The making of Buddhism in modern Indonesia: South and Southeast Asian networks and agencies, 1900-1959

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Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the making of Buddhism in modern Indonesia, with an emphasis on the transnational networks that mediated the (re) introduction of Buddhism in the Indonesian archipelago. By doing so, this dissertation provides a corrective to several common historiography trends in two ways. First and most importantly, it focuses on Buddhism in modern Indonesia within the framework of religious revivalism. Second, by viewing the late-colonial and early post-colonial period as a continuum in which Buddhism continued to take root, it seeks to connect developments that are often broken up by the demarcation line of independence.

Several scholars have attempted to historicize the presence of Buddhism in Indonesia. By placing Buddhism within the framework of revivalism, Iem Brown an Australian scholar, who also wrote about contemporary Indonesian Buddhism and monotheism, argues that Buddhist resurgence started in the nineteenth century, during which time Buddhism visibly made a return in Indonesia.[1] She further argues that Buddhist revivalism was in many ways influenced by external figures, and especially notes the importance of visiting Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka. Brown also maintains that global religious movements were a broader feature of the era and that in colonial Indonesia,

1 Buddhism was mostly left unrecorded and disappeared after thirteenth century.

Islam underwent a similar revitalization.[2] She claims that Islam, as the majority religion in Indonesia, played a significant role in the religious renaissance of the region. Within this framework, Brown sees the Buddhist revival as part of a larger (mostly Islamic) revival.[3]

In a broad historical survey of Buddhism in colonial Indonesia, Yoneo Ishii also views Buddhist history through the lens of revivalism. Ishii divides his study into two parts. The first part covers the period before the Second World War, in which he alludes to the role of the Theosophical Society in the process of Buddhist revivalism. Although he states that this period was not the focus of his research, he does discuss the individuals and groups involved in the process of Buddhist revival on Java. The second part of Ishii's work is devoted to the period from independence to 1952.[4]

Bhikkhu Budi Utomo Ditthisampanno, an Indonesian Buddhist scholar, has also studied Buddhist revival in Indonesia.[5] By surveying a broad time frame starting from the early historical period of Buddhism, Ditthisampanno recounts how Buddhism first arrived on Javanese soil and describes the golden era of Buddhism during the Syailendra dynasty.[6] He discusses how Buddhism re-emerged in Java during the colonial times. According to him, Buddhists in the Dutch East Indies consisted of three groups of people, namely the Chinese, the Theosophists and the *boemiputra* or *pribumi* (sons of the soil). The visit of Bhikkhu Narada from colonial Sri Lanka to Indonesia frames his discussion of this era. The latter part of Ditthisampanno's work is dedicated to Buddhist developments in the present time. One of the most interesting points he raises pertains to the revival of Buddhism. According to him, this revival only occurred after the independence of Indonesia. He

2 Iem Brown disclosed that the project was part of her PhD. dissertation research, which was unfortunately never completed.

3 I. Brown, "The Revival of Buddhism in Modern Indonesia," in Martin Ramstedt (ed.), *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia: A Minority Religion between Local, Nationality and Global Interests* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 46.

4 Y. Ishii, "Modern Buddhism in Indonesia," in G. Dhammapala, R. Gombrich and K.R. Norman (eds), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Hammalava Saddhatisa* (Nugegoda: Buddhist Research Library Trust, 1984), 109-15.

5 B.U. Ditthisampanno, "Buddhism in Indonesia, Past and Present" (A Paper presented to the first International Conference on Buddhism and Australia, 2012), http://www.buddhismandaustralia.com/index.php/.

6 He also enlisted the kind of Buddhist literatures produced in early periods such as *Sanghyang Kamahayanikan*, *Sutasoma* and *Kunjarakarna*.

argues that the Vesak celebrations of 1953 at the Borobudur were a particular milestone in this process, and that it signified the "real" form of revivalism of Buddhism in Indonesia.[7] Unfortunately, Ditthisampanno's work lacks textual evidence, thus making it difficult to evaluate the validity of his statements. His study is primarily a synthesis of other works on the subject. Additionally, his methodology is unclear and the limited discussion of how the various organizations and networks engaged with each other in the revivalism of Buddhism further undermines his work.

Finally, Heinz Bechert's article titled "The Buddhayana of Indonesia: A Syncretistic Form of Theravada" discusses Buddhist revivalism in modern Indonesia. The article focuses on the post-independence era, and the Buddhist activist named Ashin Jinarakkhita and the Buddhist school which he founded. Bechert states that until 1953, Chinese Buddhist temples largely represented the *Buddha-sasana*[8] (a Pali term which means the teaching of the Buddha) in Indonesia[9] and that, in contrast, "native" Buddhists were few in number, comprising mostly educated people who had come into contact with Buddhism through the Theosophical Society. Furthermore, Bechert states that the number of Buddhists grew after independence, particularly after the celebration of Vesak Day in 1953. Furthermore, he argues that the introduction of Theravada Buddhism[10] in Indonesia was largely the result of

7 Vesak is the Buddhist celebration to commemorate the three major events of the life of the Buddha, namely the birth of the Buddha, his attainment of enlightenment, and the death of the Buddha. In colonial times the term was often written as *Wezak* and also *Waicak* in different newspapers and monthly journals (*maandblad)* published mostly in the first half of the twentieth century. However, in this dissertation, the word Vesak will be used throughout the discussion.

8 *Buddha-sasana* or *Sasana* literally means: the teaching of the Buddha in Pali. However, the term has a wider meaning in Sri Lanka and Mainland Southeast Asian countries which not only includes the teachings of Buddhist but also institutional practices regulating how monks and laypeople live their lives as Buddhists and how monks and the laity are related to one another. Alicia Turner uses the term when explaining how the people of Burma framed their challenge to colonial religions and identities associated with these religions as an attempt to reverse the decline of Sasana. See, A.M. Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 2

9 H. Bechert, "The Buddhayana of Indonesia: A Syncretistic Form of Theravada," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 9 (1981), 12.

10 Ibid, 12. Theravada Buddhism is a school of Pali-oriented Buddhism that

the activities of Ashin Jinarakkhita, who was ordained as a monk in Burma.[11] Bechert maintains that several important events happened in the 1950s. A number of Buddhist organizations were established in Indonesia from 1952 onwards. Most importantly, Bhikkhu Narada revisited Java in 1958 and laid the foundation for a Buddhist centre in Semarang. Finally, Bechert discusses how some Chinese temples slowly became Theravada temples in the 1970s.[12]

Most studies on Buddhism in Indonesia have examined the subject through the lens of Buddhist revival. Much of the scholarship focuses on the years after Indonesia gained independence, and particular attention is given to the central figure of Ashin Jinarakkhita, a Peranakan Chinese who became the first Theravada Buddhist monk in the country. In order to contribute to existing scholarship, this dissertation discusses a crucial element that has been mentioned above but has thus far not been investigated thoroughly: the valuable connections that Indonesian Buddhists established with Buddhist networks from abroad during the late colonial period. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the period prior independence was crucial for the foundation of the so-called revival of Buddhism in the 1950s. The transnational networks that existed in colonial Indonesia were highly influential with regard to the kind of Buddhism that was studied by Indonesian Buddhists in the post-independence period. Importantly, this study will also show how Indonesians – both the Peranakan Chinese and native Indonesians – responded to newly-introduced styles of Buddhism and how they consequently became active agents in the reshaping of the Indonesian articulations of this religion.

The larger historiography of Buddhism in Southeast Asia rarely includes a discussion of Indonesia. Scholars studying Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia mostly concentrate on the countries where Buddhism is the majority religion: Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Sri Lanka.[13] Donald K.

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mostly developed in the regions of South and Southeast Asia. Some scholars such as Anna Blackburn also refer the school as Southern Buddhism. The term, Theravada, became fairly common from 1930 onward. A.M. Blackburn, "Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore: New Ritual Spaces and Specialists, 1895-1930," *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 184 (2012), 1-28.

11 I will retain the use of term, Ashin, which is a religious title used exclusively for monks like Jinarakkhita who were ordained in Burma.

12 Bechert, "The Buddhayana of Indonesia," 15.

13 A.M. Blackburn, *Location of Buddhism: Colonialism & Modernity in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). Also see, J. Schober, *Modern*

Swearer in his book *The Buddhist World in Southeast Asia* primarily focuses on the development of Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia. In other words, Buddhism, particularly Southern or Theravada Buddhism, has not been thoroughly discussed in studies focusing on countries beyond the mainland regions.[14]

Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this trend. Of special importance is the work by Anne M. Blackburn, who discusses Ceylonese Buddhism in colonial Singapore as an extension of her work on Buddhism in colonial Sri Lanka.[15] However, while the colonial Sri Lanka-Singapore connection has attracted scholarly attention, Indonesia is rarely discussed within the context of Buddhism in Southeast Asian countries, and studies of Buddhism in Indonesia have been largely viewed as a separate entity**.** Consequently, the emergence of Buddhism in Indonesia has not been viewed as a part of a global, or even regional, movement.

Unlike the aforementioned studies, this dissertation argues that Buddhism in the Indonesian archipelago developed as a result of global and regional religious transformation, particularly the spread of Theravada Buddhism from South and Southeast Asia. In this process, lay people, religious networks, Buddhist missionaries and intellectuals living in and travelling to colonial Indonesia are shown to have been the most active non-state actors in the founding of Buddhism. It is for this reason that states -- both Indonesian and non-Indonesian -- rarely appear as drivers of change in this dissertation.

Unlike what happened in other countries, the making of Indonesian Buddhism did not result from a single mission to revive the religion itself. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Buddhist revival was part of a movement to regain or save a larger communal identity. For instance, in colonial Sri Lanka Buddhist revivalists used their movement to systematically oppose colonial rulers as well as the mushrooming of Christian missions.[16] Another example is

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Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011); R. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988); G.D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).

14 D.K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2010).

15 Blackburn, "Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore," 3-28.

16 Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka,* 46-47.

the case of Buddhist reform in Burma, where the spirit of Buddhist revivalism grew out of what is described as a critical turning point. In the late nineteenth century, Buddha-sasana was considered to be deteriorating and abandoned by its followers. Thus, Burmese Buddhists made a determined and concerted effort to save Buddha-sasana, an effort which grew into a mass movement throughout Burma.[17]

In the case of colonial Indonesia, the above sources indicate somewhat counter-intuitively that the Buddhist religion by itself was not the main driving force behind its introduction to Indonesia, particularly in terms of the Peranakan Chinese's role in the process. This is evidenced by a notable lack of references to Indonesia's own Buddhist past. Furthermore, the sources indicate that various individuals, communities and organizations from different backgrounds contributed to a visible Buddhist presence in the archipelago. Very few sources used by these groups refer to the so-called "golden era" of Indonesian Buddhism during the Syailendra dynasty. There are hardly any textual references to that time used as a justification for bringing Buddhism to Indonesia. This suggests that many of the actors involved did not in fact see their actions as part of "reintroducing" or "reviving" Buddhism in Indonesia.

This dissertation argues that the Peranakan Chinese should be central to the discussion on the introduction of Buddhism into Indonesia. Furthermore, the Peranakan Chinese are considered as the primary local actors in this process because their role in it was pivotal from the beginning of the period under consideration until the post-independence years. The Peranakan Chinese community can be seen as a "place" where people from various backgrounds who were interested in Buddhism articulated their ideas about Buddhism and interacted with others. In this study, the Peranakan Chinese are considered a community which is both local and native to Indonesia due to their prolonged presence in the region. This corresponds to the view which the community had of itself as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Peranakan Chinese considered themselves as Indonesian and envisioned their future in Indonesia.

However, many Peranakan Chinese did embrace their Chinese identity to the extent that they expressed the desire to maintain the cultural legacy of their ancestors. This desire intensified in tandem with the Chinese cultural movement in China in the 1890s. Thus, there were attempts to revitalize

17 A. Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 2.

Chinese traditions and cultures. On several occasions, the Peranakan Chinese leaders and other prominent individuals criticized those among them who were inclined toward European influence and neglected their Chinese roots and culture**.** In this context, Chinese repudiation of colonial influence in the cultural sphere was part of the attempt to revitalize forms of "Chineseness."

However, what place did Buddhism occupy in the Peranakan Chinese identity? As part of their optimism for revitalizing their community culture, Peranakan Chinese began reassessing their cultural legacy, which included religion. In doing so, they rejected the influence of revolutionary mainland China, as this would have resulted in further dominance of the Chinese from China. Instead, the Peranakan Chinese leaders devised a countermovement aimed at restoring the concept of three religions as one entity. Buddhism was one of these religions.

Along with this development, Buddhism began to thrive within the other sectors of colonial society. For example, the Java Buddhist Association (JBA) and the Theosophical Society, which had been founded by European groups, actively sought to establish Buddhism in colonial societies. In particular, the JBA became well-known for its mobilization against imperialism and colonialism. In some regions, the Theosophical Society encouraged Indonesians to adhere to their own religion despite the popularity of Christianity. The members of this Society came from different religious backgrounds. Many Chinese, including all the prominent Peranakan Chinese discussed in this study, were also members and leaders. Encounters between people from different backgrounds, specifically between the Peranakan Chinese and the other members of the Society, led to opportunities for learning about Buddhism and the Buddhist networks. As the Buddhist society gradually became more defined, many prominent Theosophists expressed their support by giving lectures on Buddhism to Peranakan Buddhist organizations. Javanese Theosophists also became involved. Despite their widespread suspicion of Western cultural influence, the Peranakan Chinese remained open to the Theosophical Society. Their close relationship demonstrates an interesting aspect of Javanese interaction with Buddhism. Unfortunately, there is little available information on this topic.

As the Theosophical Society and the JBA were both inclined towards Southern or Theravada Buddhism, the Peranakan Chinese's sense of religious legacy was impacted by its increasing connection with these two groups. The first Southern Buddhist mission to Indonesia immediately penetrated the heart

of Chinese religious sites, the *klenteng* or Chinese shrine. The first official dialogue took place at a klenteng named Kwan Im Tong in Batavia. It was a dialogue between the Southern Buddhist mission and a group of Buddhist monks who represented Northern (Mahayana) Buddhism, and it focused on Buddha's teaching and making the klenteng a Buddhist centre. The occasion became a hallmark for the Peranakan Chinese, as the Southern school of Buddhism differed from their own tradition. At this dialogue the Mahayana monks, Peranakan Chinese leaders and the Southern Buddhist missionary exchanged views which launched and decided the future of Buddhism in Indonesia to a certain extent.

The aforementioned dialogue and the subsequent ones resulted in changes to the way Buddhism was performed. One change was that the klenteng became increasingly central to Buddhist religious functions. Thus, this study focuses on the religious sites where Buddhists actively performed their religion, particularly the klenteng and the Borobodur. These sites underwent changes which amplified their Buddhist religious purpose. Being central to the Chinese cultural heritage, the klenteng was a primary concern; it later became a stage for Buddhist performances in the Peranakan Chinese community. In the process of (re)introducing Buddhism, the klenteng was transformed into a Buddhist learning centre. The Borobudur in particular became a stage for the performance of Buddhism mainly for European Buddhist Theosophists, on whose initiative the Borobudur was refashioned as a religious site and a marker of Buddhist heritage. In this study, the scrutiny of this aspect has yielded deep insights into the various Peranakan Chinese figures and other Buddhist networks involved in creating Buddhism in Indonesia. Understanding the connections between these various figures are essential to understanding Buddhism in Indonesia.

Finally, this dissertation seeks to address a lacuna in the historiography of Buddhism by addressing the role of women in the making of the religion. The history of Buddhist revivalism is mostly focused on the role of men and monks, and on the influence of laymen and monks. Even in the concept of modern Buddhism, which does highlight the fundamental work done by lay people as one of its characteristics, the participation of women is frequently overlooked. Where does one locate women in the course of Buddhist revivalism? What role did they play? Why have they received no credit in the historiography of Buddhism? Thus, a question most pertinent to this dissertation is: what role do women play in the development of Buddhism

in modern Indonesia? Does their role make the development of Indonesian Buddhism different from the historical narrative dominated by male actors and if so, how?

As noted above, documenting the role of women in the growth of Buddhism in the modern era is quite challenging because there is a dearth of studies that focus on this topic. However, if we look closely into some studies of Buddhist revivalism, it is clear that this lack is mostly due to the failure of these studies to acknowledge the women's roles. For instance, in the case of Buddhist revivalism in colonial Sri Lanka, there is little explanation of the role of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the Buddhist Theosophical Society president, after whose arrival in Sri Lanka together with Henry Steel Olcott, the Buddhist movement in the country grew. As a cofounder of the Buddhist Theosophical Society which was established in Sri Lanka in 1880, Blavatsky was an essential figure in the consolidation of the Buddhist movement that followed afterwards.[18] Another example is the Women's Educational Society of Ceylon, which was established around 1889 in Colombo. As reported by Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, whose work focuses on gender, religious identity and Buddhism in America, the Women's Educational Society of Ceylon is applauded for its success in establishing Buddhist high schools for girls.[19] However, organizations like the Women's Educational Society of Ceylon are rarely accorded the spotlight.

Given the aforementioned background, this dissertation focuses on the actors and agencies in transnational Buddhist networks in the making of Buddhism in Indonesia between the 1900s and 1959. Using the frame of transnational networks, this dissertation endeavours to understand how Buddhism secured a place in Indonesian society. From the 1920s onwards, non-state actors played a pivotal role in establishing connections between people in colonial Indonesia, in South and Southeast Asia, and beyond. Through this process, "colonial modernity" with respect to advancement of education, technology and mobility became a factor that determined the unique characteristics of Indonesian Buddhism. The focus of this dissertation then shifts to how the religion came to be practiced in Indonesia. This focus on the performativity aspects of Buddhism best explains how it became a

18 R.D.S. Wijeyeratne, *Nation, Constitutionalism, and Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 91.

19 T.J. Bartholomeusz, *Women under the Bo Tree: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 50.

"lived" religion in twentieth century Indonesia and how in turn it formed new transnational connections after independence in the 1950s. This period also shows new dynamic in term of Buddhist relation with the newly Independent Indonesia. As a result the development of Buddhism in early independent Indonesia showed some state actors in its progress.

By covering the topics mentioned above, this dissertation joins the debate about several aspects of the historiography of Buddhism in late colonial Indonesia. Hopefully, the dissertation will provide a model for research into Buddhist expansion in different regions, especially in those regions where historical records are scarce.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

In the late nineteenth century, several terms were commonly used in the historiography of Buddhism in Asia. Among these were "Buddhist modernism," "modern Buddhism," "Protestant Buddhism," "reformed Buddhism," and "Buddhist revivalism." These terms were used to describe the changes and transformation in Buddhism which occurred within the colonial context. They were used by scholars who focused on the historiography of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and later in other regions in Asia. Since then, these terms have been used interchangeably. In the historiography of Buddhism in Indonesia, the terms "Buddhist revival" and "Buddhist revivalism" were used by scholars to explain the emergence of Buddhism in the early twentieth century. An exception was Yoneo Ishii, who was the first scholar to use the term "modern Buddhism" in his article about Buddhist historiography in Indonesia. This dissertation adopts Ishii's term, "modern Buddhism."

To start with the definition of the concept, Heinz Bechert was among the first scholars who used the term "Buddhist modernism." Bechert saw modern Buddhism as consequence of social change. To him, Buddhist modernism first emerged in Sri Lanka, after Buddhists argued with Christian missionaries in public debates in Panadura in 1873.[20] Buddhists were against the idea of considering Buddhism as a form of primitive idolatry. They argued that Buddhism was fundamentally rational and in conformity with Western

20 Ibid., 91; M. Teeuwen, "Buddhist Modernities: Modernism and its Limits," in H. Havnevik (ed.), *Buddhist Modernities: Re-Inventing Tradition in the Globalizing Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1.

science, and that it was relevant to social and political issues within the colonial context.[21] Thus, they de-emphasised their rituals and demythologized their doctrine and cosmology. Furthermore, they portrayed Buddhism as the "religion of optimism and activity" because it was concerned with solving the problems of the world, which included connections with nationalist and anti-colonialist movements.[22]

In his study, Bechert proposed a threefold distinction of Buddhism that reflects the different stages of its development, namely "canonical," "traditional" and "modern" Buddhism.[23] "Canonical" Buddhism (*Urbuddhismus*) is the Buddhism found in the canonical scriptures Pali (*Tipitaka*); "traditional" Buddhism is "the totality of beliefs and practices of Buddhists in the periods after the final codification of the canonical scriptures and before the beginning of the modern period";[24] and "modern" Buddhism is all kinds of Buddhism that developed under the impact of changes that have taken place in modern times. Bechert emphasized that in this regard modern Buddhism included "the 'modernistic' forms of Buddhism as well as 'traditionalist' responses to the challenge of outside influences."[25]

The concept of Buddhist modernism in the late nineteenth century continues to be an area of interest for other scholars. Donald L. Lopez in his book, *A Modern Buddhist Bible,* shares similar elements of modern Buddhism with other authors; however, it is also clear that he argues for modern Buddhism to be regarded as a new entity and school of Buddhism:

> Modern Buddhism seeks to distance itself from these forms of Buddhism that immediately precede it and even those that are contemporary with it. Its proponents viewed ancient Buddhism, especially the enlightenment of the Buddha 2,500 years ago, as the most authentic moment of the long history of Buddhism. It is also the form of Buddhism, they would argue, that is the most compatible with the ideals of the European Enlightenment, ideals such as reason, empiricism, science, universalism, individualism,

21 H. Bechert, "Sangha, Society, 'Nation': Persistence of Traditions in 'Post-Traditional' Buddhist Societies,'" *Daedalus* 102, no. 1, Post Traditional Society, (1973), 91; Teeuwen, "Buddhist Modernities," 1.

22 Bechert, "Sangha, Society, 'Nation,'" 91; J.M. Shields, "The Scope and Limits of Secular Buddhism: Watanabe Kaikyoku and the Japanese New Buddhist Discovery of Society,'" in H. Havnevik (ed.), *Buddhist Modernities: Re-inventing Tradition in the Globalizing Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 15.

23 Bechert, "Sangha, Society, 'Nation,'" 85.

24 Ibid., 85.

25 Ibid., 85.

> tolerance, freedom, and the rejection of religious orthodoxy. It stresses equality over hierarchy, the universal over the local, often exalts the individual above the community.[26]

Other scholars who continue studying the notion of Buddhist modernism have arrived at a slightly different more progressive definition than those proposed in the nineteenth century. For instance, David L. McMahan, author of *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* focuses the notion of Buddhist modernism on the interaction between modernizing Asian Buddhists and Western Buddhist practitioners. According to him, such interaction has resulted in a hybrid Buddhism. He emphasises that modern Buddhism refers to "forms of Buddhism that have emerged out of an engagement with the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity. Buddhist modernism is a dynamic, complex, and plural set of historical processes with loose bonds and fuzzy boundaries."[27] McMahan's definition of modern Buddhism is refreshing and it supplements the definitions proposed by earlier scholars. Indeed, McMahan's new insight on Buddhism modernism offers new way of understanding the concept. It provokes other scholars to look into the aspect of connectivity that surrounds the formation of Buddhist modernity. McMahan's work is aligned with later works which focus on the interaction and networks within the scope of Buddhist modernism in Asia, one of which is the work of Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox and Brian Bocking.

Turner, Cox and Bocking claim that Southeast Asia acted as a dynamic crossroads in the late nineteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century and enabled the emergence of a "global Buddhism."[28] Referring to global Buddhism as "modern Buddhism", they argue that the Buddhism developed in that period of time was dominated by several elements: the rise of laity as practitioners and organisers; new roles for women, scholars and monks; the development of national *Sangha* (community of Buddhist monks)[29] and ethno-nationalist Buddhist discourse; and finally, the association

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26 D.S. Lopez, Jr., "Foreword," in P. Carus (ed.), *The Gospel of Buddha: According to Old Records* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publication, 2004), foreword.

27 D.L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.

28 A. Turner, L. Cox and B. Bocking, *A Buddhist Crossroads: Pioneer Western Buddhists and Asian Networks (1860-1960)* (London: Routledge, 2015), 1.

29 *Sangha* is a Pali word which means the assembly of monks.

of Buddhism with a demythologized rationalist and scientific discourse.[30] In short, they argue that the late nineteenth century was a determining period for Buddhism across Asia. Central to their argument is that the meeting between the Asian Buddhist network and Western would-be Buddhists configured modern Buddhism. This argument is interesting because the term "modern" here is not limited to a single definition. Modern Buddhism, in these authors' view, is not only a product of national development but a result of extensive interactions and connections across a wide variety of national, ethnic, cultural and colonial boundaries.[31] This dissertation adopts Turner, Cox and Bocking's argument as the foundation of its argument on modern Buddhism.

The framework used by Turner, Cox and Bocking is intriguing. They describe modern Buddhism as not an exclusively "Eastern' product" but one that welcomes global and local agents. This dissertation believes that the participation of local agents has allowed various Buddhism(s) that have developed in different places to acquire distinctive features. This framework contributes significantly to my argument that Buddhism, although it is global, has never been homogeneous or uniform. This concept aids this study's investigation into new kinds of modernism in the world of Buddhism, particularly the Buddhism in the Indonesian archipelago.

It is worth noting here that because there is no significant record showing closeness between Buddhists and the upper echelons of the colonial state, it is rare to come across state actors involved in the discussions regarding the introduction of Buddhism. However, this does not mean that Buddhism was completely separated from the state. Rather, it means that Buddhism at the time grew out of convoluted religious networks, most of which came from areas outside the colonial state borders, which sometimes included members of the colonial administrative network but were never controlled by it.

In this dissertation, these transnational networks are accorded an important role. In order to appreciate their contribution, a transnational view is taken with the assumption that the development of Indonesian Buddhism cannot be viewed as isolated from wider phenomena. The concept of (Buddhist) networks is also important in understanding the connection between individuals and organizations involved in the process. In this regard, the transnational approach helps in understanding the rather complicated

30 Turner, Cox and Bocking, *A Buddhist Crossroads*, 1-2.

31 Ibid., 2.

locus of Buddhism in non-majority Buddhist regions such as Indonesia. Buddhism took root in the mainly Peranakan Chinese community which had also displayed significant contact with organizations from different backgrounds and geographical origins.

Given the various conditions that surrounded the (re)introduction of Buddhism, the concept of "the transnational" informs fundamental aspects of this research. It follows Akira Iriye, whose work clarifies the difference between the concepts of "the transnational" and "the international." According to Iriye the transnational approach allows historians to focus on non-state actors, thus enabling them to move past the nation as the key unit of analysis.[32] Furthermore, he states that "unlike the international approach, the transnational point of view does not deal with relations among nations as sovereign entities."[33]

Iriye's approach furthers the present study in several ways. It enables this study to "look beyond national boundaries and seek to explore interconnection across borders."[34] It also helps to widen the focus of the study from one particular region or community to relevant phenomena from outside that location or group. Furthermore, Iriye's transnational approach is a valuable catalyst when it comes to decentring Europe or the West.[35] This is because the emphasis of his approach is "to focus on cross-national connection whether through individuals, non-national identities, and non-state actors, or in terms of objectives shared by people and communities regardless of their nationalities."[36] In this way, Iriye has paved the way for the study of individuals or communities in various contexts including, but not limited to, nation states. According to him, this is what distinguishes the transnational from the global concept, which tends to universalize subjects of study.[37]

Based on the above discussion, using the transnational concept to understand the making of Buddhism in Indonesia helps recognize the mixture of various networks, individuals and organizations as unique entities. The concept can help recover the agency of Asian Buddhist networks and

32 A. Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: Past, Present and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 6.

33 Ibid., 6.

34 Ibid., 11.

35 Ibid., 11.

36 Ibid., 15.

37 Ibid., 15.

the variety of actors they contained: sponsors, lay Buddhist organizations, monastic institutions, pioneers, teachers and audiences. These are the key elements that shaped Buddhism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Conversely, this approach may also ameliorate the awkward position of state actors, who rarely appear in the discussion but are never far removed from it. Despite their fluidity, these networks are not completely separated from, or unrelated to, agents of states.

In post-independence Indonesia, the overtone of Buddhist modernism and transnational Buddhist networks continued to be pertinent. After Indonesia gained her independence, Buddhists continued the presence of Buddhism and its status as a religion in the newly independent Indonesia. Atkinson, a scholar on Indonesian religious minorities, points out that the concept of religion in Indonesia during this period involved "notions of progress, modernization, adherence to nationalist goals. Populations regarded as ignorant, backward, or indifferent to the nationalist vision are people who de facto lack a religion."[38] As this dissertation shows, Buddhists continued to work for recognition from the government by making Buddhism relevant to the concept of religion in Indonesia.

Finally, bringing the notion of transnational Buddhist networks fully into view serves to counter the exclusion of Buddhism in the Southeast Asian archipelago. As this dissertation shows, the development of Buddhism in Indonesia cannot be separated from the development of Buddhism elsewhere.

SOURCES

Sources on Buddhism related to both the Peranakan Chinese and other local Buddhist communities, particularly in Java, form the backbone of this study. Born and raised in Indonesia, the Peranakan Chinese used Malay, particularly Melayu Rendah, as their lingua franca. Kwee Tek Hoay's works, which are used extensively here, were written in this language, as were many of the community's magazines, newspapers, and other periodicals.[39] In general, sources written by Peranakan Chinese in Melayu Rendah are occasionally mixed with Dutch and English words, but few or none are written completely

38 J.M. Atkinson. "Religion in Dialogue: The Construction of an Indonesian Minority Religion," *American Ethnologist* 10, no. 4 (1984), 688.

39 The list of these primary sources is mentioned in the sources section (section D).

in Chinese characters.[40] Other sources, such as those written by Willem Josias van Dienst, are written in Dutch, but many of his lectures given in the Chinese klenteng were translated to Melayu Rendah by other Peranakan Chinese.[41]

Periodicals included in this study consist of editions of *Moestika Dharma, Sam Kauw Gwat Po, Soeara Sam Kauw*, *Khong Kauw Gwat Po* and *Sin Po* as well as local newspapers such as *Pewarta Soerabaja* that published articles on issues related to Buddhism. There are also various Dutch-language newspapers, such as *Soerabaijasch Handelsblad, Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië, Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, De Sumatra Post* and *De Indische Courant*, and Dutch-language missionary publications, such as *Nama Buddhaya* and *De Dharma in Nederlandsch-Indië*. Some newspapers published in Singapore also provide valuable information on Buddhist networks, particularly for the 1930s. Housed in the National Library of Singapore, these are *The Straits Times, The Singapore Free Press* and *Mercantile Adviser* (1884-1942).[42]

Sources published by the Theosophical Society have been used to find Peranakan Chinese and indigenous people who were attracted to Buddhism through their membership in the Theosophical Society. These include *Theosofie in Nederlandsch-Indië, Koemandang Theosofie, Pewarta Theosofie, Persatoean Hidoep* and the *Diary of Henry Steel Olcott*.

Finally, this research is informed by sources in which written material is complemented by oral information. Over the course of this study, several people from the Tri Dharma organization (the current name of Sam Kauw Hwee) shared new literature from their own private collections of Buddhist

40 Only translated Chinese terms are occasionally accompanied with the original Chinese characters. With regard to this discussion see T.G. Hoogervorst, "What Kind of Language was 'Chinese Malay' in Late Colonial Java?" *Indonesia and the Malay World* 45 (2017), 294-314.

41 Among these sources, I found "Ada Atawa Tida Adanya Allah" which was translated by Kwee Tek Hoay and was published in *Moestika Dharma*, 1934. Another Van Dienst lecture, given during the Vesak festival held at Klenteng Kwan Im Tong on 28 May 1934, was translated by Toean Jo Oe Liong. Kwee's daughter, Visakha Gunadharma, also mentioned that lectures delivered by other foreigners were also translated into *Melayu Rendah*, for example: a lecture by Nona Noer (a Dutch woman) was translated by Nona Sie Giok Hoa; a lecture by Toean Chakrabuty (an Englishman) was translated by Visakha Gunadharma, etc. Most of these lectures, mentioned by Gunadharma, were published in *Moestika Dharma* 1934.

42 Accessible via eresources.nlb.gov.sg/index.aspx.

literature published during colonial times. Among them, Marga Singgih, one of the most influential figures in Tri Dharma Indonesia, provided an introduction to the family of Visakha Gunadharma, which, as shown below, yielded much new information.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on the historiography of Buddhism in the Indonesian archipelago. It opens with background on the globalisation of Buddhism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This background is particularly important in order to see how Buddhism developed in different regions throughout the world, particularly in South Asia, mainland Southeast Asia and archipelagic Southeast Asia.

The second chapter discusses how Southern Buddhism made its way to colonial Indonesia through transnational networks and organizations such as the Theosophical Society and the Java Buddhist Association. The chapter also describes Indonesian Buddhists' non-institutional connections with individuals who introduced them to new ways of understanding Buddhism -- for example, Bhikkhu Narada, the Sri Lankan monk who was instrumental in bringing Southern Buddhism to Indonesia.

Chapter Three explores the special role of the Peranakan Chinese in spreading Southern Buddhism in Indonesia during the early twentieth century**.** The main question addressed by this chapter is how Buddhism, particularly Southern Buddhism, gradually took root in the Peranakan community. The chapter argues that the reformulation of Chinese religion to include Buddhism as an integral component was a leading factor in the growth of Buddhism in Indonesia. The chapter then discusses the Peranakan Chinese's relationships with various Buddhist networks in Batavia with a focus on the roles of several Peranakan Chinese individuals in the establishment of the first Buddhist organization established by Chinese Buddhists. Additionally, special attention is given to the role of women, particularly the first Chinese Buddhist laywoman, Visakha Gunadharma. This dissertation argues that she represents the notion that studies of modern Buddhism have not fully explored the contributions of women.

Chapter Four addresses the central role of the Chinese klenteng and Borobudur as Buddhist religious sites which helped the growth of Buddhism

in Indonesia. The chapter argues that the circumstances leading to the Chinese klenteng and the Borobudur becoming Buddhist religious sites were very different. In the wake of reorientations in Chinese nationalism, the klenteng became pivotal sites for holding Chinese religious rituals. In the awakening of Buddhism in Indonesia, several Chinese klenteng became Buddhist centres, in which Buddhist rituals were regularly performed. Sources have also mentioned that some klenteng were used for other activities such as gambling, social gatherings and even shelters for homeless people. The second site is the Borobudur complex. This temple complex is another place that was infused with new meaning, but in this case the Buddhist reorientation of the site was spearheaded by transnational figures.

Chapter Five continues to argue that new religious practices, rituals and festivities resulted from Indonesian Buddhists' close connections to transnational Buddhism. The chapter focuses on how Indonesian Buddhists' acceptance of modern Buddhism led to Vesak being instituted as a Buddhist holiday.

Chapter Six examines inter-Asian *Dhammic* (missionary work that involved the teaching of Buddhism by Buddhist monks) networks with a focus on the activities of Bhikkhu Narada, the Southern Buddhist monk whose missionary activities were central to the spread of Buddhism in Indonesia. Special attention is given to his continuous involvement in the development of Indonesian Buddhism as well as his written works which influenced the direction of this development.

Chapter Seven discusses Buddhism in the 1950s. Indonesian independence helped foster new relationships in the region, often with the rhetorical underpinnings of shared historical and spiritual trajectories, which opened up new spaces for Buddhist contacts to flourish. However, there was also a continuity of developments that had long been put in motion by individuals and networks before the 1950s. This chapter highlights both the continuity and change as Indonesian Buddhism continued to grow through the 1950s. Two developments which characterized continuity and change are highlighted: (1) the "localization" of Buddhism -- a long process through which Buddhism progressively took on specific Indonesian characteristics and which culminated with the first Theravada ordination in Indonesia in the late 1950s; and (2) the role of women in the development of Buddhism which had begun in the 1930s but gained strength in the post-independence era.

SPELLING

Due to the many languages and dialects used in this study, as well as the fact that it covers both the pre- and post-independence period, the spelling of geographical locations follows current names as much as possible. Therefore, "colonial Indonesia" is preferred to "the Netherlands Indies" or "the Dutch East Indies." The historical names of cities are kept as such throughout the text, except in the post-independence period when Batavia changed into Jakarta, Buitenzorg became Bogor and so forth. In order to avoid confusion, however, the names of individuals strictly follow the spelling given in the study's sources, which in several cases diverge from the way these names would be spelled today. In the case of the Chinese names, the sources exhibit inconsistencies in spelling; in such cases one version is used throughout. For instance, Kwee Tek Hoay is also spelled as Kwee Tek Hoeij. In this case, Kwee Tek Hoay is used. In the case of the adoption of Buddhist names, the situation is further complicated. For instance, in this dissertation Kwee Yat Nio or Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij is referred to as Visakha Gunadharma, the Buddhist name given to her by Bhikkhu Narada. This is in recognition of her role in the development of Buddhism.