was the major event for all Buddhists at that time indicates that there was no *bhikkhuni* sangha attending this event, implying that the lineage of *bhikkhuni* was completely broken before then. In the abbess's view, this reflects the ignorance of the person who wrote this book as the story about the Buddha's cremation was firstly recorded 450 years after the Buddha's *Parinibbhana*. Since this was the big event for all Buddhists, she was confident that *bhikkhuni sangha* would definitely have attended the Buddha's cremation. But the stories of *bhikkhuni* were missing simply because the recorder did not pay attention to explore about *bhikkhuni*'s presence. It reflects male prejudice about the existence of *bhikkhuni* (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014).

The abbess also raised another critical point indicating the ignorance of the writer about *bhikkhuni sangha.* In the same book, the author mentioned that after 300 years of the Buddha's *Parinibbhana*, King Asoka of India sent his daughter: *Bhikkhuni* Sangkhamitra to Sri Lanka to establish a *bhikkhuni sangha*; and she was accompanied by other *bhikkhuni* whose number was unknown. The abbess pointed out that this reflected the lack of knowledge about *bhikkhuni sangha* as it should be commonly known that in order to establish a *bhikkhuni sangha,* there should of course be a number of qualified *bhikkhuni*-at least four of them. She concluded that what we call history could be subjective as it was selectively inscribed by the author's interests and preferences. In this case it was written by a man with prejudice and ignorance about the existence and

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[70] From the three TV programmes; 'Tang Khon Tang Kid' broadcasted on Amarin TV, 2014; 'Kom Chud Luek', in 2014, and NewTV in 2017.
[71] Authored by the abbess (See Chatsuma,2008, pp.18-20).

contribution of female clerics in Buddhism. Similarly, the *Tipitaka* which was recorded from male perspectives could as well overlook detailed content related to *bhikkhuni.* She said that is why modern feminists are calling for 'herstory' to balance the views.

Another prominent example of 'gender prejudice' from S's perspective is related to the discourse made by the male *sangha* and some Buddhist academics that the emergence of *bhikkhuni sangha* will shorten Buddhism. It was claimed that such a statement is written in the *Tipitaka.* *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha explained that this message is clearly distorted as the male *sangha* only refer to the first part of the scripture and skip the remaining part which is crucially important. In fact, the full statement in the *Tipitaka* is 'The emergence of *bhikkhuni sangha* will shorten Buddhism if the *bhikkhuni* do not accept the *Garudhammas'*(*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014)*.*

The last example of gender prejudice discourse noted by S is as interesting. It is related to societal attitudes towards ordination. When somebody says his/her son will be ordained, people will praise the son and congratulate the parents. But if it is the daughter, people will be curious and start asking negative questions such as 'what is wrong with her?', 'does she have any problems?'. This implies that by societal norms, men are more deserved as ordained persons than women (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2017).

Songdhammakalyani summarise that the Buddha's permission to have *bhikkhuni* ordination is the beauty in Buddhism as it illustrated his belief in equal potential of women to attain spiritual awakening just as men. Hence, the Buddha was the first Buddhist feminist. The Buddha's permission for *bhikkhuni* ordination is not just about promoting women's rights, but their spiritual fulfilment which is probably more important.

6.2.1.B.iv. Increasing demand for qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* to contribute to the Thai society

The last reference for S 's assertion of their legitimacy is that there is increasing demand for qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* and their contributions to the Thai society, especially in the current circumstance of declining quality and credibility of the male *sangha*. From my interview with the abbess (2018)[72], she mentioned that the conduct of the male *sangha* should be a good example for the society. Male *sangha* should give people

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[72] With BBC in 2018

spiritual guidance. But now the *sangha* itself is going through crisis; the numbers of male clerics are declining and many of them are not qualified to give people ethical and spiritual guidance to live in today's complex world. Thus, there is an urgent call for qualified *sangha* members including *bhikkhuni* to guide the people with the Buddha's teaching which can be applied to their daily living. The community adopt the '*Socially Engaged Buddhism*' principles according to the *Bodhisattva Mahayana* philosophy which aims to help people with their social problems as well as their spiritual development. From my interview with the abbess in 2017, she mentioned, 'the world is being in chaos, how can I just sit and meditate for my own sake?' The Buddha once sent out his 60 disciples towards different directions to propagate his teaching and to follow his footsteps, the abbess claimed that *Songdhammakalyani* aim to stabilise *bhikkhuni sangha* and develop their network nationwide as a core platform to propagate what the Buddha had taught.

6.2.2 *Nirodharam's* discourses of legitimacy

Similar to *Songdhammakalyani, Nirodharam*'s discourses on their 'legitimacy' are explained in the broader Buddhism context as well as the Thai Buddhism context. The findings below are drawn from my interviews with N's abbess[73], senior *bhikkhuni* [74] and lay community members[75] as well as from the abbess speeches on various occasions[76] and N's publications.[77]

6.2.2.A. *Nirodharam***'s Legitimacy in the Broad Buddhism Context**

In the Buddhism context, N interpreted themselves as *bhikkhuni* or a female '*nak-buat'* established by the intention of the Buddha by referring to the following reasons.

6.2.2.A.i. The Buddha's acknowledgement of his four 'majestic disciples'
From my interview with the abbess (2017), *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani started her explanation on the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni sangha* by mentioning the Buddha's acknowledgement of his four 'majestic disciples'. The abbess clearly pointed out that it has always been for every Buddha in this world to have four types of majestic disciples:

[73] *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani in 2017
[74] *Bhikkhuni* Warayani – senior *bhikkhuni* at *Nirodharam* who also worked as the abbess's assistant
[75] Khun Kamphu – a media person and at *Nirodharam*;
[76] Including to Chiang Mai University's students at Sala *Dhamma*, on 26 March 2015, lecture given to staff of Tamban Administrative Organisation 'Toong Pee', Chom Thong, Chiang Mai which was re-produced via YouTube channel on 30 July 2015
[77] *Nirodharam*'s publications titled: '*Bhikkhuni Sangha* in Chiang Mai'; authored by the abbess in 2008; and 'Why *Bhikkhuni*'? authored by the abbess and *Nirodharam*'s monastic members in 2016.

bhikkhu, bhikkhuni, ubasok[78], and ubasika[79]. Hence, the Buddha knew from the very beginning since his enlightenment that he would have *bhikkhuni* as one of his majestic disciples. N also elaborated why it took quite some time before the Buddha allowed women to be ordained. It was not because he did not want to have the *bhikkhuni sangha,* but he had to consider how women could be properly protected and respected as '*nak-buat'* within the socio-cultural context of India at that time. The first woman requesting to be ordained was his stepmother who was once the Queen of *Kabilpatsdu*. And to detach from the Royal and luxurious life and enter a physically difficult life as a monk would not have been easy for her. Hence, the Buddha issued eight rules called 'the *Garudhammas*' to be adopted by her and later by any women wishing to enter monkhood in order to prevent conflicting problems between the *bhikkhu* and the *bhikkhuni*.

6.2.2.A.ii The permission of the Buddha which has never been withdrawn

The next reference of *Nirodharam* in interpreting their 'legitimacy' is similar to rationale referred to by *Songdhammakalyani*. From N's abbess public speech (2015), she pointed out that in principle women ordination is legitimated. The Buddha has given his permission for women to be ordained and the *bhikkhuni* order has never been given up by him.

6.2.2.A.iii The history of *bhikkhuni* ordination that is completely legitimated by the *bhikkhu sangha*

Another reference for N's 'legitimacy' is similar to that of *Songdhammakalyani* regarding the process of *bhikkhuni* ordination which is completed within the *bhikkhu sangha*. From her speeches[80], *Nirodharam's* abbess pointed out that only the *bhikkhu sangha* were authorized by the Buddha to ordain women while the *bhikkhuni sangha* just have a supporting role because the ordination protocols require asking the to-be ordained woman a few intimate questions about her physical conditions which could potentially be 'harmful for monkhood' and some women refused to answer the questions posted by *bhikkhu* because of the shyness. The Buddha then assigned *bhikkhuni* to be engaged in asking these questions. This is called the 'purifying stage'. Since then, it becomes a rule that *bhikkhuni* ordination must be conducted with

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[78] Laymen
[79] Laywomen
[80] Given to Chiang Mai University students, and TAO staff in 2015

engagement of the *bhikkhuni,* but it must be completed within the *bhikkhu sangha* led by the 'Upatcha' or 'first teacher' of the newly ordained.

6.2.2.A.iv Equal ability of women to attain spiritual awakening but much more difficult without ordination

Similar to *Songdhammakalyani's* reference, *Nirodharam* also interpret their legitimacy by mentioning women's ability to attain the highest stage of spiritual awakening. The abbess referred to the statement of the Buddha when Ven. Anandha asked him about women's potential to be enlightened and the Buddha replied: 'Women who follow purity of conduct as per my advice can enter the stream of *nirvana*'. During my interview with her (2017), the abbess also reiterated the necessity to enter an ordained life should one wants to ultimately attain spiritual awakening. Speaking from her over 30 years' experience as *mae-chi* and then *bhikkhuni,* the abbess asserted that ordination is the short-cut to enlightenment and life without monastic codes of conduct proves to be much more difficult for one to practice detachment from worldly defilements, which slows down the awakening stage.

6.2.2.B. *Nirodharam*'s Legitimacy within the Thai Buddhism Context

Within the context of Thai Buddhism, *Nirodharam* do not explicitly communicate their 'legitimated status' as Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* as *Songdhammakalyani* do. The first, yet most important interpretation of their 'legitimacy' in Thai Buddhism is in line with that at the broader Buddhism context. N perceive themselves as a 'legitimated *bhikkhuni* sangha, or a group of female '*nak-buat*' who see the threats from reincarnation and tirelessly train themselves towards *Nibbhana* to get out of this cycle. The community declare their 'legitimacy' within the Thai Buddhism based on the following justifications.

6.2.2.B.i. Their strict adherence to the *Vinaya* and the 'legitimated' duties of female '*nak-buat*'

From the interview with the abbess (2017), the abbess's speech, and S's publications, S clearly identify themselves as *bhikkhuni* community who form part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies with designated duties of a Buddhist community. To support this, the community always refer to their strict adherence to the *Vinaya* and the duties assigned by the Buddha. In particular, *Nirodharam* emphasise their strict adherence to

the 311 monastic rules as well as the '*Garudhammas*' issued by the Buddha as the requirement for all *bhikkhuni* to follow. One prominent example of their strict adherence to the monastic rules is their avoidance to engage in any money matters. N's monastic members do not collect, keep, or use money in any circumstances. The community's financial management lies within responsibility of lay disciples under the '*Nirodharam* Foundation'. This involves management of donated fund and using it to support N's activities (See Chapter 5).

Another evidence is their strict adherence to the '*Garudhammas*'. I have learnt this from my fieldtrip in 2017, when I was with *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani and *Bhikkhuni* Warayani, and a newly ordained monk came all the way from another province to seek for the abbess's *Dhamma* advice as he came across her teaching from '*Rom Dhamma Rom Jai*' and would like to meet her in person. I saw the abbess let the younger monk sit in the higher position and she sat in the lower chair to make a distinct level between them as a part of their practices of the '*Garudhammas*'. Another example of their strict adhering to the '*Garudhammas*' is the regular attendance of their monastic members in '*Patimokkha*' session conducted by the respectful male *sangha* in Chom Thong and Doi Saket every fortnight.

In a foreign media programme (2018) [81], the abbess was asked about the current 'illegitimated status' of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism; and how the community felt being labelled as rebels to the Thai *male sangha* authorities. She asserted with her laughing voice, 'I don't want to fight (with) anyone because I feel compassionate to everyone. I just stay calm.' And when the journalist asked whether she felt annoyed for the course that the male monks get state funding, whilst female clerics have to rely on donations, and whether she thought this was an unfair treatment; the abbess again mentioned clearly that she never minded because *Nirodharam* never relied on money nor anyone else. They depended only on the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sanga*. I found *Nirodharam*'s answer pivotally confirmed their confidence about the legitimacy according to what the Buddha asserted, regardless what the state and the public think of them.

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[81] NPR in 2018

6.2.2.B.ii Patronage from senior local monks

N also describe their 'legitimacy' by referring to the support from high-ranking and respectful monks in Chiang Mai. From my interview with the abbess (2017); her speeches in selected occasion; [82] and the community's publications[83] , the abbess clearly mentioned that she and other *Nirodharam*'s monastic members had received higher ordination as *bhikkhuni* from Sri Lanka simply because of the support from the senior monks in Chiang Mai. The abbess reflected that having been *mae-chi* who observed 10 precepts for almost 30 years, she had never dreamed of being a *bhikkhuni*. In her *mae-chi* hood, she demanded herself to do more than what was required, including not using money, walking barefoot, eating one meal a day; and studying the teaching of the Buddha from senior and learned monks until she was able to preach/teach *Dhamma* to lay people. The abbess was consistently advised by a senior *bhikkhu* in Chiang Mai to be ordained first as '*samaneri*' in Sri Lanka, and later as a *bhikkhuni.* She said he advised her to 'go to Sri Lanka, get full ordination as *bhikkhuni* and come back to help women in Thailand'. Seeing their strict adherence to the *Vinaya*, *Pawattini* and *Upatcha* from Sri Lanka who paid a visit at *Nirodharam* also encouraged the abbess and other monastic members to receive full ordination to become *bhikkhuni*. Feeling somewhat discouraged by controversial debate about *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism at that time; and not being sure if they should follow the advice or not as they had not seen the benefits of holding 311 monastic rules, the abbess and her monastic members have consulted the senior monks in Chiang Mai regarding this. The male monks all supported them with no hesitation. They blessed the *samaneri* and gave them monastic robe for ordination.

Nirodharam also mentioned the support they received from these senior monks in many other occasions after being ordained in Sri Lanka. For example, monastic members of *Nirodharam* have received '*Patimokkha*' which is required for every *bhikkhuni* from the senior monk at *Wat Phra Thad Sri Chom Thong* and the abbot of *Wat Phra That Doi Saket* every fortnight. On top of this, the community also underlined their legitimacy by referring to the speeches given to *Nirodharam sangha* by Ven. Luang Phu Thong – the well-known senior monk in Thailand in many occasions. In one of his speeches, Luang Phu Thong said, 'It is so great that in our (northern) region, we have all

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[82] At Chiang Mai University in 2015
[83] '*Bhikkhuni Sangha* in Chiang Mai in 2008; and 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*?' in 2015

groups of the fourfold Buddhis assemblies (*bhikkhu, bhikkhuni, ubasok, ubasika*) serving the religion and the people. You must be confident in the path you've taken and never give up or feel discouraged'.

6.2.2.B.iii. The necessity to have the complete fourfold Buddhist assemblies and their contributions to Thai Society

From the interview (2017), the abbess also mentioned the necessity of having the complete fourfold Buddhist assemblies to sustain Buddhism. Each member has specifically important roles and the missing of any member could eventually destabilise the religion. She stressed that having only *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* is not enough, laymen and laywomen also play equally important roles in continuing the religion. Laymen could support ordained communities, for example, in labouring tasks whilst laywomen in household duties, etc. She also pointed out that the emergence of *bhikkhuni* (in the Thai Buddhism) would make the *bhikkhu* more aware of the needs to improve themselves so that they could be qualified mentors as well as role-models to the emerging *bhikkhuni sangha* who are regarded as their sisters. Specifically, the *bhikkhu sangha* have to be qualified in terms of their knowledge as well as conducts.

Unlike *Songdhammakalyani* who feel obliged to provide both spiritual and worldly support to lay people, I see that *Nirodharam* focus on proliferating *Dhamma* teachings and role modelling to laypeople as the abbess declared to (i) live their lay lives by applying *Dhamma;* and at a more advanced stage, (ii) practice spiritually to attain an awakening stage. N particularly elaborated that the existence of *bhikkhuni* community is a great advantage to female lay persons who in some specific cases feel more comfortable to seek advice from female clerics rather than from male monks. To me, this justifies N's interpretation of their legitimacy as one of the core Buddhist pillars.

6.2.2.B. iv.   A gradual process in 'legitimising' *bhikkhuni sangha* in the Thai Buddhism

The last reference N use to negotiate for their legitimacy is their adoption of a gradual process in legitimising *bhikkhuni* ordination and *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism. From the abbess statement (2015), *Nirodharam* see themselves as legitimated *bhikkhuni sangha* established by the provision of the Buddha, who perform functions of the Buddhist community. But in the socio-cultural context of Thai Buddhism, *Nirodharam* accept that Thai *Theravada* Buddhism is under the administration of the

Sangha Supreme Council, governed by the *Sangha* Act. Therefore the 1928 Decree and its reinforcement in 2014 by the *Sangha* Supreme Council is still valid although it could post complications to *bhikkhuni* ordination in the present days. To address this barrier, the abbess proposes gradual steps to legitimise *bhikkhuni* ordination and *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism.

From the same speech (2014), she elaborated four key reasons currently illegitimating process of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand as claimed by the *sangha* authorities. Firstly, the absence of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand until recently, which makes it impossible for *bhikkhuni* ordination to be conducted by both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha*. Secondly, although there is an exemption that *bhikkhu sangha* alone can conduct the ordination in the absence of *bhikkhuni* in that particular society, it is further required that the *Upatcha bhikkhu* must be *Anakhami* (the Non-Returner) who has no more worldly passion, especially about the opposite sex. In such case, it is not very easy to identify. Thirdly, the Buddha required that the *bhikkhu* must be able to coach *bhikkhuni* about their specific *Vinaya* or codes of monastic conduct, which are more complicated than those of the *bhikkhu*. The majority of *bhikkhu* in Thailand do not have profound knowledge of these as there have never been bhikkhuni in Thailand before. And lastly, there is also a misinterpretation of the *Garudhammas*, which makes it more difficult for the *bhikkhu sangha* and the general public to support *bhikkhuni* ordination. For example, rule No. 2 of the *Garudhammas* says that *bhikkhuni* must live in place where *bhikkhu* exist, which is literally misinterpreted as they have to live in the same place. Thus, this seems inappropriate and not well-received. However, *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani mentioned what the Buddha meant reveals a different interpretation. He required *bhikkhuni* to live in their own private place, but within the 16 kms proximity of the distance far from the *bhikkhu*' so that they can attend the preaching by the *bhikkhu* every fortnight according to rule no. 3 of the *Garudhammas*.

N's abbess also believes the gradual process to legitimize *bhikkhuni* ordination starting from the *bhikkhuni* themselves who need to work systematically to prove to the *Sangha* Supreme Council and public that their existence is a complement to the society and the religion. The abbess proposes that *bhikkhuni* in each community should (i) prepare a report about themselves and their communities (ii) make these reports available to the *Sangha* Supreme Council and public to inform them and gain their acceptance about righteous practices and contributions of *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand; and (iii)

propose to have amendments to the related policies based on consultative process and evidence-based information.

The abbess, however, has a strong opinion that to legalise *bhikkhuni* ordination is not the end. Similar to *Songdhammakalyani, Nirodharam* see that in order to influentially contribute to the society, *bhikkhuni sangha* must be qualified -having righteous conduct and profound knowledge to help people; and strictly comply to the *Vinaya* and practice for purification stages, including study and gain insight understanding of the *Dhamma* so they could really become a strong force to help people and the society. Whilst, N see lay people should help to monitor the conduct of *bhikkhuni* (and *bhikkhu*) and report to the authorities in case of the misconduct.

All of these explanations are crucial as they clearly build up my understanding about *Nirodhram*'s self-perception as 'legitimated *bhikkhuni* community'. In a nutshell, *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani sees that the existence of *Nirodharam* is legitimate by the Buddha's permission and their righteous conduct of monastic disciplines. It is important that the four groups of the Buddhist assemblies co-exist to play complementary role to each other in order to sustain the Buddha's religion and to help the society. Its legal status in Thailand is an issue which requires further discussion with concerned authorities, not for the benefit of *bhikkhuni* themselves but for all mankind.

6.3 Discussions: Legitimacy interpreted by *Bhikkhuni* communities

Before making further remarks on the two communities' interpretations of their legitimacy, I would like to clarify what is supposed to be considered as their 'legitimated status' by firstly restating the broad meaning of legitimacy, which is commonly interpreted in association with the features of 'hierarchical power relations' between the authoritative body and the sub-ordinated. The relations allow the former to rule and exercise power over the latter for collective compliance (See Weber, 1978; Suchman, 1995; p, 575; Hurd,2007; Billerbeck and Gippert, 2017). Whilst, Hurd (2007) suggested that the term 'legitimacy' does not necessarily coincide with 'legality' as not all legal acts are considered legitimate; and the two terms should be treated in separation, particularly when the actor cannot prove their own legitimacy and compliance to social regulation (Taylor, 2001, p.416).

Streamlining to investigate the specific meanings of *bhikkhuni's* legitimacy, it is apparent that both *bhikkhuni* communities describe their legitimacy in relation to what Hurd has suggested rather with legal acts or commitments. *Bhikkhuni* is legitimated as a member of the fourfold assemblies (*sangha)* of the Buddha, consisting of *bhikkhu, bhikkhuni*, laymen and laywomen. For a woman to be legitimately ordained, there is the so called 'de-jure' process assigned and approved by the Buddha. It involves the purification and the actual ordination stages which must be completed by *bhikkhu* sangha with engagement of *bhikkhuni sangha* during the purification stage. Protocol wise, before being eligible for ordination, the to-be ordained woman called '*sikkhamana*' has to strictly practice the eight monastic rules[84] for two years. During this time, she would be asked intimate questions by senior *bhikkhuni* called '*Pawattini*', who have been in their robes for at least 12 years, as part of the purifying process. After successfully completed the two years, the *sikkhamana*, now called '*Upasampadapeckha*' asks to be fully ordained from *bhikkhu sangha* called '*Upatcha*'. After the woman has received full ordination, she then legitimately becomes a '*bhikkhuni'* (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014; *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, 2015)*.*

I see the controversial debate on legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism is related to the 'de-jure' structure which apparently illegitimates the official status of the approximately 300 *bhikkhuni* nationwide. As per the mainstream discourses by the Thai Buddhist authorities, it is argued that the lineage of *Theravada bhikkhuni* has already been broken and it cannot be revived, including in Thailand as there has never been any establishment of qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* in the country. Moreover, the 1928 Decree of the former Supreme Patriarch disallows monks and novices to give ordination to women in Thailand. Hence, the existing *bhikkhuni* who mostly had their full ordination from Sri Lankan *Theravada* lineage cannot be considered as part of the official Thai monastic order. Rather, they are regarded as foreign female clerics.

However, in considering *bhikkhuni*'s legitimacy based on de-factor legitimation process, *bhikkhuni,* like *bhikkhu* as a cleric person, are committed to (i) studying and understanding *Dhamma* essences and other important contents in the scriptures, and (ii) applying what they have learnt in the scripture into practice to eliminate sufferings and gain insight into the ultimate truth leading to the spiritual awakening stage. In addition, Buddhist cleric communities are supposed to render an appropriate

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[84] particularly rules number 1 to 6 consistently

environmental conditions for monastic members to (i) stay away from the external faulty society so that they can train their minds and attain different levels of spiritual development through the threefold learning of morality, concentration, and wisdom; and (ii) serve as role model to the society in following the right path of the Buddha in order to sustain Buddhism (see Phra Payutto, 2002, p. 119). The scripture also mentioned the closely inter-reliant relationship between members of Buddhist community comprising both clerics and laity. Cleric persons are expected to support lay people spiritually be helping them to understand *Dhamma* essence; preventing them wicked thoughts and deeds, guiding them through virtuous path, and giving them a chance to make merits. Meanwhile, laypeople are required to support clerics by providing food, services, and other necessary support in return. Through inter-reliant relationship, all groups have common goal in serving the religion and society (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014; *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, 2015)*.

The strongest reference to claim legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* is, perhaps, based on the Buddha's confirmation that women have equal ability to men to attain enlightenment should they follow the Buddha's advice to follow purity conducts.

6.3.1   Comparative Interpretations of the Two Communities' Legitimacy

From the two communities' discourse concerning their legitimacy in 6.2, it is obvious to see both share similar interpretations as legitimated *bhikkhuni* community in a broad context of Buddhism. They similarly reflect their understanding by referring to the four important principles (i) the Buddha's intention to establish the fourfold Buddhist assemblies to constitute and stabilise Buddhism; (ii) *Theravada* principle that mentions what has been established by the Buddha and has never been withdrawn is valid; (iii) the historical evidence proving that *bhikkhuni* ordination is completed by *bhikkhu sangha*; and (iv) women's ability to attain awakening stage similar to men.

However, when it comes to interpretation of their 'legitimated status' within Thai Buddhism context, there are both similarities and differences in their interpretations. *Songdhammakalyani* identify themselves as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni sangha*, by referring to (i) their being trailblazer regarding the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism; (ii) the null-void status of the 1928 Decree; (iii) gender prejudice which obstructs legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination; and (iv) demand for 'qualified' *bhikkhuni sangha* in the light of declining faith in Thai Buddhism.

In Thai Buddhism context, *Nirodharam* reiterate their legitimated status as *bhikkhuni* 'nak-buat' who perform expected roles of the Buddhist community without explicitly claiming themselves as *Theravada.* In asserting themselves as legitimated female 'nak-buat', N refer to (i) their strict adherence to the Vinaya and the duties of the Buddhist community; (ii) the strong support they get from local senior (male) monks; (iii) the increasing demand for qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* to contribute to the society; and (iv) their (proposed) process to gradually legitimize *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism.

Although both of them claim that there is increasing need for qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai society, they explain it from different gender perspectives. *Songdhammakalyani* see this phenomenon from the feminist perspective by referring to declining faith among Thai Buddhists from the misconducts of male *sangha* and the needs to have qualified female *sangha* to address the gap. *Nirodharam* see the needs to have *bhikkhuni sangha* as a complement to *bhikkhu sangha*. Not mentioning the quality of existing male *sangha*, N see their advantages to be spiritual mentor to lay women from female cleric perspectives who understand specific issues women are facing and how the Buddha's *Dhamma* could help in resolving those issues.

6.3.2. Legitimation Strategy of the Two *Bhikkhuni* Communities

Legitimation is considered as a collectively continuous process, performed as mechanism to show voluntary compliance to fulfil certain societal and cultural expectations, norms, values and rules of law, in gaining support and avoiding sanction from the society (Suchman-1995, Berger et al.-1998, Van Leeuwen and Wodak -1999, Erkama and Vaara,-2010). Based on this consideration, I aim to explore how the existing *bhikkhuni* communities who are not part of the official Thai monastic order negotiate their legitimated status in Thai Buddhism context.

6.3.2.A. Subjective legitimation strategy in Buddhism context

Both *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* interpret their legitimacy in a broad Buddhism context by resorting to 'subjective legitimation strategy'. According to Weber (1978), this strategy focuses on explaining the community's relations with external moral standard, assessed through individual and collective acceptance of the people towards their administration and performance as legitimated. To elaborate, both identify themselves as *bhikkhuni* by referring to historical evidence mentioning the

Buddha's provision to establish his fourfold assemblies including *bhikkhuni* to sustain his religion and this has never been withdrawn. They also clarify that *bhikkhuni* ordination must be completed by *bhikkhu sangha* whilst *bhikkhuni sangha* is added only for purification stage. Thus, if male *sangha* refuse to give *bhikkhuni* ordination by saying that is must be completed within both *sangha*, that is wrong and is just an excuse.

S and N also share the same reference that women and men have equal ability to attain awakening stage regardless of biological distinctions. These rationales demonstrate their similar understanding regarding legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* and *bhikkhuni* ordination as mentioned in the scripture. By proving their performance in compliance with such standard, they could eventually gain individual and collective acceptance among Thai Buddhists of their legitimacy. This exemplifies their comprehension towards assessment criteria of their 'legitimacy' through 'subjective legitimation' model. (Weber,1978).

6.3.2.B Subjective vs mixed legitimation strategies in Thai Buddhism

Within Thai Buddhism context, *Songdhammakalyani* consistently utilise subjective legitimation model in interpreting their legitimacy as 'the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*', whilst *Nirodharam* refer to a mixed choice of strategies.

S demonstrate their legitimated status by referring to the abbess profound knowledge and her role as a trailblazer on the topic of legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Buddhism, her PhD thesis; and her reputation as a keynote speaker at global level on this topic. *Songdhammakalyani* also mention the supposedly null-void status of 1928 Decree which was specifically declared in response to Narin Pasit's attempt to have his two daughters ordained as *samaneri*, which they see inapplicable for their *bhikkhuni* who continued *Theravada* lineage from Sri Lanka from the year 2003 onwards. Additionally, status of this Decree is supposedly null and void because it was issued when Thailand was under the absolute monarchy, whilst now the country is under constitutional monarchy. From legislation perspective, the Decree should be now invalidated. Most importantly, S refer to the essence in Thailand's Constitution underlining full liberty of all men and women to adhere any religious sects. And this is regarded as the broad umbrella to govern the country. Any legal documents contradict to the constitution is considered as void essence, so is the 1928 Decree and other

affiliated documents issued by Thai religious authorities to illegitimate *bhikkhuni* status in the country.

As S mention the crucial necessity in having qualified *bhikkhuni* to fill in the declining faith in Thai Buddhism due to misconduct of male monastic members, they rely on existing norms and values of society to justify their legitimated position (Hurd, 2007). In other words, S assert their legitimacy by resorting to authorisation strategy in implementing rhetoric and written discourse referring to the authority of Buddhist traditions, custom and practices as well as the Buddha who is the highest figure in Buddhism in accrediting their official and verified status as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* (Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 2007).

Shifting to N's strategy within the context of Thai Buddhism, *Nirodharam*'s choices reflect both subjective and objective strategies. In interpreting their legitimated status in the country, in many occasions, N discursively refer to the support from senior and respectful monks to legitimise their status as female '*nak-buat*' in Thai society. The community mentioned their two ordinations: *samaneri* and *bhikkhuni* from Sri Lanka were strongly encouraged by senior local monks in Thailand and Sri Lankan senior *bhikkhuni* who see their strict adherence to the *Vinaya* and their enhanced potential to contribute to Thai Buddhism should they be ordained as *bhikkhuni*. This is considered as 'subjective legitimation' in reference to highly respected figure in Thai Buddhism.

The community also deploy 'objective legitimation model' focusing on their quality and performance to fill in their normative standard or moral requirements of people (See Bodansky, 1999; Buchanan, 2003; Keohane, 2006). N only identify their legitimated status as *bhikkhuni* or female '*nak-buat*' with their strict adherence to the 311 *bhikkhuni Vinaya* and roles of Buddhist community without mentioning their *Theravada* status. This clearly exemplifies N's objective strategy opting out to produce discourse relating to their legitimated status as Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*, but to prove and role model to the society by their strict performance according to the monastic rules required for qualified *bhikkhuni* community. In other words, it means the community opted for 'silent strategy' in legitimising their status in the early years of their establishment by allowing people to experience them as 'legitimated female cleric community justified by their strict adherence to the monastic rules than patriating in public domain for acquiring their 'legitimated status' as ' Thai *bhikkhuni*'.

This additionally complies with Habermas's interpretations of legitimacy which is mainly assessed by how the actor or institution benefits people. *Nirodharam* highlight this aspect as they see their monastic members perform specific roles of female *nak-buat* which complement the existing contributions of *bhikkhu sangha* in Thai society. I also see N's 'objective strategy' to legitimise their status in Thai Buddhist coincides with Locke's (1980) statement that legitimacy is put forward by people's consenting to the institution. And this is depicted as voluntary process in transferring people's authority to the institution. In performing functions of Buddhist community, N also engage a wide range of audience, particularly in the *Dhamma* sessions by the abbess. This reflects people's consent to their legitimated status as cleric community.

According to Van Leeuwen and Wodak (2007), *Nirodharam* demonstrate their legitimacy as *bhikkhuni nak-buat* in Thai Buddhism through a variety of strategies, including their strict compliance to the 311 *Vinaya* which indicate their moral standards by referring to Buddhist value systems to which they adhere. Besides, N highlight their contributions to Thai society, in parallel and complementary to those of the existing *bhikkhu sangha*, which indicate their rationalisation by referring to institutionalised social action, particularly through their continual commitment in performing functions of Buddhist community. The last aspect to demonstrate N's legitimacy strategy is their knowledge of society exemplified through the essence of their frequent *Dhamma* disseminations which benefits daily practices of monastic and lay audience.

6.3.3   Gender Perspectives as Related to Legitimacy of *Bhikkhuni* Ordination

In considering their interpretations of legitimacy from gender perspective, both communities possess similar stance in the broad Buddhism context, particularly their references for gender neutral ability to attain awakening stage which is the ultimate aim in Buddhism. However, within Thai Buddhism context, their interpretations reflect different gender perspectives as described below.

6.3.3.A. Gender neutral ability to attain spiritual awakening stage

At principle level in broad Buddhism context, both communities reaffirm gender neutral message in relation to women's ability to attain spiritual awakening as confirmed by the Buddha. They both believe that women have the rights to be ordained by the permission of the Buddha under given rules, and physical distinctions between men and women are not obstacles to their spiritual enlightenment. *Songdhammakalyani*

underline legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Buddhism by referring to the Buddha's confirmation of women's ability to attain spiritual awakening through ordination. They further point out that it is only through the well-paved road of ordination that women could reach this ultimate stage with less difficulty.

Nirodharam interpret the non-gender discrimination message propelled by the Buddha by explaining that the mind has no gender. Being a man or a woman is determined by biological conditions, whilst gender is the role of men and women constructed by the society which is adjustable as times and conditions change. In order to reach spiritual awakening stage, it is the ability of mind that matters most, not physical conditions nor societal roles. N also see ordination as the only 'must' way for women to achieve this spiritual goal. Such common understanding towards the awakening stage conforms with the belief of those who believe in 'gender neutral' Buddhism (Murcott, 1991; Sponberg, 1992; Shaw, 1994; cited in Tomalin, 2014, p.88); and those referring to gender prejudice or male patriarchy interpretation was later considered as non-True Buddhism (Chatsumarn 1991: 31–34; Kunlavir 2006: 2, 8–10). As the ultimate truth in Buddhism reaffirms equal human ability to reach different stages of spiritual development regardless of biological qualities nor gender attributes, thus both men and women should have equal opportunity to enter conditions conducive to spiritual practices towards awakening.

6.3.3.B. *Songdhammakalyan*i: promoting gender equality in Thai Buddhism

Nonetheless, in Thai Buddhism context, gender perspectives underlining S and N approaches towards their legitimising efforts are somewhat different. S tends to refer to 'Feminist Buddhism' approach [85] when talking about equal rights of the existing ordained women from Sri Lankan *Theravada* lineage, specifically 'Thai *bhikkhuni*'. Asserting her profound knowledge in the issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination, the abbess identifies herself and her community technically as 'the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni sangha*'.

Although in broad Buddhism context, S interpret their legitimacy from gender neutral perspective highlighting the equal ability of both men and women in achieving the ultimate spiritual development stage, S explain the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai society from Feminist Buddhism perspective. The community promote equal

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[85] Buddhist feminism is a movement that seeks to improve the religious, legal, and social status of women within Buddhism.

opportunity for Thai women to enter ordination life which is believed to be a shortcut to spiritual awakening. Thus, Thai women, particularly those with restricted financial resources to receive full ordination from Sri Lankan Theravada lineage should be offered opportunity to be ordained within the country under Thai *Theravada* Buddhism.

The community see 'gender prejudice' from the misinterpretation of the scripture and the distorted Buddhist history recorded from male perspectives as social obstruction to the already legitimated status of *bhikkhuni* ordination in the country. They point out the distorted information regarding the broken *bhikkhuni* lineage before the Buddha's cremation ceremony and the unknown number of *bhikkhuni* accompanying *Bhikkhuni Sanghamitra* to establish *bhikkhuni sangha* in Sri Lanka mentioned in Thai Buddhism textbooks as examples. Another evidence is the incomplete interpretation of the Buddha's statement by male *sangha* mentioning that the existence of *bhikkhuni* would shorten the life of Buddhism. This interpretation covers only the first part of the statement and skips the crucially important second part. In the full statement says, 'The existence of *bhikkhuni* would shorten the life of Buddhism if the *bhikkhuni* do not accept the *Garudhammas.*

S's stance which view gender prejudice as obstruction to the legitimates status of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand could be further explained from the studies of Tannenbaum (1999) who claim that status and power are key concerned values in Thai society, which could be observed through gender frame. A few other studies also mention that male patriarchy and gender prejudice in Thai society are reflected through subordinated status of women to men in a number of Thai literatures influenced by Buddhism. For examples, it is commonly explained that women's inferior status was due to their (bad) conduct or *khamma* in their past lives. Hence, they need to do more virtues in order to be reborn as a man in their next life (Pranee, 2019). A mythological narrative from Buddhist scripture also mentions women having menstruation as being impurified and this impurity is considered to be the consequences of their ill karmic conducts (Deliah,2014; Komkrit, 2016). Some literatures talk about taboos that women have to follow according to religious reasons, for example, women are not allowed to enter the inner area of a relic stupa while men can.

Another example of gender prejudice discourse which predominantly appear in Thai society according to S is the public attitude regarding ordination. The abbess mentioned

Thais normally praise and congratulate when someone's sons will be ordained but pose a serious or curious question if this happens to a daughter. In the old time, a man reaching an adulthood, was expected to be ordained in order to become a 'learned man' before he gets married and becomes the 'leader' of his new family. A woman, on a contrary, was expected to be trained in skills to perform their role as the 'hind-legs of the elephant. Although women in present days are equally educated and can earn their own livings, these male dominant attitudes still persist in the society, including in religion institute. S see these gender prejudice attitudes are deeply rooted and are major obstacle for women to enter ordained life and be treated on an equal basis to male clerics.

S's gender perspective resonates with, for example, Tomalin, 2006; Seeger, 2009 who argue that the missing historical evidence and the long been non-existence of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand is the major cause of the resistance from male patriarchy in both Thai secular and sacred realm. Although Buddhism allows both forms of *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* ordination, only men are seen as legitimated to enter lower and full ordination in Thai Buddhism. Through ordination, it is believed that they gain greatest merit which will also go to their parents. It is an honourable way to pay gratitude to their parents who raise them up. Yet, this respectful act applies only to men; women have to pay back their gratitude in some other ways which are not necessarily related to religion. The fact that women are not allowed to enter ordained life also implies that they do not have the same opportunity to be trained as a 'learned' person through the cleric way of living.

From Feminism perspective, it could be further explained that gender prejudice and male patriarchy in Thai Buddhism had been predominantly influenced by the gender inequality attitude embedded into Buddhism since the very beginning. They refer to the Buddha's seemingly unintentional will to set up *bhikkhuni sangha* at first when he repeatedly declined his stepmother's request for ordination. The Buddha's final approval for *bhikkhuni* ordination was also conditional that women would be allowed to ordain only when they adhere to the eight *Garudhammas* in relating with *bhikkhu.* From the feminist perspective, it is interpreted that the Buddha put male *sangha* in a more superior status as these *Garudhammas* require *bhikkhuni* to treat *bhikkhu* with high respect under various conditions. For example, *bhikkhuni*, no matter how long they have been in monkhood, have to pay respect to a male monk who is in the first day of his ordained life. On top of this, *bhikkhuni* have to adhere to the 311 monastic

disciplines [*Vinaya*] while *bhikkhu* adopt only 227 rules, indicating that *bhikkhuni* are more strictly controlled in their conducts than their male counterparts. Feminists tend to raise these as inequality issues, without investigating more deeply into the reasons for these requirements in the socio-cultural context of India at that time.

Considering herself as a Buddhist before a feminist, S's abbess recaps her stance in promoting gender-equality in Thai Buddhism by mentioning that *bhikkhuni* ordination is the beauty of Buddhism, established by the Buddha's permission. Thus, she sees the Buddha as the first feminist in Buddhism and the first person to see the equal potential of women to attain spiritual awakening through an ordained life similar to men. The community underline that what the Buddha had permitted was much more meaningful than merely promoting 'human rights' of women. In fact, he reaffirmed their 'spiritual rights'. They also argue that if Thai people think they are living in Thai culture whilst *bhikkhuni* ordination is a part of Buddhist culture, they should rethink about this. The point is Thai culture is largely influenced by Buddhism and the two cultures are in fact inseparably blended. This comment coordinates with opinions of those scholars who see the necessity of Buddhism as crucial background in understanding gender ideology in Thai society (Rita, 1993; Apinya,2011; Pramual, 2013; Somrit, 2014).

In addition, I see S's self-interpretations as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* and the trailblazer on legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Buddhism is immensely moved by the support from international Buddhist network. This is in line with what Tomalin (2009) mentioning an international movement, especially those from Buddhist feminist networks, such as *Sakayathida*, who has also shifted to balance their emphasis on esteemed charismatic religious leaders on both genders. And Delia's (2009) and Itoh's (2013) said that the socio-cultural and political-economic factors in Thailand have determined unique characteristic of women's accession to religion to become 'more fluid' in comparison to those of other Southeast Asian peers.

6.3.3.C. *Nirodharam*: gender complementary role in Thai Buddhism

In contrast, I see *Nirodharam's* interpretation of *bhikkhuni* ordination legitimacy in Thai Buddhism from gender complementary role perspective which is similar to general gender portrayal in Southeast Asian countries. The approach tends to be more flexible in negotiating complementary roles between *bhikkhuni* and their male counterparts (King and Wilder, 2003). The community do not mention any confronting message

towards the male *sangha*, especially as determining factor obstructing 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* ordination in the country. On the contrary, N see that their status as *bhikkhuni* or female '*nak-buat*' is fully supported by male *sangha* and they feel indebted to this. N's interpretation of their legitimated complementary role also conforms with Tannenbaum (1999) who argued that explaining gender in Thai society through major debates in Buddhism based on Western interpretations is not sufficient and lacks ethnological perspectives.

Another different gender interpretation between S and N is their messages regarding the necessity to have qualified *bhikkhuni* community in Thai Buddhism. *Songdhammakalyani* see this from the feminist perspective highlighting declining faith among Thai Buddhists from the misconducts of male *sangha* and the needs to have qualified female *sangha* to help bring back the faith, *Nirodharam* see it from a different angle. They mention that *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* are equally important and their roles are complementary to each other. The existence of *bhikkhuni* could fill in the gaps that *bhikkhu* could not perform well, particularly with regard to helping lay women and youths with their specific issues.

For example, S mentioned they have trained female prisoners to practice meditation and chanting and given them spiritual encouragement. Some of these women were pregnant, and they have reached out to *bhikkhuni* to ask for their blessings and the names for their newborn babies. Another example is about a teenage boy in *Ubekkha* juvenile rehabilitation centre writing to the abbess promising that he would correct himself to be a better person. He also asked the abbess to be present as 'his mother' in the Mother's Day event at the centre for he has high respect for her and her teaching. This is in line with Ven. Bodhi, mentioned (2012) that roles of *bhikkhuni* are preachers, scholars, meditation teachers, and also as counsellors and guides to women lay followers and their families. S underlined that the revival of *bhikkhuni sangha* helps to offset the socio-structural inequality between Thai men and women by allowing women to engage in spiritual training on an equal level. S's abbess reckons that to her, the word '*Phra*' does not limitedly refer to male *sangha*, but female *sangha* as well. '*Phra*' has the same meaning as '*Ariya*'-he who is spiritually prosperous. Hence, it can refer to both men and women who have reached such stage.

N see this gender complementary role as an advantage, just like in other Southeast Asian culture. To be specific, N's abbess sees it in the light of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies whereby each member plays an equally important role through different duties. In the specific context of Thai Buddhism, the existence of *bhikkhuni sangha* has benefited not only laywomen followers but also male *sangha* who have to improve themselves to a higher standard in terms of knowledge and practice as they have to serve as mentor and role model to the newly established *bhikkhuni sangha.* Meanwhile, the complementary role of *bhikkhuni sangha* goes beyond the traditional role of laywomen disciples and *mae-chi* who are strictly confined as devotees to support male monastic members, for example, cooking, cleaning, providing basic necessities for cleric life, and performing other miscellaneous tasks to support monastic activities. (Pha Paisal, 2006; Lindberg Falk, 2007). Equally important, laywomen are also expected to support their sons to be ordained at the right age. Although Pranee (2019) claimed that Thai Buddhism is in debt with the contribution and devotion of Thai women in these regards, N argue that the role of *bhikkhuni* could also be regarded as equally necessary to sustain Buddhism. Through ordination, women have opportunity to study and practice *Dhamma* and to train themselves to become a 'learned person' who could provide complementary support to *male sangha* in propagating and sustaining the Buddha's teachings. Thus, women are alternatively shifting from an immersed historical lay donor to be a more pro-active ascetic Buddhist practitioner or as an active member of the monastery.

N's interpretation of *bhikkhuni*'s legitimacy from gender complementary perspective also reflects a changing landscape in modern Thai Buddhism indicated by the increasing numbers of qualified lay women who are able to understand and practice 'beyond worldly' *Dhamma* essences. The fact that N's abbess has been a *Dhamma* disseminator for more than 30 years with a large number of female lay disciples reflects that Thai women today are searching to find alternate way to access spiritual training opportunity outside male *sangha.*

All in all, although women seem to be excluded from the official Thai *Sangha* from historical and gender perspectives, S and N commonly agree that *bhikkhuni sangha* could respond to specific needs and problems of lay women in a more appropriate way than *bhikkhu sangha*. As currently the numbers of monks are monumentally descending, (Phra Paisal,2006; Seeger,2009), S specifically reinforce the benefits of

having qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* in addition to the male counterpart from Buddhist feminist approach, whilst N see the benefits from gender complementary process.

6.3.4 Interpretations of Legitimacy according to Functions of Buddhist Community

In a broad Buddhism context, both S and N interpret their meanings of legitimacy according to functions of Buddhist community. Both communities define themselves as *bhikkhuni sangha* as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies established by the Buddha. Accordingly, their interpretations reflect functions of Buddhist community in two-folds. The first function is to render appropriate environmental conditions for monastic members to stay away from the external faulty society so that they can train their minds and attain different levels of spiritual development. The second function is to serve as role model to the society through the right paths of his noble *Sangha.*

However, in Thai context, N's interpretations are more conforming with functions of Buddhist communities defined in the scripture, particularly those expectely to be committed by cleric people beyond the worldly level. N abbess also mentions the duties of *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* clearly made by the Buddha's statement that ordained persons owe lay people for their support on the four necessities of life[86], thus, they have main duties to: (i) stop people from committing devils, (ii) support them to think and do good things, (iii) teach them *Dhamma* which they never hear before, (iv) make sure they understand thoroughly what they hear, (v) help them to get out of sufferings, and (vi) show them way to heaven-a spiritually better life'.

From my observation, I can see clearly that *bhikkhuni* at *Nirodharam* are very committed to these legitimated duties given by the Buddha. Their priorities include giving regular *Dhamma* teaching sessions at both campuses and outside the temple when invited-locally, nationally and internationally; organising *Dhamma* camps for youth groups and lay people-women as well as men; conducting ordination for female novices; and organizing special Buddhist events on special occasions. And from my fieldtrip and observation of their Facebook website, I see N's abbess allowed more and more monastic members: *bhikkhuni, sikkhamana and samaneri* to take part in propagating *Dhamma* sessions to different groups of laypeople. According to the abbess (2017) this founds the sustainability of their community after her departure. The

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[86] Food, shelter, clothes, medicine

encouragement of their monastic members in performing this cleric duty also coordinate with what is mentioned in the Buddhist scripture; with different *Dhamma* activities are designed to respond to specific interests of individual participant groups, thus they vary in terms of content, length, and methods but all aiming to help the participants understand and appreciate the Buddha's teaching and its application to their lives.

Unlike *Nirodharam*, S's interpretations of legitimacy go further beyond the monastic confined duties to involve social work and contributions. For monastic duties, they provide spiritual guidance to laypeople who come and seek for their advice, based on the teaching of the Buddha. This is compatible with the prominent responsibilities of cleric persons which are defined to help laity to understand *Dhamma* essence which they have not yet understood. In addition, S are also committed to help the society on non-monastic activities such as giving vocational training to youths in corrective centre, distributing 'life-saving bags' to those affected by natural disasters, etc. S adopt the 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' approach as they believe that performing just monastic duties is not sufficient to help people get out of their problems in today's chaotic society.

The two communities' interpretations of legitimacy well illustrate the inter-reliant relationship between members of the Buddhist assemblies. While monastic community rely on economic support from the lay community, they provide moral, ethical and spiritual development services to the laity, in return. Such relationship underlines the significance of 'companionship' and 'interdependence' which hold them together as they perform their duties towards the common goals.

6.3.5 Multimodality and Their Interpretations of Legitimacy

The two communities' interpretations of their legitimacy from multimodal resources retrieved mainly from their rhetoric and written discourses have proven what Weber (1964, p. 325) highlighted that language is the most vital resource in constructing legitimacy, particularly in transmitting human experiences. In this regard, I believe their disparate interpretations are simply related to their different objectives as S aim to communicate discourse concerning legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination and their status; and N aim to communicate core teachings of the Buddha and serve as role model of qualified female cleric community as prescribed by the Buddha. In addition, Van

Leeuwen (2007); Henderson, 2007; and Schroder, 2013 also elaborate that legitimating experience is constructed through vocabulary whereby verbal resources play the most vital role with complementary roles of other semiotic resources such as visual, audio and spatial modes. For these two communities, the effectiveness of their verbal resources also involves professional backgrounds of the two charismatic leaders. One of them has long been 'branded' as feminist Buddhist scholar before being ordained as *bhikkhuni* and possess outstanding public speaking and advocacy skill. The other one has been well respected as a competent *Dhamma* disseminator who acquires in-depth knowledge of beyond-worldly *Dhamma* topics and the ability to communicate them in a uniquely clear-cut and simplified style. Her interpretations and elaborations of Pali lexical references are easy for the audience to understand and apply them to their lives.

Another point of discussion from multimodal perspective reflect their different positions in 'legitimising' *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism over spatial and temporal elements. From my observations of their communication on 'legitimacy' since the beginning of this project in 2015 until recently, I notice both S and N have, to a certain degree, adjusted their positions in legitimising *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism over the years. In the early years of their establishment, I see S applied a pro-active approach in legitimizing *bhikkhuni sangha* in the country through means such as being the centre in bringing *bhikkhuni* communities together; educating female monastic members and lay people regarding the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination, etc. And at the beginning, according to the abbess and Khun Kanjana, (2017), S aimed to communicate with the audience at international and national level rather with local audience. However, in recent years, the community have changed their approach to be less antagonistic and more compromising, especially on winning the contradicting issues with the male *sangha* and state authorities. They also realise the needs to communicate more with local audience in Nakhon Pathom. Through their constant and consistent messages regarding the importance and contributions of the *bhikkhuni* to Thai society, S believe that people will eventually support the legitimacy of '*bhikkhuni*' even without any law enforcement. This process may take some time as there had not been *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thailand before and people need time to learn about benefits of having *bhikkhuni sangha* in today's society (*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha and Kanjana, 2017).

Similarly, *Nirodharam* has also adjusted their legitimation strategy over spatial and temporal experiences; beginning with a relatively low-profiled approach, especially in

showing their stance on the issue related to legitimacy of *bhikkhuni/ bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism. During the early years of their establishment, the abbess decided to stay low-profiled and avoided giving opinion to the public towards the controversial issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination. Instead, she asked the press to let *Nirodharam*'s monastic members live peacefully and train themselves as a good *nak-buat* first (*Bhikkhuni* Warayani, 2017). However, from my interview with the abbess and my participation in their activities (2017), I have observed the gradual changes in 'legitimation strategy' of the community. For example, in selected occasions, the community explicitly communicated with the local audience about the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni/* ordination. They refer to their status as legitimated *bhikkhuni* or female *nak-buat* who perform duties of a Buddhist community as assigned by the Buddha. However, *Nirodharam* continue not to confront nor oppose the mainstream discourses, particularly those made by state authorities and male *sangha* when discussing about *bhikkhuni* legitimacy in the Thai Buddhism. Instead, they propose a gradual process of *bhikkhuni* legitimation from an evidence-based justification and communication.

In combining these to findings from their multimodal monastic resources in Chapter 5, both communities reflect paradoxical meanings of *bhikkhuni* according to *Theravada* and *Mahayana* Buddhism. Despite asserting their legitimacy as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community in Thailand, S apply mere *Mahayana* than *Theravada* semiotic elements to describe themselves. These are signified by verbal mode of their monastic title aligning with the socially engaged Buddhism approach which conforms with *Mahayana* principle for monastic practices. The presence of the Medicine Buddha and *Bodhisattva* pond through visual, spatial, and temporal elements materialised in their community, also well consent to *Mahayana* concept.

On a contrary, *Nirodharam* who do not explicitly define themselves as *Theravada bhikkhuni*, mainly reveal *Theravada* elements through their verbal resource of community's title reflecting the community's objective in providing proper place for women to end sufferings within the boundary of monastic practices and duties. Their monastic constructions, all coherently represent the community's highest respects to the Buddha, which is the core element of *Theravadian* tradition. Their administrative approach strictly follows traditional *Theravada* rules and regulations, especially with regard to money matters. Represented through spatial and temporal modes of their geographical locations, both *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* are situated in

historically and temporarily significant locations. S's venue in Nakhon Pathom signifies the golden area where the two Buddhist envoys landed to situate Buddhism in Southeast Asia in ancient Suvarnabhumi period while Chiang Mai where *Nirodharam* is located was known as the sacred Lanna region where Buddhism has been prospered from the past until today.

For multimodal communication, both communities render a variety of multimodal means of communication in negotiating their 'legitimated' status through the re-dissemination of the knowledge and power in a horizontal domain. This reflect their hybridity of media system combining offline and online media convergences. For offline-media channel, they both focus on personal communication of their charismatic leaders – *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha and *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani who acquire different backgrounds which influence their communication styles. But both prove to be effective. Their in-house publications are also considered as their main off-line media while Facebook website serves as their most salient online platform in updating their religious activities and interacting with their virtual community members.

The two communities apply different approaches in engaging with mainstream media. *Songdhammakalyani* have been active since the early years until now in engaging in mainstream media programmes as a way to publicly promote their legitimacy. These include interviews, panel discussion, and documentary programmes produced by Thai as well as foreign media. *Nirodharam* are a bit different. In their early years of establishment, N tended to avoid engaging with any mainstream media programmes but focused on self-training according to the *Vinaya* and on *Dhamma* study and dissemination. After almost a decade, they have gradually become more engaging with broader audience and mainstream media on some selected occasions. This marked the more advanced step of their media and communication stance.

6.4. Conclusion

Findings from this chapter convey the two communities' common interpretations of their legitimacy within the broader context of Buddhism. Overall, the two communities see themselves as legitimated *bhikkhuni* community established according to the provision of the Buddha supported by four reasons including (i) the Buddha's intention

to establish bhikkhuni as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies in stabilizing Buddhism ; (ii) *Theravada* doctrine made by the Buddha and has never been withdrawn; (iii) historical evidence that *bhikkhuni* ordination was completed within *bhikkhu sangha*; and (iv) women equal ability to attain spiritual awakening as men.

Within Thai socio-cultural context, the two communities have dissimilar interpretations of their 'legitimacy', which could be explained from different theoretical perspectives. *Songdhammakalyani*, reflect their meanings of 'legitimacy' specifically as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* relying on 'subjective legitimation strategy' in officialising their 'illegitimated' status in line with rules and regulations in Buddhism. They refer to their ordination from Sri Lanka through legitimised process; the support from international Buddhist network; Thailand's constitution; and the supposedly invalid status of the 1928 Decree.

Nirodharam, simply interpret their legitimated meanings as *bhikkhuni* or female clerics who are part of the Buddha's fourfold assemblies, without explicitly claiming themselves as *Theravada.* More specifically, *Nirodharam's* define themselves as 'beggars' or ones who see the threats from reincarnations and want to get out of it, by departing their wealth and properties to live an ordained life, possessing nothing of their own. N refer to 'objective legitimation process', relying on their proven contributions to the religion as well as the society, particularly through their righteous conducts and teachings.

Both S and N claim that there is an increasing demand for *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai society, whilst their justifications are different. S mention the necessity to have qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* as a way to help improve the declining faith among Thai Buddhists from the misconduct of male *sangha.* N see the role of *bhikkhuni sangha* to complement the existing contributions of male *sangha,* especially to serve as preachers, meditation teachers, and also as counsellors to lay women.

Considering from gender perspective, *Songdhammakalyani* resort to Feminist Buddhism approach as mirrored in the community's objective to legitimise and stabilise the status of Thai *bhikkhuni* within the male dominant context. They advocate for equal opportunity for women to receive full ordination; and mention gender prejudice within male *sangha* and state authorities as major obstacles for legitimising female ordination. *Nirodharam* do not mention male patriarchy or gender prejudice in obstructing

legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination but rather they are looking for a way to collaborate with and complement the *bhikkhu* in performing functions of Buddhist community. N see the four members of Buddhist assemblies having different but complementary functions in perpetuating the religion. Interestingly, when it comes to the ability to attain awakening stage through the practice of the noble truths in Buddhism, both communities refer to equal spiritual ability of women and men regardless their biological distinctions.

From multimodal perspective, given rhetoric and written discourses of both abbesses underlined importance of linguistic elements in constructing their interpretations of legitimacy through their reflection of disparate experiences as female Buddhist communities in Thai Buddhism. Through spatial and temporal elements, their legitimation strategies have been gradually adjusted overtime to serve the changing local and international landscapes in which they aim to fulfill their duties. Whilst, their monastic elements reflect paradoxical meanings to their aforementioned meanings of legitimacy according to *Theravada* and *Mahayana* boundaries. Besides backgrounds of the two abbesses led to different approaches of their monastic administrations according to these two major Buddhist doctrines. Both communities take advantages of 'hybridity media systems' in communicating their updated issues with Thais and Buddhists overall through traditional and social media.

Figure 6.1 (below) illustrates comparative interpretations of legitimacy as interpreted by the two communities drawn from their rhetoric and written discourses in various occasions.

Community	Interpretations of Legitimacy		Paradoxical Meanings	Legitimation Process		Gender Ideology		Functions of Buddhist Community	
Socio-Cultural Context	Buddhism	Thai Buddhism	*Theravada* VS *Mahayana*	Buddhism	Thai Buddhism	Similar	Varied		
Similar / Varied Meanings	Similar	Varied		Similar	Varied			Similar	Varied
Songdhammakalyani	*Bhikkhuni* as a member from the fourfold Buddhist assemblies established by the Buddha. By referring to: (i) the Buddha's intention to include *bhikkhuni* as part of the four Buddhist assemblies with assigned duty to constitute and stabilise Buddhism; (ii) this permission never been withdrawn; (iii) *bhikkhuni* ordination is completed within *bhikkhu sangha,* whilst *bhikkhuni sangha* is added for purification stage; (iv) women's ability to attain enlightenment and difficulty without ordination	The first *Theravada bhikkhuni* community in Thailand by referring to: (i) being trailblazer in legitimacy issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination; and support from international Buddhist networks; (ii) the invalid status of 1928 Decree; (iii) gender prejudice and male patriarchy which obstruct legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism; (iv) the necessity to establish the qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* to fill in the existing gaps of declining faith in Thai Buddhism posted by misconducts of male *sangha*	Identifying themselves as *Theravada* whilst indicating mere *Mahayana* monastic elements: (I) 'socially engaged Buddhism' which conforms to *Mahayana* principle focusing on 'helping others to attain *nibbhana* before yourself'; (ii) monastic constructions: the Medicine Buddha and *Bodhisattva* pond, etc. well consent to *Mahayana* concept; (iii) flexible governing approach and financial administration: allowing monastic members to engage with financial management for good purpose	Mixed legitimation strategy: referring to: (i) the Buddha's intention in establishing *bhikkhuni* as important member of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies, with designated duties to sustain Buddhism; (ii) rules and regulations of *Theravada* Buddhism which thrusts on what originally provided by the Buddha;	Subjective Strategy referring to: (i) Thai Constitution and international legal frameworks on women's human rights; (ii) the invalid status of the 1928 Decree; (iii) professional background of their abbess and support from international monastic and lay communities; Objective strategy referring to: (i) 'socially engaged Buddhism' approach, which is beyond confined monastic duties; (ii) their objectives in establishing and strengthening *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism and worldwide	Both agree that women and men have equal spiritual ability to practice according to the noble truths regardless of biological distinctions	(i) highlighting the need to establish, legitimise, and stabilise the status of Thai *bhikkhuni* in Thai Buddhism to promote gender equality in religious realm; (ii) mentioning aspects of male patriarchy in Thai society through textual misinterpretation from Pali scriptures which mislead public understandings and obstruct the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism; (iii) referring to emerging needs for female clerics to respond to the issue of declining faith among Thai Buddhists due to male *sangha*'s misconduct.	Defining themselves as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies' function to (i) render appropriate conditions for monastic members to stay away from the external faulty society to train their minds and spiritual development; (ii) to serve as role model to the society	(i) go further beyond the monastic confined duties, committed to help the society on non-monastic activities to help people get out of their problems in today's chaotic society
Nirodharam		Female *nak buat* who see threats of the reincarnation, thus live a cleric life for spiritual practices towards awakening stage by referring to: (i) their strict adherence to the *Vinaya* and perform legitimated roles of Buddhist community; (ii) support from senior local monks; (iii) the necessity to establish the qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* to complement the existing contributions of male *sangha* in Thai Buddhism; (iv) gradual stages in legitimising *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism	Not explicitly identified themselves neither as *Theravada* nor *Mahayana bhikkhuni,* yet reflect more *Theravada monastic* elements: (i) monastic title(s) represent the goal in *Theravada* Buddhism; (ii) monastic constructions represent the community's highest respects to the Buddha, which is the core element of *Theravadins;* (iii) their financial administration which strictly refrains monastic members from engaging with money matters is based on *Theravada* principle.	(iii) 'legitimated ordination' from Sri Lankan *Theravada* lineage	Subjective Strategy referring to: (i) their strict adherence to the *Dhamma Vinaya*; (ii) the *mae chi* experience and strict practices of *Dhamma Vinaya* of their abbess; (iii) knitted connection with and support from local high-ranking monks Objective strategy referring to: (i) their 'legitimated' status is automatically guaranteed by how much they have contributed to Thai society in the confined boundary of monastic duties		(i) seeing *bhikkhuni* helps to fulfil specific religious functions which cannot be well-performed by male monastic members; (ii) manifesting their humble approach towards Thai Buddhist monks, and seeing *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* complementary role in sustaining the religion; (iii) asserting functional basis as *bhikkhuni* and lay women are as equally important as *bhikkhu* and laymen in forming the four-fold Buddhist assemblies and perpetuating the religion as intended by the Buddha.		(i) Conforming with functions of Buddhist communities, particularly those expectedly to be committed by cleric people beyond the worldly level;

Table 6.1 Comparative Interpretations of Legitimacy by *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam*

All in all, this chapter provides worthwhile responses to the first research question: how the two communities understand and interpret their meanings of 'legitimacy' in specific Thai socio cultural context, consolidated from findings of their selected multimodal resources of monastic elements from Chapter 5; and linguistic elements of their rhetoric and written discourses from various occasions. It also renders explanations from multimodal semiotic analysis interpreted within specific Thai context; legitimacy and legitimation theory; gender ideology referred to in Buddhism and Thai society; as well as functions of Buddhist community.

The next two chapters aim to answer the second research question: how do *bhikkhuni* communities construct their legitimacy through multimodal means of communication? I will begin with findings and discussions of *Songdhammakalayni's* in chapter 7, followed by *Nirodharam's* on chapter 8. The findings are drawn mainly from their Facebook website, supplemented with analysis of their offline constructions on the same themes and during the same periods.

CHAPTER VII: *SONGDHAMMAKALYANI*'S

MULTIMODAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF 'LEGITIMACY'

7.1   Introduction

This chapter proceeds to find the answer to the second research question: 'how do *bhikkhuni* communities construct their 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication?'; and an affiliated question: How does the interplay of employed semiotic modes construct their meanings of 'legitimacy' conflicting to mainstream discourse? It presents multimodal analysis of *Songdhammakalyani,* starting with (7.2) the findings of their multimodal constructions through (i) their Facebook website; and (ii) their offline constructions of 'legitimacy', followed by (7.3), the discussion and analysis in answering the key and affiliated research question; and (7.4) the conclusion.

7.2 Findings

Findings in this Chapter are multimodal analysis, drawn from 49 postings retrieved from Facebook website of *Songdhammakalyani* (www.facebook.com/thaibhikkhunis) on three major Buddhist events: in 2012, 2014 and between 2016 and 2017. However, as *Songdhammakalyani* did not specifically construct their 'legitimacy' in relation to the event of *Buddha Jayanti* in 2012 via their Facebook website, findings are based only from their postings in 2014; and between 2016 and 2017.

From 386 of S's posts during the studied period, 49 or 12.66[87] % of their total posts were related to their legitimacy. In relation to 2014 *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla, there were 9 postings on *bhikkhuni's* legitimacy issue. This accounted for 27.27% of the total 33 posts in the same period. Between 2016 to 2017, S posted about their 'legitimacy' for 40 times out of 353 postings which accounted for 11.33 % of all postings in the same timeframe.

In addition, findings, are drawn from their offline constructions of legitimacy in the parallel period consisting of their 8 arranged activities; 1 publication; 12 times participation in the public events; and 13 times participation in media programmes. Similar to the online construction, from the best of my knowledge, *Songdhammakalyani*

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[87] S posted in relation for their legitimacy in the selected themes for 49 post from 387 posts in the studied period.

did not construct their 'legitimacy', specifically in relation to the *Buddha Jayanti* in 2012. Response from S's secretary (2019) also confirmed with my observation. Thus, presentation of their offline constructions is based only on S's activities and publications in December 2014; and between October 2016 and December 2017 (See Chapter 4).

7.2.1. Online Multimodal Constructions

❖ **2014**

Songdhammakalyani constantly communicated contents related to *bhikkhuni* ordination in *Songkhla* from 15 to 20 December and on 22 December 2014, informing audience on their movements towards the incident. On 15 December 2014, S posted a written text in Thai and one image showing their presenting petition to state authorities regarding the reinforcement of 1928 Decree by the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council. On 16 December was another Thai written text to inform FB audience of TV programme '*Kom Chad Luek'* where S secretary was invited to discuss the incident in Songkhla. The programme was broadcast on Nation Channel between 8 to 9 pm. on the same night. On 18 December, they posted a video clip from a TV programme '*Tob Jod'* on Thai PBS channel; and the advertisement on S abbess's interview to Thairath TV towards the question: 'whether the *bhikkhuni* lineage could be revived'? Three images related to the content were used to accompany the texts.

On 19 December, S communicated their stance towards issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination by using a poster created by a TV programme '*Tang Khon Tang Kid*', aired on 18 December depicting S' abbess and secretary debating with another man from the Government's Buddhism Bureau. At the top of the poster lies a big title '*Ladies seeking liberty to be ordained?*' with a two-paragraph text underneath, conveying the chronology of the Songkla incident, followed by two challenging questions: why are more women seeking for equal rights to be ordained, and what are the root cause for the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council's barring them to do so. On 20 December, S posted a re-produced video clip from '*Tang Khon Tang Kid*' TV programme from YouTube channel, and on 22 December a reproduced text originally created by website Prachathai.com entitled: the resolution of Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council to disallow women ordination is by itself against the *Vinaya*?
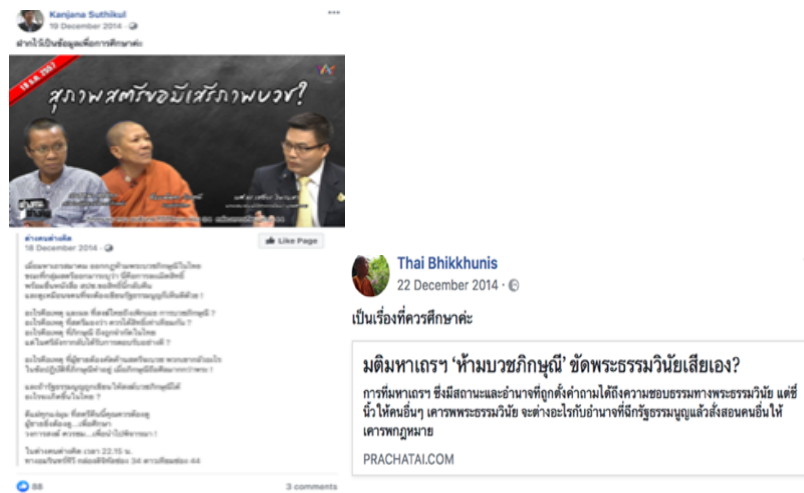
Figure 7.1 *Songdhammakalyani*'s FB posting on 18 December 2014 from TV programme '*Tang Khon Tang Kid*' on Amarin TV on (Left) and their post on 22 December which reproduced the content from www.prachathai.com (Right)
Source www.facebokk.com/thaibhikkhunis

❖ 2016 – 2017

S constructed their 'legitimacy' in relation to the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX) through as many as 40 posts on their FB between 2016-2017, which are classified into 6 groups. The first group is the expression of their loyalty through a wide-ranged of religious and non-religious activities. Beginning on 13 December 2016-the day he passed away- S changed their FB profile picture into black color. On 23 October, there were a two-minute videoclip showing the secretary attending the rehearsal of 'Thai Royal Anthem' singing for the late King at Sanam Luang in Bangkok, followed by a bird-eye view image posted on 25 October portraying thousands of people gathering for singing the 'Thai Royal Anthem' for the King. On 28 October, twenty-three images were posted portraying local people gathering in Nakhon Phatom to vow their commitment to 'turn the grief into the collective force of the nation'.

On 20 January, 2017, there was S's determination to follow the King's footprints, which was further reinforced on 9 July by a photo of S's secretary drawing the King's hard-working cliché image with employed linguistic elements showing her admiration towards his '*Dhamma* principles in ruling the country throughout the 70 years. On 26 July, S employed three images to illustrate souvenirs given to people paying homage to the Royal Urn. These include a small bag of paddy rice with a copy of the late King's handwriting on the bag; a VCD on the King's contributions to the country; a pin with his photo; and a picture of the King playing saxophone. All to remind the people of his tireless devotion to the country. The accompanied text also reflects S' holding to his teaching on 'Sufficiency Economy' principles comparable to the 'middle path' concept in Buddhism'. The last post in this first

category was on 20 October 2017, which included 18 images demonstrating S's members attending exhibition 'From Dusk to Galaxy' to express condolences for the late King.

The second group is their reproduced contents from the mainstream and social media. These include their posts on 14 October 2016, which was an image of a foreign woman holding a newspaper with the King's image on its cover, followed by a clip of mantra chanting for him on 19 October reproduced from Ven. Phra Wannarat - the abbot of *Wat Bavornnivetvihara*[88]. Another post on 30 December 2016 was an introduction of new musical band formed up to play in the events related to the Royal funeral with a provided link from YouTube. On 9 May 2017, a 4:23 video clip of the King's speech on 'the importance of Buddhism for him as the King of Thailand' was reposted from YouTube.

From this speech, S's abbess has praised his profound knowledge in Buddhism. He mentioned different levels of spiritual practices with spiritual purity attainment being the highest, whilst meditation is a crucial process to clear faulty emotions, concentrate one's mind and see things more clearly, leading to wisdom and sound decision. One can gradually train oneself to reach these stages.

On October 12, S reposted a clip from the Ministry of Cultures on the King's biography, available on YouTube. On 26 October 2017, S's admin posted five images of the late King in different postures with texts expressing her loyalty to him. On 29 October S reproduced a documentary about the work of the late King aired on ThaiPBS TV. On 11 November, there was another reproduction of an unseen album of the late King from 'Sud Sab Dha' magazine.

The third group is about S performing cleric duties, especially making merit for the King and showing loyalty to the Thai monarch. Their post on 2 December 2016 showed loyalty to HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn who accepted to be crowned as King Vajiralongkorn, (Rama X) of Thailand, with 3 images. Postings on 4 and 5 December 2016 were related to special *samaneri* ordination at *Songdhammakalyani* in 2016, as an act of tribute to the late King.

As S considered their presence at the Royal Palace to pay homage to the Royal Urn as one of the most important cleric duties, they posted about this for 3 consecutive days (9-11 December), and also on 15 and 18 December. The first post on 9 December was S's secretary personal view towards what happened during the day S monastic members

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[88] Important temple in Bangkok where some of the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Patriarch reside.

presenting at the Royal Palace with 8 images of the monastic members and her own selfies, showing indifferent feeling. Three postings on 10 December were about the same incident, including two images of S monastic members paying respect to male *sangha* who walked past them into the palace with text commenting that they were not allowed to go inside to pay homage whilst foreign *bhikkhuni* were. The second posting on 10 December was 5 images with a short text expressing the admin's conclusion towards the incident saying that 'fear' is the root cause, leading to 'recession' (lacking moral practices). The last post was an excerpt reproduced from Sanitsuda Ekachai's[89] self-translated Thai version, referring to S's abbess quote mentioning coordination with the palace officers before they actually went there. Yet S were barred to que in monastic line and accused of being illegal wearing the same robes as male *sangha.*

On 11 December, there were 2 postings: 21 images of S's monastic members and *bhikkhuni* from their network from Uthaithani, with a comment that the incidence was nothing but a training of their tolerance. The second post was 12 images of S monastic members making merit for the late King, with short text.

Two postings on 18 December were a prose by S's secretary expressing painful feeling that they were barred to pay homage to the Royal Urn; and 20 images showing a connection of Ven. Mahidawamsa's - a senior male *sangha* of Sri Lanka who visited Thailand and were presented with the late King Rama IX and the His mother. There was a depiction of S chanting for the King with 4 photos on 31 December 2016.

In 2017, there were depictions about S's networks gathering to prepare sandal flowers for the Royal Cremation in October 2017. These include 12 images of children from 'Hom Hug' Foster Home on 7 May; 5 images of S monastic members on 7 July, and 5 images of *Buddhasavikha* Foundation members on 14 September, preparing sandal flowers together. On 9 October 2017, S posted 1 image and 1 video clip to invite laypeople to attend their merit making session on 13 October which was the 1st anniversary of King Bhumibol's passing away. On 13 October, S posted 8 images of their monastic members chanting and praying for the King; and 5 images of S's monastic and lay members planting 'sunflower' plants at the community as a symbolic action showing their first step to follow the King's footsteps. On 5 December, which was his birthday, S posted 22 images of *samaneri* ordination organized as a tribute to him.

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[89] A famous columnist of Bangkok Post newspaper

The fourth group is about S performing beyond monastic duties to gain merit for the King. There were a number of occasions that S posted in relation to their activities specially arranged for the youth particularly at juvenile detention centres called *Ubekkha* and *Sirindhorn* Houses. On 10 November 2016, there were 15 images showing S's visit to *Ubekkha* House with Thai-International Horoscope Institute and Tan Tawan Group as a part of their 'follow the King's footsteps scheme'. On 24 November, there was a 4 minute-video clip showing teenagers from *Ubekkha* House singing a song '*Kho Pen Kha Rong Bata Took Chat Pai*' to express their gratitude to the King. On 16 December there were 15 images to show S providing food, clothes and daily consumer goods for these youths and playing musical instruments and singing a song '*Sai Phone*' [The Rain] composed by the King with them. On 29 December, S posted 8 images showing their endeavour to use music as a tool to cultivate the teenagers by organizing music competition among regional detention centres. There were also 2 posts showing S's activities with these groups: 15 images showing S teaching *Ubekkha* children on 25 April to make sandalwood flowers; and 2 images of the completed sandalwood flowers made by them on 27 May 2017.

The fifth group is S's declaration to follow the King's footsteps including the 10 Royal virtues in governing the country. S's posts on 9, 21, 28 and 30 January 2017, were in relation to their seminar on 'Law and Religion: how to harmonise their relationship?' by Prof. Charan Pakdeethanakul and Mr. Kittichai Chongkraichakra as key-note speakers and Somrit Luechai as a moderator. On 9 and 21 January, S posted a poster to invite monastic members and the public to attend this event on 28 January 2017. Whilst 2 postings on 28 January were a live broadcasting and 15 images. S's posting on January 30 was to summarise the event with 7 images.

The last category presented S as the King's follower to implement his well-known 'sustainable development' projects. These included 13 images of an academic in Chiang Mai who pursued her agricultural projects to follow the King's path on 7 February 2017. Another post on 2 March was about the seminar on 'Sufficiency Economy' with 8 images showing S's secretary attending the event and collaborated with Dr. Sumet Tantivejkul, a Secretary-General of the Chaipattana Foundation which was initiated by the late King. On 16 May, they posted a 5.30 min. video clip of a Thai monk talking about the King's philosophy of sustainable development from a conference in Sri Lanka on *Vesak Day*. On 24 August, there were 16 images of S's admin paying a study trip to the King's sustainable development project of 'Laem Phak Bia' in Phetchaburi Province. S also posted 11 images showing S giving away plant seeds supplied by the Royal project to local communities on 25 October. On 29

October was a posting with 9 images showing them implementing 'eco-temple' scheme after a study trip to the King's 'Laem Phak Bia' project. There were 11 images highlighting S's project to prepare plant seedlings to be grown around the community under the 'eco-temple' concept on 24 October.

Figure 7.2 Screengrabs from S's postings on the passing away between on 9, 10 and 18 December 2016.
Source www.facebokk.com/thaibhikkhunis

In communicating their 'legitimacy' online, S relied on five semiotic modes: verbal, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial. The two most important resources are verbal (written) and visual resources. From S's 49 postings, they utilised short paragraph or middle-length written texts to inform the readers and describe details of every post. Whilst, visual mode is commonly used to accompany linguistics in almost every post, except only three posts that text appears as a sole mode without images or video clips.

However, when considering spatial and gestural modes, it is quite complicated to categorise these two modes via Facebook platform. When looking at any FB posting, it always involves spatial mode as layout appears to classify different sections in each post. Similarly, gestural mode needs to be analysed through visual mode – image or video clip. Thus, in this thesis when mentioning these two modes via Facebook construction, I mean their appearance along with employed visual element in each post.

S also employed 355 images and 10 video clips to construct their 'legitimacy' in relation to the explored themes. From the total employed images, gestural mode was referred to for 309 times, accounting for 87.04 %. Spatial was the next popular mode after gestural which was employed for 82.25 % in 292 posts. Audio is the least utilised mode during the studied period and appeared in only 10 postings.

Modes employed by *Songdhammakalyani*
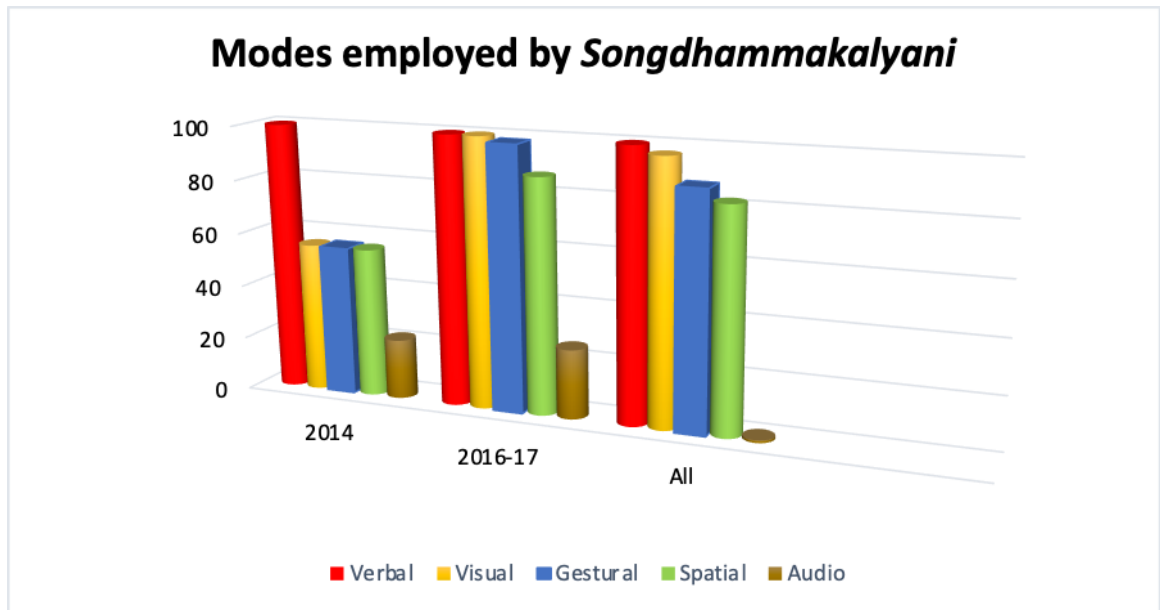
Figure 7.3 representing percentage of modes employed by *Songdhammakalyani's* online construction during the studied period

The most frequently utilised modal resources are colour and hand-gesture. Whilst, body language is the second most commonly used mode, followed by facial expression, interaction and perspective respectively.

7.2.2 Offline Multimodal Constructions

The exploration on their offline communication shows four means of their construction of 'legitimacy'. The first means is the arrangement of religious and non-religious activities to make merit for the late King. Most of these activities are also posted in their FB, including chanting sessions; arrangement of *samaneri* and *bhikkhuni* ordinations; visit to the Royal Palace to pay homage to the Royal Urn; activities at juvenile detention centres at *Ubekkha* and *Sirindhorn* Houses; seminar on '*Law and Religion: how to harmonize their relationship;* their public talk on 'Sufficiency Economy; their study trip to the King's 'sustainable development project of Laem Phak Bia' in Phetchaburi Province; their free distribution of plant seeds supported by the King Royal project and their implementing 'eco-temple' project as a result from what they learnt from the trip; as well as their arrangement of '2600th anniversary of the first *bhikkhuni* in Buddhism'.

The second means is the publication of '*Buddhsavikha*' newsletter in January 2017. Its cover image illustrates S's monastic members being presented as 'invisible' while they were Waiting to pay homage to the Royal Urn on 9 December 2019. They were depicted in sepia color, standing in a humble manner as male *sangha* walking past them into the palace. The employed linguistics also reflected how the late King applied the principles of 'benefits for all' as the rule of law for any of his legitimated decisions and actions. S brought this up to contrast it with 'the rule of law for discrimination' which Thai religious authorities applied to illegitimize *bhikkhuni* ordination as well as to discriminate them in the event of 9 December. The newsletter mentioned this is not only non-conforming with the late King's will but also contradicting to what is (believed to) have been established by the Buddha. S also reaffirmed their 'legitimacy' despite the 'unequal' and 'unrighteous' treatments from mainstream Buddhist authorities.

The third means is their presence and participation in public events including S's monastic members gathering at the Royal Palace on 9 Dec 2016; S's secretary joining the Thai Royal Anthem singing at Sanam Luang; their participation in the gathering after the 15th days of the King's passing away in Nakhon Pathom; their participation in the exhibition 'From Dusk to Galaxi'; S's abbess receiving honorable awards on various occasions, especially her being entitling as the first *Pawattini*' in Thailand; and finally their participation in several national and international conferences and trainings.

The last means is their participation in a number of foreign and national media programmes, including *Kom Chad Luek* on Nation Channel, '*Tob Jod*' on ThaiPBS, Thairath TV, '*Tang Khon Tang Kid*' on Amarin TV; BBC Thai, NPR, Thailand Law Forum, NBT and Chanel 5; and German National Radio. According to S's secretary (2015, pp.93-97), *Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha was admired by media professionals for her ability to give precise and straight-to-the point information with clear examples. Thus, they prefer working with her as it requires less efforts in editing the final production.

7.3 Discussion and Analysis

Based on the findings in 7.2, this section answers the second research question 'how do *bhikkhuni* communities construct their 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication?' The answer to the main research question will be presented in 7.3.1., whilst 7.3.2 provides answer to affiliated question, 'how does the interplay of employed semiotic modes in the meaning making of 'legitimacy' conflicting to mainstream discourse?

7.3.1 How do *Bhikkhuni* Communities Construct Their 'Legitimacy' through Multimodal Means of Communication?

Songdhammakalyani constructed their meanings of legitimacy both via their online media - Facebook website; and offline platform. Via online channel, S constructed their 'legitimated meanings' as: (i) Thai *bhikkhuni* community performing cleric and beyond cleric duties with loyalty to the Thai monarch; (ii) Thai *bhikkhuni* community supported from network of monastic members and laypeople; (iii) Thai *bhikkhuni* community in the spotlight of the media; (iv) Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies through legitimated ordination; and (v) Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand's Constitution.

These meanings of 'legitimacy' are also constructed via four means of their offline channels: (i) arranged activities; (ii) publications; (iii) public participation; and (v) participation in media programmes. I will proceed with discussion of S's online construction in 7.3.1.1.A; and then their offline construction in 7.3.1.B.

7.3.1.A. Online Multimodal Constructions

Songdhammakalyani constructed their 'legitimated meanings' in five aspects via their Facebook website as aforementioned. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), visual representations and all semiotic modes have to fulfil representational and communicational requirements to identify how the sign-producers shape and associate with reality and themselves, constitute power relations, and select textual relations in the communicative environment. Thus, I will present these five aspects of S's legitimacy according to the three meta-functions: (i) ideational, (ii) interpersonal and (iii) textual functions.

7.3.1.A.1 Ideational function

The first meta-function is ideational, underlining the ability of semiotic modes to represent objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system or in the semiotic system of a culture (p.42). *Songdhammakalyani* as the media producer expressed their experiential and logical meanings of 'legitimacy' through FB website in three aspects: (i) 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*' performing cleric and beyond cleric duties with loyalty to Thai monarch; (ii) Thai *bhikkhuni* supported by (foreign) male *sangha* and network of monastic and lay people; and (iii) *bhikkhuni* community in the spotlight of the media.

7.3.1.A.1.i Thai *bikkhuni* performing cleric and beyond cleric duties with loyalty to Thai monarch

❖ **Mode of representations**

Songdhammakalyani constructed their first ideational meaning of 'legitimacy' through five semiotic modes: linguistics, visual, gestural, aural, and spatial. I selected their postings between 2016 and 2017 in relation to the passing away and the Royal funeral of the late King to illustrate how they perform cleric and beyond cleric duties through ''narrative process'' in this regard.

❖ **'Narrative process'**

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) commented 'narrative representations' as resources which portraying how 'represented participants' inter-relate to each other, and with FB viewers who are 'interactive participants' in different scenarios. From figure 7.4, images No.1-6 represent 'narrative process', which describes actions between 'actor', 'participants' and 'goal', in which vectoral lines indicate patterns of their relationship (See 3.2.1.A).

Image No.1 is a screengrab from 29 December 2016 showing S's visiting to *Sirindhorn* juvenile detention centre to cultivate boy teenagers with music activities, inspired by the late King. The left image which shows S's admin standing in front of the King's big image before entering the house forms the vector line emanating from her as 'represented participant' performing 'transitional action' called '*Wai*' to the image of the late King, as her 'goal'. The bigger size of the King image illustrates his 'superiority' over the small figure of S's secretary standing beneath, and his gentle posture in playing golden saxophone signifies his relaxing moment and music talent. The linguistics denotes the King's speech about the importance of cultural arts and education as vital tools to complement other development process to unify and sustain Thai-ness. Whilst, gestural language of S's admin indicates her 'high respect' to him and her acceptance to follow his given rhetoric. The right image shows two female sponsors who support music instruments to the teenagers. Employed linguistics indicate S's mission to pursue the King's teachings to integrate music activities into the process of empowering the boys. It also notifies the audience of the upcoming music competition among the youth groups from 19 juvenile detention centres in January 2017.

Image No.2 is a screengrab from 7 July 2017. The employed visual and gestural elements emanate from S's monastic members and laypeople as 'actor' teaming-up to make

sandalwood flowers for people attending the Royal Cremation ceremony on 25 October 2017. Linguistic resources inform specific details of what they were doing.

Image No.3 illustrates S's monastic members in ochre and white robes as 'represented participants' in 'helping each other for ploughing the ground and planting sunflower seeds at the community, with the King's image in the left hand behind them on 13 October 2017, which marked the 1st anniversary of his passing away. Their visual and gestural elements illustrate beyond cleric duty performed by S, whilst visual element of 'sunflower', according to S's admin (2017), is selected to signify their commencing to follow the King's path on this special day. In Thai cultural context, it is understood that sunflowers are flowers of King Bhumibol's birthday because he was born on Monday.

Figure 7.4. Part of screengrabs from S's postings of the theme 'legitimacy' in relation to the late King between 2016 and 2017.

Source: www.facebook.com/thaibhikkhuni

Image No. 4 is a screengrab from 29 October 2017 showing S's abbess as 'actor' in performing 'transactional action' in plastering a garbage tank. Whilst, linguistics elucidates S's 'Eco-Temple' scheme, including waste management and fertilizer making, which S

implemented after a study trip to the King's 'Sustainable Development Project' of Laem Phak Bia, Phetchaburi.

Image No.5 was a screengrab from 10 December and one of the three-day consecutive postings regarding the incident on 9 December expressing S's deep feeling towards what happened on that day. They clearly indicated 'fear' as the root cause which created 'unequal treatment' towards S's monastic members. They identified this as 'recession' (or lacking moral practices). The employed texts reinforced S's 'legitimacy' as '*bhikkhuni*' in Buddhism, although they were not recognized as part of Thai monastic order. The admin highlighted she was not 'surprised' with what S's monastic members have been through as she foresaw this to happen. The lexical choices somewhat expressed 'gloomy' and 'lonely' mood as she mentioned her only regret was that she missed the King so badly. The text is accompanied by 5 images of *Songdhammakalyani* from different geographical perspectives.

Image No. 6 was S's posting on 18 December 2017 describing S's gratitude towards the King and highlighting the 'unequal treatment' towards S's monastic members who were barred from paying homage to the Royal Urn, simply because they are female clerics. The first image on the top left depicts the late King when he was ordained as a monk. The layout contrasted this with an image of S's monastic members lining up patiently, hoping that they would be allowed to pay a final homage to the urn of their beloved King.

Figure 7.5. Representing part of screengrabs from S's postings of the theme 'legitimacy' in relation to the late King between 2016 and 2017. Source: www.facebook.com/thaibhikkhuni

Images No.1-5 from figure 7.5 (above), also show a set of 'narrative process' constructed by *Songdhammakalyani*. Image No. 1 shows another S's embracing of the King 'Sufficiency Economy' project'[90], evidenced by an image of a blackboard with written text to give away variety of plant seeds, supported from the Royal Project. This is a small part of S's self-portrayal in pursuing the King's philosophy and his development project from other postings during the period.

Image No.2 shows the vector line emanates from S's abbess as 'represented participant', with her welcoming gestures to different groups of laypeople who attended *samaneri* ordination at *Songdhammakalyani* to make merit for the late King. Image No.3 illustrates gestural languages of the to be ordained *samaneri* in a white robe as 'an actor' proceeding the ordination ceremony at *Songdhammakalyani*'s hall. Whilst Image No. 4 depicts S's abbess as 'an actor' performing 'transactional action' in giving monastic robe towards her goal 'a white-robe woman' who now becomes a newly ordained *samaneri* after receiving the robe. Image No. 5 depicts a group of newly ordained *samaneri* standing in front of the Medicine Buddha *Vihara* after the ordination ceremony on 5 December 2016. The visual element underlines S's attempt to embrace different groups of laywomen to experience the ordained life and form a part of the community to express their gratitude to the King.

❖ **Multidimensional Structure**

In constructing their legitimacy online, S also utilised 'multidimensional structure' which explains the complex elements of visual representations and embraces different processes, including (i) classification; (ii) analytical; (iii) symbolic and (iv) transactional processes (See 3.2.1.A). As aforementioned S reproduced evidence supporting how they performed cleric duty for the late King by their presence at the Royal Palace on 9 December 2016, for 3 days consecutively on Dec 9, 10, 11 Dec, and on 18 Dec 2016. I selected 7 from 37 employed images to discuss S's construction of 'legitimacy' through 'multidimensional structure'.

From figure 7.6, the first layer of images 1-7 all contain 'narrative process', showing S's monastic members as 'represented participants' performing varied actions during their presence to pay homage to the Royal Urn in December 2016. Additionally, the 'symbolic process' in image No. 1, which illustrates the participants' meanings or state of being (see 3.2.1.A), is depicted by a long distant camera shot to show a group of monastic members

of S and other *bhikkhuni* communities[91] standing with the Royal Palace wall at their background and an empty road in the foreground. Whilst an empty road potentially signifies the 'lacking (official) status of these *bhikkhuni*', the Royal Palace symbolises the Kingdom area. The interplay of foreground space and long shot camera signifies monastic members as a 'legitimated' big network of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism and under the King patronage.

Image No. 2 highlights 'narrative process' by a medium shot which emanates from two laywomen wearing black colour in performing 'transactional action' by presenting '*Wai*' towards their 'goal'- two S's monastic members, who have a name tag, 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*' on their chests. The humble gestures of these two laywomen underlines respect and recognition for S's monastic members. Whilst, in the second layer, S's monastic members become 'reactors' towards the '*Wai*' action of these women with their smiling faces as acknowledgment called 'phenomenon' in reacting to laywomen.

Image No. 3 also shows 'narrative process', with a perspective of S's abbess and monastic members sitting on a small chair almost at the same level with foreign and Thai lay members who surround them. These employed visual, gestural and spatial elements signify coalition and support from different groups of lay members, local and foreign.

Images No. 4 offers 'narrative' as the first layer with diagonal perspective as vector line emanates from S's monastic members appearing in tranquil and respectful manner whilst waiting for the line of male monks passing them. Another layer is 'symbolic process' illustrated by a dim lighting which symbolised 'uncertainty' if they would be allowed to go inside. They are again depicted with a name tag 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*' on their chests, with a low-staring eye gaze and hands woven in front, somewhat reflecting their calm and tranquillity.

Apart from 'narrative process' which highlights S's monastic members respect to a group of male *sangha* passing by, image No. 5 also contains 'classification process', which concerns how depicted elements in the frame categorise and differentiate participants; and how these affect their relations with other participants (pp.79-87).In this image, visual and spatial elements of ochre robes worn by S's monastic members differentiate them

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[91] From Songkhla, Nakhon Nayok, and Yasothorn (*Bhikkuni* Dhammawanna, 2016).

from state officials appearing in black suits and khaki uniforms. Although, the colour of monastic robes worn by S's was similar monastic colour to those worn by the *bhikkhu*, employed resources classify them as different monastic groups. To illustrate, a space between them with their contrasting directional movement portray S's monastic members staying still and paying respect to male monks who were walking by.   An in-depth perspective also leads male *sangha* to the Royal Palace along with the officials wearing black suits and khaki uniforms who followed them.

Figure 7.6 Part of screengrabs from S's postings on FB during 9, 10 and 11 December 2016 in connection to the late King.
Source www.facebokk.com/thaibhikkhunis

Image No. 6 involves 'narrative process' by a vector line emanates from S's members as 'represented participants' walking slowly out of the palace. A darker light scene signifies the end of the day atmosphere. As they were not allowed to go inside the Royal Hall to pay homage to the Royal Urn, the employed hue colour of darker shade with their gestural language, walk slowly out of the palace with little smile on the abbess's face and tranquil manner of monastic members also play 'symbolic process' in exemplifying their acceptance of the circumstance.

Image No. 7 through 'narrative process' in which vector line emanates from S's abbess and monastic members with diagonal angle to represent the whole group of S's monastic members performing cleric duty through the 'walking meditation' at the background of the Royal Palace to make merit for the King instead of going inside to pay homage. The employed elements also represent 'symbolic process' indicating these female clerics' confidence of their 'legitimated status' as 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*' as presented on the name tag on their chests. Thus, they perform cleric duty along the palace wall, which also symbolises the King's territory.

7.3.1.A.1.ii Thai *bhikkhuni* supported by network of monastic members and lay people

❖ **Mode of representations**

The second meaning of S's 'legitimacy' through ideational function is presented mainly via linguistics and visual resources of S's posting between 2016 and 2017; including live feature which involves all five semiotic modes: verbal, visual, gestural, spatial and audio in underlining 'offer interactional relation' between represented participants and interactive participants, which requires less engagement degree between them (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006; pp.120-121). I selected S's postings on 28 January; 14 June; 18 August; 16 and 23 December 2017 to discuss their 'legitimated meanings' in these stances.

❖ **Offer interactional relation**

In figure 7.7, image No. 1 shows a screengrab from 16 December 2017. The text summarises the occasion that S's abbess was entitled as the first '*Pawattini*'[92] in Thailand by Ven. Mahindavamsa, a senior Sri Lankan *Mahanayaka* monk since 29 November 2014[93]. The 1st image on the top left illustrates an envelope signed by Ven. Mahindavamsa entitling the abbess as '*Pawattini*'. Whilst, the top-right image demonstrates close connection between the abbess and this senior Sri Lankan male *sangha* with their gestural languages, facial expressions and spatial resource.

Written text in image No. 2 drawn from S's posting on 14 June 2017 indicates another occasion that S's abbess has received honourable award 'world religious leader' arranged by TonBun Vesak Foundation in corporation with Daily Mirror and again conferred by

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[92] Pawattini is a senior *bhikkhuni* who was ordained more than 10-12 years and are monastically qualified for giving ordination to women.
[93] He is a *Mahanayaka* from *Amarapura* Sect of Sri Lanka which is comparable to the Patriarch.

Ven. Mahindavamsa. The two images on the left highlight the moment the abbess receiving the award with her smiling face and the golden 'divine' trophy in her hand which represents the meaning of this award. The first top right image represents a certificate with the abbess' name on it whilst the other two images show different groups of participants both monastic members and laypeople. These postings indicate S's 'offer interactional relation' in deliberating information with the audience regarding their legitimacy as Thai *bhikkhuni* supported by foreign male *sangha*, Ven. Mawindawansa, who is considered as a high-ranking monk in Sri Lanka comparable to Thai Patriarch.[94]

Image No. 3 also illustrates S's abbess knitted connection with another senior member of Sri Lankan *sangha - Bhikkhuni* Satha Sumana-her *Pawattini*. The visual, gestural and spatial resources underline S's abbess respect to her Sri Lankan *Pawattini* and their close connection through small talks and interaction during her visit at her *Pawattini*'s resident. Textual elements reinforce their knitted tie by mentioning the *Pawatinees*'s long-standing support to the abbess since her mother passed away more than ten years ago.

Image No. 4 portrays another tie with Sri Lankan *sangha*, showing another three *sikkhamanana* from *Songdhammakalyani* receiving full ordination on 23 December 2016 at *Sakyadhita* centre in Sri Lanka. Visual and gestural elements depict S' monastic members and other Sri Lankan women attending this ordination ceremony with a number of participants while linguistic elements inform the audience about the 'legitimated ordination' process that S's monastic members received from *bhikkhuni* then *bhikkhu sangha*, in this occasion.

Image No. 5 illustrates another tie of *Songdhammakalyani*'s abbess with a well-known Taiwanese '*Bhikkhuni* Cheng Yen', the founder of Tzu Chi Foundation, who received the 'Magsaysay Award' in 1991. The employed linguistics highlight their long-established connection since S's abbess backed up *Bhikkhuni* Cheng Yen to be awarded with 'Niwano Prize'. The texts further informed the audience that all expenses during S's abbess admission to a hospital in Taiwan were covered by *Bhikkhuni* Cheng Yen, and S truly appreciated this. Spatial element is used to compare the two images of *Bhikkhuni* Cheng Yen on the left and S's abbess on the right to highlight their similar social contributions, particularly in *Dhamma* propagating to the greater audience.

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[94] There are three Buddhist Sects in Sri Lanka, which are autonomous and have their own *Mahanayaka*.

Figure 7.7 Part of screengrabs from S's postings posted on S's FB on 16 December 2016, and 14 June 2017 in relation to support from foreign *sangha*. Source www.facebokk.com/thaibhikkhunis

The meaning of S's legitimacy as *bhikkhuni* supported by monastic and lay community network was further supported by the postings about S's attendance in a number of seminars, conferences and trainings for monastic and lay members in religious and non-religious themes both in Thailand and abroad, including International Buddhist Conference in India, Nepal, Myanmar, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Hongkong.

Figure 7.8 illustrates their connection to male *sangha* in Thai Buddhism. Image No. 1 demonstrates S's monastic members standing in front of a big billboard of the current Thai Supreme Patriarch. The employed linguistics and their gestural languages show their high respect to him by humbly giving him '*Wai*' during his visit in Nakhon Pathom on 18 August 2017.

Image No. 2 shows S's network with local and foreign *sangha* and laypeople through a training programme 'Dying with Mindfulness' by a Thai monk, Phra Ajarn Kanchit, arranged at *Songdhammakalyani* between 1-30 June 2017. Employed linguistics identified

46 attendants who are monastic and lay members from Songkhla province, UK, Hong Kong, and Korea. The employed image also highlights a big group of S's monastic members on the left side with male *sangha* members on the right side. Whilst male and female laypeople appear in white colour standing and sitting on their left and right sides.

Image No. 3, was selected from S's posting on 28 January 2017 with an extra-long shot in illustrating a divergent group of monastic and lay participants from Thailand and neighbouring countriesas part of S's network attending the seminar on 'Law and Religion: how to harmonize their relationship?' The image depicts the two key speakers: Prof. Charan Pakdeethanakul[95] and Mr. Kittichai Chongkraichakra sitting on highchair in the top right direction, with Mr. Somrit Luechai as a moderator on the right edge. Next to the them in anti-clockwise direction are a group of nine male *sangha*, a big group of *bhikkhuni*, and groups of laypeople scattering around the frame. This image was employed with another posting of live feature which summarises t he essence of how the late King implemented the 10 Royal Virtues in ruling Thailand for the last 70 years. The verbal resources which are perceived audibly through their employed live feature include Prof. Charan's comment on how the late King had demonstrated 'legitimacy in action' He pointed out that if the idea is not agreed by majority of people, the King never used his 'authority' for forced adoption of the idea just for his own benefits, but he would sought to find the best solution for the benefits of his people. And Prof. Charan and *Songdhammakalyani* mutually agreed this is where 'legitimacy' and 'righteousness' really stand.

Image No. 4 represents S's connection with a senior local monk 'Phra Kru Sudhammanarda' the abbot of *Wat Palak Lai Mai* in Nakhon Pathom, who pays a visit to the community to teach S's monastic members every fortnight as part of the *Dhamma Vinaya* (Kanjana, 2017). According to S's secretary, he is considered as the main supporter to the work of *Songdhammakalyani* and their legitimization efforts since the early years of the current abbess. The visual elements portray him standing in front of S's library which is partially arranged as a classroom with a microphone and his notes written on the white board, whilst S's monastic members, including the abbess jotted down his teaching. On the right side was a big golden statue of *Ven. Anandha* – the Buddha's close disciple who is believed to have great contribution towards *bhikkhuni* ordination in the Buddha's time. Through these postings, S attempted to provide 'offer interactional relation' to FB

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[95] He was appointed by the late King to be the Constitutional Court Judge of Thailand.

audience in constructing their 'legitimacy' as 'Thai *bhikkhuni* supported by *sangha* and lay people network'.

Figure 7.8 representing part of screengrabs from S's postings posted on S's FB on 16 December 2016, and 14 June 2017 in relation to support from Thai *sangha* and their network. Source www.facebook.com/thaibhikkhunis

7.3.1.A.1.iii Thai *Bhikkhuni* community in the spotlight of the media

❖ **Modes of representations**

The last meaning of S's 'legitimacy' through ideational function is presented through all five semiotic modes. There are 11 occasions that S attended foreign and national media programmes particularly during the sparking controversial debates on legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla in December 2014. These include Thai TV programmes: *Kom Chad Luek* on Nation Channel[96], '*Tob Jod*' on ThaiPBS[97], Thairath TV [98], and '*Tang Khon Tang Kid*' on Amarin TV[99]. There were also Thai and foreign media who expressed interest to interview the abbess and publicise content regarding legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand. These included BBC Thai[100], NPR[101], Thailand Law Forum[102], a documentary concerning the late King on Thai PBS, and a special episode entitled: *Delicacy Yet Not To Be Overlooked* on NBT and Channel 5 TV. I selected 4 occasions of S' online constructions to discuss this meaning.

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[96] Broadcasted on 16 December 2014 from 8-9 pm.
[97] On 17 December 2014
[98] On 17 December 2014
[99] On 18 December 2014

[100] In January 2017
[101] In 2018
[102] Recorded on 18 December 2017

❖ **Offer interactional relation**

In figure 7.9, the screengrabs indicate S's establishing 'offer relation' in constructing their legitimacy as '*bhikkhuni* community' in the media's interest. The three selected postings present S's abbess being interviewed by 3 Thai media programmes.

Firstly, text in image No. 1 indicates content of TV programme '*Moving Forward Thailand*, focusing on *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand exemplified by the case of *Songdhammakalyani* through a special episode '*Delicacy Yet Not To Be Overlooked*. S employed 9 images of the abbess being interviewed during the filming process to accompany the text. This programme was sponsored by the Thai government as it was aired on Channel 5 and NBT channel. This point is worth mentioning as it contradicts to previous literatures mentioning that the existing *bhikkhuni* communities are not yet considered as part of the official Thai monastic order (see for example, Seeger, 2006; Varaporn, 2008). However, the lexical choices of this TV episode '*Delicacy Yet Not To Be Overlooked'* and the selection of *Songdhammakalyani* as a case study to be documented in this programme could be seen as signals towards more open and flexible approach of Thai religious authorities regarding the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thailand.

Figure 7.9 S's postings posted in January and February 2017 in relation to their popularity for media. Source www.facebokk.com/thaibhikkhunis

Image No. 2 also shows five images of S abbess being interviewed and filmed from different locations of *Songdhammakalyani* community, whilst the text invites the audience to watch the programme on ThaiPBS between 22.00-24.00 hrs. on 29 October 2017. Image No. 3 was a screengrab of S's posting on 18 December 2017, with texts and images demonstrating S's abbess being interviewed in the TV programme -Thailand Law Forum, emphasizing the emergence of *bhikkhuni* community in Thailand. Image No.4 is a 1.30-minute live video clip uploaded on 29 January 2017. The employed text informs the audience about the abbess being interviewed by BBC Thai, with the introduction by the abbess about the starting point of *bhikkhuni* community in the country. These four postings indicate S's legitimacy as *bhikkhuni* community at the centre of media attention, mainly because S is the first *bhikkhuni* community in the country.

In short, for 'ideational function', S integrated their experiential world to communicate their 'legitimacy' as: Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* performing cleric and beyond cleric duties with loyalty to Thai monarch; Thai *bhikkhuni* supported by network of monastic members and laypeople; and Thai *bhikkhuni* community in the spotlight of the media.

I see the balanced interplay of the five semiotic modes which are orchestrated in the meaning making of *Songdhammakalyani*'s legitimacy. Visualisations, gestural and spatial modes play vital role in illustrating S's performing variety of cleric and beyond cleric duties in presenting their loyalty to the late King; highlighting their interaction and knitted ties with divergent network of monastic and laypeople from international and local domains including a number of high-ranking male *sangha* and famous *bhikkhuni*; and portraying *Songdhammakalyani* as the centre of foreign and Thai media's attention regarding the issue of legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* in Thai Buddhism. Whilst, the ensemble of linguistic and aural modes, register S's legitimacy as Thai *bhikkhuni* in these three aforementioned aspects.

7.3.1.A.2 Interpersonal function

The second meta-function category is interpersonal function which is the ability of semiotic modes to convey social relations between the sign producer, the viewer and the represented object (Kress, 2006). Thus, I explore how the employed semiotic resources to construct *Songdhammakalyani*'s 'legitimacy' could potentially influence attitudes and behaviours of FB audiences, and to what extent. Finding indicates S's core legitimated

meaning as 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies established by the Buddha and through legitimated ordination' as explained below.

7.3.1.A.2.i. Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies established by the Buddha and through legitimated ordination

❖ **Modes of representations**

S utilised all five semiotic modes: visual, gestural, verbal, spatial, and audio in constructing this meaning of 'legitimacy' in relation to the controversial debates on *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla in 2014 through 9 postings from December 15 to 20 and another posting on December 22, 2014. I select three of S's postings on 17 December 2014 which highlight S's participation in three TV programmes '*Kom Chud Luek'*[103] by Nation Channel TV on December 16; *Tob Jod* by ThaiPBS on December 18[104]; and *Tang Khon Tang Kid* by Amarin TV on December 19, 2014[105].

❖ **Demand interactional relation**

From figure 7.10, image No.1 highlights 'demand interactional relation' whereby the viewer is directly addressed and there is communicative power and a sense of direct involvement between the two participants (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, pp.120-121). In this case, S's admin utilised written text along with five images sequentially to depict S secretary in the TV programme '*Kom Chad Luek'* aired on December 16, 2014. Written text played inviting role to FB audience to go back to S's previous posting on the same day which provided the link to the aforementioned programme available from YouTube. In this stance, the admin aimed to engage with the audience by not only 'offering information' but also requiring their response with 'demand interactional relation' by providing them opportunity to fully engage in S's action regarding the issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla through their click on the provided link reproduced from YouTube channel. If the audience opt to follow their offer by clicking to watch the clip, they will be informed of S's legitimacy in this regard not only through conventional linguistic, visual, and audio means but all five semiotic modes.

In image No.2, S also communicated about a TV programme '*Tob Jod*' on ThaiPBS by employing three selected images depicting participants in the programme, i.e. S's abbess

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[103] Kom Chad Luek. Accessed 23 June 2018. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZ7AM4CbbEg
[104] Tob Jod. Accessed 23 June 2018. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHt3cQMZnmY
[105] Tang Khon Tang Kid. Accessed 23 June 2018. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vofOtyJDSDY

and another two guests – one is a female academic and governmental officer working in the legislation field[106], and the other is a male speaker from the government's Bureau of Buddhism[107]. S established 'offer interactional relation' with the audience through these three images without any other modes. Image No. 3 also indicates S's last posting on 17 December 2014, with selected written mode to invite FB audience to watch the TV programme '*Tang Khon Tang Kid*' broadcast on Amarin TV at 10 pm. on that night. S also chose one image to complement this invitation message.

If the audience opt to retrieve available links of these aforementioned programmes via YouTube channel[108], they can learn a lot more how S reasserted their 'legitimacy', particularly in conflicting to those of the mainstream because Buddhist authority and scholar were also presented in these programmes and their comments were somewhat reinforcing the 'illegitimated status' of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla and in Thai Buddhism.

Through audio-visual clips reproduced by S's FB during December 17, 18 and 20, 2014, there were four aspects of S's arguments in negotiating with mainstream discourse on the 'legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination' in Thai Buddhism. The first reason given by Buddhist authority in the TV programmes to 'illegitimate' the ordination in Songkhla is related to the necessity for 'dual ordination'– a process which requires both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha*' to complete the ordination. The scholar pointed out that since there has never been legitimated *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism, the ordination in Songkhla could not be considered completed and legitimated according to the *Dhamma Vinaya* (Sathira, 2014). Through all five semiotic modes, particularly verbal and gestural resources which could be perceived visually and audibly, S abbess and S secretary (2014), argued that from their thorough study of the *Vinaya, bhikkhuni* ordination is actually completed within the *bhikkhu sangha*. The inclusion of *bhikkhuni sangha* is an addition for the purification stage to ask certain questions which the to-be-ordained women could potentially be humiliated if asked by *bhikkhu*. Therefore, even without *bhikkhuni sangha*, the ordination could still be complete by *bhikkhu sangha*.

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[106] Dr. Suthada Mekrungruengkul, a member of the National Human's Rights Committee
[107] Dr Thawiwat Buntharikwiwat, Director of Research and Development Institute of World Buddhism
[108] Kom Chud Luek from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6-XYR35QcY; Thai PBS from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHt3cQMZnmY&t=514s; Tang Khon Tang Kid from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vofOtyJDSDY

Secondly, the Buddhist authority reiterated in the TV programmes the supreme authority of the *Dhamma Vinaya* as the principle to govern and administrate conflicting issues within Thai Buddhism realm' (Danai, 2014). The argument went on to comment that the constitution is rather 'socially constructed within laity boundary' and 'being changed over time'. Thus, the constitution should not be resorted to deal with this dispute; but rather 'the *Vinaya*' should be taken as the core reference (Danai, 2014). By responding to this rhetoric, S secretary and another legal expert from the government (Kanjana, 2014; Suthada, 2014) referred to Thailand's Constitution as the broad umbrella which fully protects all Thai citizens against any State's derogation of their rights or detriments to their benefits in adhering to and practicing a religion or religious sect.[109] They also argued that women's rights are protected under the framework of certain international conventions and agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)[110]. As such, *bhikkhuni* ordination should also be protected, not forbidden.

The next argument pointed out by the Buddhist academic in the selected media programmes is about the unofficial status of the existing *bhikkhuni* communities which have been settled in many provinces in Thailand. As most of them had their ordination from Sri Lankan *Theravada* lineage, they are considered *bhikkhuni* according to foreign tradition and were not considered as a part of the official Thai *Theravada sangha* (Sathira, 2014). S abbess and secretary (2014) responded to this argument by reiterating the Buddha's intention to establish the fourfold Buddhist assemblies comprising of *bhikkhu, bhikkhuni*, laymen and laywomen with functional meanings to sustain Buddhism. Thus, the ordination was 'legitimated' since the time of the Buddha and *bhikkhun*i ordination is conducted in accordance to the Buddha's permission and within the context of Buddhism, not under any particular (Buddhist) sects which have been constructed after the passing away of the Buddha (Kanjana, 2014). The ordination is completely 'legitimated' since the Buddha's time and the current *bhikkhuni* communities are Thai *bhikkhunis* as they are Thai citizens living in Thailand.

The last point argued by the Buddhist authority was that ordination was not the only means for women to reach the ultimate stage of spiritual development as they could

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[109] The draft of the new Constitution which passed the referendum in August 2016 has removed provision under Part 3: Section 37 of the 2007 Constitution and this change will have an impact on the issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination in the country (Kanjana, 2016).
[110] In which Thailand has ratified to be a member country since 1985 and committed to 'undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms' (UNWOMEN, 2013).

achieve it even as lay people (Sathira, 2014). Whilst, S abbess (2014) insisted that she believed in what the Buddha has constructed – the necessity to have four Buddhist groups which include *bhikkhuni sangha* who have specifically given functions, including: (i) to study' what the Buddha taught; (ii) to propagate *Dhamma* to other Buddhists; and (iii) to prevent any threats that could possibly harm Buddhism. And she sees the ordination as a shortcut to attain awakening stage provided by the Buddha by reiterating:

'If men are allowed to walk on this path, why women cannot be allowed to walk on this same path which the Buddha had already given them his permission to do so? And why this permission is currently disallowed under the context of Thai Buddhism?'

(*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha, 2014)

These constructed discourses underline S's assertion on their legitimate status because they are part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies established by the Buddha, and they received legitimated ordination from Sri Lankan *Theravada* lineage which did not violate Thai constitution. This message was clearly stated and repeatedly reinforced by *Songdhammakalyani* at the beginning of each aforementioned programmes. S also explained other relevant references, such as the *bhikkhuni* ordination is completed within *bhikkhu sangha* to substantiate their claim as already discussed in Chapter 6.

Apart from their clear stance presented linguistically, S also posted images related to different TV programmes: '*Kom Chad Luek*', '*Tob Jod*', and '*Tang Khon Tang Kid*' on December 17. I see the power and social relations among the participants which S' FB audience can perceive from these selected images. Images No.2 and 3 represent hierarchy and priority of S community in the three TV programmes as S abbess was sitting first in a row in both pictures, whilst S secretary was also sitting in the first place next to the moderator in image No. 1. The elements in these three images could apparently portray S as an 'important' agent working to steer the movement towards the issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism. Thus, S abbess and secretary were treated with respect by the programmes.
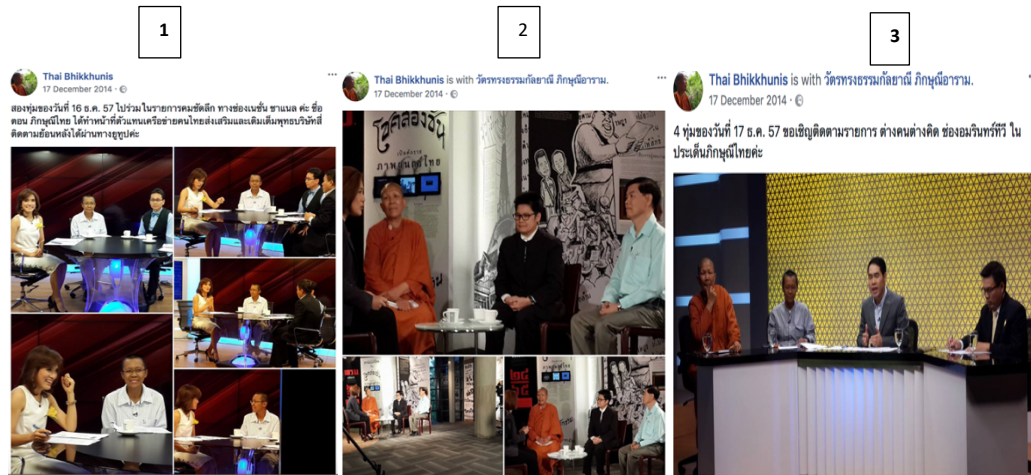
Figure 7.10 showing the three different TV programmes: 'Kom Chud Luek' on Nation TV, 'Tob Jod' on ThaiPBS, and 'Tang Khon Tang Kid' on Amarin TV that S abbess and secretary attended to voice about the issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla in December 2014. (Retrieved on Facebook Thai Bhikkhunis, 23 June 2018)

Besides, the spatial positions and gesture language of each participant, particularly in image No. 3 did not only provide the audience a glimpse of participants' power and social relations, but also their standpoints, including moods and tones of the discussions in the selected programmes. The two women from *Songdhammakalyani* were sitting on the right side next to the moderator. The abbess had her right hand on her chin reflecting her seemingly 'stiff' and 'thoughtful' personality, whilst S secretary was so attentive to what the moderator spoke. She had a little smile on her face. Next to them, was a moderator sitting in the middle of the frame, between S secretary and another male guest on the left. Whilst the moderator was speaking by summarising the discussions; or introducing the new topic(s) of discussions, the male guest wrote his script and prepared what he would speak in the programme, which mirrored his seemingly 'worrying' or 'nervous' posture. The visual elements possibly connote S' superior power over the male guest speaker. On the one hand, I see S abbess characters appeared as 'noble' and somewhat 'arrogant', whilst S secretary appeared more 'friendly' compared to the abbess. The picture illustrates both of them being equally confident in pursuing for the 'legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination' which they believed already been constituted by the Buddha (Kanjana, 2014). On the contrary, a male guest appeared to be 'nervous' and 'fearful', which could mirror his insecure state of mind and lack of confidence while arguing about the legitimacy of the *bhikkhuni* ordination. Although the ordination in Songkhla was announced 'illegitimate' by the Thai Buddhist authority, this selected image, in a sense,

depicted S as superior and more powerful than the male representing Buddhist authority in the argument about legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination.

On top of this, spatial positions and gesture languages of the participants in image No.3 could potentially communicate 'oppositional' atmosphere in the discussion with the abbess and secretary obviously presenting themselves as proud members of *bhikkhuni* community, the other guest who represented the Buddhist authority, seemingly appeared critical of the community. And the moderator sitting in the middle of the scene could possibly be expected to be 'neutral' in facilitating discussion between S and the male guest. Thus, these elements provide audience a mood of thoughtful conversation, particularly in comparing to image No. 1 and No. 2 that seemed to reflect more friendly discussions among the participants.

These three postings exemplify how S aimed to continuously communicate the theme 'legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination' to their FB audience. These recurrent constructions are intentionally selected to reinforce S role and significance as female Buddhist community who work to promote the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination and network of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism and worldwide.

To sum up, through 'interpersonal function', the community constructed their legitimated meaning as Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* as part of the four Buddhist assemblies established by the Buddha through 'legitimated ordination'. S admin employed all five semiotic modes to engage with FB audience through the portrayal of their participation in three TV programmes regarding *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla and invite for their interactive responses on their proposed action. Linguistics is the core resources to establish S's 'demand interactional relations' with FB audience; and offer them information regarding S's assertion of their legitimacy as 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community'. In addition, visual, gestural and spatial elements are simultaneously utilised to depict the overall moods of setting scenes in the TV programmes; depicting participants and moderators; moods and tones of the discussion; their power and social relations; as well as their standpoints towards the issue.

7.3.1.A.3 Textual Function

The last category of meta-function is textual function which focuses on the ability of semiotic modes to form text which is coherent internally within itself and externally with the produced context (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006; p.117). In this sense, S utilised employed resources in constructing their 'legitimacy' by focusing on: (i) information value represented by placement of employed elements; (ii) salience concerning extent in which employed elements and participants are portrayed to engage with audience; and (iii) framing focusing on how devices are in use or absent to connect or disconnect the whole textual coherence. S's legitimacy in this regard is 'Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand's constitution' as explained below.

7.3.1.A.3.i Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand's Constitution

❖ **Mode of representations**

S utilised linguistics, visual, gestural and spatial modes in the meaning making of their 'legitimacy' for textual function. I pick up their posting on 15 December 2014 in relation to the *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla to exemplify the case.

❖ **Information value**

From figure 7.11, Thai text on top of the post, firstly introduces community's movement against the reinforcement of the 1928 Decree by the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council. It informs audience how S' secretary and the community's representatives collaborated with NGOs working for women's rights to present a petition to the Thai authorities. The petition called for enforcement of women's rights to be ordained as *bhikkhuni* under the Thai constitution, using the *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla as the reference case. The translation of the Thai text is as follows:

> 'In the afternoon of December 15, 2014, representatives of Thai People Network to Promote the Four Buddhist Institutes, Women Network for Development and Peace, and Women Movements for Social Reform in Thailand had submitted a petition to appeal to the Thai Government Committee on Arts and Cultures, Ethics and Religions; the National Reform Committee; as well as Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC), to reconsider the Thai Sangha Supreme Council [*Mahatherasamakom*]'s Reinforcement on the 1928 Decree to disallow monks and novices to give ordination to women in Songkhla province, issued on December 11, 2014. The petition was well received by the three organizations who will proceed on next steps'

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p.186), the placement of this written text is considered as 'ideal' as they explained that the 'top' position signifies 'promises' and a 'sensory fulfilment'. Its position in the whole posting represents S's ambition in achieving their 'goal' after presenting the petition to the state authority. The written text also indicates different organisations working with *Songdhammakalyani* to put forward 'the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination' in Thailand; including the government agents to whom *Songdhammakalyani* presented petition. The whole lexical choices equip the audience with informative details.

Whilst, S also resorted to one image to complement the written text. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p.186) mentioned the 'lower' and 'bottom' section as 'real' which rather represents a more 'factual information', the image in figure 7.12 portrays the current stage of *Songdhammakalyani*'s action to fulfil their mission which is presented through the written texts in the above section. This is evidenced by visual resources illustrating S's secretary as 'actor' in leading other community's representatives in presenting a petition to the government agents. She appears in a scene with a white hat, blue shirt with no eyebrow and no make-up on her face. These features symbolize 'recently disrobed' woman whose eyebrow and hair have not yet grown. There are also other 4-5 women accompanying S's secretary in the scene. Two of them in the picture also seemingly appear in their bald heads with pieces of hair bands on. Their appearances also represent somewhat the recent stage of disrobed women. These elements also signify 'classification process' which categorise these women probably as former S's monastic members. Whilst, standing next to S's secretary in the front row is a woman in her yellow shirt with one hand holding the other in a humble manner. Her gesture could possibly communicate somewhat respectful and inferior manner.

In addition, as the left side represents 'given', or 'old' information signifying 'common sense' and 'self-evident' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006), the fact that all of S's representatives are appearing on the left of the image possibly reveal the already known fact that they are women from *Songdhammakalyani* who had repeatedly experienced unfair judgements over the controversial debates on 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* in the country. Their gestural elements also depict 'inferiority' in this scenario. On the opposite, the 'right' side represents 'new' information explained as 'ideology' to the audience (p.19). In this frame the group of representatives from the government agents are all men, standing on the right-hand side, wearing suits and ties. These elements all connote

their superiority; having more authority comparing to the representatives from *Songdhammakalyani* and her partners. Besides, it connotes the 'new' or 'ideal' group of authority figure whose support for legitimated *bhikkhuni* ordination is increasingly needed.

❖ **Salience**

The next composition of textual function is salience. From figures 7.12, linguistic and visual elements are employed at equal salience in constructing their 'legitimacy' in this regard. Linguistics plays important role in providing specific and detailed information regarding S's action, what Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) called 'offer interactional relation' with FB audience. This informative piece of data is straightforward containing factual information and impartial languages concerning 'who, did what, to whom, when, why and how', particularly regarding S's networks which are organisations working in collaboration with the community in legitimising the *bhikkhuni* ordination in the country. Although this text does not explicitly reveal S's legitimated status as '*bhikkhuni* community' under the constitution, I see it implies S's role as leader in the process to fight for legitimate female ordination. Audience who share common socio-cultural backgrounds could clearly understand from S's presenting petition to the government authorities to reconsider the reinforcement of 1928 Decree by Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council as the action against their fundamental rights protected by the supreme legislation – Thailand's constitution.

In addition, the employed visualisation also plays salient role in constricting S's legitimacy in this posting. It clearly depicts what is already informed by texts; as well as functions to reinforce the community's standpoint towards the resolution of the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council. The selected image also demonstrates what is less accentuated by the text: the extent in which social and power relations between the participants were framed in the image. This highlighted function of the image to make the post more convincing.

Figure 7.11. An image constructed on FB ThaiBhikkhunis on December 15, 2014 showing *Songdhammakalyani* secretary to present a petition to government authority to call for the reconsideration of Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council Reinforcement of 1928 Decree to disallow monks and novices to give ordination to women in Thailand.

❖ **Framing**

S's FB admin referred to ''narrative process'' for their constructed message to inform about their proactive movement against the reinforcement of the 1928 Decree by Thai Supreme *Sangha*. The three first lines of the Thai text represent the three organisations: Thai People Network to Promote the Four Buddhist Institutes, Women Network for Development and Peace, and Women Movements for Social Reform in Thailand, as 'actors' in performing action of 'giving petition' which appears as verbal phrase in lines 2 and 3. In complementing what the three women's organisations have performed, lines 2 and 3 also mentioned the two governmental organisations: Government Committee on Arts and Cultures, Ethics and Religions; the National Reform Committee; as well as Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC), as 'goals' which the three aforementioned women organisations were aiming their action towards. Particularly, the text underlines S's expectations towards further action from these two governmental organisations with 'proposing mood', in reconsidering the *Sangha*'s resolution. Besides, the text involves 'linear-composition' of written text to reproduce S's message which requires strict coded in horizontal structure, and to be read from left to right (Kress and Van Leeuwen,2006, p.204).

In addition, a small space between text and image forms the first 'framing line' of this posting. It divides text and image into two separate parts which guide readers to follow. Audience could firstly begin with text then image, or opt to skim visual elements, then go back to text for their comprehensive understanding. Besides, the position of S's members

and state authorities appearing on the left and the right sides of the frame also function as another 'framing line' to classify these 'represented participants' into two groups. The vector line emanates from S's members standing on the left side representing the 'inferior' parties who seek support from the group of men on the right side by presenting them the 'petition'. In this stance, the second framing line portrays state authorities, on the right side as 'superior'.

In sum, S employed verbal, visual, gestural, and spatial modes to construct their 'legitimacy' as 'Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand's Constitution through 'textual function' which focuses on 'information value', 'salient' and 'framing' of the employed texts. Linguistics plays vital role in providing specific and detailed information regarding S's movement, with factual information and impartial languages on 'who, did what, to whom, when, why and how'. The employed visualisation, gestural and spatial modes play complementarily salient role in accentuating what was already constructed by texts, including to reinforce the community's standpoint against the resolution of the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council. The employed semiotic elements make up the whole textual coherence in representing with S's legitimacy as *bhikkhuni* community under Thailand's Constitution.

7.3.1.B.   Offline Multimodal Constructions of Legitimacy

As already discussed, (see Chapter 5), S's offline communication channels primarily focuses on personal communication of the abbess, their publications and their religious and non-religious activities, including their participation in the media programmes.   And these four means explained below are utilised to construct their legitimacy in the parallel meanings with online construction. This conforms with Campbell (2012) explication of how religious groups before the emergence of new media utilised and refurbished different multimodal means of technology to accommodate their religious goals. S's multimodal means to construct their 'legitimacy' via social and traditional media also matches up with Chadwick (2017)'s 'hybrid media system', underlining the interactions between old and new media, where *Songdhammakalyani* (re)negotiate their power in the more interdependent and complex settings across traditional and new media convergence.

7.3.1.B.i. Arranging and performing activities

Songdhammakalyani's first offline construction of their legitimacy is through the arrangement and organisation of religious and non-religious activities which S performed as cleric and beyond cleric duties, particularly in relation to the late King.

For cleric duties, the community organized a number of activities to make merit for the King. For example, on 13 October 2017, they organized a gathering of cleric and lay members to mark the 1st anniversary of his departure and to pray for him. The community also arranged special *samaneri ordination* in December 2016, April 2017 and December 2017 and sent three of their monastic members to be ordained as *bhikkhuni* at *Sakyadhita* Centre in Sri Lanka on 23 Dec 2016 as a commemoration for him. These ordination ceremonies were the way to generate merit for the dead person in Buddhism. And S considered these as cleric duties they have to perform to the monarch.

S also arranged a chanting session to bless HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn who accepted to be crowned as the next King of Thailand on 2 December 2016. On 31 December 2016, S arranged another chanting and meditation session of S monastic and lay members to welcome the New Year as well as to pay tribute to the late King. They also gathered with their monastic and lay people network: Home Hug Foundation, *Buddhasavikha* Foundation and Juvenile detention centres: *Ubekkha* and *Sirindhorn* Houses in three occasions to make sandalwood flowers for people attending the Royal Cremation ceremony in December 2017.

For beyond monastic activities, S constructed their 'legitimacy' by their engagement with teenagers from juvenile detention centres which they have been working closely with for many years aiming to cultivate them through *Dhamma* teaching and activities for grounding their morality and life skills so that they could lead a better life after they leave the centres (Kanjana, 2017). These include several visits during November-December 2016 and April-May 2017 to give *Dhamma* sessions, food and daily consumer goods and to play games; sing songs and teach them to make sandal wood flowers for the Royal Cremation ceremony.

S also presented their loyalty to the late King by promoting the King's teaching such as the 10 Royal virtues or the 10 *Dhamma* principles the King adhered to as the country's ruler. On 28 January 2017, S in collaboration with their legal network organized a seminar on '*Law and Religion: how to harmonize their relationship?*' at Suan Benjatat, Bangkok. Keynote speakers included Prof. Charan Pakdee thanakul, who was appointed by the late

King to be the Constitutional Court Judge of Thailand, and Kittichai Chongkraichakra a Thai barrister. The session was moderated by Somrit Luechai, a Buddhist Feminist.

Additionally, the community have learned and applied the King's 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy and sustainable development principles through various activities. After their participation in learning activities and study visits to the King's sustainable development learning centre and projects, they have initiated activities to apply what they have learned in the community, such as 'eco-temple' project, a nursery to prepare seedings of wild plants/trees, distributions of vegetable and plant seeds to nearby communities, etc. All of these demonstrated their concern to conserve the environment as exemplified by the King.

Last but not least, S arranged the event: The 2600th anniversary of the first *bhikkhuni* in Buddhism, on 16 September 2017 at TK Park, Bangkok. This clearly underlines S's emphasis and high respect towards Ven. *Bhikkhuni* Gotami Theri, the first *bhikkhuni* receiving full ordination from the Buddha. Her ordination as *bhikkhuni* marked the beginning of *bhikkhuni* sangha in Buddhist history.

7.3.1.B.ii In-house publications

Another S's construction of 'legitimacy' in connection with the late King was through their tri monthly '*Buddhasavikha*' newsletter publicized on January 2017. As S's FB admin is also an editor for this publication, she responded to what S perceived as 'discrimination' on the day they went to pay homage to the Royal Urn at the Royal Palace. The cover page illustrates the incident on 9 Dec 2016. From figure 7.12, image No.1 demonstrates employed textual elements on its cover by saying 'a woman' – one who has power in herself. S presents the word 'woman' in red, bold and bigger font emphasizing woman's significance, whilst putting the phrase–one with power in herself in white color underneath with thinner and smaller fonts. This white-colored-thinner font could be interpreted as less significant to the word 'woman' above. This probably means even without the following phrase– the word 'woman' alone could clearly indicate 'power' within itself.

S also selected cover image showing S's monastic members lining in a que and paying respect to a line of male monks who were walking through them with an in-depth perspective heading into the palace. The color of S's monastic members was intentionally faded and made in sepia color to show their invisible status.
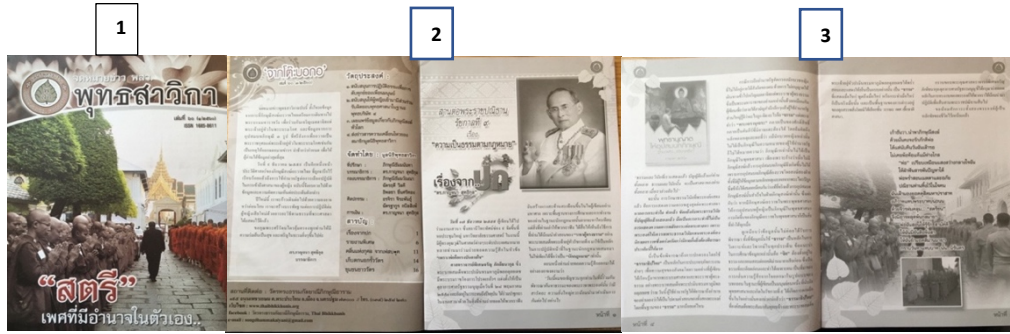
Figure 7.12 S's newsletter '*Buddhasavikha*' issued Jan 2017 – three months after the passing away of the late King

According to Khun Kanjana (2017) multimodal resources on the cover image were selected to symbolize 'invisible' status of S monastic members who were not allowed to que in the same 'Thai monastic line' as other (male) monks. Yet, in reality they are still legitimated by the approval of the Buddha and, more importantly they have power in themselves. As such, their emerging existence could probably have threatened some groups of people and that is why they were kept 'invisible' and 'unrecognized' in Thai society especially in the public sphere.

Image No. 2 shows content from page 1 indicating S's strong commitment to follow the late King's intention in promoting 'legitimacy' through the law of righteousness. Image No. 3 provides content of pages 4- 5 about dominant characteristic of the late King's administration which adhered to the rules of righteousness as reflected by Prof. Charan Pakditanakul, who was appointed by the late King to be the Constitutional Court Judge of Thailand. The text mentions: 'Although he is the King, he did not manipulate authority for his own benefits, but he always tried to do the right things for the benefits of his people. If the idea is not agreed by majority of people, he would seek the best solutions to bring most benefits for all'. This is praised by S as an act of legitimacy and righteousness of the King.

Through linguistics, S mentioned that the 'rule of righteousness' applied by the late King was totally contradicting to the 'rule of discrimination' applied by Thai religious authorities on the issue related to legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination, particularly the reinforcement of the 1928 Decree after the 2014 *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla; and the recent discrimination against them at the Royal Palace. The textual elements mention the 'unrighteousness' which is not only non-conforming with the King's will but also contradicting to what is believed to have been established by the Buddha. These selected textual and visual representation clearly present S's attempt to reaffirm their (existing)

'legitimacy' not only by connecting to the late King but also to the Buddha in response to the evidence they perceived as 'discrimination' on 9 December 2016.

7.3.1.B.iii. Public participation

S were also presented at 7 public events during the studied period. Most of these were posted in their FB as earlier discussed. For example, 92 monastic members from *Songdhammakalyani*, Songkhla, Uthai-tahini, Chachoengsao and Yasothorn gathered at the Royal Palace on 9 December 2016 with intention to pay homage to the Royal Urn. According to *Bhikkhuni* Dhammavanna (2016), the community have informed the officer-in-charge at the palace that they would be at the palace 0n 9 December at 3.30 p.m. However, when they arrived onsite, officials barred them from queuing in monastic line and asked them to get in laypeople's line while *bhikkhuni* from Taiwan and Tibet were allowed to Wait in monastic line. As these groups of monastic members were wearing monastic robes with the name tag 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni'* on their chests, some of them were also asked to disrobe by the officers who claimed they had no right to wear the same uniform as *bhikkhu* and accused them as being illegal as they imitated male *sangha*'s clothing. They asked *bhikkhuni* from S to disrobe and wear black clothes instead. These *bhikkhuni* were eventually not allowed to come inside the palace, so they decided to perform 'walking meditation' in front of the palace as an alternative way to make merit for the King.

The community also attended other public events as posted in their FB and already discussed, including S's secretary joining to sing the 'Royal Thai Anthem' at Sanam Luang along with Thai people from all walks of life. On 28 October 2016 S cleric members attended the special memorial occasion to mark the 15th days after the King's departure in Nakhon Pathom. The event was joined by local people from divergent groups, including the provincial governor, presidents of local universities and institutes, high-ranking monks and the general public. The participants collectively declared that they would turn their grief over the nation's big loss into the nation's collective force. This coincides with his name 'Bhumibol', which literally means 'mighty force of the land'. On 20 October 2017, S's members attended an exhibition 'From Dusk to Galaxy' to bless the King an eternally peaceful rest.

S's abbess also attended various ceremonies where she was granted awards; for example, the 2018 International Women's Day, and the World's Religious Leaders awarding ceremony organized by TonBun Vesak Foundation in corporation with Daily Mirror on 14

June 2017. On 29 November 2014, the abbess was also entitled as the first '*Pawattini*' in Thailand by Ven. Mahindavamsa, a senior Sri Lankan *Mahanayaka* monk. Additionally, S abbess and secretary also attended seminars, conferences and training on religious and non-religious themes in Thailand and abroad.

7.3.1.B.iv. Participation in the media programme

S's abbess and secretary participated in a number of foreign and national media programmes in 11 occasions. The programmes were produced at private studios as well as at *Songdhammakalyani.* Most remarkable was their participation in several Thai TV programmes about *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla in 2014. Apart from this there were interviews with the abbess regarding legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination by Thai and foreign media which were broadcast/ publicised in BBC Thai[111], NPR[112], and Thailand Law Forum. There were two documentary programmes produced at *Songdhammakalyani*: one concerning the work and contribution of the late King broadcast on Thai PBS, and the other one was produced by the government PR team and televised on the government's official channels. Its title: *Delicate Yet Not to Be Overlooked* suggested that the issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand is important and should be carefully revisited despite its delicacy. Additionally, an Argentine press has presented the abbess photo with her award on the International Women's Day in March 2017 and the German National Radio also broadcast an interview with the abbess on 'technology and religion'.

7.3.1.C. Comparative Multimodal Constructions

In considering S's comparative constructions via online and offline channels, online plays a vital role in reinforcing what were already constructed via offline channel. To illustrate, the five meanings of S's legitimacy are reinforced via S's FB platform, which the admin recapitulated what S already performed via the four aforementioned offline means. I believe this is because S offline and online media teams consist of the same people, led by S's secretary-Khun Kanjana who has been working with the abbess for almost 10 years. She worked with the abbess most of the time and was occasionally assigned to represent the abbess in some events. Khun Kanjana who is seen by most people as the abbess' right-hand person shares the same interest as the abbess on *bhikkhuni*-related issues. Additionally,

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[111] January 2017
[112] 17 December 2017

the publicized contents are occasionally advised by the abbess herself. Thus, the offline and online messages are closely linked and complementary to each other.

7.3.2. How Does the Interplay of Employed Modes Construct *Bhikkhuni*'s Meanings of 'Legitimacy' Conflicting to Mainstream Discourse?

This section aims to answer to the affiliated question in unveiling how the interplay of modal resources are utilised to construct certain meanings of *Songdhammakalyani*'s legitimacy which are conflicting to the mainstream discourse; and to play a vital role in re-disseminating their horizontal power structure in negotiating their 'legitimated status' in the Thai Buddhism. I will firstly present the aspects in which *Songdhammakalyani* constructed their legitimated meanings conflicting to the mainstream discourse in 7.3.2.A; and then discuss how the interplay of employed resources are utilised to construct such meanings in 7.3.2.B.

7.3.2.A. Legitimated Meanings Conflicting to the Mainstream Discourse

As aforementioned in section 1.2, the mainstream discourse propelled by the Thai religious authorities underline the 'illegitimacy' of the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand by referring to the 1928 Decree issued by the former Thai Supreme Patriarch, disallowing monks and novices to give ordination to women in Thailand. This Decree was again reinforced by the Thai Supreme *Sangha* Council in 2014 to 'illegitimate' the *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla' (See Chapter 4.). They mentioned that the broken lineage of *bhikkhuni* in *Theravada* Buddhism automatically illegitimated the official status of the existing *bhikkhuni* in the country and worldwide as legitimated *Theravada bhikkhuni* ordination requires a conduct from both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha*[113]. Since the *bhikkhuni sangha* has not officially been established in Thai Buddhism, *bhikkhuni* ordination and the revival of the *Theravada bhikkhuni* lineage in Thailand is not permitted (Seeger, 2008). Thus, the current approximately 300 members of *bhikkhuni* communities in more than 20 provinces country-wide are not considered as part of the official Thai monastic orders, but rather *bhikkhuni* according to 'foreign' traditions as most of them received the ordination from Sri Lankan *Theravada* lineage.

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[113] There must be at least 4 members in order to form a *bhikkhu* and a *bhikkhuni sangha*

From 7.3.1, S*ongdhammakalyani*'s multimodal constructions of 'legitimacy' highlights their endeavour to negotiate with the mainstream discourse in the three following aspects: (i) as a Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni sangha* established by the Buddha's provision and through a legitimated ordination; (ii) as a Thai *bhikkhuni sangha* under Thailand's Constitution; and (iii) as a Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* who performed cleric and beyond cleric duties with loyalty to the Thai monarch; as will be discussed below.

7.3.2.A.i The Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni sangha* established by the Buddha's provision and through a legitimated ordination

S constructed the first conflicting meaning to the mainstream discourse by identifying themselves as 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* established by the provision of the Buddha and through a legitimated ordination. They communicated this through their participation in selected TV programmes in 2014 which highlighted the controversial debates on legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla as aforementioned in 7.3.1.A.2.i. The debates given by S's abbess and secretary - Khun Kanjana in response to the moderator and the religious authority in the programmes clearly asserted their legitimated status particularly by reiterating that the *bhikkhuni* ordination has always been 'legitimated' since the time of the Buddha. It was with the Buddha's permission and within the context of Buddhism, not under any particular (Buddhist) sects which have been constructed after the Buddha had passed away. *Songdhammaklyani* also claimed their legitimated status by referring to their legitimated ordination from Sri Lanka *Theravada* lineage; not from Thai monastic order who comply with the 1928 Decree. They claimed that they are legitimated by not violating the regulation established and reinforced by the *Sangha* Supreme Council, particularly after the 2014 incident. Besides, they argued that S's monastic members should be considered as 'Thai *bhikkhuni*' rather than foreign *bhikkhuni* as they are Thai citizens, and they received legitimated ordination from *Theravada* lineage, just as *bhikkhu sangha* in Thailand.

The community additionally referred to the supposedly invalid status of the 1928 Decree which illegitimated the official status of the existing *bhikkhuni* in Thailand by mentioning the specific context in which it was originally issued; and within the particular time to respond to Narin Pasit's attempt in having his two daughters being ordained as *samaneri* without clear evidence of their *Upacha*. The community further emphasised that the Decree was announced in 1928, when Thailand was ruled under the absolute monarchy, and the country has been under a constitutional monarchy from 1945 onwards. According

to *Songdhammakalyani*, this posed an important question from legal perspective, whether this 1928 Decree, which was lately reinforced in 2014, is supposedly 'invalid' at present. *Songdhammakalyani* also pointed out its conflicting substance to the permission of what the Buddha has established which is considered as the ultimate frame to rule all Buddhists.

Another explanation showing S's attempt to educate Buddhists and publics on *bhikkhuni*'s legitimacy found in 7.3, is their clarification on legitimated *bhikkhuni* ordination. S's abbess clearly accentuated that according to the scripture, the process is actually completed within *bhikkhu sangha*, whilst the additional of *bhikkhuni sangha* is only for purification stage to ask intimate questions which the to be ordained women might feel intimidated to be asked by *bhikkhu.* To make an ordination more feasible for Thai women, S still viewed the feasibility to establish a legitimated *bhikkhuni sangha* in the Thai Buddhism so that they do not have to spend much more money going abroad for the ordination. S abbess further highlighted this feasible opportunity, firstly by replacing the lexical choice of 'the lost lineage' of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism as often concretised in the mainstream discourse by the phrase 'an introduction' of a *bhikkhuni sangha* in the country. According to the abbess, this replacement well reflects the scenario in Thailand where the evidence of existing *bhikkhuni sangha* is absent. S also highlighted the current necessity to establish the qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* to fill in the existing gaps of declining faith in Thai Buddhism posted by misconducts of male *sangha*.

These crucial aforementioned messages are also reinforced by S's FB admin through their online platform in spontaneously period to their offline constructions.

7.3.2.A.ii. The Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand's constitution

The next assertation of S's legitimacy conflicting to the mainstream from 7.3 is proposed from legal perspectives through their newsletter '*Buddhasavikha*' publicised in January 2017 (see7.3.1.B.ii) whereby S's secretary and their network presented a petition to Thai authorities in December 2014 (see 7.3.1.A.3.i); and also through their seminar on 'Law and Religion: How to harmonise their relationship' in January 2017 (see 7.3.1.B.i).

For example, the substances in their newsletter and the seminar similarly exemplified how the late King Rama IX applied the 10 Royal virtues drawn from religious principles in performing his duty as the ruler of the country under democratic rules and laws. These messages underline how the King ruled the country by the 'rule of law' determined by the

benefits of his people, not by manipulation of power for his own benefits. The community also reiterated that the 'rule of law' principle must be applied to legitimize *bhikkhuni* ordination in the country, instead of what seems to be 'the rule of subjectivity'.

Songdhammakalyani also asserted this conflicting meaning through depictions of their presenting petition to the state authorities against the reinforcement of the 1928 Decree of the *Sangha* Supreme Council towards the *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla in December 2014. In this regard, S referred to Thailand's Constitution as a broad umbrella which clearly renders all Thai citizens - men and women, the full liberty to adhere to a religion and a religious sect and to practice in accordance with their beliefs. Its essence also highlighted that all Thai citizens are fully protected against any State's derogation of their rights or detriments to their benefits in adhering to and practicing a religion or religious sect. From this point of view, S asserted that any legal document put out by religious authorities which contradicts to the constitution's essence is considered nullified. In addition, *Songdhammakalyani* referred to women's rights which are protected under the framework of certain specific international conventions and agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

All of these contents were also reproduced via S's Facebook website to reinforce their offline efforts in legitimising the status of existing *bhikkhuni* communities in the Thai context.

7.3.2.A.iii. The Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* who is a part of the Thai Trinity to perform cleric and beyond cleric duties with loyalty to the Thai monarch

Last but not least, S's legitimacy is clearly portrayed by their onsite presence to pay homage to the Royal Urn at the palace on 9 December 2016 and their various cleric and beyond cleric activities to make merit for the late King between 2016 and 2017 which were also reproduced via their online platform. These multimodal constructions underlined S's constant role in fulfilling the functions of a Buddhist community exemplified by their 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' approach; and their commitment to follow the late King's footsteps, particularly his 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy as already discussed (see 7.3.1.A.1.i)

To illustrate, S's onsite presence to pay homage to the Royal Urn at the Royal Palace on 9 December 2016 with 92 monastic members from *Songdhammakalyani*, and other

bhikkhuni communities from their network clearly illustrated their self-actualization as Thai monastic members to perform cleric duty for the late King evidenced by their monastic robes with the name tag 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni'* on their chests. This clearly identified them as representative of the Buddhist community which forms a part of the Thai Trinity: the nation, the religion(s); and the monarch. Although in the actual scenario, some of them were asked to disrobe by state officers who accused them of being illegal in wearing the same uniform as the *bhikkhu's*, and who barred them from entering the palace. Being confident of their legitimated cleric status, S's monastic members and their network decided to perform a cleric duty by practicing a walking meditation in front of the palace as an alternative form to show their loyalty to the King and to make merit for him. As important as it was, this event was selectively reproduced via their Facebook website to confirm their self-perception as legitimated female cleric community who forms a part of the nation's Trinity and to make it known to a wider audience.

Additionally, the fact that S also posted about their respectful conducts towards other Thai monarch members such as King Vajiralongkorn (Rama X), King Naraesuan, and King Taksin during the studied timeframe clearly demonstrated their consistency in upholding the value of the Thai Trinity as well as their self-identification as a part of the Trinity by being a legitimated religious institute. This is further reflected through their posting about the connection they have with high-ranking and well-known monastic figures in Thailand, as well as national and international Buddhist networks.

From these conflicting meanings to the mainstream discourse, I will discuss the interplay of modes in constructing these legitimated meanings in the next section.

7.3.2.B. The Interplay of Modes

From 7.3.2.A., the three meanings of S's legitimacy were originally performed via their four offline means: (i) arranged activities; (ii) publication; (iii) public participation and (iv) media participation; and were recapitulated via S's Facebook website. In other words, online plays a vital role in reinforcing what have already been constructed via offline channel. The interplay of modes in constructing these meanings are presented as follow.

7.3.2.B.i. Thai _Theravada bhikkhuni_ established by the Buddha's provision and through a legitimated ordination

This meaning of S's legitimacy was constructed through the interplay of five semiotic resources, both via online and offline platforms. The meaning was originally constructed from S's participation in the three TV programmes '_Kom Chud Luek'_, _Tob Jod,_ and _Tang Khon Tang Kid_ in December 2014; and S reproduced these events online during the same period. At a large extent, verbal resources, both in the forms of speech and written texts, played the most salient in constructing S's meaning in this stance, whilst, visualisation, gestural, spatial and audio elements were added to complement. Firstly, via these selected TV programmes, the audience who watched them live could perceive the meanings of S's legitimacy through all five semiotic modes; and could clearly understand S's assertion of their legitimated status mainly through verbal expressions of the abbess and S's secretary as earlier discussed in 7.3.2.A.i.

Via the reproduced message on FB, the short text invited the audience to go back to S's previous postings and retrieve the links of these TV programmes available on YouTube. Texts also played informative role in giving specific details about the contents presented in these TV programmes, if the audience opted to click on provided links.

Along the same line, the interplay of visual and gestural resources via these video clip portrayed power and social relations among 'represented participants'. In the first place, spatial element portrayed by the seating position of S's abbess and the secretary – being in the first and the second places of the panel in these TV programmes indicated their significant status as an 'important' agent working to steer the movements towards the issue of _bhikkhuni_ legitimacy in the country. Their gestural elements also highlighted their superiority and power over a male guest who represented the Buddhist authority whose gestural languages and facial expressions mirrored his insecure and unconfident state of mind while debating about the legitimacy issue of _bhikkhuni/_ ordination in the Thai Buddhism (see figure 7.7)

The interplay of these employed resources constructs to the meaning of S's legitimacy, particularly their confidence in being a legitimate member of the Buddhist fourfold _sangha_ according to the Buddha's permission; and through a legitimated ordination process. Besides, it highlights _Songdhammakalyani_'s standpoint in supporting the _bhikkhuni_ ordination which they believe had already been 'legitimised' by the Buddha.

7.3.2.B.ii. Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand's constitution

This second conflicting meaning was mainly constructed through verbal and visual elements, whilst gestural and spatial were added to complement the two aforementioned modes.

Originally through traditional platform: S's newsletter *'Buddhasavikha'*, the construction of this meaning relied mainly on linguistics reiterating legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* from legal perspective as already discussed in 7.3.2.A.ii. In this stance, visual elements such as colour, font, gestural languages of S's monastic members, male *sangha*, and state officers were complementarily used to enhance contents presented through linguistics. To illustrate, linguistic resources, with a choice of font colour, size as well as its syntax coherently highlighted the 'power' women have in themselves, regardless of any societal perceptions. Visual, gestural and spatial resources of the cover image also symbolized 'invisibility' and 'inferiority' of S monastic members as treated by the Royal Palace officers on the day they went to pay homage to the Royal Urn. The picture of S's monastic members on the cover page was intentionally made in sepia colour to highlight the 'invisibility' of *bhikkhuni* in the Thai society especially in Thai Buddhism realm.

Mainly through linguistics, the inside content highlighted S's elaboration on the 'rule of righteousness' applied by the late King based on the principle of 'the best solutions for the most benefits for all, without manipulation'. Textual elements also indicated *Songdhammakalyani*'s commitment to follow his 'rule of righteousness' in promoting 'legitimacy' issue of *bhikkhuni* in the country. Whilst the employed image illustrated the late King in his 'civil servant' uniform in reinforcing his adherence to the rule of righteousness to do the right things for the benefits of his people. The interplay of these textual and visual representations clearly presented S's attempt to reaffirm their (existing) 'legitimacy' according to the rule of law with the connection to the late King.

Similarly, the seminar on 'Law and Religion: how to harmonize their relationship?' in January 2017, also constructed S's legitimacy according to the rule of law. In this stance, the five semiotic modes were utilised through 'live feature. The verbal resources which were perceived audibly played the most vital role in legitimising S's status through the discourse summarising the essence of how the late King implemented the 10 Royal Virtues in ruling Thailand for the last 70 years, as similarly publicised in their *Buddhasavikha* newsletter. Whilst, visual, gestural, spatial, and audio played complementary role in

illustrating a divergent group of monastic and lay participants from Thailand and neighbouring countries as part of S's network scattering around the frame in attending the session, given by the highly respectful figures from Thai legislative sector; and a well-known media person as a moderator.

A short text was used to legitimise S status by indicating different organisations working with *Songdhammakalyani* to put forward the agenda on the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand, particularly in presenting a petition to the government agents. The lexical choices provided the audience with knowledge on S's active movements against the reinforcement of the 1928 Decree by the Thai *Sangha* Supreme Council in 2014 by referring to their rights protected under Thailand's Constitution and international human rights conventions. Visual, gestural and spatial elements also highlighted significant meaning of *Songdhammakalyani* as a 'leading actor' in presenting the petition to the government authorities; and their recognition in their (already) legitimated status protected under the constitution.

7.3.2.B.iii. Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community who perform cleric and beyond cleric duties with loyalty to the Thai monarch

The interplay of visual and gestural elements highlighted S in performing cleric duties at the Royal Palace on 9 December 2016. A long distant camera shot showing a long line of S's monastic members standing towards the white wall of the Royal Palace seemed to reflect them as a big legitimated *bhikkhuni sangha* (in Thai Buddhism) under the King patronage. Whilst, a camera angle, humble gestures and a different level of sitting positions were used to demonstrate respect and recognitions of local and foreign laypeople towards S's monastic members. The linguistics appeared on name tags of S's monastic members also clearly indicated their self-perception as legitimate Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*'. Other employed visual and gestural elements in this stance, illustrated S's monastic members standing in a tranquil and respectful manner with low eye gaze and their hand gestures crossing in front while Waiting for the line of male monks passing by. The ochre colour of S's monastic robes distinguished them from the palace officers in black and khaki. Spatial mode was also added to differentiate S's monastic members from the male *sangha*, and to reflect contrasting perspective of their movements. Whilst, facial expression of S's soft smiling faces while walking out of the palace at the end of the day and their gesture languages in performing walking meditation to pay homage to the late

King all exemplified their self-confidence as 'legitimated Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*' with loyalty to Thai monarch, despite all forms of discrimination on that day.

Similarly, a prose authored by S's secretary in many occasions also officially legitimised S's status as 'Thai *bhikkhuni* community' who aim to follow the late King's path by adopting his teaching and pursuing his virtual philosophies for the people's benefits. In addition, there was an occasion that S employed written text to highlight their loyalty to King Naraesuan, one of the greatest Thai Kings in history to inform the audience about S's cleric conducts to make merit for him. Interestingly, S also utilised verbal mode in establishing their loyalty with King Rama X, on his acceptance to be crowned as the next King of Thailand. All of these reinforced their self-assurance as legitimated Thai *bhikkhuni* sangha who are as loyal to the monarch as other Thai institutions, regardless of their official cleric status.

Verbal, visual and gestural resources highlighting S performed cleric and beyond confined monastic duties also accentuated their legitimacy in this regard. For example, the abbess and S secretary were portrayed as speakers and or participants in various international conferences on Buddhism, some of which were also attended by high-ranking Buddhist figures such as H.E. Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan *Vajrayana* Buddhism. Through FB construction, the audience were constantly informed about the abbess's visits to Buddhist countries such as Nepal, Myanmar, India; her connection to a high-ranking Sri Lankan male *sangha* Ven. Mahindavamsa, who is comparable to the Supreme Patriarch in Thailand; her long-standing connection with her Sri Lankan Pawattini - *Bhikkuni*' Satha Sumana Theri', as well as an internationally well-known Taiwanese *Bhikkhuni* Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi Foundation. These also help legitimising S status as Thai *Bhikkhuni* community who carry out greater contributions to Thai as well as global society. S's depiction of their close tie with *Bhikkhuni* Cheng Yen', in particular, reflected their synergised efforts to enhance female clerics' contribution to the local and global communities as guided by 'Feminist Buddhism' approach. Whilst, locally, S also applied 'subjective legitimation strategy' through their connection to the recent Thai Supreme Patriarch and Phra Kru Sudhammanartha – the senior local monk in Nakhon Pathom from whom S's monastic members receive *Pathimokkha* every fortnight.

The ensemble of S's employed resources to construct these three conflicting meanings to mainstream discourse mainly through linguistics well conform with Weber (1964); and Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999, who highlighted that language is the most vital resource in

constructing legitimacy and claimed the prevailing impact of verbal resources, particularly selection of vocabulary in transmitting human experiences for the legitimation process.

Table 7.1 (below) illustrates *Songdhammakalyani*'s multimodal constructions of their meanings of 'legitimacy' which are orchestrated through the interplay of semiotic modes.

No.	Mainstream Discourse	S's conflicting meanings	Interplay of Modes
Legitimacy Discourse	The current *bhikkhuni* communities are not considered as part of the official Thai monastic orders, but *bhikkhuni* according to 'foreign' traditions	Being (i) a Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* established by the Buddha and through legitimated ordination; (ii) a Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand's Constitution; (iii) a Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* who performed cleric and beyond cleric duties with loyalty to the Thai monarch	Linguistics is the most salient mode in constructing S's discourse conflicting to mainstream; Visual and gestural resources are added to complement their legitimated meanings
I.	Referring to the 1928 Decree by not allowing monks and novices to give ordination to women in Thailand; Reinforced in 2014 by the Thai Supreme *Sangha* Council to 'illegitimate' the *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla	(i)the supposedly invalid status of the 1928 Decree: issued within specific historical scenario; (ii) the Decree conflicting to the Buddha's permission; and Thailand's Constitution	(i)Linguistics underline their debates on legitimacy of *bhikkhuni/* ordination by referring to historical Buddhist evidence and the Buddha's permission; the rule of laws; their performing religious and beyond monastic duties; their status as part of Thai trinity and loyalty to Thai monarch; their support from foreign and local male *sangha*; and lay networks;
II.	Legitimated *bhikkhuni* ordination requires a conduct from both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha;* The lost lineage of *bhikkhuni* in *Theravada* Buddhism illegitimated the current status of the existing *bhikkhuni* in the country,	(i) *bhikkhuni* ordination is completed within *bhikkhu sangha*; (ii) S's monastic members received legitimated ordination from Sri Lankan *Theravada* linage; (iii) feasibility for the introduction of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism by qualified *bhikkhuni sangha*;	(ii) Visual and gestural resources portray their power and social relations; their performing religious and beyond monastic duties; their status as part of Thai trinity and loyalty to Thai monarch; their support from foreign and local male *sangha*; and lay networks; (iii) Spatial and audio resources complement functions of these aforementioned resources

Table 7.1 rrepresents how the interplay of modes construct meanings of *Songdhammakalyani*'s conflicting to mainstream discourse adapted from 7.3

All in all, to negotiate their 'legitimacy' conflicting to those of the mainstream discourse, *Songdhammakalyani* explicitly constructed their various meanings of 'legitimacy' particularly via their employed linguistics resources: both in the forms of written texts and speeches given by the abbess and S's secretary in various occasions. The community also employed different communication strategies, including arrangements of various religious and non-religious activities to express their gratitude and loyalty to the late King; their active collaboration in the advocacy for legitimising *bhikkhuni sangha* in the Thai Buddhism as well as at extended regional and global scales; and their welcoming a divergent media groups to film and document their stories. And all these strategies are selectively reproduced via their Facebook platform, in accentuating their social contributions which go far beyond confined monastic duties, and demographical lines.

Considering themselves as the first legitimated *Theravada 'bhikkhuni* community in the country, *Songdhammakalyani* communicate comprehensive meanings of their legitimacy via the interplay of semiotic resources. Accordingly, their multimodal constructions also provide the Thai society space in exchanging opinions and information regarding the studies of *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thai Buddhism, whilst their engagement through traditional and digital platforms delivers broader and more comprehensive knowledge about socio-cultural, historical, legal, and institutional factors around the issue, which might eventually lead to more compromising solutions towards the end. As such, *Songdhammakalyani'*s Facebook construction helps the audience to gain more insight on this controversial debate based on inclusive information from multimodal perspectives.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter answers the second research question mainly focusing on *Songdhammakalyani*'s construction of 'legitimacy' via their Facebook platform and supplemented by their offline multimodal constructions in the three major Buddhist events in 2012, 2014, and between 2016 and 2017. It also explores how they utilised the interplay of modal resources in the meaning making of their legitimacy to fulfil the three meta-functions of communication; and construct discourses conflicting to those of the mainstream in negotiating their 'legitimated status' in the Thai Buddhism.

CHAPTER VIII: *NIRODHARAM*'S

MULTIMODAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF 'LEGITIMACY'

8.1 Introduction

This chapter explores *Nirodharam's* utilization of multimodal resources in order to answer the second research question: how do *bhikkhuni* communities construct their 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication? and an affiliated question: how does the interplay of employed semiotic modes construct their meanings of 'legitimacy' conflicting to the mainstream discourse? Section (8.2) presents the findings of *Nirodharam*'s multimodal constructions of legitimacy through (i) Facebook website; and (ii) their offline constructions of 'legitimacy'. Section (8.3) is the discussion of the findings in order to answer the research questions and Section (8.4) is the conclusion.

8.2 Findings

The findings in this section are multimodal analysis, drawn from 22 postings retrieved from the Facebook website of *Nirodharam* (www.facebook.com/nirodharam). As *Nirodharam* did not specifically post in relation to the event of *bhikkhuni* ordination in *Songkhla* in 2014, the presentations in this section are based only on N's postings in 2012 in relation to the *Bhuddha Jayanti*; and between 2016 and 2017 in relation to the royal funeral and cremation of King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

From N's total 100 postings during the studied period, 22 posts or 22% of their posts were in relation to their 'legitimacy'. For the event of *Buddha Jayanti* in 2012, 7 postings out of the total 45 posts of that same year (11.55%) reflected their self-perception as a legitimated cleric community.Between 2016 to 2017, N posted about their 'legitimacy' 14 times out of 55 postings which accounted for 25.45% of all year postings.

Additionally, the findings are also drawn from their offline constructions of legitimacy in the same parallel period which included 9 religious activities; 3 publications; and 4 occasions of their participation in the public events.

8.2.1 Online Multimodal Constructions

❖ **2012**

Nirodharam consistently communicated contents related to the event of *Buddha Jayanti* in 2012. There were 3 posts on May 26, 27, and 29; 2 posts on June 1 and 5; 1 post on August 17; and another post on December 12. On May 26, N posted an invitation for *Dhamma* Camp during *Vesak* days at *Nirodharam* between 2-4 June 2012 in Thai and English languages.[114] Whilst, there were two *Dhamma* prose and verse composed by N's abbess on May 27 and 29, emphasising the practical guideline for self-training to attain awakening stage [*nibbhana*]. These were re-produced by FB admin by adding image of the Buddha statue on May 27 and picture of the abbess and *Nirodharam* landscape on May 29. On June 1, N reposted their invitation message for *Dhamma* Camp by posting a schedule of their activities during *Vesak* days between 2-4 June 2012 in Thai and English, similar to their post on May 26 with golden *Bodhi* trees at the background. Their postings on 5 June, 17 August and 12 December were the summary of major events to celebrate *Buddha Jayanti* at *Nirodharam*. The post on June 5 was a summary of *Dhamma* camp attended by lay community members *whereas* the 17 August post was about *samaneri* ordination in which a number of women were engaged to commemorate the *Buddha Jayanti*. The final post on 12 December was the bestowing ceremony of *Buddha Jayanti Chedi*[115] by lay community members.

Figure 8.1 representing screengrabs from N's postings on the theme *Buddha Jayanti* during May, June, August and December 2012. Source www.facebokk.com/nirodharam

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[114] This was created by N's FB admin - Khun Traswin during this period before Khun Kampu took over her responsibility.
[115] This is considered as part of merit making in which people who offer buildings and constructions for the sake of monastic uses will be highly praised and appreciated as they contributed to the mass.

❖ **2016 – 2017**

N communicated their construction of 'legitimacy' between 2016 and 2017 in relation to the royal funeral and cremation of King Bhumibol through 15 postings. The first post on January 1, 2017 presented a gathering of N's monastic members and the newly ordained *samaneri*, as well as a group of lay participants who were chanting and meditating as a way to make merit for the late King. Their post on 21 August 2017 was a scheduled programme to invite lay women for another *samaneri* ordination to mark the 1st anniversary of King Bhumibol's passing away. The 3rd to 5th postings were uploaded on 8 October 2017 regarding *samaneri* ordination, consecutively with a 'live feature' to broadcast ordination ceremony and showing the monastic environment. Another 30 images were also uploaded to illustrate such event. The next two postings were on 13 October 2017 with 171 images about the newly ordained *samaneri*, and an audio-visual clip showing them performing cleric duties. Another post was on 25 October as N (re)produced the piece of news publicised on Thai newspaper – Matichon regarding the third *samaneri* ordination at *Nirodharam* to specially make merit for the late King on the royal cremation day. On 26 October N posted in relation to their 3rd *samaneri* ordination to specifically make merit to the late King with 63 images summarising the event; and 19 images showing N monastic members attending the royal replica funeral in Chiang Mai on October 26, 2017.

In addition, N also communicated about their legitimacy by referring to their ties with senior local monks who supported their decision to be present in the royal cremation ceremony at the replica in Chiang Mai as a way to officially introduce their legitimate existence to the public. Their posts on 15 April and 8 November showed their close-connection with Ven. Luang Phu Thong – the famous *Vipassana* monk who lived in Chiang Mai but highly respected nationwide with 78 images; 128 images and live feature respectively. On 10 October 2017, N posted twice in relation to their legitimacy, with 30 images and 4 images showing their connection with male *sangha* in Chiang Mai by attending the *săa-mee-jì-gam*[116] ceremony at the end of Buddhist Lent Day at *Phra Singha* temple. Their posting on 14 November was about the trace of *bhikkhuni sangha* which was believed to have existed in Lanna Kingdom in the old times as illustrated on the wall of *Phra Tad Hari Pun Chai*, one of the oldest and famous temples in Lamphun province.

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[116] *săa-mee-jì-gam* is a *sangha* ceremony in paying respect to and asking for forgiveness from each other for their unification

Figure 8.2 representing screengrabs from N's postings on the activities related to the royal funeral and cremation ceremonies between 2016 and 2017. Source www.facebook.com/nirodharam

In communicating their 'legitimacy' online, N utilised all five semiotic modes: visual, gestural, verbal, aural and spatial to present their meanings of 'legitimacy'. The two most employed modes are visual and gestural. From their total 22 postings, N utilised visual in all 22 postings through their uploading of 927 images in total. These included 335 images in 2012 and 592 images between 2016 and 2017. N also employed 'live feature' for 2 times and re-produced video clips from YouTube for 1 time via their FB. Gestural is N's second prioritised mode after visual. It was utilised in all 22 postings. From all 927 images, there are 907 images portraying gestural elements of N's monastic members, lay participants, male *sangha* as well as other participants and those of religious materials. Verbal mode was referred to in 8 postings out of all total 22 postings, which accounted for 36.36%. Spatial was used to accompany visual and verbal modes in 5 postings (22.72 %), such as lay-out and space between depicted elements portrayed in the image yet to reinforce the existing contributions of the aforementioned modes. Whilst, audio is the least frequently utilised mode. It was used to accompany verbal mode in 2 postings; accounting for 9.09%.
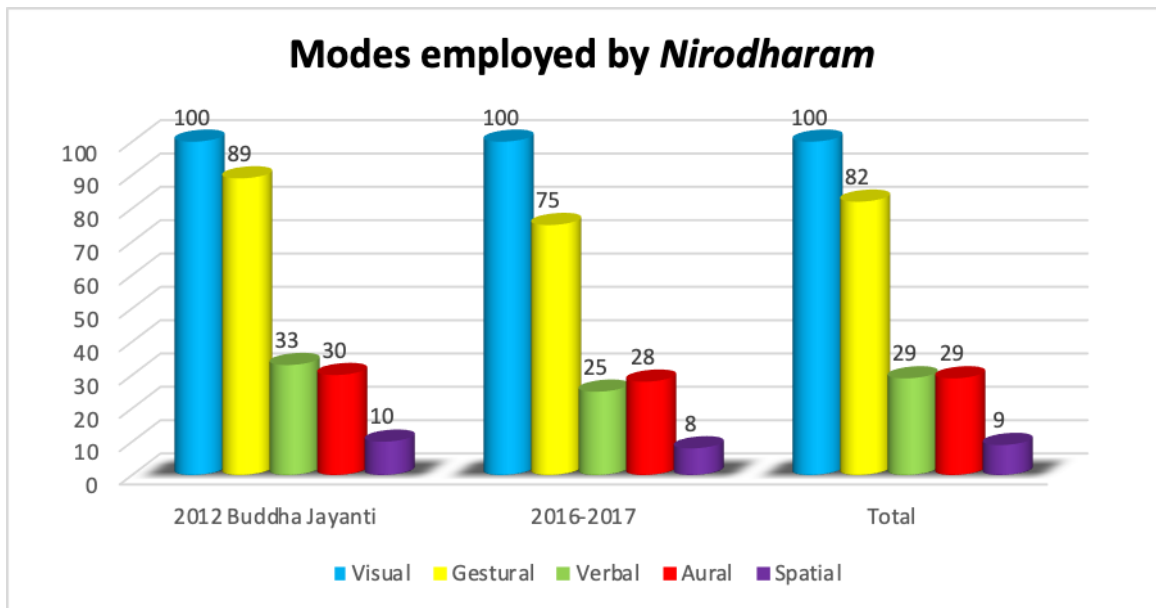
Figure 8.3 representing multimodal modes employed by *Nirodharam*

The most frequently utilised semiotic resources are those from visual and gestural modes comprising colour and body language. Whilst, hand gesture is the second most commonly used resource. Facial expression, interaction and perspective are the least used respectively.

8.2.2   Offline Multimodal Constructions

The findings show that N constructed their 'legitimacy' through three means of their offline channels. Similar to *Songdhammakalyani*, the first means of N's offline construction is their religious and non-religious activities to celebrate the Buddha Jayanti in 2012; and to make merit for the late King between 2016 and 2017. The activities included *Dhamma* camps; a few times of s*amaneri* ordination ceremony; the bestowing of the *Buddha Jayanti Chedi*; chanting and meditation sessions; and food offerings to N's monastic members by their lay disciples.

The second means is their publications. The first one is called 'Changing Attitudes Changing Life' to celebrate the year of *Buddha Jayanti* in 2012 and to express N's gratitude towards the Triple Gems in Buddhism, particularly, the Buddha and the *Dhamma*. The next publication regarding N's legitimacy is the book 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*'? publicised in 2016 to express their views regarding the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* in Thai Buddhism. Lastly is their re-publication of their chanting book with a special cover of the

late King image in October 2016 and encouraging words for Thai people to get over their mourning and conduct good deeds for the country instead, as a tribute to the King.

The last offline means is their presence and participation in selected public events including their visits to pay respect to the well-known senior male monks in Chiang Mai; their participation in religious activity at *Wat Phra Singha* together with the male *sangha;* their presence at the royal replica ceremony of the late ing at Chiang Mai International Convention Center; and their visit to *Wat Phra Tad Hari Phun Chai* in Lumphun.

8.3 Discussion and Analysis

Based on the discussion and analysis of the findings in 8.2, this section (8.3.1) provides the answer to the second research question: how do the *bhikkhuni* communities construct their 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication? and the answer to its affiliated question: how does the interplay of employed semiotic modes in the meaning making of 'legitimacy' conflicting to mainstream discourse? (8.3.2).

8.3.1 How do the *Bhikkhuni* Communities Construct Their 'Legitimacy' through Multimodal Means of Communication?

Nirodharam constructed their meanings of 'legitimacy' both via social and traditional media. The community constructed their meanings via online platform as: (i) a 'female *nak buat* community with qualified monastic members, who fulfils functions of the Buddhist community similarly to the male *sangha*; (ii) a *bhikkhuni* community who demonstrates high loyalty to the Thai monarch and who performs function as one of the national Trinity; and (iii) a religious centre which serves a large number of different lay people groups; (iv) a female Buddhist community supported by senior male *Sangha* as part of the monastic order in Chiang Mai; (v) an open religious community for both national and international audience; and (vi) a role modelling community of *Dhamma* practice to end sufferings. These meanings are also constructed via three means of their non- virtual platforms, i.e. organised activities; publications; and public participation. I will begin with N's online construction in 8.3.1.A then their offline construction in 8.3.1.B.

8.3.1.A. Online Multimodal Constructions

Nirodharam constructed their six aforementioned meanings of 'legitimacy' via their Facebook website, which will be discussed according to the three meta-functions: (i) ideational, (ii) interpersonal and (iii) textual functions, as follows.

8.3.1.A.1 Ideational Function

N expressed their experiential and logical meanings of their 'legitimacy' through FB website in three aspects : (i) as 'a female *nak buat* community with qualified monastic members who fulfils functions of a Buddhist community similarly to the male *sangha*'; (ii) a *bhikkhuni* community who demonstrates high loyalty to the Thai monarch and who performs function as one of the national Trinity; and (iii) a religious centre which serves a large number of different lay people groups.

8.3.1.A.1.i A female *nak buat* community with qualified monastic members who fulfils functions of the Buddhist community similarly to male *sangha*

❖ **Mode of representations**

Nirodharm constructed their first ideational meaning of 'legitimacy' mainly through visual and gestural resources. I selected N's postings on 5 June, 17 August, and 12 December 2012 in relation to the Buddha *Jayanti* to discuss this meaning of N's legitimacy through narrative process.

❖ **Narrative process**

'Narrative process' portrays how 'represented participants' inter-relate to each other, and with FB viewers who are interactive participants in different scenarios (See 3.2.1.A). From figure 8.4 (below), N's monastic members are recurrently portrayed as 'represented participants' who perform disparate organized activities including *Dhamma* preaching, walking meditation and Yoga lesson, *samaneri* ordination, and chanting in a bestowing ceremony of religious materials. They are usually depicted as 'actor' in performing such duties towards another group of 'represented participant', laywomen and children, who are customarily presented as 'goal' in the narrative process which highlights N's meaning of 'legitimacy'.

Images No. 1 – 2, indicate the two vector lines representing 'transactional action' and 'transactional reaction' processes. The portrayed size and position of N's abbess (No.1) and

the *Sri Lankan Pawattini* No.2) creates the first vector line emanating from them who perform certain steps of ordination towards their 'goal', the two white-robed women in the *samaneri* ordination at *Nirodharam* during *Buddha Jayanti*. Although both 'actors' lack direct eye contact with their 'goals', the abbess's gestural languages in trimming (the woman's) hair; and the *Pawattini*'s hand gesture in giving monastic robe (to the white-robed woman) are regarded as a vertical 'vector' (No.1); and an 'oblique vector' (No.2) in connecting them with their 'goals'. The abbess's soft smiling facial expression; and the *Pawattini*'s smiling face while giving certain steps of ordination to these women also function as a 'narrative process' which Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) indicated as 'explicit directional action' in emphasising N's monastic members' contentment during their performing this function of the Buddhist community.

Images No. 1 and 2 also involve the second vector in creating 'transactional reactional process' between 'represented participants.' In image No.1, the action of the abbess (in trimming the laywoman's hair) constitutes the second vector between the abbess and another group of 'represented participant', lay community members standing in circular surrounding her. In this second layered process, the action of the abbess becomes 'phenomenon' which forms 'reactional process' of these 'reactors', lay people who pay close attention to the ordination service. This second vector additionally highlights respectful relation between laypeople and monastic members which are exemplified by laypeople's hand gesture at their chest level to perform the '*wai*'[117] towards the abbess. Likewise, image No.2 also involves the second vector which represents *Sri Lankan Pawattini's* action towards a white-robed laywoman as 'phenomenon' in which 'reactor' or the other two monastic members performed 'transactional reaction process'. Their eye glance, soft smiling, and facial expression of attentiveness and satisfaction indicate the community's welcome of this newly ordained woman to be part of their female cleric community. Similarly, contrasting colour of ochre and white uniforms in images No. 1 and 2 function to classify monastic members from groups of laypeople in white clothes. More importantly image No. 2 which portrays the founder of N's FB-Khun Traswin- as a white-robed woman in this *samaneri* ordination clearly exemplify how the communicator integrates her experiential world to communicate with FB audience on N's legitimacy in performing duties of the Buddhist community as established by the Buddha, which in this case is the conduct of *samaneri* ordination to commemorate the Buddha's victory. I see

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[117] 'Wai' in Thai culture is a gestural language to represent respectful thought towards the other. Thais Normally perform 'Wai' to the elders or someone superior for social status.

that through the posting of her image participating as a to-be ordained *samaneri*, the admin has directly engaged FB's viewers to promote the community's objective. It is clear that the greater number of *samaneri,* even temporarily, the more human resources to help N disseminate the Buddha's teachings and sustain Buddhism. Most importantly, the more women will have a chance to train themselves spiritually through the practice of monastic conducts.

Figure 8.4 indicating N's legitimacy as religious community who perform functions of Buddhist community through narrative process. Source www.facebook.nirodharam

Images No. 3 and 4 also convey the community's merriment in performing function of the Buddhist community through the abbess smiling face with her eyes aiming straight in disseminating *Dhamma* teachings (No.3); and her soft smiling face with her eyes lowering whilst receiving an alms round from laypeople (No.4). Image No.3 portrays the term Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) referred to as 'non-transaction action' of the abbess who appears as the only one 'represented participant' functioning as an 'actor' in fulfilling (community's) 'goal' by performing *Dhamma* dissemination at the captured moment, whilst lay people who are supposed to appear as other 'represented participants' are omitted. Whilst in image No.4, the lacking direct eye contact between the two 'represented participants' who are N's monastic members and lay community members, are replaced by a vector line of their interaction showing N's monastic members' soft smiling faces whilst receiving an alms round from laypeople who offered food and lotus flowers to her. In this regard, the abbess's gestural and body languages conform with two ideational notions in Buddhism and Thai socio-cultural contexts. The abbess receiving alms-rounds from lay people clearly coincide with the meanings of 'legitimated status' similarly performed by male *sangha* as

part of their cleric duties. This also conforms with *Nirodharam*'s interpretation of '*bhikkhuni*' as beggar who lives on the food given by lay people. Secondly, her avoidance of direct eye contact and reserved body expression of monastic members is considered as expected manners performed by (female) clerics members, as they are wearing robes, similar to garments worn by the Buddha.

Images No. 5 to No. 8 depict the community's 'legitimacy' in performing expected role of the Buddhist community by guiding children on walking meditation (No.5); helping laypeople in cleaning monastic venue (No.6); leading laypeople in the candle light procession (No.7); and performing chanting session during the bestowing ceremony of *Buddha Jayanti* Chedi (No.8). In the images No. 5 and 6, monastic members and laypeople are portrayed as 'interactors', in which the vector emanates from and towards these 'represented participants' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.75). In the image No. 5, the long shot portrays a *bhikkhuni* at the frontal position in leading a group of boys and girls in white clothes to perform a walking meditation. Her lowering eye gaze to avoid direct eye contact with neither 'represented participants', laypeople in the image; nor 'interactive participants', FB viewers, shifts a more salience to a group of children who follow as they looked straight at the camera to build up a more direct contact with FB viewers. Another worth mentioning point is N's 'legitimacy' through depicted elements in image No. 6. The long shot perspective presents the equal importance of the two 'represented participants', the monastic members and the lay community members, in performing 'transactional action' in cleaning the monastic venue. It also establishes 'impersonal social relation' between 'represented participants' and FB viewers who are regarded as the 'subject' in observing this scene, whereas, the monastic members and laypeople become an 'object' of interest. Although the colour of ochre robe worn by monastic members has differentiated them from white clothes worn by laypeople, their gestural elements in sweeping and mobbing the floor reflect their engagement and mutual cooperation.

However, in images No. 7 and 8, N's admin highlights the monastic members as the main 'actors' in performing 'transactional action' of candlelight procession (No.7); and chanting session in the bestowing *Buddha Jayanti* Chedi (No.8). In these two stances, the diagonal vectors emanating from monastic members particularly the abbess (No.7) are portrayed to connect with other depicted elements to narrate the community's 'legitimacy' in completing religious duties. In most of the instances, the admin employed gestural and body languages to exemplify monastic members leading lay people to perform merit

making and spiritual training. This is because the candle procession is a form of spiritual training through the practicing of chanting whilst paying homages to the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*, in each round of walking around the *chedi/stupa*[118]. Similarly, image No. 8 illustrates monastic members, as an 'actor' of a sacred realm in performing chanting session to acknowledge the bestowing of *Buddha Jayanti Chedi*; and to bless lay people for their support in the Construction. On the other hand, lay people's chanting along with the former also signifies the stage of their spiritual contentment through this religious activity beyond the merit gained from the bestowing of the *chedi.*

8.3.1.A.1.ii. The *Bhikkhuni* community who demonstrates high loyalty to the Thai monarch and who performs function as one of the national Trinity

❖ **Mode of representations**

The next meaning of N's legitimacy through ideational function is evidenced mainly through their visual and gestural resources, comprising all five semiotic modes, in their postings and live features about various activities to make merit for the late King Bhumibol between 2016-2017. These include their chanting and meditation sessions portrayed on 1 January 2017; their invitation to the audience to attend *samaneri* ordination at *Nirodharam* on 21 August; two live features on 8 and 13 October to broadcast another *samaneri* ordination ceremony to mark the first anniversary of the royal passing away; a reproduced video clip from N's YouTube channelon 13 October explaining the purpose of *samaneri* ordination; a reproduced report about their *samaneri* ordination from the Bangkok Post newspaper on 25 October; and the community's first appearance on the public domain to attend the late King's royal (replica) cremation in Chiang Mai on 26 October. I selected four out of 21 employed images to discuss N's legitimated meaning via virtual platform in this stance.

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[118] Candle procession involves walking in three-rounds in of to. The first round aims to perform sincere gratitude to the Buddha, and the Dhamma, and the Sangha respectively in the second and third rounds.

Figure 8.5 illustrates four images from 21 photos employed on *Nirodharam*'s Facebook on 26 October 2017 showing *Nirodharam's* monastic members attending the late King's royal (replica) cremation in Chiang Mai on 25th October 2017. Source www.facebook.nirodharam

❖ **Narrative process**

Images 1-4 from figure 8.5 (above) label *Nirodharam*'s significance as a *bhikkhuni* community with high loyalty to the monarch. In this scenario, these female clerics were robed in the same sacred colour as that of the *bhikkhu*, conveying 'uniformity' of the ordained persons. By resorting to these online portrayals, FB audience could probably perceive this massive group of ordained women from *Nirodharam* already as part of the Thai *sangha.*

Images No. 1-3 also depict how these ordained women demonstrate 'proper' qualities as members of a religious community, whilst image No.4 demonstrates N's connection with the late King. The vector line in image No.1 emanates from the left side that *Nirodharam*'s monastic members as 'actor' were walking in tranquillity and mindfulness in their bare feet. The long distant diagonal perspective shows a long and sizzling path from the main road entrance to the cremation house which N's monastic members had walked through in the midday's heat. These portray well-qualified manners of N's monastic members as expected by the societal norms. Images No. 2-4 also portray them as 'represented participants' in their long wait line in a queue before proceeding to present sandalwood flowers as a final tribute to the late King. Although in all images these 'represented

participants' lack direct eye contact with 'interactive participants'– FB audience, these resources demonstrate how they have been trained to be disciplined and tolerate; and how they managed to remain calm in difficult circumstances. The diagonal in-depth perspective from images No.1-3 highlight a huge number of female clerics, indicating their collective power. In Image No. 4, N's monastic members were entering the cremation house with government officials in white suits with black arm band. Their standing positions and gestural elements show that they accommodate the female clerics in the same way they do to male clerics who just passed by, which reflects their acceptance of this group as one institute of the national trinity.

FB audience could probably notice extended meanings of community's integrity presenting through *sangha*'s manner through images No.1-3. They appeared as if they were *Dhamma* warriors with 'strength' and 'forces', who could already be fully regarded as a strong pillar to support Thai Buddhism. These apparently well-performed *sangha* members possibly connote how hard *Nirodharam* had put efforts through many years to establish itself as a 'qualified' religious community to meet 'expected roles' by Thai Buddhists. After many years of persistent studies of the deep *Dhamma* and of strict practices according to the *Vinaya*, they seem to now be ready to present themselves as part of the Thai *sangha* who have roles and responsibilities in the Thai society at large and probably in international world where opportunities emerge.

N's postings of their participation in the royal replica cremation of the late King Rama IX (King Bhumibol) in 2017 signify N's loyalty to the Thai monarch which, in combination with the faith in religion(s), and loyalty to the nation, makes up the national Trinity which holds the whole country together.

8.3.1.A.1.iii The religious centre serving a large number of lay people from divergent groups

❖ **Mode of representations**

The third meaning of N's 'legitimacy' through ideational function is depicted at a large extent by referring to visual and gestural elements which Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) indicated as 'multidimensional structure' from their postings during the *Buddha Jayanti* event on 5 June, 17 August, and 12 December 2012. The common portrayals illustrate a large number of lay people participating in religious activities organised by *Nirodharam*

❖ **Multi-dimensional structure**

Multidimensional structure is referred to by *Nirodharam* in constructing their legitimacy in this theme. It comprises the four structures of 'narrative', 'classification', 'symbolic' and 'analytical' processes (See Chapter 3). From Figure 8.6 (below), image No. 1 shows that N utilised a full extent of the four processes of 'multidimensional structure'. 'Narrative process' is embedded to portray 'bi-directional transaction' highlighted by gestural elements performed by N's monastic and lay community members in the celebration of *Buddha Jayanti*. The first vectoral line emanates from a group of boys playing percussion who are considered as the first group of 'represented participants' in the scene. The same vector line continues to connect another group of 'represented participants': N's monastic members in ochre robes walking slowly after the percussion band. This arrow-headed line is carried on in vertical domain to point at the last group of 'represented participants'- the to-be ordained female novices appearing at the back of the scene. The second diagonal vector is formed by a group of audience standing both at the left and right edges, as 'represented participants' who perform 'transactional action' by aiming their cameras towards their 'goal'- the to be ordained *samaneri*- at the back row. The first and second vectors clearly portray attentiveness and prompted participation performed by different groups of lay people in this *samaneri* ordination at *Nirodharam*. In addition, the depicted element of northern-styled flags called '*tung*' prepared by lay community members in white, yellow, red and blue blowing against the wind also deliver 'celebration atmosphere' for commemorating this major Buddhist event.

Figure 8.6 indicates N's legitimacy as religious centre attended by a number of laypeople through multidimensional structure process. Source www.facebook.nirodharam

For a 'classification process', the white clothes worn by the lay people classify them as 'lay participants', and also differentiate them from the monastic members wearing ochre robe, normally depicted as 'actor' in leading laypeople in performing the religious events.

'Symbolic process', is also presented through 'traditional style of northern celebration', depicted through traditional attires of white cotton shirts and trousers worn by a group of percussion boys. A traditional percussion called '*klong sabad chai'*, a decoration of colourful '*tung*'- northern style flags, as well as the northern style parade arrangement, all additionally symbolise the embracing of local traditions to celebrate the glory of Buddhism through the event of *Buddha Jayanti*. Whilst 'analytical process' embedded in image No. 1 is formed by 'possessive attributes' of a parade pattern normally arranged for special celebrations, in this case the ordination of women and girls. Visual elements depict how the community have assimilated a traditional parade pattern performed locally in Chiang Mai to a parade to celebrate '*samaneri* ordination' at *Nirodhram* during the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment. This is evidenced by the first 'possessive attribute' showing a line of traditional percussions called '*klong sabad chai*' leading the parade. *Klong sabad chai*' literally means 'drum of victory' and is played as a symbolic force to conquer '*Mara*'[119], who is believed to obstruct the ordination -an act of the greatest merit generation. The second attribute composes of monastic members walking as representatives of the Buddhist realm; followed by lines of the to-be-ordained women who are in the last layer of the possessive attribute'. They are considered as the main actor in this ordination parade walking around a given area to receive blessing from their families, friends and lay attendants in the ceremony. Whilst, the laypeople attending the events together with these elements make up the 'carrier' to communicate the whole meaning of this image - 'the celebration of *samaneri* ordination at *Nirodharam* in the year of *Buddha Jayanti'*.

Image No. 2 also involves multidimensional structure. For the 'narrative process', the diagonal vector made by a medium-shot emanating from the to be-ordained women who are depicted as 'actor' in bowing their heads and presenting monastic robes, bowls, and flowers[120] up high to their parents or relatives as a way asking for forgiveness[121]. The parents or relatives appear as the 'goal' in the first 'transactional action'. On the other hand, they become 'reactor' towards the action of the 'white robed' women', by their similar hand gestures and body languages, including a smiling face of a woman in the top right corner, which in this stance is the 'phenomenon'. These exemplify the parents' contentment as their daughters are being offered by *Nirodharam*, a similar opportunity to

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[119] Personifications of evil minds - defilements
[120] They are part of the eight-monastic necessity, called in Thai '*krueng bo-ri-khan*'.
[121] Ordination is considered as stage in entering a new chapter of life, thus, to be ordained persons normally ask their parents, close-relative, siblings or affiliated persons to forgive them in doing bad deeds in the past to start a new life.

those of laymen to enter a monastic life. For the 'classification process', the to-be ordained *samaneri* and their parents are classified by the different sides of camera angles and they appear in the frame in oppositional position. Parents and families are presented in the top position indicating their 'seniority' and 'more powerful status' as their daughters are asking for their forgiveness. Meanwhile, the shaved-headed hairstyle of the to-be ordained *samaneri* classify them into a different societal class from their parents. For the 'symbolic process', monastic robe, bowl and flower which are part of the eight necessity of Buddhist monks symbolise 'monastic realm' in which the to be ordained *samaneri* are about to enter. All of these depicted elements functioning as 'possessive attributes' to make up a 'carrier' or the meaning of 's*amaneri* ordination' at *Nirodharam*, in the event of the *Buddha Jayanti*, for 'analytical process'.

'Narrative process', in image No. 3 is formed by the long-shot camera presenting the newly ordained *samaneri* sitting in the monastic hall [*ubasata*] of *Nirodharam*. This horizontal vectoral line emanating from left to right illustrates a large number of newly ordained *samaneri* as 'represented participants' who now become a part of *Nirodharam*, a female religious community. They perform direct eye contact with 'interactive participants' – FB's viewers, which Kress and Van Leeuwen called 'non-transactional action'. This is because their 'goal' is omitted and not represented in this scene. For 'classification process', the visual representations of ochre-robed uniforms worn by these newly ordained women and their monastic necessities laid right in front of each of them, classify them as part of the Buddhist 'monastic' members. The position of the golden Buddha statue located high above these newly ordained *samaneri*, symbolizes the Buddha - the highest figure in Buddhism for a 'symbolic process'. This is reinforced by a vertical vector emanating from the top position of the Buddha statue, pointing down to the group of *samaneri* sitting below which symbolizes the territory in which these newly ordained *samaneri* are entering – a sacred Buddhist realm. Lastly, these aforementioned depicted elements become 'possessive attributes' to make up the 'carrier', a whole text of *samaneri* ordination at *Nirodharam* for the celebration of *Buddha Jayanti* for 'analytical process'.

❖ **Offer interactional relation**

This meaning of *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimacy' is also presented through the 'offer interactional relation' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.16). In figure 8.7 (below), images No.1-3 present different groups of laypeople attending religious activities organized at *Nirodharam* during the celebration of the *Buddha Jayanti*. Although the previous findings (See Chapter 5)

mentioned that *Nirodharam*'s objective is to serve as a place to practice *Dhamma* and spiritual development for lay people with particular focus on women, findings in this section go far beyond the scope of such objective. It is obvious that lay people attending religious events at *Nirodharam* during the *Buddha Jayanti* include both women and men, girls and boys as well as the elderly groups. In image No. 1, 'represented participants' are a group of primary school children who attended *Dhamma* camp during the *Vesak* days. They are practicing meditation in an early morning session during the *Vesak* course. The long-shot camera illustrates them sitting with legs crossed, hands woven on their laps and eyes closed. In image No. 2, the woman standing in the middle is portrayed as the 'actor' performing 'transactional action' in having a talk with another woman represented as the 'goal' in the right angle of the frame, in the candle procession on the *Vesak* night. Both present 'offer interactional relation' as they did not directly address FB viewers by direct eye contact and become 'object' of the 'viewers' who observe their action in this stance. In image No. 3, the diagonal line forms a perspective vector portraying a group of laymen and laywomen at different ages participating in the chanting session in the bestowing ceremony of *Buddha Jayanti Chedi* at *Nirodharam*, repeatedly without social contact with FB viewer.

Figure 8.7 indicating N's legitimacy as religious centre attended by a number of laypeople through 'offer interactional relation'. Source www.facebook.nirodharam

All in all, in communicating 'ideational function' of Buddhist community in relation to the three Buddhist events, N integrate what they see in experiential world to communicate their meanings of legitimacy with FB audience through online constructions. Visualisations and gestural modes play the most vital role in depicting N's 'legitimacy' as: 'a religious community with qualified monastic members who perform cleric duties similarly to the male *sangha*' through 'narrative process'. Whilst the admin also portrayed N as 'a religious centre serving a number of different laypeople groups' through 'multidimensional

structure', in which visual and gestural resources are mainly referred to, based on specific interpretations within Thai socio-cultural context. And this could be comprehensible by Thai and Buddhist FB's viewers.

8.3.1.A.2 Interpersonal Function

This section shifts to explore *Nirodharam*'s online constructions of legitimacy according to interpersonal function emphasising how the employed semiotic resources could potentially influence attitudes and behaviours of FB audiences, and to what extent. The findings in this section demonstrate N's construction of their 'legitimacy' as (i) a female '*nak buat'* community supported by senior local monks as part of local monastic order since historical time; and (ii) a cleric community which welcomes lay audience from local and global vicinities to become part of their community through organised activities.

8.3.1.A.2.i A female *nak-buat* community supported by the senior male *sangha* as part of local monastic order

❖ **Mode of representations**

N's first 'legitimacy' according to the interpersonal function was communicated via visual, gestural, verbal, audio, as well as spatial modes to inform the audience about their legitimated status as a cleric community having close connection to the male *sangha.* N constructed this meaning of legitimacy in several occasions mostly between 2016 – 2017, including on 24 March, 15 April, and 8 November 2017 to highlight their close connection with Ven. Luang Phu Thong - one of the highly respected senior monks in Thailand [122]. Their two postings on 10 October 2017, with images and live feature also communicated their joint activities with the male *sangha* at *Wat Phra Singha* in Chiang Mai. And lastly, their post on 14 November 2017 was about the trace of *bhikkhuni sangha* which was believed to historically exist in the Lanna Kingdom. I selected N's postings on 24 March 2017 about Ven. Luang Phu Thong's visit to *Nirodharam* for the bestowing ceremony of the *Bhuddha Jayanti chedi* and on 10 October 2017 about N's attendance in the *săa-mee-jì-gam*ceremony at *Wat Phra Singha* to discuss this meaning of their legitimacy through 'offer interactional relation' as follow*.*

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[122] Luang Phu Thong has already passed away in December 2019

❖ **Offer interactional relation**

Image No. 1 from figure 8.8 (below) is a screengrab from the 1.10 hours live broadcasting media N used to create deeper engagement with their FB audience. This newly introduced feature on FB provides the audience with real-time content showing Ven. Luang Phu Thong's interacting with *sangha* members and lay participants in the event. Either by watching it live or retrieving the provided link at a later time, FB audience could notice a pleasant tie between *Nirodharam* and this well-known senior monk in Chiang Mai. Visual and gestural elements at the beginning of this interactive feature portrayed Luang Phu Thong as a high-ranking and respectful monk visiting the community and receiving a warm welcome from a large number of lay disciples gathering at the site. The live content which depicted Ven. Luang Phu Thong in his 90s walking slowly to the arranged seat in order to give a *Dhamma* talk to N's monastic members and lay participants clearly reflected his warm support to this female cleric community.

His verbal support to the community is considered as a 'blessing' and compliments on *Nirodharam*'s existence and contributions to the Thai society[123]. He compared *bhikkhuni sangha* who strictly follows the *Vinaya* and beyond-worldly practices as 'the beauty in Buddhism' as also been praised by the Buddha in his time. Luang Phu Thong's speech also underlined that the emergence of *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai and Thai Buddhism has brought back the 'missing' piece of the fourfold assembly in Buddhism once established by the Buddha. He was so delighted to know that the '*bhikkhuni sangha*' which was once seen as the missing pillar has been re-established in this contemporary period. His rhetoric speech was as follows:

> 'After the Buddha was enlightened, *Mara* invited him to *Parinibbhana*[124]. He refused to do so unless his four-fold *sangha* comprising of *bhikkhu* (male monks), *bhikkhuni* (female monks), *upasaka* (laymen), *upasika* (lay women) communities have been established to secure his religion. Buddhism has been progressively perpetuated by these four pillars. If the Lord Buddha had been alive, he would have been so delighted to see that the fourth pillar has been re-established here. So, we (as members of the fourfold Buddhist sangha) should practice according to his teachings as the way to show him our gratitude'.
>
> Ven. Phra Bhramam Mankala, Luang Phu Thong, 2017

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[123] *Luang Phu Thong*'s compliments on *Nirodharam*'s existence and contributions to the Thai society starts from minutes 19 onwards. (Available from: https://www.facebook.com/nirodharam/videos/10155340349237197/?q=นิโรธาราม%20อารามแห่งความดับทุกข์%20หลวงปู่ทอง)
[124] This is commonly used to refer to nirvana-after-death, which occurs upon the death of the body of someone who has attained nirvana during his or her lifetime. It is also called [*Maha Parinibbana*]- the stage in which the Buddha's passing away transform to '*Nibbana*' without human residue.

The ensemble of visual and gestural elements of Luang Phu Thong's presence at the community, with warm welcoming from N's monastic and lay members; along with his rhetoric discourse provided 'offer relations' to the FB audience in constructing *Nirodharam*'s legitimated status as *bhikkhuni* community patronaged by one of the well-known senior monks in Chiang Mai. As Luang Phu Thong is widely known as a faithful Buddhist follower who persistently studies *Dhamma* in depth and practices strictly in accordance with the *Buddha*'s teachings, people who watch this 'live' content would implicitly recognize *Nirodharam*'s credibility as a qualified *bhikkhuni* communities (in Thai Buddhism) who practices righteously to follow the Buddha's path as well. Eventually, this posting has received high attention among N's FB audience evidenced by 44 times shared contents and 66 comments.
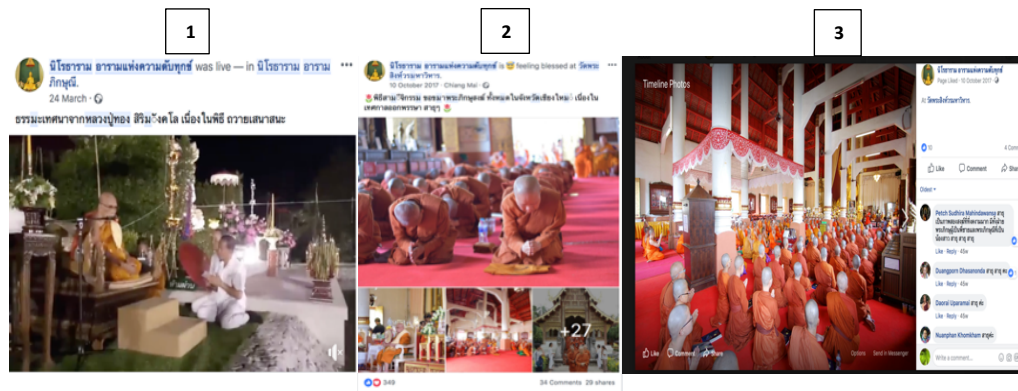
Figure 8.8 indicating N's legitimacy as female Buddhist community having close connection with senior male *sangha* in interpersonal relation. Source www.facebook.nirodharam

Apart from the depictions of their cordial relation with Ven. Luang Phu Thong, through 'offer interactive relation', *Nirodharam* also constructed their 'legitimacy' as *bhikkhuni* community who is considered as part of local *sangha* in Chiang Mai evidenced by the posting of their participation in the main hall of *Phra Singha* Temple, another long-established and principal temple in Chiang Mai in a ceremony on the Buddhist Lent's ending occasion on 10th October 2017. These two posts were demonstrated by 'live' feature providing real-time content which last for 24.26 minutes; with additional 30 images uploaded on the community's timeline (See images No. 2 - 3). N also employed a short-written text to inform about the incident and used 'tag' feature to indicate the 'venue' where the *sangha* members were present at that time.

The 'live' content with clear visual, gestural, audio, verbal and spatial elements was expected to have immediate effect to reinforce *Nirodharam*'s 'offer interactional relation' with the audience in constructing N's legitimacy as part of the monastic *sangha* as well as their cordial relationship with *bhikkhu sangha* in Chiang Mai. If the audience opt to watch the 'live' content, they can see from the very beginning that *Nirodharam's sangha* members participated as one group of 'represented participants' in this ritual practice similarly to male *sangha'* - another group of 'represented participants.' The two groups are regarded as 'possessive attributes' combining the whole meaning of the *sangha* members in Chiang Mai – as 'a carrier'.

In images No. 2 and 3, N's monastic members sit on the right side of the hall while the *bhikkhu sangha* occupied the left and central parts of the same hall. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), the right side represents the newly introduced entity whilst the left edge is something already exists. Thus, N's monastic members' position in the two aforementioned images underline their freshly introduced status as part of the monastic members, whilst the *bhikkhu sangha* are the already dominant group in Buddhism realm in Chiang Mai. Although from the whole 'live' content, *Nirodharam*'s monastic members were not verbally mentioned, the audience could notice their 'acquired monastic status' visually and through their gestural elements in performing ritual procedures in a similar way as the *bhikkhu* did*.* And they were not treated differently from the male monks. Despite the spatial distance between N's monastic members and the male *sangha* in the hall which differentiated them as *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni*, both groups together formed the 'complementary parts' of monastic *sangha* in Chiang Mai.

Audience who did not enjoy or opt to watch the 'live' content but only see the employed images could also perceive the non-conflicting vibe between the two *sangha* who took part in this ritual practice after the Buddhist Lent Day. This is evidenced by one comment from a FB audience mentioning that this image which has both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha* in the same frame is a beautiful picture showing companionship between the two *sangha* in Chiang Mai: *bhikkhu* as brothers and *bhikkhuni* as sisters. As this ritual is regarded as an important tradition for the *sangha* to ask for forgiveness from senior monks, these employed 'live' feature and images along with other semiotic resources on N's FB have provided 'offer relations' in reinforcing their legitimated status as a female Buddhist community and a part of the *sangha* order in Chiang Mai.

8.3.1.A.2.ii An open religious community for both national and international audience

❖ **Mode of representations**

The second meaning of N's 'legitimated status' according to interpersonal function is its being a religious community which is opened to both national and international audience to participate in their organized events, evidenced by N's online constructions on 26 May with an invitation to lay members to participate their arranged activities during Vesak Days. Linguistic mode, in the form of written text plays the most vital role to engage the audience at varying degrees in this stance. Visual and spatial modes were used to complement linguistic elements to construct such meaning through 'symbolic process'.

❖ **Offer interactional relation**

From the below screengrab in figure 8.9, linguistic and visualisation resources deployed in Text No. 1 corporately depict the community's 'legitimacy' as 'a Buddhist community' who organised disparate religious activities in the event of the Buddha *Jayanti*. Linguistic element, especially Thai and English texts play the most vital role in underlining the importance of the event, especially to Thai and foreign Buddhists.

If looking at point A on the top left of the screen grab, the audience can see *Nirodharam*'s virtual profile picture depicting an image of the golden Buddha statue sitting under the golden umbrella. As I have observed from my visits to *Nirodharam*[125], people who come to *Nirodharam* usually enter the hall to pay homage to the Buddha, as signified by this statue[126]. The statue is physically situated at *Nirodharam* for the last ten years and considered as one of community's symbolic icons among few other existing Buddhist related infrastructures and objects (See Chapter 5). From my interview with Khun Kamphu (2017) – N'S FB admin[127], her selection of this image as Facebook profile picture establishes 'offer interactional relation' with Facebook audience in twofold. Firstly, it created the pattern of 'offer relation' for those community members who have had offline experience with *Nirodharam* to recognise this Facebook as the 'virtual *Nirodharam*' and feeling like being present at the 'actual *Nirodharam* community'. Eventually, they might be prompted to participate in this online platform, e.g. by scrolling down the page, clicking the 'like' icon[128], giving comments, sharing related information, or just reading it. The second

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[125] And a participatory observation during 2016 and 2017
[126] The Buddha statue also reminds people to appreciate 'His Great Benefits' to humanity.
[127] She is N's Facebook' s Administration after Khun Traswin.
[128] In 2012 Facebook had not yet provide other icons, i.e. laugh, angry, etc. for feedback.

rational is an establishment of 'offer interactional relation' for new audience who have no background about *Nirodharam* and come across this posting for the first time. This image is employed to construct *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimated status' as 'a female religious community' in Thailand who also appears through virtual channel. And this could attract the new audience from local, national or abroad who are interested to actually participate in their offline activities offered through the community's virtual platform. This conforms with Prebish (2004) study on functions of virtual Buddhist community in encouraging participation and discussion among online Buddhists and non-Buddhists from all over the world; and also with what Kim (2005) pointed out that virtual Buddhist community functions as 'relational communities' where people can relate to other virtual members at certain degrees.

Additionally, the lexical choice of Facebook' s profile name – '*Nirodharam* – the place to end sufferings' at point B in figure 8.9 also rendered 'offer relation' by informing the name of this religious centre, which conforms perfectly with the community's objective aiming to be a place where people come to learn *Dhamma* teaching and practice towards spiritual awakening (See Chapter 5). Besides, the admin's resorting to 'tagging' at point C also indicated the community's advanced utilization of online feature available via Facebook platform. Thus, they can be sure that this online posting would be proliferated and communicated with expanded numbers of Facebook audience. At least, audience tagged in this posting, can potentially circulate this content to other online members or extended offline members via their face-to-face communication. The employment of 'tagging' could potentially engage a broader range of audience who could eventually become part of the community's online or offline members at a later stage.

Figure 8.9 The layout of Facebook *Nirodharam* in May 2012

(Available from: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=นิโรธาราม%20อารามแห่งความดับทุกข์%202012

accessed from April 2018)

❖ **Demand interactional relation**

Through this posting, N also engaged with their FB audience through 'demand interactional relation', by their employed linguistic elements in inviting and persuading Thai Buddhists and foreigners to participate in the special Buddhist event of the *Buddha Jayanti*. The admin employed Thai and English languages to engage with them as can be seen in texts No. 2 and 3 from figure 8.9. I provide the English translations in the below figure.

No 2: (*Nirodharam*) would like to invite (everyone) to perform good deeds as a way to pay tribute to the Buddha in the event of the World's *Vesak Day of the 'Buddha Jayanti'* year –the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment by (participating in) cleaning the temple, decorating the entrance, and making 'baisri' (for welcoming ceremony) at *Nirodharam*, Chomthong, Chiang Mai. For those who are interested, please contact 08-1634-2242, 08-4804-2040 by May 30, 2012.

No 3: Practicing mindfulness meditation; joining *Dhamma* Camp and *Dhamma* conversation with the abbess - *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani

From these lexical resources, Thai is used as the key language in communicating N's legitimacy whilst English plays a supplementary role. The employed Thai lexical choices rendered persuasive and informative functions as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) called 'demand' and 'offer' relations. The first part of the Thai lexical choices (see figure 8.9, texts No.2-3) functioned as 'persuasive rhetoric' to invite their members as well as the general Buddhist audience; and established 'demand interactive relation' with FB audience to respond to their invitation by attending the various activities organized to celebrate the 2600 year-anniversary of the Buddha's victory through the word choice, organisation and textual coherence.

The Thai excerpt was presented in two paragraphs (texts No. 2) divided by a spatial element placed between them. Although in the text No 2., the subject (the word '*Nirodharam'*) was omitted and the admin did not directly address the FB audience by including the word 'you', I see the following phrase 'would like to invite (everyone) to perform good deeds' could promptly make the readers to feel that they need to provide 'responsive support' towards the information provided by the community, as they are regarded as an 'important' part of this special event. More specifically, I believe the admin intentionally selected the words 'perform good deeds' instead of 'merit making', simply because in Thai socio-cultural context, 'performing good deeds' covers a broader range of activities which render positive effects imprinted in the doer's mind. These include simple religious activities, for example, giving alms to the monks, reserving the precepts, chanting, practicing mindfulness and meditating; and general activities like volunteering for social work, helping others, feeding and releasing animals, as well as donating money, food, clothes, etc. For *Nirodharam*, the interest is not to mobilize funds or donations to celebrate the event since this is not compatible with the community's objective (See Chapter 5). Rather, the community focused on winning massive participation of the audience in diverse activities arranged to celebrate the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's victory.By encouraging laypeople to participate in these religious activities , *Niodharam*'s 'legitimated status' a female Buddhist community was highlighted and clearly visible (See Chapter 5).. Moreover, the second part of the first sentence saying '*as a way to pay tribute to the Buddha'* also plays vital roles in establishing 'offer interactional relation' between *Nirodharam* and laypeople. It highlighted the speciality of the *Buddha Jayanti* and a prime opportunity for everyone to pay back to the Buddha by doing something useful to the religion.

Although, this is considered as 'informative' content, it delivers mood and tone of the event as 'special', which could prompt the audience's responses towards this 'celebration' by participating in the community's invitation on the *Buddha Jayanti*. This exemplifies how the admin established 'demanding interactional relations' with 'interactive participants', laypeople who read the post. They are regarded as 'object' who are expected to respond to *Nirodharam*'s invitation in this scenario. Whilst the following texts, reflect 'offer relation' in providing clear instruction about the venue, date, contact details and application channel for those who are interested to join the event.

In the second paragraph (text No.3, figure 8.9), the successive phrase: 'by participating in cleaning and restoring the temple, decorating the entrance, and making 'baisri, ...and *Dhamma* conversation with the abbess - *Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani', also highlighted the community's 'legitimacy' in performing functions of the Buddhist community and again established 'offer interactional relation' between *Nirodharam* and lay community members in offering them a chance to carry out communal works at the community to gain merit and practice spiritual training.

N also provided English version after the Thai text to communicate with foreign audience as follows (See figure 8.10):
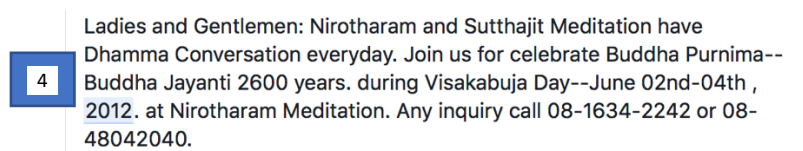
Figure 8.10. The excerpt of English text related to '*Buddha Jayanti*' theme posted on Facebook *Nirodharam* in May 2012 (Available from: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=นิโรธาราม%20อารามแห่งความดับทุกข์%202012 accessed from April 2018.

To compare the English text on figure 8.10 with the already elaborated Thai content (texts No. 2-3, figure 8.9), the English text plays similar role in building 'offer' and 'demand' interactional relation' to the FB audience. On the one hand, it provided 'offer interactional relation' especially with foreign audience in rendering information relating to the organised activities at *Nirodharam* in the event of *Buddha Jayanti*. The lexical choices are adjusted to be precise, using more commonly known words to foreign Buddhist readers to replace some specific Thai terms. For example, the community is re-defined as 'meditation

(centre)' rather than '*bhikkhuni*/ female Buddhist community' as used in the Thai version. The name then becomes '*Nirotharam* and *Suddhajit*' meditation (centres), which specifically label the two campuses: *Nirodharam* in Chomthong, and *Suddhajit* in Doi Saket (See Chapter 5). The admin also deployed the word '*Buddha Purima Buddha Jayanti*' in place of '*Buddha Jayanti*' in Thai version, as it is the more commonly used term worldwide than '*Buddha Jayanti*' which is used mostly in Thailand (see Phra Maha Praiwan, 2012).

As part of the *Buddha Jayanti* celebration, N chose to focus on '*Dhamma* conversation' as a prime activity to attract foreign audience, who seem to be more interested in the practice of meditation and mindfulness training as well as in the discussion on *Dhamma* contents. In the Thai version, however, they offered more activities because most Thai Buddhists have interests over a wider range of activities, from physical labour work to spiritual development exercises. In the English version, N also utilised lexical choice 'join us to celebrate the *Buddha Purima Buddha Jayanti*' to establish the 'demanding relation' with the audience, expecting them to respond by their actual participation in the event.

Figure 8.11 (below) also demonstrates employed linguistic with a combination of visual and spatial elements from the same N's posting on 26 May 2012 in inviting FB audience to attend *Dhamma* camp in *Vesak* days. The content of the Thai text here is a reproduced version of a previous Thai excerpt already discussed in figure 8.9 (texts No.2 and 3). Likewise, linguistic elements, presented here in figure 8.11 also provide 'offer' and 'demand' relations with FB audience.
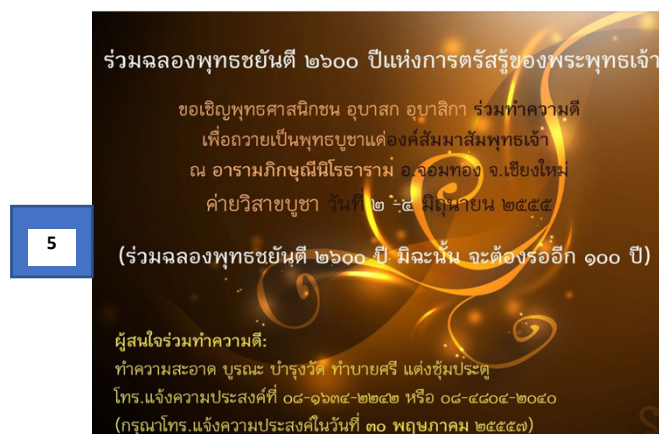
Figure 8.11. The visual composition related to '*Buddha Jayanti*' theme posted on Facebook *Nirodharam* in May 2012
(Available from: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=นิโรธาราม%20อารามแห่งความดับทุกข์%202012
accessed from April 2018)

The two distinct functions of linguistic elements employed in figure 8.9 and 8.11 are (i) the direct engagement with FB viewers, and (ii) the reinforcement of the *Buddha Jayanti* event. In text No. 5 of figure 8.11, the admin directly engaged FB viewers as 'members of Buddhist community, *upbasoka* (laymen), and *upasika* (laywomen), whilst in 8.9 these 'interactive participants' are omitted. Also, in figure 8.11, there was a reinforcement of the importance of the *Buddha Jayanti* by mentioning the long wait for another 100 years if the viewers miss the opportunity to join *Nirodharam* in the cerebration of this special occasion. Similar to figure 8.9, linguistic elements created 'offer relation' with FB viewers in providing details of the *Dhamma* camp and the religious events, the venue and the contact information. Simultaneously is the function as 'demand interactional relations' in expecting the viewers to attend the activities arranged during the camp. More importantly, I see employed linguistics function as a discursive strategy in raising the public awareness on the importance of *Buddha Jayanti* event as the 2600 years anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment.

❖ **Symbolic process**

On top of linguistics, *Nirodharam* also utilised visual and spatial elements to construct their 'legitimacy' through 'symbolic process' in underlining the importance of the *Buddha Jayanti*. In figure 8.11, a layout of a bright to dark golden shades with different wavy lines is employed as a background and plays a complementary role to the written texts. An ensemble of golden and wavy lines is deployed from top to bottom diagonal orientation to signify the ray of candlelight sparkling. Another visual composition presents a diagonal vector of hue darkened-golden saturation emanating from the left-handed side and gradually dissolves to a brightened and eventually lightened golden hue on the top right of the frame. From my interview with the community's FB admin in 2017, she created this visualisation to engage lay people's interest in the celebration of the *Buddha Jayanti*. The first layer is employed to 'symbolise' the enlightenment of the Buddha, the glory in Buddhism which lightens-up human wisdom to be free from sufferings [*Dhukkha*] through spiritual practice. The employed wavy and sparkling golden lines on the top right is considered as the 'ultimate awakening stage' in Buddhism, and the 'recently achieved stage' attained by the Buddha. Whilst the lines stretching from top to bottom symbolise the Buddha's compassion to help laypeople from sufferings through his *Dhamma* teachings. The second layer are added to convey the 'initial' and 'current' stage of sufferings that human beings encounter before the enlightenment of the Buddha; whilst

the waving line at the upper level; and the bright golden colour on the right-handed side represent the 'transforming' and 'ideally free from sufferings' stage that all human beings cold practice to achieve. In addition, the employed archery wavy lines also resemble the linkage of different parties that could be brought into connection whilst the wavy lines also feature the sense of 'femininity' as they mimic women's 'delicacy' and 'flexibility'. And this symbolic entity also represents *Nirodharam* as female religious community who attempt to embrace different groups of lay audience to become part of their community in celebrating the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's victory.

All in all, for 'interpersonal function', N employed linguistic elements as a main strategy to engage with different groups of lay members to participate in their activities through their legitimated meanings of (i) a female cleric community which are supported by senior male *sangha* and regarded as part of monastic order in Chiang Mai; and (ii) a religious community opened to national and international audience. Linguistics resources established 'offer interactional relation' in giving particular details of their arranged activities to celebrate the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment; and provided 'demand interactional relation' in requiring FB audience's responses to participate in the activities. The resources also unveiled the community's open contacts with the outside world; and their intention to raise the public awareness on the event. Visual and spatial elements are used to highlight the importance of the Buddha's enlightenment through the font, colours, spatial and visual elements which were ensembled to symbolize the stages of his enlightenment on the *Vesak* night 2,600 years ago.

8.3.1.A.3 Textual Function

This section focuses on 'textual function' to explore how the three interrelated systems: information value, salience, and framing are shaped through employed multimodal resources in constructing *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimacy'. As Kress and Van Leeuwen pointed out three compositions of multimodal texts (2006,p.117), the section examines (i) how placement of depicted elements contributes to specific informational values; (ii) how the depicted elements and participants are portrayed to engage with the viewers at varying degrees; and (iii) how framing devices are in use (or absent) to connect or disconnect the whole textual coherence.

8.3.1.A.3.i A role modelling community of *Dhamma* practice to end sufferings

❖ **Mode of representations**

The customary findings on *Nirodharam*'s legitimacy in this regard is the portrayal of *Nirodharam* as the place of thoroughly *Dhamma* practice towards spiritual awakening stages. This is evidenced by N's postings on May 27 and 29, 2012, which were the re-postings of the two *Dhamma* prose and verse composed by the N's abbess – *Bhikkhuni Nandhayani* on the practical guideline for self-training towards the awakening stage. The posts were accompanied by the images of the Buddha statue, N's abbess, and N's landscape respectively. These were presented through visual, gestural, spatial and written texts of *Dhamma* substances. I selected their two postings on 26 and 27 May 2012 to discuss this meaning.

❖ **Information value**

'Ideal' and 'real' information are common portrayals of *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimacy' in textual function. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p.186), the 'top' position signifies 'promises' and a 'sensory fulfilment' which is considered as 'ideal', whilst the 'lower' and 'bottom' section represents a more 'factual information' considered as rather 'real'. In figure 8.12, the image of the abbess standing with her back turned to the camera and her eyes looking over a mountainous landscape at sunset is positioned on the top, above the image of paddle fields located adjacent to *Nirodharam*. In this regard, visual elements play a major role in highlighting the abbess as an 'actor' in leading lay community away from the 'faulty world' outside *Nirodharam*. This represents an 'ideal' community's mission. Whilst, a 'perspective' of the paddle fields is added to portray a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere surrounding *Nirodharam* landscape. It functions to symbolise the ultimate stage of non-defilements which *Nirodharam* members and lay disciples are aiming to achieve.

In figure 8.12, the written texts which are placed on the right top of each image offer 'new' information which Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p.22) explained as 'ideology' to the audience. Whilst in this stance, the image of the abbess and the Buddha statue appearing on the 'left' position is regarded as 'given' or 'old' information signifying 'common sense' and self-evident'. Thus, the two images become 'given' details for rendering overall impression of *Nirodharam* as a peaceful female religious community under the charismatic leadership of the current abbess. The written texts (the proses written by the abbess)

considered as the 'new' information highlighted *Nirodharam*'s objective as the community of *Dhamma* practice to achieve the awakening stage.

In figure 8.13, the FB admin also juxtaposed image of the white Buddha statue on top of the written texts which appear in the middle of the frame followed by the image of a lotus flower at the bottom of the layout. This syntagma reflects another 'text-image' relations highlighting the importance of the white Buddha statue, which is employed to symbolise the Buddha, the highest figure in Buddhism. In this stance, the Buddha (statue) is represented to symbolise an 'ideal' figure who achieved his ultimate awakening stage through self-spiritual training. At the same time, the texts introducing the practical guideline for self-purification in order to attain the stage of selflessness [*anadtha*], represent the 'current stage' or 'stage of reality' of *Nirodharam* as a religious community committed to helping people to achieve the ultimate happiness through spiritual practices as guided by the Buddha. In addition, I found the image of lotus flower employed at the bottom of the page also underlining another 'actual stage' of the community at this temporal moment. As in Buddhism context, lotus flower symbolises 'the awakening stage' and 'wisdom', its employed syntagmatic position connotes the 'current stage' of lay practitioners who follow *Nirodharam* to embrace *Dhamma* practice and gradually grow until they reach the final awakening stage-like a fully blooming lotus.

❖ **Salience**

The next composition of textual function is salience. As can be seen from figures 8.12 and 8.13, the admin specifically employed linguistic and visual compositions in a balance weight, which are equally salient in constructing *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimacy' in the event of the *Buddha Jayanti*. From figure 8.12 and 8.13, linguistic mode functions as a vector connecting visual, gestural and spatial modes to ensemble the meaning of 'legitimacy', which Halliday (1985) referred to as narrative process; whilst Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) called 'conceptual pattern'. These three modal resources also operate as 'possessive attributes' to supplement the message constituted by linguistic element in the meaning making of *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimacy'. They are also employed in trading off the salience of linguistic elements. In figure 8.12, a long-shot camera underlines the abbess as the only salient 'represented participant' in the scene to perform 'non-transactional action' through the depiction of her turning the back to camera and standing with two hands crossed at the back, starring far over mountainous landscapes at sunset. These modal

resources signified her determination to fulfil the mission of her community-leading lay people to reach awakening stage-no matter how far the path is. The employed image of the white Buddha statue in figure 8.13, is also portrayed as the only salient 'represented participant' in the image. The statue's gestural elements of low eye gaze and hands weaving on the lap resemble the tranquil manner and detachments from 'faulty surroundings' of the Buddha. I see these employed gestural resources as a strategy to build up 'offer' interactive relation with FB viewers by exemplifying the Buddha's awakening stage through visualisation of his gestures.

The admin employed visualisation, yellowish and golden colours which represent the enlightenment and the wisdom [*panna*] to signify the awakening stage in Buddhism as thematic backgrounds in each picture. The white colour of the Buddha statue and the group of white lotus flowers in figure 8.13 also signify 'purified stage'. These employed visual and gestural resources are regarded as 'possessive attributes' in complementing linguistic mode which will be discussed in the next section (see 'Framing') to make up a 'carrier', the holistic connotation of *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimacy' in this category as a community of *Dhamma* practice to guide laypeople to stay away from the faulty world.

L.1	โอ้อาราม นามนิโรธ โปรดพินิจ	มุ่งถึงจิต อิสระ ละตัณหา
L.2	ไม่มีโลภ โกรธหลง ปลงมายา	ไม่ถือสา ไม่ผูกพัน ไม่หวั่นใจ
L.3	ถึงนิโร ธาราม แล้วถามจิต	ใยยังคิด กังวล พะวงหลัง
L.4	ใยไม่ฝึก ให้จิต มีพลัง	ดับรักชัง มุ่งนิพพาน สุขศานติ์จริง
L.5	ที่มันทุกข์ ก็เพราะมีเหตุเกิดทุกข์ ถ้ามีเหตุเกิดทุกข์ มันก็ต้องทุกข์	
L.6	ที่ไม่ทุกข์ เพราะไม่มีเหตุเกิดทุกข์ ไม่มีเหตุเกิดทุกข์ มันก็ไม่ทุกข์	

Figure 8.12 representing N's posting on 26 May 2012 to celebrate the event of '*Buddha Jayanti*' through textual function by analytical process. (Available from: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=นิโรธาราม%20อารามแห่งความดับทุกข์%202012 accessed from April 2018

❖ **Framing**

N reproduced 'proses' composed by the abbess. One of them was specially written for the event of the *Buddha Jayanti*. Both proses mention practical guidelines for spiritual development. In figure 8.12, the three-paragraphs-written texts are divided by spatial elements between the two employed images; and the two-paragraphs-prose presented in figure 8.12 are positioned to make up the comprehensive meaning of '*Nirodharam*', as a place (of *Dhamma* practice) to end sufferings[129]. The admin selected the community's connotation as a word choice to coincide with the word '*nibbhana*', the awakening stage, considered as the ultimate goal in Buddhism.

The admin referred to 'linear-composition' for both postings in figures 8.12 and 8.13, as they are strictly coded in vertical structure and require a precise way to be read (Kress and Van Leeuwen,2006, p.204). From figure 8.12, the first sentence in L1 represents the word '*Nirodhharam*' and functions as the subject for the sentences in L1 and L2, which perform 'transactional action' to complement meaning of the word *Nirodharam*. These lexical choices are chosen to highlight the community's ideology to refrain from worldly defilements. The first sentence in L3 also repeats the same syntagmatic structure of L1 while the following sentences in L3 and L4 further complement the necessity to purify one's mind and accumulate mind power for attain the awakening stage. The last two lines of figure 8.12 (L5 and L6) mention causes of suffering and ways to end suffering, i.e. to avoid its causes. These chosen rhyme and theme using simple language comprehensible by lay people also reinforce the re-interpretation of the four-noble truths (highlighting causes to end sufferings), which is considered as the ultimate goal in Buddhism. Although, the first and the second images in figure 8.13 are divided by spatial arrangement in framing them as a sperate entity, the meanings of linguistic and visual elements employed in both frames play vital role as 'vector' in connecting the contents and making the whole textual coherence. They assemble to function as 'possessive attribute' in constructing N's objective which conforms with the ultimate goal in Buddhism.

Figure 8.13 is another prose authored by the abbess and reproduced by N during the *Buddha Jayanti* celebration period. It underlined the concept of selflessness [*Anadtha*] – one of the *tri-laksana[130]* which is considered as practical guidelines for self-purifications towards the awakening stage [*Nibbhana*]. From L1 to L4, the excerpts connote the concept

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[129] When the word '*Nirodha*' (to end sufferings) and '*Arama* (place) in Pali are merged.
[130] *Tri-laksana* composed of *Anidjung, Tukkang and Anadhtha*

of selflessness [*anadtha*] which should be thoroughly practiced at present and future moments. L5 to L8 exemplify characteristics of *Arahant* – a person who reaches the ultimate awakening stage in Buddhism[131]; and clarify the rejoice from attaining the highest purification stage. The last line (L9) indicates name of *Nirodharam*'s abbess as the composer as well as the composed date: 25 May 2012 which was during the celebration of the *Buddha Jayanti*. These linguistic elements clearly reinforce *Niordharam*'s objective in performing expected roles of the Buddhist community in this major Buddhist event. Unlike figure 8.12 where framing lines are employed to separate the two images, the admin opted to utilise looser structure with non-framing division in figure 8.13. These deployed visual and linguistic resources form a vector line to unite the whole textual coherence underling *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimacy'. The overall linguistics are also regarded as 'possessive attribute' to make up the meaning of *Nirodharam*'s objective as a place to practice spiritual development and emotional detachment as already mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6. Besides, the colour saturation deployed in figures 8.12 and 8.13 convey a golden gradient with huge saturation at the bottom left and gradually dissolve to the light hue in the top right. This colour saturation which accentuates the bottom part, indicates the 'actual stage' of community's practice to follow the Buddha's path until achieving the 'ultimate stage' in ending sufferings.

L1	ไม่มีเรา ในโลกนี้ หรือโลกหน้า
L2	ไร้อัตตา ในระหว่าง โลกทั้งสอง
L3	ก็จะถึง นิพพาน ตามที่ปอง
L4	ทุกข์ทั้งผอง สิ้นสุด วิมุติจริง
L5	พระอรหันต์ ไม่ต้องดับ และไม่ก่อ
L6	สุขจริงหนอ ไฟหยุดเผา ความเศร้าหาย
L7	ไม่ต้องพัก ไม่ต้องเพียร แสนผ่อนคลาย
L8	ถึงเป้าหมาย เสร็จกิจ พิชิตมาร
L9	ภิกษุณีนันทญาณี รุ้งเดือน ๒๕ / ๕ /๒๕๕๕

Figure 8.13 representing N's posting on 26 May 2012 to celebrate the event of '*Buddha Jayanti*' through textual function by analytical process. (Available from: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=นิโรธาราม%20อารามแห่งความดับทุกข์%202012 accessed from April 2018)

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[131] In Buddhism, there are four awakening stages in spiritual training: 1) stream-enterer, 2) once-returner, 3) non-returner, and 4) Arahant

To conclude, as 'textual function' focuses on 'information value', 'salient' and 'framing' of the employed text, *Nirodharam* chose to construct their 'legitimacy' as 'a role-model community of *Dhamma* (practice) to end sufferings' through this function. Linguistic highlighted the community's ambition in leading the laypeople towards the spiritual awakening stage, and the urgency to practice spiritual development at *Nirodharam*, whilst the addition of visual and spatial elements gave a balance weight as salient modes in constructing *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimacy'. The interplay of employed resources coherently made up the unified meaning of *Nirodharam* as the place (of *Dhamma* practice) to end sufferings, which conforms with their objective.

8.3.1.B. *Nirodharam's* Offline Multimodal Constructions of Legitimacy

To supplement the analysis of *Nirodharam's* online constructions of their Facebook website, I proceed to explore how N also constructed their meanings of 'legitimacy' via their offline channels. Findings in this section are drawn from 9 religious events arranged by *Nirodharam*; 3 issues of their in-house publications; and 4 occasions of their presence/participation in the public events during the studied period. The findings indicate that through these three offline channels, *Nirodharam* constructed their meanings of 'legitimacy' as follows.

8.3.1.B.i. Organisation of religious activities

Among their existing communication channels and media outlets (See Chapter 5), N selected religious activities as the main offline platform in constructing their 'legitimacy' with the lay audiences. In 2012, the *Buddha Jayanti* year, N organized a *Dhamma* camp between 2-4 May 2012 to render opportunity to the public in attending *Dhamma* teaching sessions by their charismatic leader: *Bhikkhuni* Nanndhayani and to practice meditation led by N's monastic members. They also organized one *samaneri* ordination ceremony to celebrate the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's victory over *Mara.*

The year 2012 was considered vital for Buddhists all over the world, there was also a ritual to bestow the *Buddha Jayanti Chedi* (pagoda) at *Nirodharam* in December 2012. The *Chedi* containing part of the Buddha's relics at its summit was sponsored by N's lay disciples. The celebration ceremony of this *Chedi* took place in November 2017 where Ven. Luang Phu Thong was invited to give a blessing and to give *Dhamma* talk to a large number of clerical and lay audience.

During the 2016-2017 which was the nation's mournful period over the passing a way of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), N organized three more *samaneri* ordinations. The first ordination took place between 10-17 October 2016, originally intended to wish him a speedy recovery from his illness. Nonetheless, as he passed away on October 13, 2016, this ordination turned to be part of the religious ritual to collectively offer merit to the late King. The second ordination where 89 women participated was conducted from 8-16 October 2017 to mark the first anniversary of his passing away. The third ordination was a week later, during 25-27 October 2017. The decision was made to provide opportunity for women who could not take a long leave from their jobs to be ordained and to take part in a merit making process during his royal cremation for a shorter period. The ordination during the cremation is called '*buat na fai*'.

Through these ordinations, women were offered opportunity to experience an ordained life in the same way men generally were. According to my interview with the abbess (2017), unlike *Songdhammakalyani,* the community arranged *samaneri* ordination not to promote the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism, but to provide opportunities for as many women as possible to experience the ordained life and to practice spiritual development. It is expected that these women will apply *Dhamma* practices to help themselves and other people after disrobing (*Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, 2017).

Nirodharam also gathered monastic and lay community members to attend chanting and meditation sessions on 31 December 2016 and on the following day whereby participants had a chance to offer food to the monastic members as a way to make merit for the New Year. These arranged activities all conform with N's self-perception as 'legitimated female *nak-buat* community' who perform cleric duties to help lay people in their mournful and difficult times through various spiritual development activities

Figure 8.14: (Left) N's offline multimodal constructions of their legitimacy in relation to the passing away of King Rama IX in 2016. (Right) People gathering for chanting and meditating and praying for making merit for the late King

These arranged activities also constructed similar meanings of N's 'legitimacy' as constructed via online. Through these offline activities, N has demonstrated their legitimacy as (i) a religious community who perform functions of the Buddhist community similarly to the male *sangha;* (ii) a *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai with loyalty to the Thai monarch; (iii) a *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai with support from senior local monks; (iv) a religious community role modelling *Dhamma* practice to end sufferings; and (v) a religious centre serving a large number of different lay people groups'.

8.3.1.B.ii In-house publications

N also construct their 'legitimacy' through in-house publications in two occasions. Firstly, in May 2012, the community publicised the testimonial book called 'Changing Attitudes Changing Life' (*Plian Kwam Kid Cheewit Plian*) to celebrate the year of the *Buddha Jayanti* and to present N's gratitude towards the Triple Gems in Buddhism. This book presents monastic experiences of their 14 monastic members, who have disparate backgrounds before ordination. All reflected the moment which turned their lives after they have listened to *Dhamma* teaching of the abbess and felt motivated to leave their struggling lay life for a more peaceful ordained life. The book also reflected their comparative experiences of being lay and ordained persons; their contentment with the ordained life; and the happiness they experience from continual spiritual practices. N also debuted another in-house publication called 'Why *Bhikkhuni*'? in August 2016. The publication is meant to express N's position regarding the societal concern over the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* in Thai Buddhism sparkled from the 2014 *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla and the reinforcement of 1928 Decree by the *Sangha* Supreme Council. On its preface, the community clearly indicated the purpose in publicising this book: to inform the public

regarding the necessity to have *bhikkhuni* community and their social contributions; as well as to share experiences of *Nirodharam*'s monastic members as ordained women.

The first chapter begins with the abbess' previous ordained life as *mae-chi* and her attempt to strictly adherence to the *Vinaya* before being ordained as a *bhikkhuni*. The abbess underlined the ordained life as a crucial mechanism to protect ones from committing bad deeds and to leverage their virtue deeds [*Karma*] which lay life could not easily accommodate. She asserted that her experiences along ordination path exemplified by the Buddha and the venerable monks really assure her the right way to get off sufferings and attain certain stages of spiritual development. Most interestingly, in constructing *Nirodharam's* legitimacy the abbess mentioned that her Sri Lankan *Upacha* and *Pawattini* for lower ordination in 2016 and Ven. Luang Phu Thong-the famous senior monk in Chiang Mai had encouraged her and four other *samaneri to* receive a full ordination as *Bhikkhuni* in Sri Lanka. To prove legitimacy of these newly ordained *Bhikkhuni,* the abbess thoroughly explained that the ordination was conducted within two *sangha*, firstly by a *Pawattini-* a senior *bhikkhuni* and then an *Upatcha* – a senior *bhikkhu* from *Amara* sect [*nikaya*] who were joined by three other sects of Sri Lankan *sangha*. She emphasised that *Nirodharam*'s monastic members were in debt to Thai monks for mentoring and coaching them according to the *Vinaya* (pp.7-9).

The abbess also clarified that the Buddha had assigned the *male sangha* with responsibility to teach/coach the *bhikkhuni sangha* who reside within 16 km. of *bhikkhu*'s monasteries on essential monastic principles. However, there has been an argument that this should not actually be valid even during the Buddha's time because there had never been *bhikkhuni's* establishments within 16 km. from those of the *bhikkhu.* According to the abbess, there actually existed *bhikkhuni sangha* within the given proximity, but little was recorded about their existence (p. 76).

This publication also mentioned the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* from Buddhist history written by one of N's monastic member - *Bhikkhuni* Suwida Saengsinghanart, a former senior university lecturer. She highlighted *bhikkhuni*'s legitimacy by explaining there was no segregation of Buddhist sects in the Buddha's time; and he had his permission to establish *bhikkhuni sangha* as part of the fourfold Buddhist assembly. *Bhikkhuni* Suwida pinpointed that *bhikkhuni sangha* is a self-autonomous and governing entity which has never been

discontinued in the mainstream Buddhism but still carried on in different places, beginning from India to Sri Lanka; then to China, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam. *Bhikkhuni* from Chinese *Upakutra* sect adhere to the same 311 monastic rules similarly to *Theravada bhikkhuni* in the past, and then the lineage has been revived in Sri Lanka by the support from their senior monks; and then to Thailand to establish the missing pillar of the fourfold Buddhist assembly and to stabilise the religion (pp. 57 – 69).

In October 2016, N also re-publicised their chanting book with a special cover of King Bhumibol's picture. Inside the book, there were special phrases to encourage Thai people to get over the mournful feeling and turn it into strength to conduct good deeds for the country, and a tribute to the King. The visual image on the first page of this re-printing chanting book reflects the King's cliché image which is commonly appreciated by Thais as it reflects his hard working moment in a remote rural area with a drop of sweat on the tip of his nose, a notebook on his left hand, his right hand with pencil ready to jot down the messages reported to him, a camera hanging on his neck and his attentive and thoughtful face. N's selected textual elements with italic traditional fonts are probably intended to lead the audience to step out of their grievance and inspired to follow his footsteps by doing good deeds for those who need help.

These three publications partially underline similar meanings of N's legitimacy portrayed via their Facebook website. The first publication 'Changing Attitudes Changing Life' highlighted N as a female religious community with qualified monastic members who faithfully train themselves according to the path of the Buddha. This is similar to that constructed via online. Whilst, N's chanting book with tributary words to the late King also reinforces their meaning as 'a *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai with loyalty to the Thai monarch', also similar to their online construction. Interestingly, their publication, 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*?' appears to the first time that they formally communicated their self-perception as 'a legitimated *bhikkhuni* community according to the Buddha's intention and who received legitimated ordination from (Sri Lankan) *Theravada* lineage' because they never explicitly constructed this via their Facebook website despite a few posts about their monastic members' visit to Lamphun to trace the existence of *bhikkhuni* in Lanna's (Chiang Mai) history

Figure 8.15 showing N's publications (Left) 'Changing Attitudes Changing Lives' reflecting ordained experiences of N's monastic members and *bhikkhuni*'s social contributions. (Middle) 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*'? explaining the importance and legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination (Right) N's chanting book with picture of King Rama IX on the cover with encouraging words for Thai people after his passing away'

8.3.1.B.iii   Participation in the public events

The last offline mode includes 4 occasions of their physical presence in the public sphere. The first time was in April 2017 when N's monastic members were walking for a 3.3 km[132] distance from their monastic resident at *Nirodharam* in Chomthong to Phra Tad Sri Chomthong temple to pay homage to Ven. Luang Phu Thong on the Thai New Year's occasion. This underlined N's close connection with and patronage from the well-known senior male monk in Chiang Mai.

Another public appearance was when their monastic members attended '*samijigam*' at *Wat Phra Singha* after the end of the Buddhist Lent in October 2017. This is considered as vital Buddhist ceremony especially for junior members of the *sangha* to ask for forgiveness from the senior *sangha* members. The presence of *Nirodharam*'s monastic members in this occasion clearly signifies them as part of the local monastic order in Chiang Mai performing due duty in the major Buddhist event.

Their most important presence in the public took place on December 25, 2017 when a group of 102 N's monastic members and newly ordained *samaneri* participated in the royal replica ceremony at Chiang Mai International Convention Center. Their intention was comparable to S's presence at the royal place on December 9, 2016 to pay homage to the

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[132] The distant between *Nirodharam* to *Wat Phra Tad Sri Chomthong*

royal urn. However, N opted to be low-profiled by their presence at local level and this marked N's first official participation in the public event as a legitimated institute-the biggest female cleric community in Chiang Mai. This is considered as a 'vital move' as the event was live broadcast through several TV channels nationwide – and the abbess knew that beforehand. Her decision to attend the royal replica cremation to present sandalwoods as final farewell to the late King is the way to communicate N's 'legitimacy' as a female Buddhist community in Chiang Mai who perform expected religious role in connection to the Thai Monarch (*Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani, 2017).

The last occasion was when a small group of N's monastic members including the abbess and other six *bhikkhuni* visited *Phra Tad Hari Phun Chai* temple and had *Dhamma* conversation with Lum Phun Provincial Patriarch. Their main purpose was actually to pay homage to the Buddha statue located in the old monastic hall of the temple, which they believed used to be a monastic residence of *bhikkhuni* in the ancient *Lanna* time.

These four occasions of their public presence and role performed by N's monastic members reflect their self-interpretation as 'legitimated *bhikkhuni* community' and conform with those communicated via their online FB as (i) a *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai with loyalty to the Thai monarch; (ii) a *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai supported by senior local monks as part of the local monastic order.

8.3.1.C. Comparative Multimodal Constructions

Nirodharam constructed similar and disparate meanings of their legitimacy via online and offline platforms. For similar meanings, N constructed five similar legitimated meanings via both platforms. However, only via their Facebook website that N constructed their legitimated meaning as an 'open religious community who welcome national and international audience'. Whilst, on a contrary, N did not underline their vital meaning as '*bhikkhuni* community according to the Buddha's intention who received legitimated ordination from (Sri Lankan) *Theravada* lineage via online construction, but only through their publication 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*?'

According to my interview with N's members[133], N did not extend invitation in English language via their offline channels like they do via FB although they actually welcome both Thai and non-Thai participants to their arranged activities. Despite this, the number of international participants in N's activities constantly increases over the past few years. Most of them joined these activities from words of mouth and some from information in the FB. In such case, it is clear that online platform plays complementary role to support offline activities (*Bhikkhuni* Worayani, 2017). N also opted to accommodate different needs and interests of various participant groups. For example, the abbess occasionally communicates in Northern dialect to accommodate lay participants who come from local vicinities in Chiang Mai and other Northern provinces during the *Dhamma* sessions to make 'Dhamma' easy and fun rather than sophisticated (Kamphu, 2017)

Another dissimilar meaning based on N's publication: 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*?' is N's explicit explanation on *bhikkhuni*'s legitimacy according to the Buddha's intention to establish *bhikkhuni* as the four members of his Buddhist community supported by the evidence that all of N's *bhikkhuni* received legitimated ordination from (Sri Lankan) *Theravada* lineage, which is excluded from N's FB construction. I see this publication indicates N's stance in relation to *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand after the reinforcement of the 1928 Decree in 2014 due to *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla. According to the abbess (2017), she mentioned that N was obliged to respond to societal queries about their existence and legitimated role in Thai Buddhism. N chose to communicate this clear stance via offline channel as it is the delicate issue and N wanted to educate the audience on this legitimacy issue by not opposing Thai religious authorities. As N's monastic members are taking care of N's printed media so they can closely look after the publicised substances.

N's dissimilar constructions via online and offline platforms also arise from judgements of their media producers to include or prioritise different published contents. N's offline channel which includes their traditional media are operated by N's monastic members and their professional lay media persons. Besides, it comprises religious activities arranged and performed mainly by N's abbess and her monastic members. Whilst, N's online construction-FB is mainly managed by N's FB admin and her team which includes the community's lay disciples who see the benefits of *Dhamma* teaching of N's abbess and would like to spread it to a broader-ranging audience via virtual platform. Unlike the offline

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[133] From my visit to N in 2017

platform, N's monastic members are totally excluded from communication through social media outlets[134] (See Chapter 5). Although, findings in Chapter 5 indicate that N's cleric and lay members share common understanding of the community's objective and mission, the choice of their media content at specific time could be different as they operate independently from each other. However, FB admin usually asks for the abbess' approval of content before posting it on the FB[135],

Despite the fact that N' online and offline communication platforms are operated independently by two different teams, they do supplement each other, especially on important themes or for especially important occasions. For example, while the FB did not directly mention N's legitimacy as 'legitimated *bhikkhuni* community according to the Buddha's intention who received legitimated ordination from (Sri Lankan) *Theravada* lineage, it has indirectly reinforced this legitimacy by posting images about *Bhikkhuni* existence in the old *Lanna*'s time. Also, because the online platform can reach a wider range of audience beyond geographical limits, it helps to widely spread the invitation and information about the offline activities which reinforces N's legitimated stance as 'an open religious community for national and international audience'. In this case, N's FB unites broad ranged members and serves as a communicative tool to achieve the religious goals (Prebish, 2004; Campbell, 2012).

Moreover, the dissimilar depictions between the online and offline constructions highlight Chadwick's (2017) 'hybrid media system' which pinpoints interactions among old and new media where N (re)negotiated their 'power' in the more interdependent and complex settings across traditional and new media convergence. Thus, N's access via traditional and digital platforms could also facilitate more participation, interaction and networking among broad-based communicators who share mutual attentiveness and interact via codes of conduct through technological mediation (Preece, 2000; Lee et al., 200; Zappavigna, 2012) in order to bring more comprehensive understandings on N's meanings of 'legitimacy'.

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[134] Including their Web, Facebook, Instagram
[135] To avoid the negative impact or unexpected consequences may occur

Table 8.1 (below) demonstrates comparative multimodal constructions of 'legitimacy' between *Songdhamamkalyani* and *Nirodharam* via their online and offline channels.

Community	Multimodal Constructions			
Platform	Online		Offline	
Similar / Varied	Similar	Varied	Similar	Varied
Songdhammakalyani	*Bhikkhuni* community performing cleric duties and showing loyalty to Thai monarch	(i) Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* supported by network of monastic members and laypeople worldwide; (ii) *Bhikkhuni* community in the spotlight of the media; (iii) Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* established by the Buddha's provision and through legitimated ordination; (iv) Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand' Constitution	The same five meanings of 'legitimacy' via their online construction with three similar offline means to N: (i)Arrangement of religious and non-religious activities; (ii) In-house publications; (iii) Participation in public events	(iv) participations in media programmes
Nirodharam		(i) Religious centre serving different groups of laypeople; (ii) *Bhikkhuni* community supported by senior male *sangha* and part of local monastic order; (iii) Open religious community welcoming wide-ranging audience; (iv) Role modelling community of *Dhamma* practice		Dissimilar meanings of legitimacy via online and offline constructions: Offline: N's publication: Why *Bhikkhuni*? claimed bhikkhuni 's legitimacy according to the Buddha's provision and legitimated ordination from Sri Lanka *Theravada* lineage. Online: The meaning of 'open religious community welcoming wide-ranging audience.

Table 8.1 representing of *Songdhammakalyani*'s and *Nirodharam*'s multimodal constructions of legitimacy via online and offline platforms

8.3.2.   How does the Interplay of Employed Modes Construct the

Bhikkhuni's Meanings of 'Legitimacy' Conflicting to the Mainstream Discourse?

This section responds to the affiliated question to understand how the interplay of modes constructs certain meanings of *Nirodharam*'s legitimacy which are conflicting to the mainstream discourse and helps to negotiate their 'legitimacy' in contemporary Thai Buddhism.

I will firstly present the aspects of their conflicting meanings to the mainstream discourse in 8.3.2.A; and then discuss how the interplay of employed resources are utilised to construct such meanings in 8.3.2.B.

8.3.2.A. N's meanings of legitimacy conflicting to the mainstream discourse

In reference to the rationales for *bhikkhuni* 'illegitimated status' in Thai Buddhism proliferated by the mainstream discourse (explained in 7.3.2.A), and from the analysis of *Nirodharam's* multimodal constructions of legitimacy (in 8.3.1), this section discusses *Nirodharam*'s meanings of legitimacy which are conflicting to the mainstream discourse in four aspects. These include their self-interpreted legitimacy as (i) a *bhikkhuni* community with legitimated ordination*;* (ii) a female *nak buat* community with qualifiead monastic members who fulfils functions of the Buddhist community similarly to the male *sangha,* (iii) a *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai who demonstrates loyalty to the Thai monarch and who forms a part of the Thai trinity and (iv) a female Buddhist community supported by senior male *sangha* as part of the local monastic order; which will be presented as follows.

8.3.2.A.i. A *Bhikkhuni* community with legitimated ordination

Nirodharam's publication 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*?' marked their first articulation of their public discourse regarding the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* communities in Thai Buddhism in 2016. The community intended to negotiate their pre-existing illegitimated and marginalized status by referring to historical Buddhist evidence mentioning there is no segregation of Buddhist sects in the Buddha's time; and the Buddha's permission to establish *bhikkhuni sangha* as part of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies. N also highlighted that *bhikkhuni sangha* is self-autonomous and governing entity which has never been discontinued in mainstream Buddhism but carried on in different Buddhist places with the same adherence to the 311 monastic rules similar to

Theravada bhikkhuni in the past. The community pointed out that this linkage has continued to *bhikkhuni* communities in contemporary interval who play a part to fulfil and stabilise Buddhism, including those existing in Thailand.

In this publication, N further emphasise their legitimacy through legitimated ordination firstly by senior *bhikkhuni*; and then senior *bhikkhu* from *Amarapura* Sect [*nikaya*]; and the ordinations were cordially attended by monastic members from the three sects of Sri Lankan *Theravada sangha*. This evidence clearly made up their legitimated status as '*bhikkhuni*' according to the *Vinaya.*

However, this conflicting meaning to mainstream discourse was only communicated via their publication without the reproduced message via online platform, which rather limited the extended impact of N's legitimated meaning only for those who exposed to this print media.

8.3.2.A.ii. A female *nak buat* community with qualified monastic members, who fulfils functions of the Buddhist community similarly to the male *sangha*

Nirodharam posed this meaning of their legitimacy through discursive strategy in negotiating with the mainstream discourse by avoiding their direct confrontation towards the religious authorities. N, instead, selected to massively demonstrate this through their cleric conducts and religious activities in 2012; and between 2016 and 2017, which were somewhat similar to what have been performed by male *sangha*. For example, in 2012, the community organized a *samaneri* ordination, a *Dhamma* camp, and a ceremony to bestow religious constructions at the community to celebrate the 2600th anniversary of the Buddha's victory over *Mara*. The *samaneri* ordination in this special offered woman similar opportunity to men in experiencing an ordained life. Also, between 2016 and 2017, the community arranged a number of special events including three *samaneri* ordinations, in addition to their usual *Dhamma* dissemination sessions by the abbess; their meditation and chanting sessions; and other usual merit making activities. Most remarkable is their attendance at the royal replica cremation ceremony of King Bhumibol. These activities were specifically arranged to contribute the merit to the late King after his passing away in October 2016 until his cremation in December 2017. It is common for the male sangha to lead or organize these kinds of activity but for a female cleric community, it is not usual and could raise a question of their legitimacy to do so.

N's FB admin also reinforced this conflicting meaning via their serial of postings via N's Facebook website during the same period, which render extended impact to a wider audience.

Another evidence showing N's attempt to negotiate with the mainstream discourse on this stance is through their publication 'Changing Attitudes Changing Life' publicized in 2012, which highlighted experiences of their monastic members after being ordained at the community and undergone intensive spiritual practices accordingly. These conform with the assigned duties of male and female clerics according to the Buddha's teachings. Similar to 8.3.2.A.i, *Nirodharam* did not reproduce these substances via online platform and this restricted the impact of this publication to only those having accessed to read through it.

8.3.2.A.iii *Bhikkhuni* community who demonstrates high loyalty to the Thai monarch and who performs function as one of the national Trinity

In their early years of establishment, *Nirodharam* gave less emphasis to communicate the legitimacy issue of *bhikkhuni* and *bhikkhuni* ordination. However, in recent years, they gradually constructed messages relating to their 'legitimacy' in negotiating with the prevailing discourse, mainly because they are obliged to answer the public's queries on this matter (*Bhikkhuni* Nandhayai, 2017)

Through offline multimodal construction, the community highlighted this significant meaning through their attendance in the royal replica cremation of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej in October 2017. N's onsite presence at the local public sphere is comparable to *Songdhammakalyani'*s onsite presence at the royal urn on 9 December 2016 in terms of their intention to perform cleric duty as related to the monarch and the nation's Trinity. This offline construction also marked the first official debut of *Nirodharam* to the Thai society - ten years after their monastic members were ordained in Sri Lanka and have been living as *bhikkhuni* community in Thailand. Their attendance conveyed their de-factor existence as *bhikkhuni* in the Thai Buddhism and their self-perceived legitimacy to perform cleric duty to make merit for the late King. This public presence also highlighted N's status as a representative of the Buddhist community who forms a part of the Thai Trinity consisting of the nation, the religion(s) and the monarch. I see this public premier tear down N's pre-existing stance to humbly live locally in own remote sphere; to be more open to and more accessible by the general public.

N's FB admin also reproduced this event via their Facebook in the same period which reinforced the public perception of their legitimated status as a *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai who, as a part of the nation's Trinity, has performed due cleric duty in connection to the Thai monarch.

8.3.2.A.iv A female Buddhist community supported by senior male *sangha* as part of the local monastic order

Nirodharam also draw attention to their knitted connection and support from the reputable high-ranking Thai *bhikkhu* in various occasions, particularly their ties with Ven. Luang Phu Thong - the abbot of Phra Tad Sri Chomthong temple in Chiang Mai, their participation in the *săa-mee-jì-gam* ceremony in the main hall of *Phra Singha* Temple with male *sangha* at the end of Buddhist Lent in 2017.

These contents were also selectively reposted through N's FB websites in various occasions across the same studied period. From these four meanings of their legitimacy which, to some extent, are conflicting with the mainstream discourse, I will proceed to discuss the interplay of modes in constructing these meanings.

8.3.2.B.   The Interplay of Modes

The conflicting meanings from 8.3.2.A are originally reflected via N's three offline means of communication: (i) arranged activities; (ii) publications; (iii) public participation and are recapitulated via *Nirodharam*'s Facebook website.

8.3.2.B.i. *Bhikkhuni* community with legitimated ordination

N's publication 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*? shed light on the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* from the Buddhist history. Mainly through linguistic elements, the audience could potentially be educated regarding the *bhikkhuni*'s legitimated status according to Buddhist historical evidence. The employed texts also play educative and informative roles in explaining how *bhikkhuni* from the legitimated *Theravada* lineage has been carried on until now and how the reconnection with the lineage from Sri Lankan *Theravada* is essential for the establishment of *bhikkhuni sangha*-the missing pillar of the fourfold Buddhist assembly- in Thai Buddhism. Linguistic resources are used to elucidate

misunderstanding about the absence of *bhikkhuni sangha* since the ancient India time as propelled by the mainstream discourses, particularly those which claimed that the male *sangha* had never been in charge of coaching *bhikkhuni* as *bhikkhuni* had never existed at all. However, through a written discourse, *Nirodharam* explained reason for this misunderstanding and further clarified a few other distorted messages found in the mainstream discourses. For example, about the proximity of the distance between the *bhikkhuni*'s and *bhikkhu's* monastic residence, the mainstream discourse would claim that this information is not available as there had never existed any *bhikkhuni sangha* even in the Buddha's time. But the abbess argued that the information was not available not because there had not been any *bhikkhuni,* but it was very little was recorded about them. To me, this reinforced the comment of S's abbess about the gender-prejudice or ignorance of (male) writers who recorded Buddhist history who tend to omit stories about the existence of *bhikkhuni sangha.*

8.3.2.B. ii. A female *nak buat* community with qualified monastic members who fulfils functions of the Buddhist community similarly to the male *sangha.*

Mainly through their employed visual, and gestural languages, N's monastic members were depicted as having similar monastic status and qualities as those of the male *sangha* in performing cleric duty, particularly during 2012; and between 2016 and 2017. These include employed visualizations depicting gestural and body languages as well as facial expression of the abbess giving monastic robe to the to-be-ordained women in the *samaneri* ordinations or conducting *Dhamma* sessions to lay people; N's cleric members receiving alms round and blessing lay people; their leading position in walking and sitting meditation; and the gathering of people to chant for the late King.

This legitimated meaning is evidenced through visual, gestural and spatial resources highlighting divergent groups of laypeople: children, women, men and the elders attending N's activities. This underlines people's recognition towards *Nirodharam* as 'female cleric community' performing similar role to the male *sangha* in Thai Buddhism. Verbal, visual and gestural resources were orchestrated in N's posting regarding Dhamma sessions proliferated by the abbess, mainly about practical paths to attain awakening stage [*nibbhana]* which is the ultimate goal in Buddhism. Such postings also prompted the audience's acceptance of *Nirodharam*'s 'current mission' in leading lay practitioners on the path led by the Buddha, which is similar to that of the *bhikkhu.*

Whilst, the depicted colours of their monastic robe in ochre, differentiated their status from lay people and clearly classified their monastic status as similarly obtained by the *bhikkhu*. Besides, this similar colour of the ochre robes worn by the *bhikkhuni* and *bhikkhu* in the religious ceremony at *Wat Phra Singha* also puts them under the same status as cleric members of the *sangha* in Chiang Mai. Whilst, the depiction of monastic necessities owned by newly ordained *samaneri* at *Nirodharam* classifies them as part of the Buddhist monastic members.

Gestures and facial expressions of N's monastic members while attending the royal cremation also portray proper and well-trained manner of qualified ordained persons as expected by the societal norms. Their gestural languages reflect how N's monastic members have been trained to be disciplined and tolerate in difficult circumstances; as highlighted by their walking in mindful manners in bare feet from the main road entrance in the mid-day's heat. Their hand gestures which clasped in front together with their lowering eye-gaze with no direct eye contact with people surrounding while waiting in a long queue before entering the replica cremation house clearly evidenced them as 'qualified' cleric members who have been consistently training themselves in the same way the male *sangha* are expected to be doing.

I additionally see that linguistic elements employed in N's publication 'Changing Attitudes Changing Life' aim to construct N's 'legitimacy' through experiences of their monastic members. Lexical choices elaborate experiences of their monastic members, particularly on how their lives have changed after ordination at *Nirodharam* where they have opportunity to study *Dhamma* in-depth and practice accordingly. These written texts are illustrated by photos of *bhikkhuni* wearing robes with tranquil gestures and smiling facial expression, highlighting N as a qualified female religious community who tirelessly train themselves along the Buddha's path.

8.3.2.1. iii. A *bhikkhuni* community who demonstrates loyalty to the Thai monarch and who forms a part of Thai Trinity

The portrayal of 102 *Nirodharam's* monastic members comprising of the existing *bhikkhuni* and *samaneri* as well as the newly ordained ones lining up in front of the Chiang Mai International Conference Centre with the same sacred colour as that of the *bhikkhu's* is sending a core message to the public about their existence as a female cleric community in Chiang Mai. Their similar uniform to that of the male monks' and their mindful gestural

languages while walking barefoot in the mid-day's heat into the replica cremation house, right after the line of male cleric members also underline *Nirodharam*'s 'legitimated status' as a part of the *sangha* in Chiang Mai as well as well as a part of the Thai Trinity-the nation, the religion(s) and the monarch. In this regard, they are considered as representatives from the religion who come into sight to make merit for the late King.

This substance was also reproduced via N's online platform with 21 images. A short text to inform the audience on this event and the interplay of visual, gestural and spatial elements underline N's loyalty to the King and present them as part of the Thai Trinity in this event. The recapitulated visualisations in addition to gestural, and spatial resources elements portray N's monastic members standing aside male and female officials from the Office of H.M. Principal Private Secretary who wore white cap and shirt with black trousers/ skirt and black armed band. These presents N as a religious institute in Chiang Mai performing cleric duty to the monarch. Whilst gestural elements of the royal officials who represented the Thai monarch in accommodating N's monastic members also signifies the connection between the two entities of the Thai trinity in this ceremony which is very important for the whole nation. Overall, the interplay of these resources clearly demonstrates the roles and interconnection between the three elements of the Thai Trinity, which when combined together in this event, helps to strengthen and unite the whole country together.

8.3.2.1. iv.   A female Buddhist community supported by senior male *sangha* as part of the local monastic order

For this last meaning, verbal, audio and spatial are utilised through offline and online constructions in accentuating N's legitimated status. Visual and gestural modes complement linguistics in portraying N as a female Buddhist community in Chiang Mai receiving support from senior local monks as part of the local monastic order while spatial portrays N's connection and unification with the male *sangha*.

N's FB admin reproduced this meaning via Facebook through 'live feature' and images to broadcast their knitted connection with highly respected monk Ven. Luang Phu Thong. His visit to *Nirodharam* in the bestowing celebration of N's new religious building depicted a warm welcome from N's monastic members and lay participants. From visualisations, Luang Phu Thong in his 90 years old was depicted to give a *Dhamma* speech to N's monastic and lay members, which reflects his warm support to *Nirodharam*. Simultaneously, verbal and audio modes helped the audience to understand the content when Luang Phu Thong

was praising that the existence of *Nirodharam* had completed the fourfold Buddhist assembly in Chiang Mai; and that *bhikkhuni sangha* who have both monastic disciplines [*Vinaya*] and beyond-worldly practices is the 'beauty' in Buddhism as also been praised by the Buddha in his time. Through the interplay of these resources, he discursively implies N's monastic members in acquiring such qualities.

Another occasion was the online construction of N's monastic members participating in the *săa-mee-jì-gam* ceremony in the main hall [*Ubasatha*] of *Phra Singha* Temple with the male *sangha* in Chiang Mai and the content was broadcast 'live' through FB live feature. After the live broadcast, a number of images are added to highlight the significance of this event. Firstly, if audience watched it live, the interplay of visual and gestural elements plays the most vital role in depicting N's legitimacy in performing ritual procedures in a similar way and at the same time and venue with the *bhikkhu sangha*. Through visual, gestural, and spatial resources, N's monastic members were not treated differently from a group of male *sangha*. Their sacred colour of robes also conveyed their 'uniformity' of the ordained persons, whilst, spatial resource highlighted this group of *bhikkhuni* as a freshly introduced members, contrasting to *bhikkhu sangha* who were depicted as the already dominating members. The distance between their seats differentiated them as the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* groups, yet the interplay of modes underlines the complementary roles between the two *sangha*, which make up the holistic picture of monastic order in Chiang Mai.

Last but not least, the interplay of modal resources in N's FB posting regarding their visit to *Wat Phra Tad Hari Phun Chai*, in Lumphun legitimated their official status as part of the local monastic order mainly through verbal, visual and gestural elements. The written discourse plays important role in underlining N's legitimacy in reference to the potential existence of *bhikkhuni* in the ancient Lanna time from the folk story. This meaning was complemented through visual and gestural elements in depicting N's monastic members in front of a place which is believed to be a former monastic resident of the *bhikkhuni* in that ancient time, as well as the image of they paying respect to and having a conversation with the provincial patriarch of Lamphun on this issue.These ensemble resources discursively pinpoint *bhikkhuni*'s legitimated status both from historical traces and presently as evidenced by the warm welcome of the provincial patriarch.

All in all, *Nirodharam*'s multimodal constructions of 'legitimacy' have been extended beyond the community's original objective stated as simple as 'to provide proper

environment for women to study *Dhamma* and practice spiritually to achieve awakening stage'. N's various aspects of 'legitimacy' via multimodal constructions, particularly the interplay of visual and gestural resources, which Chadwick (2017) called 'the hybrid of media system', clearly reflect *Nirodharam*'s calibres as qualified *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai who have worked as hard as the *bhikkhu sangha* to sustain and prosper Buddhism. N's engagement in leading different groups of laypeople in wide-ranging religious activities indicate 'recognition' and 'acceptance' of laypeople towards *Nirodharam.* In addition, N's mixed interplay of semiotic resources, mainly through non-verbal resources with a supplemented role of verbal elements unveil contradictory application to conventional semiotic productions of 'legitimacy', which at the large extent, relies on linguistics with subordianated role of non-verbal resources (Henderson, 2007; Schroder, 2013). Although, these visual and gestural resources require specific background knowledge and multimodal literacy to interpret and understand their specific connotations implied within Thai socio-cultural context, they mirror N's attempt to construct their 'legitimacy' with the audience in Thai society in negotiating with mainstream discourse and the absence of de-jour Thai *bhikkhuni* through their discursive legitimation strategy.

Table 8.2 (below) presents an interplay of modes in constructing meanings of *Nirodharam*'s legitimacy which are conflicting to the mainstream discourse.

No.	Mainstream Discourse	N's conflicting meanings	Interplay of Modes
Legitimacy Discourse	The current *bhikkhuni* communities are not considered as part of the official Thai monastic orders, but *bhikkhuni* according to 'foreign' traditions	Being (i) a *bhikkhuni* community with legitimated ordination; (ii) a female *nak buat* acquiring expected qualities and performed similar cleric duties to male *sangha*; (iii) a *bhikkhuni* community in Chiang Mai who forms a part of Thai trinity and with loyalty to the Thai monarch; (iv) a religious community supported by senior male *sangha* as part of local monastic order	<u>Visual and gestural elements</u> play the most salient role in constructing N's conflicting meanings to mainstream; <u>Verbal resources</u> are added to inform specific details of N's legitimated meanings
I.	Referring to the 1928 Decree by not allowing monks and novices to give ordination to women in Thailand; Reinforced in 2014 by the Thai Supreme *Sangha* Council to 'illegitimate' the *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla	-	(i)<u>Visual and gestural resources</u> illustrate N performing disparate monastic duties similar to their male *sangha*; N's qualified monastic manners; their loyalty to the late king and being a part of Thai Trinity; their close connection to senior high-ranking monk in Thailand; and their being part of the local monastic order
II.	Legitimated *bhikkhuni* ordination requires a conduct from both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha*; The lost lineage of *bhikkhuni* in *Theravada* Buddhism illegitimated the current status of the existing *bhikkhuni* in the country,	(i) no segregation of Buddhist sects in the past; the Buddha's permission is the ultimate message; (ii) *bhikkhuni sangha* has been carried out through history with the same adherence to the 311 monastic rules obtained by *bhikkhuni* in the past; (iii) their legitimated ordination by both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sangha* from Sri Lankan *Theravada*; (iv) their performing disparate cleric duties similar to those of male *sangha*	(ii)<u>Linguistics</u> educated audience regarding *bhikkhuni*'s legitimacy status according to Buddhist historical evidence; proliferated *Dhamma* essence disseminated by N's abbess; reflected N's monastic experiences and spiritual practices; depicted N's close connection to senior high-ranking monk in Thailand; and presenting N being part of the local monastic order (iii)<u>Spatial and audio resources</u> highlight N's loyalty to the late king and being a part of the local monastic order

Table 8.2 representing how the interplay of modes construct meanings of *Nirodharam*'s conflicting to mainstream discourse

8.3   Conclusion

This chapter aims to answer the second research question to explain how *Nirodharam* construct their 'legitimacy' mainly through online multimodal resources via their Facebook platform, and supplementarily through their offline multimodal constructions in the three major Buddhist events in 2012, 2014, and between 2016 and 2017. It also explores how they utilised the interplay of modal resources in constructing such meanings to negotiate with the mainstream discourse within the Thai socio-cultural context.

Nirodharam constructed their meanings of 'legitimacy' via Facebook platform in six aspects as (i) a female *nak buat* community with qualified monastic members who fulfils functions of the Buddhist community similarly to the male *sangha;* (ii) a *bhikkhuni* community who demonsrates loyalty to the Thai monarch and who performs function as one of the Thai Trinity; (iii) a religious centre serving different groups of laypeople; (iv) a *bhikkhuni* community supported by senior male *sangha* as part of the local monastic order; (v) an open religious community for both local and international audience; and (vi) a role modelling community of *Dhamma* practice to end sufferings. All of these are compatible with the meanings of their legitimacy as already discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Dissimilar constructions between online and offline also exist. Their self-interpreted legitimacy as 'a legitimated *bhikkhuni* community established by the Buddha who received legitimated ordination from Sri Lanka *Theravada* lineage' was constructed only via an offline platform, through the publication 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*?' and was not reproduced via N's FB. Whilst, the meaning as 'an open religious community for both local and international audience' was only proliferated via FB and was omitted through the offline channel.   Visual and gestural elements play the most salient role in constructing N's legitimacy meanings conflicting to the mainstream discourse while verbal resources are added to inform specific details of N's legitimated meanings.

In the next chapter, I proceed to the end of this thesis by providing a conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER IX: CONCLUSION

9.1   Introduction

This project aims to fill in the research landscape on multimodality studies by bringing the debates on 'legitimacy' into a local Thai context through the studies on *bhikkhuni* communities in Thai Buddhism. This final chapter brings together key findings in this project in responding to the two research questions: how do *bhikkhuni* communities interpret their 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication, and how does the interplay of modes construct meaning conflicting to mainstream discourse?

The research explores how the meanings of 'legitimacy' are interpreted and constructed by two *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand, namely *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam,* through multimodality. Thailand is the biggest (*Theravada*) Buddhist country and it is believed that the Buddha had allowed women to be ordained as members of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies to sustain Buddhism. However, currently, the existing *bhikkhuni* are not considered as part of the official Thai monastic order as chiefly demonstrated via the mainstream discourse of Thai religious authorities. The study refers to Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006), to (i) provide a comparative analysis on how notions of 'legitimacy' are interpreted and (re)disseminated; (ii) identify similar and disparate utilisation of employed multimodal resources in the meaning-making of 'legitimacy'; and (iii) find out how this study can link the ideas of 'multimodality' and 'legitimacy' in the localised Thai context.

The study mainly analyses the multimodal discourse of 'legitimacy' constructed via Facebook websites, excluding audience comments, in three major Buddhist events in 2012, 2014, and 2016 - 2017, in connection with their offline communication consisting of (i) publications; (ii) speeches; and (iii) activities organised and attended by them for the same timeline with complementary data of participatory observation, interview and focus group discussion with monastic and lay community members from a fieldtrip research in Thailand.

Section 9.2 provides an overview of the theoretical framework, methodology and key findings from the previous four empirical Chapters. Section 9.3 focuses on the project's original contributions to the existing literatures, as well as its practicality in supporting

further research in relevant scholastic fields. Section 9.4 further discusses project limitations and future research which could potentially stem from this study.

9.2. Summary of Key Findings

Findings from the project have shown how *bhikkhuni* communities employed multimodal means of communication via both a Facebook website and offline platform to construct their 'legitimacy' in negotiating with mainstream discourse. Major findings are summarised as follows.

9.2.1 Comparative Interpretations of 'Legitimacy'

Chapters 5 and 6 answer the first research question: How do *bhikkhuni* communities interpret their meanings of 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication; and its affiliated question: what are their comparative interpretations of 'legitimacy'? Key findings convey the two communities' dissimilar interpretations of their 'legitimacy' in the Thai socio-cultural context; which could be explained from different theoretical perspectives. Both communities also reflect paradoxical meanings according to the interpretations of *Theravada* and *Mahayana* Buddhism.

❖   **Interpretations of Legitimacy**

Songdhammakalyani claim their 'legitimacy' specifically as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community. *Nirodharam*, however, do not clearly identify themselves as Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*, but more broadly as *bhikkhuni* or female *nak-buat* who see threats of the reincarnation, and thus live a clerical life for pursuing spiritual practices towards the awakening stage. Both utilise mixed 'legitimation strategy' processes to authenticate their status.

They applied 'subjective legitimation' by referring to the Buddha's intention in establishing *bhikkhuni* as important members of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies, with designated duties to sustain Buddhism. Both refer to the rules and regulations of *Theravada* Buddhism, which trusts in what was originally provided for by the Buddha, including his permission for *bhikkhuni* ordination which has never been withdrawn. Both assert their 'legitimated ordination' from the Sri Lankan *Theravada* lineage which has been properly continued from the ancient *bhikkhuni* lineage in the time of the Buddha; and their complete ordinations from *bhikkhuni* and *bhikkhu sangha* in Sri Lanka.

Songdhammakalyani refer to the Thai Constitution and to international legal frameworks related to women's human rights to support their legitimacy. They claim the supposedly invalidated status of the 1928 Decree issued and reinforced by Thai religious authorities, which officially illegitimated their status as part of the Thai monastic order. Through the same 'subjective strategy', *Nirodharam* did not mention any legal structure in validating their status, but rather their strict adherence to the *Dhamma Vinaya* as the constitutional governing rules to follow. Both see the urgent necessity to have qualified *bhikkhuni sangha* in contemporary Thai society as a valid justification for their legitimacy. In addition, unlike *Songdhammakalyani*, *Nirodharam* at their early years, chose 'silent strategy' in legitimising their status by allowing people to experience them as 'legitimated female *nak-buat*' from their qualified adherence to the *Vinaya* than showing up in public domain for debating their 'legitimated status' as ' Thai *bhikkhuni*'.

Songdhammakalyani refer to the academic and professional background of their abbess, who has long been internationally well-known as a Feminist-Buddhist academic and as a trailblazer in the legitimacy issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination, with support from monastic and lay communities worldwide to reassure their legitimacy in establishing *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism. *Nirodharam*, for their part, pledge to the long-standing *mae-chi* experience and the strict practices according to the *Dhamma Vinaya* of their abbess, to exemplify how an ordained life could spiritually benefit a woman who wishes to follow the Buddha's path to end sufferings as well as to role-model the society as to how monastic disciplines could create tranquillity and render a more worthy status-quo amidst the faulty living conditions prevailing in lay society. *Nirodharam* also refer to the community's close-knit connection with and support from local high-ranking monks in validating their position through a 'subjective strategy'.

Both additionally employ an 'objective legitimation' strategy. *Songdhammakalyani* underline their social commitment and contribution by (i) adopting a 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' approach, which goes beyond confined monastic duties, and (ii) establishing and strengthening *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism and worldwide. *Nirodharam* see their 'legitimated' status as being automatically guaranteed by how much they have contributed to Thai society, particularly within the confined boundary of monastic duties.

❖ **Paradoxical Meanings:** *Theravada* **vs** *Mahayana* **Through Multimodal Monastic Elements**

Despite asserting their legitimacy as the first Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community, *Songdhammakalyani* indicate mere *Mahayana* rather than *Theravada* meanings as signified by their monastic elements. Their monastic title literally means 'the place where women perform *Dhamma* practices', yet they define the term '*Dhamma* practices' as going beyond their confined monastic duties, as reflected in their primary objective to embrace 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' to help uplift people from their difficult circumstances and suffering, as best they are able to do so. This conforms to the *Mahayana* principle focusing on 'helping others to attain *Nibbhana* before yourself'. This is also reflected in *Songdhammakalyani*'s more flexible governing approach and financial administration in allowing monastic members to engage with financial management for good purposes; including their monastic constructions presented in their community: the Medicine Buddha and *Bodhisattva* pond which are well in keeping with the *Mahayana* concept.

Similarly, although *Nirodharam* have not explicitly identified themselves either as *Theravada* or *Mahayana bhikkhuni*, the community reflect more *Theravada* elements through their verbal resource of their community's titles: *Nirodharam* and *Suddhajit* which mean: 'the place to end sufferings', and 'the purified soul'. These clearly represent the community's objective of providing a proper place for women to practice spiritually to end sufferings, which is considered as the ultimate goal in *Theravada* Buddhism. Besides, their monastic constructions and materials evidenced through visual, spatial and temporal elements, namely the *Dhammacakka* wheel, *Buddha Jayanti Chedi* and the Buddha *Sihingkha* statue, all coherently represent the community's highest respects to the Buddha, which is the core element of *Theravadins.* Their financial administration, which strictly restrains monastic members from engaging with money matters, is likewise based on *Theravada* principles.

The geographical locations of both communities as exemplified through spatial and temporal elements signify their importance according to Buddhist history in Thailand. *Songdhammakalyani*'s venue in Nakhon Pathom signifies the golden area where the two Buddhist envoys from Sri Lanka landed to situate Buddhism in Southeast Asia in the ancient Suvarnabhumi period. *Nirodharam*'s location in Chiang Mai is a part of the ancient

Lanna state where Buddhism had been firmly settled and prosperous in the past, and where a number of notable monks in contemporary Thai Buddhism reside.

❖ **Gender Perspectives**

Songdhammakalyani resort to Feminist Buddhism as mirrored in the community's objective, highlighting the need to establish, legitimise, and stabilise the status of Thai *bhikkhuni* in Thai Buddhism as an important step to promote gender equality in the religious realm from which women have long been excluded. *Nirodharam* interpret their legitimacy from a gender- complemented role, similarly to what has been commonly depicted and practised among their Asian counterparts. As they see it, being ordained as *bhikkhuni* helps to fulfil specific religious functions which cannot be satisfactorily performed by male monastic members, as according to the *Vinaya*, *bhikkhu* have been instituted to specifically support laymen, whereas *bhikkhuni* are there to spiritually support laywomen.

Songdhammakalyani mention certain aspects of male patriarchy that are concretised in Thai society through textual misinterpretation from the Pali scriptures into Thai Buddhist-related textbooks and documents, which to a large extent mislead public understandings and obstruct the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* ordination in the country. *Nirodharam*, however, did not mention male patriarchy or gender prejudice as a root cause in obstructing the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination. They manifest their courteously humble approach towards Thai Buddhist monks, particularly the high-ranking ones in Chiang Mai to whom they are indebted for their utmost support since the early years of the community's establishment, despite their lack of official status as part of the Thai monastic order. They see that *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* are brothers and sisters with complementary roles in sustaining the religion.

Both mentioned the crucial necessity of having Thai *bhikkhuni* communities in contemporary Thai society. *Songdhammakalyani* refer to the emerging needs for female clerics to respond to the issue of declining faith among Thai Buddhists due to the male *sangha*'s misconduct. *Nirodharam* asserted that their functional basis as *bhikkhuni* and lay women are just as important as *bhikkhu* and laymen in forming the four-fold Buddhist assemblies and perpetuating the religion as intended by the Buddha. When it comes to the ability to attain the awakening stage, both agree that women and men have an equal spiritual ability to practise according to the noble truths, regardless of biological distinctions.

❖ **Multimodal Means of Communication and Policies in Engaging with Mainstream Media**

For their re-dissemination of 'power structure' and 'knowledge' in a horizontal/bottom-up domain (Kress,2010), both apply multimodal means of communication, including social and traditional media in constructing their 'legitimated' status. Their offline channels include publications, personal communications, radio programmes, audio CDs, library, and religious events whereas their online platforms are website, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram (recently added by *Nirodharam*). These demonstrate their 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick, 2017), underlining their (re)negotiation of 'power relations' in the more interdependent and complex settings across traditional and new media convergence.

Songdhammakalyani's media team, comprising a small number of professional media staff who previously worked in journalism and broadcasting fields, is considered more committed and pro-active in producing media substances. *Nirodharam*'s team is bigger, consisting of professional staff and volunteers working on new media. The contents across media platforms are not necessarily similar as the two teams work independently but, in some cases, reinforce each other.

For their traditional platforms both emphasize personal communication by their charismatic leaders, whose different backgrounds influence the unique characteristics of their speech and essences of *Dhamma* dissemination given on various occasions. They also relied on in-house publications as a principal communication channel, before the emergence of social media. Most of *Songdhammakalyani*'s publications are for sale, while those of *Nirodharam* are for free.

As with other religious communities worldwide (Campbell, 2012), after the emergence of social media, Facebook has become their main online communication platform, whilst their web 2.0 and YouTube are occasionally updated, similarly to those that are a common part of Thailand's media landscape (Somkiat and Worapoj, 2010). They originally aimed to utilise social media to complement conventional media, yet their specific objectives in utilising FB are not identical. *Songdhammakalyani* see FB as a means to update community activities and to exchange opinions on emerging religious and secular issues, whereas *Nirodharam* rely on FB to promote the community's *Dhamma* dissemination, and they were ahead in utilising this platform in 2010 while *Songdhammakalyani* started their Facebook in 2012. Although both see the advantage of Facebook in facilitating real-time

and interactive communication with their virtual members (Zappavigna, 2012), *Songdhammakalyani* is relatively more advanced in using this platform through a variety of contents and committed authorship.

Songdhammakalyani selected virtual members who are Thais living all over the world by regularly monitoring their responses and reactions, thus managing to 'unfriend' non-responsive members so as to maintain the good number of their FB followers. *Nirodharam* chose to create their FB page to allow an unlimited number of audience members to access the community's *Dhamma* messages. Their first postings both matched well with their fundamental purposes in utilising FB.

Songdhammakalyani's Facebook administrator is Khun Kanjana Suthikul, a lay assistant of the abbess who works full-time to collaborate with the abbess on the production of online contents as well as other of S's media outlets. Meanwhile Khun Kamphu, a Yoga teacher and the abbess' longstanding disciple, is a voluntary administrator of *Nirodhram*'s Facebook. Although *Nirodharam*'s monastic members work closely with a professional media team to produce their traditional media contents, they are not allowed to take part in the production or administration of social media as it might have detrimental effects of their clerical lives.

However, the different backgrounds of their abbesses lead to differences in their communication strategies in engaging with mainstream media. *Songdhammakalyani* have consistently taken advantage of being in the media spotlight by accommodating and participating in diverse national and international media programmes for interviews, discussions, documentation, and reporting on the community's issues in order to raise their voices over the legitimacy issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand. *Nirodharam* in the early years chose to stay low-profiled and avoided being engaged in mainstream media programmes whose content related to the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand. However, after their firm establishment, N's abbess recently adjusted their communication strategy so as to engage with a broader audience through their participation in public events and media programmes on selected occasions.

All in all, these two communities selectively legitimated their status through the on-going power that already established by their older media platforms including personal communication of the abbess, their in-house publications and activities. Whilst they opted

to intermingle the co-existence of their social media platform in this case is the Facebook in extending significances in Thai Buddhism via this virtual space.

9.2.2 Multimodal Constructions of 'Legitimacy'

Chapters 7 and 8 further provide answers to the second research question: how do *bhikkhuni* communities construct their 'legitimacy' through multimodal means of communication? and affiliated question: how does the interplay of modes construct to their meanings of 'legitimacy' conflicting to mainstream discourse? Major findings are as follows.

❖   **Multimodal Constructions of 'Legitimacy'**

Some of *Songdhammakalyani*'s and *Nirodharam*'s interpretations of 'legitimacy' via the Facebook platform are similar, while the rest vary to a certain degree, reflecting the differences in their primary objectives.

Both commonly consider themselves as a legitimated *bhikkhuni* community in Thailand as they strictly adhere to the clerical duties and demonstrate loyalty to the nation's Trinity. This is elaborated by *Songdhammakalyani*'s self-construction as the 'Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* who performed clerical and beyond-clerical duties with loyalty to the Thai monarch', while *Nirodharam* describe themselves as the '*bhikkhuni* community who demonstrates high loyalty to the Thai monarch and who performs function as one of the national Trinity' and 'female *nak-buat* having qualified monastic members who perform similar clerical duties to male *sangha.*'

For different interpretations, *Songdhammakalyani* have portrayed themselves as (i) Thai *bhikkhuni* supported by a network of monastic members and laypeople worldwide'; (ii) Thai *bhikkhuni* community in the spotlight of the media; (iii) Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* established by the Buddha's provision and through legitimated ordination; and (iv) Thai *bhikkhuni* under Thailand's Constitution. *Nirodharam* additionally have constructed their 'legitimacy' as: (i) a religious centre serving different groups of laypeople; (ii) a *bhikkhuni* community supported by senior male *sangha* as part of the local monastic order; (iii) an open religious community welcoming a local and international audience; and (iv) a role-modelling community of *Dhamma* practice to end sufferings.

Via offline channels, *Songdhammakalyani* constructed the same aforementioned meanings of 'legitimacy' via four means of communication: (i) arrangement of religious

and non-religious activities; (ii) their in-house publications; (iii) their appearance at and participation in public events; and lastly (iv) their participations in media programmes. The constructions of *Nirodharam*'s legitimacy via online and offline platforms are somewhat dissimilar. It was only through its publication 'Why do we have to have *Bhikkhuni*?' that *Nirodharam* claimed themselves as a 'legitimated *bhikkhuni* community established according to the Buddha's provision who received legitimated ordination from the Sri Lanka *Theravada* lineage'. This meaning was not reproduced via their Facebook website. Rather, the meaning of an 'open community who welcome a local and international audience' was proliferated only via their Facebook and was not made explicit through their offline construction.

This discrepancy could be caused by the fact that N's online and offline media teams are separate groups who work independently from each other with different priorities and media content. *Nirodharam* constructed their legitimacy via three means of offline communication, including (i) arrangements for religious activities; (ii) their publications; and (iii) their participation in public events.

❖   **Interplay of Employed Semiotic Resources**

Via online platforms, *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* utilised all five semiotic modes in constructing their 'legitimacy' and selectively prioritized modes which are 'apt' in relation to their own interpretations of 'legitimacy' aimed to be perceived by their Facebook audience. *Songdhammakalyani* mainly rely on the linguistic mode through forms of written texts and speech discourse; complemented by visual and gestural representations as the two second prioritized modes to debate on the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism. *Nirodharam* rely rather on visual and gestural representation to highlight their roles as part of the Buddhist community.

Songdhammakalyani utilised linguistics as the most vital mode in legitimising their status as a Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni* community established according to the Buddha's provision, with specific references to Buddhist historical evidences and legal frameworks to justify their legitimated status. It is also used to inform specific details of their social contributions through religious and non-religious activities, including those related to the late King (Rama IX); the community's active movement towards the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla; as well as specific information about the particular events and incidents performed and attended by them, which could be simultaneously

perceived aurally through their live feature (Weber, 1964; Henderson, 2007; Van Leeuwen, 2007 and Schroder, 2013). *Nirodharam* use fewer verbal resources and only provide short written texts to precisely inform the audience on their certain monastic functions. They occasionally utilise a live feature, comprising linguistics, along with aural, visual, gestural and spatial modes to broadcast *Dhamma* dissemination by the abbess or discourse by the high-ranking monk to authenticate their legitimated status as a member of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies who perform clerical duties with support from senior monks in Chiang Mai.

Both utilised visual and gestural resources to reinforce what have already been constructed via the verbal mode in exemplifying their performing clerical and beyond-clerical duties in connection with the Thai monarch, and their upholding of the values of the Thai Trinity of which they form a part. Visual and gestural elements also underline *Songdhammakalyani*'s close-knitted connection with a foreign network of monastic and lay people to advocate the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni sangha in* Thai Buddhism; and their participations in various media programmes to give voice over the legitimacy issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thai Buddhism; as well as their proactive movement on the legitimacy issue of the 2014 *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla. Likewise, these modal resources highlight *Nirodharam*'s ties with the highly respected monks and their legitimated status as part of the monastic order in Chiang Mai. In addition, a spatial mode is added by both communities to highlight the two communities' social relations, interactions and power structures as depicted between 'represented participants' in the scenarios, including their monastic and lay community members, state and religious authorities, high-ranking male *sangha*, media persons, as well as their network arising from both international and local spheres.

As there are as many as 5,000 Facebook followers on each community's FB platform, the interplay of employed semiotic resources across 'digital' and 'traditional Buddhism' could provide pervasive and extended impacts for the Thai and Buddhist audience. First it could reach a wider range of audiences within and outside Thailand. The online platform has potentially reinforced their 'legitimacy' already constructed via offline platforms by providing real-time features with clear elaborations and potential exchange of information among virtual members (Prebish, 2004; Campbell, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012). This digital platform could potentially expand coverage of the two communities' audience, as those who participate in offline activities could as well be convinced to engage in their online platforms afterwards. And on the reverse side, the interplay of employed resources

via online could motivate the FB audience to take part in their offline activities. Through both means, *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* could gradually extend their network and services to a wider range of beneficiaries within and outside the country. Thus, in these possible ways, the interplay of multimodal resources across platforms could render their sustainability as a 'female Buddhist community' in Thai Buddhism in the long run, by the dynamic of the re-production and reinforcement of their meanings of 'legitimacy'.

9.3. Originality and Contributions

My project is original and has contributory value; it helps to shed light on the existing literatures on multimodality studies and *bhikkhuni* studies in contemporary Thai Buddhism; as well as the practicality of multimodality as an analytical research tool in understanding communication and the meaning-making process.

9.3.1 Original Contributions to the Existing Literatures

Given that multimodality has been increasingly referred to as a sufficient analytical framework in understanding communication in the 21st century at global landscape, my project aims to investigate how the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in contemporary Thai Buddhism have endeavoured to construct their 'power structure' with their own interpreted meanings of 'legitimacy', through their own semiotic productions to negotiate with the mainstream discourse via their online and offline multimodal constructions.

My project is the first which contributes to the existing literatures in exploring the issue of *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thai Buddhism through a multimodal lens. Currently, there are no adequate studies illustrating how multimodality could be rendered as a comprehensive lens in understanding the complexity of *bhikkhuni* ordination and their legitimacy. Most of the existing ones are explored from historical Buddhism (Seeger, 2008), ethnographic and gender perspectives (Tomalin, 2006; Varaporn, 2006; Lai, 2011; Delia, 2012; Itoh, 2013; Kakanang, 2018), and as psychological and educational studies (Manita, 2017). None has focused on the application of multimodality analysis via both online and offline platforms. Although there are some communication studies using discourse analysis (Wutthichai, 2007; Pongphan; 2017), they are mainly text-based and documentary-based with non-involvement of any multimodal approach or of intensive online media analysis. My research is the very first to fill in the landscape on *bhikkhuni*

studies in Thai Buddhism using a comparative multimodal analysis approach on the two most prominent *bhikkhuni* communities: *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam.* A few other studies on these two communities have been conducted from disparate perspectives, which overlook investigations on *bhikkhuni*'s digital platform (Ito, 2012; Kakanang, 2018). Findings from my project shed light on their comparative interpretations as well as multimodal constructions of their 'legitimacy' including an application of multimodality as research methodology.

More importantly, the existing literatures mainly explore *bhikkhuni*'s 'power structure' from a vertically top-down or institutionalized point of view (Varaporn, 2008; Ito, 2012), mentioning their non-official status in Thai Buddhism due to the reinforcement of the 1928 Decree; and particularly, the rigid nature of the monastic order, historically and traditionally influenced by the male dominant *sangha,* as a major constraint to institutionalise fully ordained female monasticism in Thai Buddhism. This is in contradiction to the fact that there currently exist almost 300 *bhikkhuni* living individually or as a community scattered all over Thailand. The gender consideration in existing literatures also views Thai women's predominant role in Buddhism in connection with their traditional household roles, or women wishing to enter monastic life could be allowed to live as *mae-chi*. Thus, my research fills in this missing landscape by unveiling an endeavour of the existing *bhikkhuni* communities in constructing their own 'power' from a horizontal/bottom-up domain in negotiating with the prevailing mainstream discourse through multimodal means of communications across their own social media and traditional media platforms.

The findings also further extended impacts of the pre-existing literatures, which mentioned global strategy, particularly transnational Buddhist Feminist network on the empowerment of Buddhist women locally in a campaign to revive *bhikkhuni* tradition (see Tomalin, 2009). My project unveils how *Songdhammakalyani* and *Nirodharam* additionally referred to other local legitimation strategies as an empowering process to counterbalance the prevailing gender inequality, as well as to enhance women's human rights and social status in contemporary Thai Buddhism.

My project additionally responds to the pre-existing conclusion on the revival of *bhikkhuni sangha* in Thai Buddhism mentioning a broad consensus and rethinking on the part of all parties involved, as well as the non-necessity of introducing Thai '*bhikkhuni*' as long as the

existing female clerics could more or less fulfil *bhikkhuni*'s monastic duties (Seeger, 2008). Findings from my project reflect how the two *bhikkhuni* communities go beyond these conclusions to seek to find their own solutions by negotiating their 'legitimated status' through multimodal resources and communication, particularly in helping laywomen within confined monastic and beyond monastic roles in complement male *sangha*. Both also propelled the non-necessity of their institutionalized legitimated status but social recognitions of Thai and Buddhists as a whole. More importantly, my project underlined the changing strategies applied by these two communities in engaging with different parties to negotiate their legitimacy within the Thai society.

Additionally, at the broader global scale, there is currently no multimodality research which mentions the tri-angular interdependence between 'multimodality', 'legitimacy' (Zaytoon, 2017; Mikkola, 2017; De Vaujany and Vaast, 2018) and marginalised female religious communities. Likewise, the existing multimodality studies in the Thai context are very scarce and predominantly conducted through 'multimodal discourse analysis' and fail to explore integrated multimodal texts available via online and offline media channels; nor its application as research methodology (Knox et al.,2011; Benjawan, 2016). Most studies appear to provide analytical arguments retrieved mainly from online multimodal resources, not to explore the interplay of modes within and across platforms. Although some studies related to Buddhist monks have explored how multimodal communication was integrated as strategies in engaging lay Buddhists for *Dhamma* practice and religious activities (Taylor, 2003; Prebish, 2004; Kim; 2005; Intra-Udom, 2013; Praditsilpa, 2014; Saisena, 2016), none of these have raised the significance of how multimodality is employed to construct the 'legitimacy' of *bhikkhuni* communities who are considered as a non-mainstream female Buddhist group in Thai Buddhism. From the missing landscape, my interdisciplinary research proves its originality as the first project to use multimodal analysis to make a comparative study on how *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand use multimodality via their online and offline constructions in the meaning-making of their 'legitimacy'.

This study sheds light on 'multimodality' studies towards the changing landscape of social media communication and the existing impact of traditional media in Thailand which will enhance the knowledge on (i) potential meanings of employed multimodal semiotic resources in the meaning-making of *bhikkhuni*'s 'legitimacy'; and (ii) the inter-semiotic relationships across online and offline platforms in constructing such meanings in the

localized Thai context. Furthermore, the project extensively broadens the knowledge on the studies of *bhikkhuni* communities in contemporary Thai society, especially in reflecting the comparative pictures of how the de-facto *bhikkhuni* communities, exemplified by the first and the largest ones, engage with different actors via online and offline platforms in negotiating their legitimacy with the mainstream discourse. Precisely, my project underlined how these *bhikkhuni* communities perceive themselves within their own semiotic production and try to communicate this meaning via variety of media – online and offline platforms. It additionally promotes dialogues and discussions on how 'legitimacy' is constituted through multimodality, particularly on how their employed legitimation strategies could bring better understandings to the studies on multimodality, gender, and Buddhism within the Thai ethnographic community. Last but not least, my project paves the way for further research on how multimodality creates social recognition, particularly on the 'legitimacy' issue in the contemporary Thai as well as global context. In addition to the *bhikkhuni*-related issue, it could potentially be applied to the study of other marginalised groups in Thailand, Southeast Asian countries or other relevant socio-cultural context.

9.3.2. Practicality

Findings in this research accentuate the significance of multimodality at least in four facets. Firstly, multimodality is recognised as a structure in interpreting and understanding communication and discourse via divergent employed semiotic resources beyond traditional forms of linguistics and visualisation. It renders ample room for communicators to construct and reinforce their discourse with more modal resources: visual, verbal, gestural, audio, and spatial in the meaning-making process. Hence, multimodality can serve as a robust communication lens for the 21st century as it offers analytical perspectives on what multimodal resources are brought together and made to interact for a variety of potential meanings.

Secondly, multimodality is referred to as a comprehensive lens in analysing communication across both conventional and new media platforms. In order to understand the complex social phenomenon, multimodal resources are applied to provide deeper and well-rounded perspectives across communication platforms in order to avoid the incomplete interpretations and partial conclusion on the studies. In addition, a multimodality research technique, comprising a wide range of research tools as applied

in this project, has adequately provided information on the complex issues addressed by the research questions from well-rounded perspectives. The technique also exposes the researcher to a wider coverage of information which cannot be covered by one single research method.

Besides, multimodality is required as an analytical tool in understanding and interpreting how 'power structures' are relocated through multimodal discourse by different parties including mainstream media persons, authorities and individuals in a more participatory dimension (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Additionally, it renders interlocutors, particularly those who are marginalised or non-mainstreamed who generally lack space in the traditional media world to communicate their own discourse in order to (re)negotiate their 'power structure' and knowledge conflicting with those of the mainstream in a more horizontal domain with the engagement of a broader-based audience.

Findings from this project could be practically applicable as a guideline for researchers, media producers, communicators or parties involved on the validity and inclusive consideration of multimodal elements in communication. The project shows that linguistics, visualizations and gestural elements are the most salient modes in constructing the two communities' legitimacy, whilst aural and spatial modes are complementarily added to highlight what has already been constructed by these aforementioned modes. Linguistics communicated as written texts via their publications or Facebook posts, and as speeches via the abbess's personal communications, clearly validate the two communities' self-perception as 'legitimated members' of the fourfold Buddhist assemblies by the Buddha's provision; and their legitimated status as clerical members to fulfil the functions of the Buddhist community as identified in the scripture. Visual and gestural modes are employed to exemplify and depict their performance and contributions according to clerical and beyond-clerical duties, and also to reinforce the messages already authenticated by verbal resources. Most importantly, the project elucidates the (re)negotiation of power structures; and proposes the grammar of sign-making within that specific socio-cultural context of Thai Buddhism, as already mentioned by Kress (2006) and O'hallan (2006). Besides, their adoption of 'hybridity media systems' by embracing the online in addition to the existing traditional offline channel is advantageous in reinforcing their messages to a broader audience and paving the way for their actual participation in religious activities onsite. As the two communities construct

their legitimacy with varied themes and prominent modal resources, the knowledge and competence of Facebook administrators are therefore very important. Firstly, they have to be mindful about the rise of digital media, its differentiated role from traditional media, as well as its significance as an influential communication platform. Secondly, they need skills in utilizing more modal resources which matter in developing meaning and which could be comprehensively interpreted within a certain socio-cultural setting, (Adami and Kress, 2014) in order to articulately communicate their meanings of legitimacy and negotiate with mainstream discourse for their 'official' status. Finally, they need to understand well the context in which the message is communicated, as multimodality promotes dialogues and discussions about how meaning is constituted and communicated across modes in a particular societal context, among people within the same speech and ethnographic community.

Last but not least, my research also paves the way for further implementations in gradually removing the existing constraints that obstruct the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* in the Thai context. Chapters 1 and 3, indicate Thailand's endeavour at structural level in complying with different strategies in promoting gender equality as we can see from Thailand constitution, National Development Plan, MDGs or SDGs. Particularly, the SDG5 aims for 'ending all forms of discriminations against women and girls everywhere' with one of the indicators on the legal framework to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex. My study revealed the equal roles played by *bhikkhuni* communities in serving the Thai society similar to those of male *sangha*. This is considered as a solid ground that could pave the way for further dialogue or negotiations discussing about the existing legal constraints at the state, religious levels that obstruct *bhikkhuni*'s legitimacy. And from this point, it could be further explored how these factors could be eradicated/ removed, in the long run. My research could potentially help strengthening debates concerning the necessity of *bhikkhuni* in Thai society and eventually shed light on the legitimacy and official status of Thai *bhikkhuni* in contemporary Thai Buddhism.

All in all, the project underlines its authenticity and value of multimodality studies, particularly on how multimodal constructions are utilized through varied legitimation strategies and gender ideologies by a marginalized female group in constructing their legitimated meanings of '*bhikkhuni nak-buat*' who sustain Buddhism locally in the contemporary Thai context.

9.4.   Limitations and Further Research

Limitations of this project can be explained in three aspects which can also pave the way for future studies in relevant fields. These limitations include: (i) the limited number of *bhikkhuni* communities to serve as case studies; (ii) the non-specific focus on particular modal resources for specific functions; and (iii) the exclusion of audience analysis. Ideally, the project would have benefited from: (i) an addition of more *bhikkhuni* communities as a case study in an extended timeframe; (ii) a focus on specific modal resource(s) for specific function(s) in extended social media platforms; and (iii) an addition of audience-based research. Owing to the limitation of the timeframe for my PhD project,however, I have scoped down the research to focus on the two selected *bhikkhuni* communities in Thailand; and have collected data across timelines of the three major Buddhist events: the 2012 *Buddha Jayanti*, the 2014 *bhikkhuni* ordination in Songkhla; and finally, between 2016 and 2017, the Royal funeral and cremation ceremonies of King Rama IX. For possible future projects, the collection of data from more *bhikkhuni* communities with different backgrounds and approaches, and with an extended timeframe since the beginning of their Facebook emergence until recently, could provide more varied and dynamic results on how multimodality is utilised in the meaning-making of *bhikkhuni's* 'legitimacy' to negotiate with mainstream discourse in the Thai context. This future data collection and analysis could potentially be applied for further 'corpus' research on multimodality, which could pave the way for marginalised groups in re-disseminating their 'power structures' to negotiate with mainstream discourse. And this is particularly applicable to similar researches conducted in the context of other Buddhist countries and other Asian peers who share somewhat similar historical and cultural backgrounds on the issue of *bhikkhuni/ bhikkhuni* ordination.

Secondly, this project currently explores the overall utilisations of multimodal resources via multimodal means of communication employed to construct the meanings of *bhikkhuni*'s 'legitimacy', and the interplay of employed semiotic resources within and across platforms by not emphasising the specific modal resources for their specific function(s) or employed in specific scenario(s). The future research could potentially choose to focus only on specific aspect(s) of how specific employed resources (for example, the interplay of non-verbal resources, including facial expressions, gaze; or aural resources, such as voice qualities, intonations or music scores) could potentially authenticate *bhikkhuni*'s 'legitimacy' via their Facebook constructions, or optionally via

other social media platforms which are significant in contemporary Thailand's media landscape, at the time of carrying out this research.

Last but not least, the findings from this project are limited within the scope of *bhikkhuni*'s (self)constructions of their 'legitimacy' by not including audience feedback or the media impact. Based on the empirical findings in this project, it is worthwhile to further explore how multimodal resources employed via online and across their offline multimodal means of communication, could be comprehensively interpreted among audiences in Thai society who share common socio-cultural backgrounds and have multimodal literacy to read, interpret, and understand the author's motivations through these employed resources. Such motivations are believed to be socially and culturally shaped and developed over time within the Thai Buddhism context (Kress, 2004; van Leeuwen, 2005; Kress, 2006; Bezemer, 2012), which is also attributed to the 'power structure' (Vannini, 2007). To a greater extent, future research could also be amplified so as to explore the functions of the 'virtual Buddhist community' as realised by *bhikkhuni* communities through interaction, exchanging of knowledge, educational and cultivating forums among virtual members on the legitimacy issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand (Prebish, 1999; Preece, 2000; Lee et al., 2003; Kim, 2005; Campbell, 2012). Most importantly, the future research could also be designed to investigate how multimodality could contribute to the social recognition in Thai society of the 'legitimacy' issue of *bhikkhuni* communities in contemporary Thailand, which will reflect how successful multimodality could promote the bottom-up insurgency of the marginalised group in re-disseminating their own power structure which conflicts with those of the mainstream (Stork ,2011, Wilson et al., 2012; Salter, 2013;Mikkola, 2017; Zaytoon, 2017; De Vaujany and Vaast, 2018) as exemplified by the case of the de-facto Thai *bhikkhuni*. All in all, this future research will validate investment in multimodality studies as an essential analytical lens, not just in enhancing understanding of communication and of meaning-making in the 21st century, but also in alleviating the prevailing socio-cultural factors which have excluded Thai women from monastic life and illegitimated their official status as Thai *Theravada bhikkhuni*.

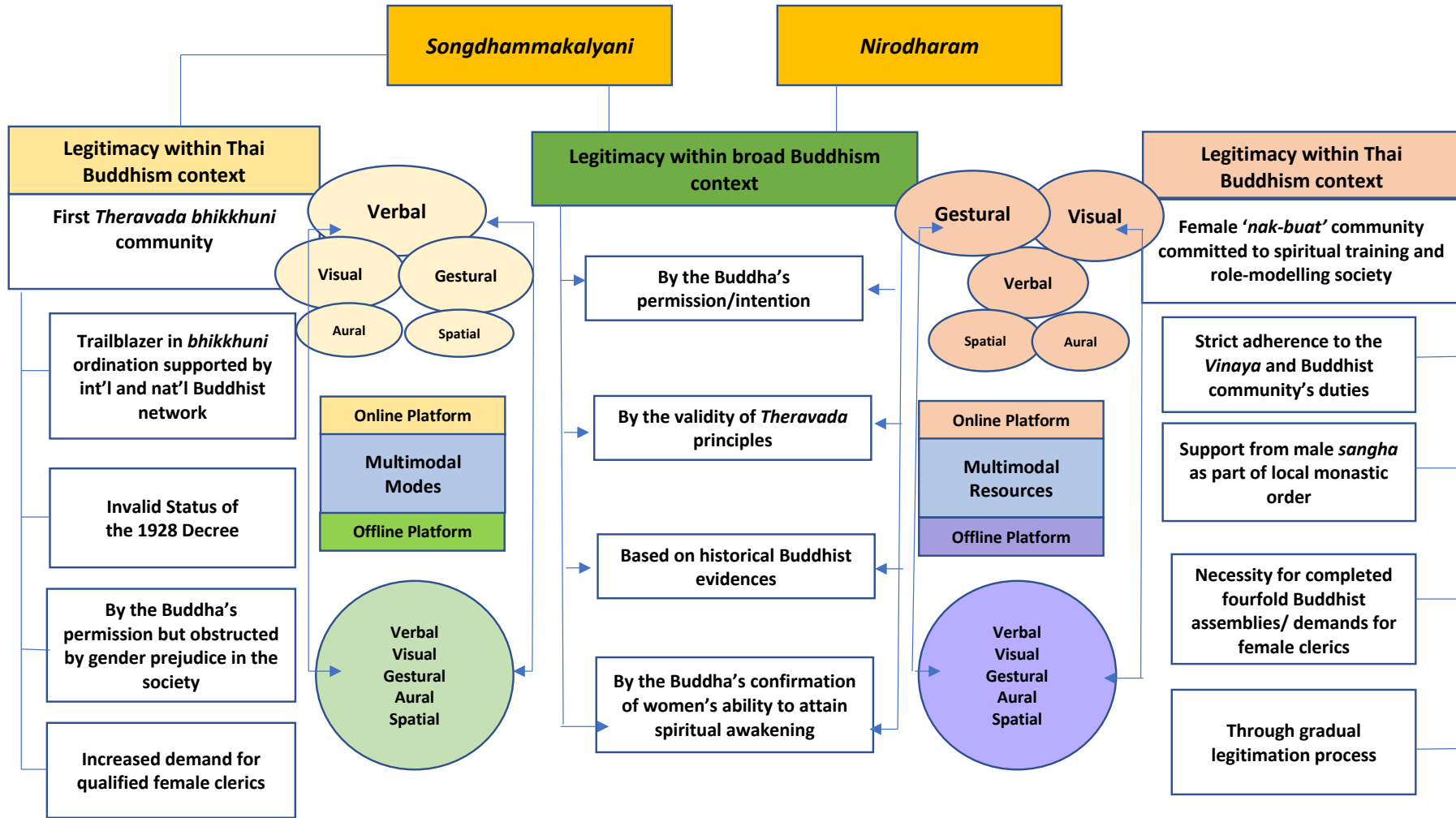Figure 9.1 (below) presents the synopsis of this project.

Figure 9.1   A Synopsis Diagram of Constructions of 'Legitimacy': A Multimodal Case Study of *Bhikkhuni* Communities in Thailand

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Appendix 1:

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Participation Information Sheet – Facebook Administrator (Translated Version)

Topic	Details
Research objective	This PhD research aims to explore how social media has been utilised to communicate about roles and significance of bhikkhuni (female monk) communities to gain recognition in Thai society.
Why have you been selected?	You have been selected for this study as you are Facebook administrator of the bhikkhuni community
Your participation	You will be interviewed individually.
Types of questions	The interview topics will be related to justification for selecting Facebook to communicate bhikkhuni stories
How long does it take for an interview?	Not more than one hour.
Audio/digital recording	There will be an audio/digital recording of the interview.
Voluntary participation	Your participation is voluntary. You have one week to decide whether or not to participate in the project after receiving invitation letter by informing the researcher. Without doing so, your consent in the project will be automatically assumed. You can reject to join the interview now or withdraw from the project at any stages but no later than two weeks after being interviewed by phone, email, or in person.
Data protection	Your anonymity will be protected at all times and no link will ever be made to your real identity.
Risk	No
Potential benefits of your involvement	Your participation in the project will proliferate greater understanding about the role (s) and the impact(s) of social media (Facebook) in answering the question of how the existing bhikkhuni communities have contributed to the Thai society and Buddhism at large. It also paves the way for further interdisciplinary studies particularly in the fields of communication, media studies, and Buddhism which will contribute to wider beneficiaries in the society.
Who is funding/supporting the research?	The research is funded by Chiang Mai University, Thailand with supervisory support from School of Languages, Cultures and Societies, the University of Leeds, United Kingdom.
Contact for further information	Piangchon Rasdusdee Email: mlpr@leeds.ac.uk Contact No. 6695-656-3694, 447-946-778-858

Thank you for your time

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Appendix 2:

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Consent to take part in the project

	Add your initials next to the statements you agree with
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated ………………..,explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I have one week to decide whether or not to participate in the project after receiving invitation letter by informing the researcher by phone, email, or in person. Without doing so, my consent in the project will be automatically assumed. I can reject to join the interview now or at any stages but no later than two weeks after being interviewed.	
I agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. My name and personal data will not be disclosed.	
I agree that interviews may be digitally recorded.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Contact detail	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of person taking consent	
Signature	
Date	

2

Appendix 3:

A Summary of Interview and Focus Group Discussion

No.	Interviewees/ Participants	Venue	Date	Remarks
1.	*Bhikkhuni* Dhammanandha	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**21 August 2017**	**Interview session**
2.	*Bhikkhuni* Dhammawanna	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**22 August 2017**	**Interview session**
3.	*Bhikkhuni* S1	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**22 August 2017**	**Interview session**
4.	*Bhikkhuni* S2	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**22 August 2017**	**Interview session**
5.	Khun Kanjana Suthikul	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**21 August 2017**	**Interview session**
6.	Participant S1	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**20 August 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
7.	Participant S2	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**20 August 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
8.	Participant S3	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**20 August 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
9.	Participant S4	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**20 August 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
10.	Participant S5	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**20 August 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
11.	Participant S6	*Songdhammakalyani* **Nakhon Pathom**	**20 August 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
12.	*Bhikkhuni* Nandhayani	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**17 August 2017**	**Interview session**
13.	*Bhikkhuni* Warayani	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**17 August 2017**	**Interview session**
14.	*Bhikkhuni* N1	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**18 August 2017**	**Interview session**
15.	*Bhikkhuni* N2	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**18 August 2017**	**Interview session**
16.	Sikkhamana N1	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**18 August 2017**	**Interview session**
17.	Samaneri N1	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**18 August 2017**	**Interview session**
18.	Khun Kamphu	**Chiang Mai**	**10 August 2017**	**Interview session**
19.	Khun Srisuda	**Chiang Mai**	**21 September 2017**	**Interview session**
20.	Khun Microphone	**Chiang Mai**	**21 September 2017**	**Interview session**
21.	Participant N1	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**24 September 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
22.	Participant N2	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**24 September 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
23.	Participant N3	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**24 September 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
24.	Participant N4	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**24 September 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
25.	Participant N5	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**24 September 2017**	**Focus group discussion**
26.	Participant N6	*Nirodharam* **Chiang Mai**	**24 September 2017**	**Focus group discussion**