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

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Chapter 1

Rethinking Buddhist Revivalism

1.1. GLOBAL BUDDHISM

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. A defining characteristic often ascribed to modern globalization is the unprecedented speed of developments in transportation, information and communication. Because of this, the world's regions have become increasingly interdependent.¹ A phenomenon that happens in one region can influence a region that is far away. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed this global phenomenon in the realm of religion as international religious movements mushroomed. The globalization of religion, according to Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, was not only expressed in geographical expansion but also, and more significantly, tied believers together in new ways across geographical boundaries.² This, according to them, was accelerated through the formation of international organizations and the conscious fostering of religious identities.

1 J.J. Meuleman (ed.), *Islam in the Era of Globalization: Muslims Attitudes towards Modernity and Identity* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 2.

2 A. Green and V. Viaene (eds), *Religious Internationalism in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities Since 1750* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.

The globalization of religion during the late nineteenth century was also furthered by the increasing spread of print technologies, literacy and urbanization.³ Chris Bayly emphasizes that the period towards the end of this century was not only the age of capitalism, but also the age of nobles, landowners, priests and peasants.⁴ This century also witnessed the appearance of religious movements. In non-Western regions, these movements often consisted of struggles against encroaching Western religions. Nevertheless, they bore considerable resemblance to nationalist Western religious movements.

As a result, Islam in archipelagic Southeast Asia saw new growth in this period. In Islamic scholarship, globalization is not considered a recent process. Azyumardi Azra, an Islamic scholar, points out the existence of trade between Muslims in maritime Southeast Asia and the Middle East around the seventeenth century and, subsequently, the intellectual exchanges that came in their wake.⁵ During the nineteenth century, a globalizing wave of Muslim discourse again reached the shores of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. Those returning from the hajj in the Holy Land reintroduced the spirit of pan-Islamism to the people of the archipelago. Various kinds of Islamic literature were transmitted as well. In the early twentieth century, the so-called "Islamic Modernism" from Cairo arrived in the archipelago and inspired a variety of Modernist movements, most notably Muhammadiyah. Such movements were characterized by the desire to retain and promote Muslim identity, while adopting certain Western ways of structuring religious organizations.⁶

Eastern religions showed similar religious movements. In China, for instance, Chinese Confucianism revivalists K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao launched a Confucian revival in 1895. They proposed to spread Confucianism throughout the Chinese empire, convert unauthorized temples into Confucian shrines and send missionaries to preach Confucianism to overseas

3 S.H. Rudolf, "Introduction: Religion, States, and Transnational Civil Society," in S.H. Rudolf and J.P. Piscatori (eds), *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 3.

4 C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publication, 2004), 5.

5 A. Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara: Sejarah Wacana dan Kekuasaan* (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya Offset, 1999), 121.

6 A. Azra, "Globalization of Indonesian Muslim Discourse: Contemporary Religio-Intellectual Connections between Indonesia and the Middle East," in J. Meuleman (ed.), *Islam in the Era of Globalization: Muslims Attitudes towards Modernity and Identity* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 22-23.

Chinese.⁷ Further in 1898, the movement proposed to make Confucianism a state religion and to officially institutionalize the Confucian temple, that is, to convert unauthorized temples to Confucianism shrines or temples. The Confucian revival spread outside China and flourished more in Singapore and Malaysia than it did in China.⁸ In these regions, the movement began in 1899 with its main objective of establishing Confucian temples and schools. At the same time in colonial Indonesia, particularly in Java, Confucianism also showed signs of emerging among the Peranakan Chinese. According to Charles Coppel, an Indonesian-Chinese scholar, the movement reached the overseas Chinese in Java and resulted in a revival of Confucianism in Java by 1900.⁹

The Buddhist world experienced a similar revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Modern Buddhism started to take root in different places in South Asia and Southeast Asia. The motivation of Buddhist revivalism in these regions shares several elements with the Islamic and Confucian revivalist movements, such as a symbolic struggle against colonial power, imperialism and conversion to western religions. It recalibrated Buddhist identity and sought to save Buddhism from Christian missionaries, particularly in colonial Sri Lanka. Gananath Obeyesekere, a Sri Lankan anthropologist who coined the term “Protestant Buddhism,” argues that this movement positioned Buddhism in colonial Sri Lanka (Ceylon) to protest against British colonial rulers and Protestant missionary activity.¹⁰

Historian Thomas DuBois argues that during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Christian missionaries took a leading role not only in spiritual (personal) liberation but also in the “civilizing” drive of imperialism, often called “evangelical modernity.”¹¹ However, such missionary efforts also motivated the followers of local religions to resist attempts to convert them.

7 C.A. Coppel, “The Origin of Confucianism as an Organized Religion in Java, 1900-1923,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12 (1981), 182.

8 Ibid., 182.

9 Ibid., 182.

10 G. Obeyesekere, “Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon,” *Modern Ceylon Studies* 1 (1970), 43-63.

11 T.D. DuBois, “Introduction: The Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia -- Paradigmatic Change in Regional Perspective,” in T.D. DuBois (ed.), *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2-3.

DuBois' argument suggests that Buddhist revival can be viewed as a manifestation of nationalist awakening. For example, the British historian Mark Frost argues that the Buddhist revivalist movement born in colonial Sri Lanka was generated primarily by a resistance to imperialism and conversion to Christianity. In the case of colonial Sri Lanka, he emphasizes that colonial authorities failed to maintain privileges of education and spatial rights for Buddhists because Christians had secured the right to run massive proselytization projects on the island.¹² The situation is described to have generated a nationalist awakening in the form of religious Buddhist revivalism, which led agitators and publicists to establish wider contacts with Theravada Buddhists.¹³ In print, Buddhist activists soon copied their Christian rivals by publishing Buddhist pamphlets, periodicals and books as well as publicizing their organization, The Society for the Propagation of Buddhism.¹⁴

Frost further argues that religious upheaval took the form of revivalism and was often a manifestation of an early sense of nationalism or proto-nationalism. Generally, religious revivalists resisted colonial authorities and colonial presence by manifesting religious and cultural responses and demanding constitutional change.¹⁵ In this sense, religious revival as a phenomenon was intricately intertwined with nationalism. As it has been argued above, this sets the Indonesian case apart from other Southeast Asian examples.

Buddhist revivalism can also be understood as an instrument for modernization through the reaffirmation of religious identity despite the fact that modernization was imposed on colonial Sri Lanka and India by the British. Historian Balkrishna Gokhale points out that the Buddhist revival in colonial Sri Lanka led by Anagarika Dhammapala (1864-1933) became "a basis for the Sinhala renaissance, involving a restatement of the faith and reaffirmation of its cultural values."¹⁶ In India the movement led by

12 M.R. Frost, "Wider Opportunity: Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening, and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870-1920," *Modern Asian Studies* 36 (2002), 943.

13 Ibid., 942.

14 Ibid., 944.

15 Ibid., 938.

16 B.G. Gokhale, "Theravada Buddhism and Modernization: Anagarika Dhammapala and B.R. Ambedkar," *Journal of Asian & African Studies* 34 (1999), 33.

Ambedkar (1928-1956) used Buddhism as an alternative cultural identity for the purpose of countering the Hindu establishment. Gokhale further points out that Buddhism provided both institutional and cultural references to these respective movements, albeit very different ones.¹⁷ However in both cases, the driver of these revivalist movements was the British attempt to modernize their colonial subjects through education, the creation of an English speaking-middle class, modern transportation and communication systems, and other instruments of colonial control.¹⁸

A full account of the Buddhist revivals in Asia involves understanding that the Buddhist revival in Asia was not particularly a “locally Asian” Buddhist concern, but that it also included Western individuals and organizations, who were important to the anti-colonial politics of early Buddhist revivalism.¹⁹ For example, the Irish Buddhist, Venerable Dhammaloka,²⁰ promoted the Buddhist movement in Burma, Singapore and Ireland between 1907 and 1910.²¹ A record of Venerable Dhammaloka’s social movement in Singapore states that he successfully propagated Buddhism and embraced all classes in Singapore.²²

Western individuals were involved in Buddhist revivals elsewhere in Asia. In colonial Sri Lanka, Buddhist revivalism occurred in conjunction with the rise of the Theosophical Society, an international religious organization in the West. In order to match the power and influence of Christian missionaries, Henry Steel Olcott, head of the Theosophical Society, established Buddhist schools and adapted features of Christian organizational practices to Buddhism. This included a Buddhist catechism which, according to Richard Gombrich, a Pali and Buddhist studies scholar, represents the beginning of the

17 Ibid., 33.

18 Ibid., 34.

19 To contain and organizes his movement U Dhammaloka established an organization called the Buddhist Track Society in Yangon. L. Cox, “The Politics of Buddhist Revival: U Dhammaloka as Social Movement Organizer,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 11 (2010), 174.

20 Venerable Dhammaloka is also usually known as Irish *Pongyee* (Burmese word for Buddhist monk), probably due to his Irish origin and Burmese-Buddhist affiliation.

21 Cox, “The Politics of Buddhist Revival,” 175.

22 *The Straits Times*, (20 January 1904).

modern Buddhist movement worldwide.²³ Olcott also attempted to establish a universal organization for Buddhists called “The United Buddhist World.”

Sri Lankan Buddhists also engaged the Western world. For example, the only Buddhist representative attending the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 was Dhammapala, a leading Sri Lankan figure in the Buddhist movement. Colonial Sri Lanka became the focal point of South Asian Buddhism revivalism in which educated urban Buddhists emphasized the rational and scientific aspects of Buddhism.²⁴

The anti-colonialism of these Buddhist revival movements united the Buddhist world. Although Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma drew closer to one another through improved communication and transportation technology introduced by colonial authorities, the budding Buddhist monastic politics of the region proved to be the more important uniting factor.²⁵ By constantly looking for Buddhist connections beyond colonial borders, the Buddhist world became a “parallel world” to that of the colonial empire. As it spread throughout South and Southeast Asia, this development created a Southern Buddhist culture²⁶ and an increase in (1) the circulation of printed materials on Buddhism, (2) the number of diplomatic missions to South and Southeast Asia; and (3) the movement of lay pilgrims and monks between Sri Lanka and the Southeast Asian regions (especially Cambodia, Burma and Thailand).²⁷

The circulation of printed materials was an important element in the Buddhist revival. It can be argued that ideas about Buddhism were able to reach across borders to like-minded individuals and organizations

23 Richard Gombrich is Boden Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford. He is also the author of a number of books and numerous journal articles dealing with early Buddhism.

24 M. Baumann, “Global Buddhism: Developmental Periods, Regional Histories and A New Analytical Perspective,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 2 (2001), 9.

25 N. Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern: Modern Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 60.

26 The use of “Southern” and “Northern” Buddhism was common in the first half of the twentieth century, which was partly influenced by International Buddhist, while the use of the term “Theravada” to refer to Buddhism oriented toward Pali-language liturgy and scripture was more common in 1930s onward. Blackburn indicates as the influence from the growth of Sinhalese Buddhist institution in Singapore. A.M. Blackburn, “Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore: New Ritual Spaces and Specialists, 1895-1930,” *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 184 (2012), 5.

27 Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, 60.

because of improved and less expensive printing technology. It became the major catalyst for the circulation of Buddhist ideas and enabled Buddhists throughout the world to communicate their ideas with each other more easily. Improved printing technology also became a means to protest colonial rule and missionary efforts to convert Buddhists to other religions. For example, when Buddhists in Sri Lanka obtained printing presses, they used them to counter Christian propagandists.²⁸ The printing press was also an important mouthpiece for lay Buddhists who produced much of the material associated with the colonial Sri Lanka's Buddhist revival. *The Buddhist* was the earliest and first modern Buddhist periodical (December 1888). Initiated by the Theosophical Society and later chaired by the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), *The Buddhist* provided knowledge about Buddhism, programs and information about Buddhism in different places in around the world.²⁹ It provided an opportunity for Buddhists worldwide to write, connecting them with co-religionists in distant locations. For example, Willem Josias van Dienst, a Dutch Southern Buddhist living in Java, was one of the readers and contributors to the magazine. Buddhists in Java also used the printing press as a catalyst to promote their cause. Each of the Buddhist organizations in Java reportedly started its own journal or periodical.

There is much historiographical evidence that shows the Buddhist revival took place at the same time across the South and Southeast Asia regions. D.G. Marr, an Asian history scholar, claims that the Buddhist revival in Vietnam was spurred by nationalist sentiment and as an alternative for Confucianism that had failed to provide a moral and national ideology that could cope with modernity. Buddhism came to symbolically represent modernity for the Vietnamese, as opposed to Confucianism, which came to be regarded as an increasingly irrelevant tradition.³⁰

H.D. Ngo, whose dissertation was on the Buddhist revival in Vietnam, points out that Vietnamese Buddhists felt Buddhism was "in a great decline." Some Buddhist revivalists saw the source of this decline as a lack of response

28 G.D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1992), 47.

29 Publication of "The Buddhist Quarterly Journal of YMBA," <http://www.ymba-colombo.org/activity/publication-'-buddhist'-quarterly-journal-ymba>. (Accessed 5 May 2015).

30 D.G. Marr, *Vietnamese on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115.

on the part of Vietnamese Buddhists to colonial modernity which led to two results: (1) some Buddhists were converting to other religions favoured by colonial authorities and (2) Buddhist monks were abandoning their traditional ascetic mode of life for more secular lifestyles. The revivalists responded to this situation by establishing organizations, publications and a monastic school.³¹ M. Nguyen, whose dissertation was about the Buddhist monastic education and revival in the early twentieth century, notes that Buddhist revivalists aimed to educate Buddhists, both monks and laypeople. In addition, the revivalists also sought to provide social services.³²

The revival of Buddhism in Vietnam connected Vietnamese followers of the Southern School of Buddhism and Southern Buddhism authorities in other countries. Because the revival took place mainly in the southern part of Vietnam, this led to a close bond with its neighbouring country, Cambodia, particularly in the 1930s. For instance, Le Van Giang, a Vietnamese Southern Buddhist, was ordained as a Southern Buddhist monk in Hanoi through the assistance of thirty Cambodian monks.³³

However, the Vietnam Buddhist movement had connections with Southern Buddhism outside of Cambodia. For example, Bhikkhu Narada, the Sri Lankan monk who later would be a prominent missionary monk to Indonesia, made his first trip to Vietnam in 1936.³⁴ From that time onwards, he visited Vietnam as many as thirty-five times to promote Southern Buddhism,³⁵ by planting Bodhi trees around the country to commemorate Buddha's gratitude for assisting his efforts to attain Buddhahood.³⁶ This act

31 H.D. Ngo, "Building a New House for the Buddha: Buddhist Social Engagement and Revival in Vietnam, 1927-1951" (PhD. Dissertation, University of Washington, 2015), 4.

32 M. Nguyen, "Buddhist Monastic Education and Regional Revival Movements in Early Twentieth Century" (PhD. Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2007), 16.

33 M.C.H.K. Lan, "A Study of Theravada Buddhism in Vietnam" (Master's Thesis, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2010), 20.

34 Q.M. Thich, "Vietnamese Buddhism in America" (PhD. Dissertation, Florida State University, 2007), 115.

35 L. Learman, *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 43; O. Gunasekera, *Venerable Narada Maha Thera: A Buddhist Missionary Par Excellence*, <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha296.htm>. (Accessed 25 May 2015).

36 S.C. Berkwitz, "History and Gratitude in Theravada Buddhism, Journal of the

of piety attracted many Vietnamese to Southern Buddhism.³⁷

While studies of Cambodian Buddhism show that Cambodian Buddhists had extensive contacts with Buddhists from other regions of South and Southeast Asia, they also show that the emergence of Buddhist revivalism was not necessarily driven by a resistance to colonial authorities and missionary activities. As Buddhist scholar, Anne Hansen, explains, “the relationship between colonial policies and ideologies and the emergence of [Cambodian] Buddhism was part symbiosis, part subversion, part a war of wills and deep ideological commitments, and part collaboration.”³⁸

In the case of Cambodia, inter-Asian Buddhist relations are also visible. Ian Harris, a professor in Buddhist studies, points to a long-standing relationship between Cambodian and Thai Buddhists that existed before, during and after colonial times. This relationship resulted in new kinds of practices in Cambodian Buddhism among which was the celebration of Vesak in 1855 and the study of the Pali language.³⁹ Cambodian Buddhists also had an ongoing relationship with colonial Sri Lanka. On his way to attend the Colonial Exhibition in Marseilles in 1906, the Cambodian king, Sisowath (r. 1904-1927) visited colonial Sri Lanka to pay homage to the Buddha’s relic with his entourage, among whom were two Cambodian monks. The stopover is claimed to have forged a lasting bond between Southern Buddhists from Cambodian and colonial Sri Lanka. King Sisowath also paid another visit to Sri Lanka in 1909 and donated a new temple to house a relic of the Buddha.⁴⁰ In 1939, the aforementioned Bhikkhu Narada visited Cambodia to plant several Bodhi trees on the ground of the École Supérieure de Pali.⁴¹

Unlike mainland Southeast Asia and colonial Sri Lanka, Buddhist revivalism in archipelagic Southeast Asia was what Trevor Ling, a professor in comparative religions, calls a “revival without revivalism,” which distinguishes

American Academy of Religion, 71, no. 3 (2003), 395.

37 M.C.H.K. Lan, *The Origin of Theravada Buddhism in Vietnam* (10th Conference on Buddhist Studies, n. pag., n.d.), <http://dr.lib.sjp.ac.lk>.

38 A.R. Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 110.

39 I.C. Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practices* (Honolulu: University Hawai’i Press), 107.

40 Ibid., 113-14.

41 Ibid., 278. Narada appeared to continue visiting Cambodia until 1953 when he donated the Buddha’s relic to the Cambodian Buddhists. Ibid., 143.

between “noisy” revivalism which refers to a movement driven by ideology, and “quiet” revivalism which focuses on the renewal of tradition itself,⁴² which in the case of colonial Malaysia, was characterized by enthusiasm and rationality.⁴³ Ling sees Buddhist Chinese communities in the Straits Settlements of Malaya as favouring “quiet” revivalism. He points out that the Chinese community had settled in Malaysia before the region became a part of the British colonial empire and the community had brought with them their religions, of which Buddhism was one. Indeed, the oldest Chinese Buddhist temple, Kwan Fu Kung which is dedicated to Kwan Yin, was established in Penang in 1799.⁴⁴

The Buddhist revival among Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia started in the early twentieth century and intensified in the early 1920s. The Chinese Buddhists in Penang were concerned mainly concerned with the growing popularity of local Chinese superstitions, such as “increased consumption of joss-sticks and joss-papers in the Straits Settlements in the second half of the nineteenth century.”⁴⁵ This concern led to the formation of the first Buddhist society -- the Penang Buddhist Association -- in 1925. Its establishment marked the commencement of the Buddhist revival in Penang. The progress in Penang, however, was supported by two Sri Lankan Buddhist monks, Venerable Pamaratana and Venerable Dhammananda, which suggests that Penang Buddhists were part of an interregional Buddhist network.⁴⁶

Buddhist movements also occurred in Singapore in the early twentieth century. One newspaper article shows the presence of Buddhist activity in Singapore as early as 1904. The article states, “A crusade having as its object the propagation of the principles of Buddhism is in full swing in Singapore at present.”⁴⁷ The crusade was launched from a mission house on Havelock Road under the general direction of Venerable Dhammaloka, an Irish monk with a Burmese Buddhist affiliation.

In contrast to the situation on mainland Southeast Asia, ethnic communities in archipelagic Southeast Asia consisted of members from

42 T.O. Ling, “Revival Without Revivalism: The Case of the Buddhists of Malaysia,” *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 7 (1992), 326-27.

43 Ibid., 333.

44 Ibid., 332.

45 Ibid., 332.

46 Ibid., 334.

47 *The Straits Times*, (20 January 1904).

various religions. Even the Buddhists within a single ethnic community were often adherents of differing schools of Buddhism. This was the case in Singapore. Chinese Buddhism was popular among the Chinese, and Southern Buddhism was popular among Sri Lankans, Thai and Burmese residents. However, while Buddhists of Sri Lankan, Thai and Burmese origin in Singapore were relatively small religious minorities, because they allied themselves with the Chinese Buddhists in order to gain stable ritual space and access to rituals, their influence was considerable.⁴⁸

Given this heterogeneous background of Singapore Buddhist society, Buddhism there can be seen as a cosmopolitan religion, that is, it was much influenced by what happened in the countries from which the Buddhist residents had originated. Ling points out that Buddhism in Singapore started with the growth of "Associational Buddhism."⁴⁹ Chinese Buddhists established an organization called the Chinese Buddhist Association in 1926.⁵⁰ The Singapore Buddhist Lodge (SBL) was established in 1934. By the end of the 1930s, there were already several Buddhist organizations in colonial Singapore, among which was the Malayan Buddhist Syndicate, a branch of the Maha Bodhi Society in Singapore.⁵¹

The growth of associational Buddhism in Singapore appears to have led to the establishment of a Buddhist temple. A letter from acting Consul-General for Siam, Luang Sri Sayamkich, disclosed the intention of the Singapore Buddhist community to acquire land for the purpose of constructing a Buddhist temple. He also agreed to help by becoming the treasurer of the building project.⁵² Aside from a Buddhist temple, a new

48 A.M. Blackburn, "Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore: New Ritual Spaces and Specialists, 1895-1930," *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 184 (2012), 5.

49 Ling's account on the growth of associational Buddhism in Singapore is helpful. However, Ling does not provide historical facts such as the dates or years in which the organizations were established.

50 J.J. Corfield and K. Mulliner, *Historical Dictionary of Singapore* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2011), 45.

51 *The Straits Times*, (11 December 1938). Further evidence of the spread of Ceylonese Buddhism and the roles of Ceylonese monks is presented in studies by Blackburn, for instance, Blackburn, "Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore," 5.

52 *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, (14 January 1925); *The Straits Times* (10 January 1925).

Buddhist hall was planned to be erected on Outram Road at the cost of about 4,000 Straits Dollars. As the organizer of the construction of the first Buddhist building for the Singapore Buddhist Association states: "what is keenly felt as most essential for a revival of Buddhism in Malaya is the propagation of our Lord's Doctrine which alone stands for the salvation for man. For this purpose, the great and urgent need for a new Buddhist building in Singapore can little be ignored for the inauguration of Buddhist missionary activities."⁵³

Like Southern Buddhism in Sri Lanka and other mainland Southeast Asian regions, Buddhism in Singapore showed waves of change. This is illustrated by the development of a relationship between Chinese Buddhists and Sri Lankan Buddhists.⁵⁴ Sri Lankan immigrants to Singapore had introduced Singapore to a new kind of Buddhism -- Sri Lankan Theravada (Southern) Buddhism that was oriented towards Pali-language authoritative texts and liturgy.

A Sri Lankan trader, B.P. de Silva⁵⁵ who was a patron of Sri Lankan Buddhism in Singapore, actively sought to achieve a more prominent position for Sri Lankan Buddhism in Singapore. De Silva succeeded in securing the Chinese Buddhist temple, Shuang Lin, in 1904 as a place where Sri Lankan ritual specialists could hold Sri Lankan rituals. This led to collaborative festivals and ritual performances between Chinese and Sri Lankan Buddhists at the temple in accordance with the Sri Lankan calendar. Buddhist liturgy also began to be used to carry out civil ceremonies, such as marriages. The *Malaya Tribune* recorded, "an interesting marriage took place this afternoon at Telok Blangah Road, when, for the first time in Singapore a Sinhalese Buddhist wedding was celebrated according to Buddhist rites."⁵⁶ It was B.P. de Silva who conducted a semi-religious ceremony of pouring water while the blessings were chanted in Pali. Such events became more common in the 1920s.⁵⁷ The period was marked

53 *The Straits Times*, (28 April 1937).

54 Blackburn, "Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore," 4.

55 Belage Porolis de Silva or better known as B.P. de Silva was a Ceylonese jewellery trader who settled in Singapore in 1872 and founded B.P. de Silva and Co. He was an important figure in Ceylonese, Buddhist, and Theosophical networks connecting the Straits Settlements with Ceylon and Buddhist Southeast Asia. See: Blackburn, "Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore," 6; P. Reeves (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Sri Lankan Diaspora*. (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet in association with the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 2013), 63.

56 *Malaya Tribune*, (27 November 1915).

57 Blackburn, "Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore," 12.

by more regularly held religious festivals such as Vesak, the commemoration of the birth of the Buddha, which was customarily observed by Pali-using Buddhists. Celebrating Vesak became increasingly popular thereafter, and finally became a national holiday of the Sinhalese of Singapore in 1924.⁵⁸ After a couple of years, the festival of the birth of the Buddha was, for the first time, recognized as Vesak in 1927. The term “Vesak” was not used prior to 1927. Instead, the holiday was called “Sakyamuni Buddha’s Birthday.” Thus, the use of “Vesak,” which is a Sinhalese term, signified a more stable Buddhist ritual position and popularity in Singapore.

This widening interest in Pali texts and Pali-language liturgy is crucial to understanding new connections within the Buddhist world. In Singapore, the increased liturgical use of the Pali language encouraged the Chinese Buddhists to use Pali as well. This choice in turn resulted in deepening connections between Chinese Buddhists and Pali-speaking Buddhist monks in the 1930s.

Although the Buddhist revival in Indonesia has not been extensively studied, it is likely to have been similar to the Buddhist revival across South and Southeast Asia. This dissertation provides evidence in the remainder of this chapter and those that follow that Buddhist networks from outside Indonesia brought ideas of Buddhist (re)introduction to the Indonesian archipelago. It also demonstrates that the Buddhist revivalism in South and mainland Southeast Asia was not simply replicated in Indonesia; instead, Indonesia had its own “quiet” revival that differed from the revivals which were occurring in other parts of Asia.⁵⁹ Two narratives that come to mind associate the revival of Indonesian Buddhism to the 1920’s and 1950’s respectively. Both attempts assumed Indonesian Buddhism could/should be revived by resurrecting the *Tantrayana* Buddhism that had developed in Indonesia during the seventh century CE. The first attempt dates from the 1920s by Willem Josias van Dienst, a Dutch Buddhist priest with a Burmese Buddhist background. His exact arrival in Indonesia is unclear. However, his religious work in Java is well documented. Van Dienst wanted to resurrect *Tantrayana* Buddhism.⁶⁰ He was convinced that Indonesia’s “original Buddhism” was still thriving on the islands of Bali and Lombok, and this conviction led him to believe that Java should be reconverted into a Buddhist island again because “The Javanese soul

58 Ibid., 13; *Malaya Tribune*, (12 April 1924).

59 Wikramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, 61.

60 W. J. van Dienst, “Present religious condition in Java”, *The Buddhist*, vol. 7 no. 7 (November 1936), 387.

is created by Buddhism, and it will never find rest till it kneels down again at the foot of the Thathagata....”⁶¹ Hence, as far as some sources are concerned, Van Dienst was the first person to come to colonial Indonesia with the idea of reviving Indonesian Buddhism.

The second narrative which is attributed to Ananda Suyono Hamongdarsono (also known as Ananda Suyono) dates from the 1950s. Ananda Suyono was a Javanese Buddhist from Solo who was a member of multiple religious organizations -- the Theosophical Society in Solo, the Subud and Pangestu Javanese spiritual communities and Santi Loka (a meditation centre that he founded and taught in). He was also a Buddhist activist in the 1950s. During a 2015 interview conducted as part of this dissertation, he recalled that in the 1950s, he encountered other Buddhist activists -- such as Parwati Soepangat, I Ketut Tangkas, M.S. Mangunkawatja, Visakha Gunadharma, Sariputra Sadono, Tee Boan An (later known as Ashin Jinarakkhita) who later became Buddhist leaders. Ananda Suyono and his Buddhist group wanted to rediscover the original Indonesian Tantrayana school of Buddhism. In an interview conducted by *Boeddhsime in Indonesië*, Ananda Suyono explained that the group’s goal was difficult to achieve because there were insufficient authoritative texts on which to base the reconstruction of Tantrayana Buddhism. In fact, they only discovered one Tantrayana Buddhist manuscript -- *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan*.⁶²

These two accounts raise an interesting question: did Indonesian Buddhist revivalism in the twentieth century actually revolve around reconstructing Indonesia’s “original Buddhism?” This dissertation argues that it did not. The later chapters of this dissertation show that none of the Buddhist revivalists working in the late colonial period actually referred to or used the old Buddhist manuscripts like *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan* in the course of reviving Buddhism. The data obtained for this dissertation suggest that Indonesian Buddhists, particularly the Peranakan Chinese in Java, carried out their reconstruction of Buddhism in collaboration with European individuals in Indonesia and to a lesser extent the Javanese. These attempts were amplified by ideas about contemporary Buddhism that were brought into Indonesia through connections with the larger movement of Buddhist revivalism across Southeast Asia. These connections, in turn, led to

61 Ibid., 389. *Tathagata* is another name of The Buddha.

62 Y. Sumarta and F. Gales, *Boeddhsime in Indonesie. Afllevering 3* (Hilversum: Boeddhistische Omroep Stichting BOS, 2010) (recorded interview).

the creation of transregional Buddhist networks of which Indonesia became a part.

1.2. NAVIGATING BUDDHISM IN COLONIAL INDONESIA

Studying the history of Buddhism in colonial times can be complicated because there are no references to it in the colonial government's official documents. For example, the population census (*Volkstelling*) conducted in 1930 did not include Buddhism in its list of religions. Rather, the *Volkstelling* divided religion into four main categories, namely: Christianity (subdivided into Catholicism and Protestantism), *Mohamedanen* (Islam), *Israelieten* (Judaism), *Aziatische godsdiensten* (Asian religion), and *geen godsdienst of onbekend* (without religion or of unknown religion). The census provided detailed demographic information on Christians in terms of their racial, ethnic and geographical backgrounds. However, detailed information was not reported for the followers of other religions.

For example, Table 1.1 shows the religious affiliations of Europeans living in Java and Madura during the 1930 census.⁶³ While many people identified themselves as Christians, a number of them listed themselves as belonging to other religions or as unaffiliated with any religion.

Table 1.1. Religions Followed by Europeans in Java and Madura

Religions	Number
<i>Aziatische godsdiensten</i>	1,302
<i>Godsdienst Onbekend</i>	6,876
<i>Israelieten</i>	332
<i>Mohamedanen</i>	194
<i>Protestanten</i>	30,339
<i>Roomsche Katholieken</i>	19,557

Note: This table is adapted from Table 18, classification of the Europeans according to religions. Source: *Volkstelling 1930*, vol. VIII, 396.

63 *Volkstelling 1930*, VI (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1936), 394-402.

Buddhism and other Asian religions (Hinduism, Confucianism and indigenous religions) were not offered as choices. While this omission probably does not reflect an antagonistic attitude of the Dutch colonial authorities toward Asian religions and their belief systems, it does indicate that the authorities regarded these religions as unimportant to governing colonial Indonesia.

In contrast, records describing the relationship between the colonial authorities, Islam and Christianity are numerous. The relationship between Dutch colonial rulers and religious institutions in Indonesia is best described as complex or, as Fred von der Mehden, a scholar of Southeast Asia, puts it, heavily intertwined.⁶⁴ The predominantly Christian colonial rulers closely watched their vast Muslim population. Indonesian Islamic scholar Husnul Suminto explains that the colonial government became increasingly concerned about *Islampolitiek* (Islam Politics) based on the advice of Snouck Hurgronje, an expert in Islamic studies.⁶⁵ As a result, the colonial authorities increased their surveillance of Indonesian Muslims. Such activities included watching the movements of politically active Indonesian Muslims while they were on the hajj in Arabia and having *pengbulu* (village headmen) assist *bupati* (regents) in watching these Muslims.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, the Dutch government also had a tolerant attitude towards religion and supported religious freedom as long as religious beliefs did not challenge its political authority. According to the well-known Southeast Asia scholar Harry J. Benda, the Dutch feared an extremist Muslim rebellion and they hoped that Christianizing the majority of Indonesians would help solve the problem.⁶⁷ The Dutch constitution granted its colonized peoples the right to practise any religion as long as doing so would not lead to social unrest and instability. The constitution also permitted the government to

64 F.R. von der Mehden, *South-East Asia 1930-1970: The Legacy of Colonialism and Nationalism* (New York: Northon, 1974), 18.

65 H. A. Suminto, *Politik Islam Hindia Belanda: Het Kantoor voor Inlandsche Zaken* (Jakarta: PT Pustaka LP3ES, 1985), 2.

66 Ibid., 3.

67 H.J. Benda, "Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and the Foundation of Dutch Islamic Policy in Indonesia," *The Journal of Modern History* 30 (1958), 338; A. Suminto, *Islamic Politics of the Dutch East Indies: Het Kantoor voor Inlandsche Zaken* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial, 1985), 11.

grant permission to followers of a given religion to hold religious festivals.⁶⁸ Muslims were given permission to observe the night journey and the ascension of the Prophet (*Isra mi'raj*), the birthday of the Prophet (*Maulud Nabi*), the concluding day of the Islamic fasting month (*Id al Fitri*) and the day of sacrifice (*Id al Adha*).⁶⁹ Other religions were also granted permission to hold the religious rites and festivals of their traditions.

The absence of Buddhism in colonial sources indicates that the colonial government believed that Buddhism did not merit close attention. Iem Brown suggests that the Dutch regarded Buddhism as a Chinese tradition which did not pose a political danger. Brown's argument is aligned with those of Ali (2007) and Suminto (1985) which, as indicated earlier, point out the colonial government's focus on Islam's potential threat to the Dutch hold on Indonesia.

However, the colonial government's lack of interest in Buddhism and the absence of official records do not imply a complete lack of awareness of the existence of Buddhism. Newspapers, magazines and journals are rich sources of information about Buddhism. In fact, from the early twentieth century to the 1930s an increasing amount of news about Buddhism was published in many newspapers like *Het Nieuws van de Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, *Soerabaijasch Handelsblad*, *De Indische Courant*, *De Preanger-bode*, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* and *De Sumatra Post*.

Newspaper advertisements were a common means of informing the public about lectures on Buddhism (see Figure 1.1).⁷⁰ This practice was maintained by Dutch language newspapers throughout the late colonial years and after independence. These periodicals are valuable sources of understanding the presence of Buddhism among the people of the archipelago.

There is evidence that Buddhism was a topic of interest for the European population of colonial Indonesia. Some newspapers published articles about

68 The 1855 *Staatsreglement*, article 119; M. Ali, *Religion and Colonialism: Islamic Knowledge in South Sulawesi and Kelantan, 1905-1945* (PhD. Dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 2007), 59.

69 Ali, *Religion and Colonialism*, 61.

70 Other periodicals such as *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlands Indië*, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, *De Soematra Post*, *De Indische Courant* also consistently covered news related to Buddhism. *De Telegraaf*, a periodical based in the Netherlands, also wrote about the Buddhist missionaries in Java. In post-independence Indonesia, news about Buddhism also could be found in *De Preangerbode*, *De Locomotief*.

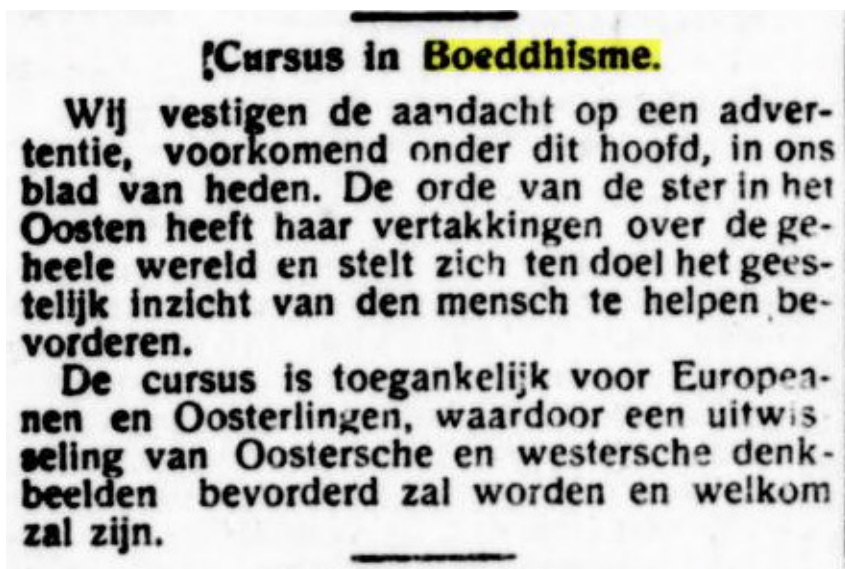


Figure 1.1. An example of a published announcement about a class on Buddhism in 1920. Source: *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* (27 November 1920).

Buddhism and Buddhist celebrations as well as announcements for lectures on Buddhism.⁷¹ Many of these articles appeared even before the coming of Bikkhu Narada, a prominent Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka, who visited Indonesia in 1934.

Aside from newspapers there are other sources about Buddhism in colonial Indonesia. Van Dienst, who arrived in Indonesia in the 1920s, wrote two interesting articles dated 1934 and 1936 about the religious situation in Indonesia for the Sri Lankan magazine, *The Buddhist*. He noted that Islam was the dominant religion in Java,⁷² as evidenced by mosques almost everywhere, including small villages.⁷³

Despite the success of Islam in Java, Van Dienst claimed that it was still

71 To mention a few examples, *Soerabaijasch-Handelsblad* published an article "Boeddhisme." The article was about a lecture held by the Theosophical Society in Surabaya. Eighty people attended the class itself. However, the name of the speaker was not specified. *Soerabaijasch-Handelsblad*, (2 April 1906).

72 W. J. van Dienst, "Buddhist work in Java and Bali", *The Buddhist*, vol. 4 no. 6 (October 1933), 77.

73 Van Dienst, "Present religious condition", 387.

possible to revive Buddhism or the old Javanese religions which lay in the Javanese soul. He pointed out that many Javanese still adhered to and had not forgotten their ancestral beliefs. This was particularly discernible in the *Wayang* (Javanese shadow puppet) performances of stories that had been adopted from the original *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*,⁷⁴ and stories about the life of the Buddha and his journey to enlightenment. These performances were evidence that the old traditional religion of Java was still in the heart of the Javanese. Furthermore, in the region of Mount Tengger in East Java, Hinduism and Buddhism still prevailed. Van Dienst suggested that in this region these two religious practices had been intermixed. On the other islands, such as Bali and Lombok, Hinduism was still being practised.⁷⁵ Hence, despite the dominance of Islam in Java, Hinduism and Buddhism still prevailed in the heart of the Javanese in Bali and Lombok.

It is important to note that Van Dienst was writing about Tantrayana (Northern/Mahayana) Buddhism and not Southern/Theravada Buddhism, which he was trying to promote. Tantrayana Buddhism was the earliest kind of Buddhism that existed in Indonesia during the ninth century and it was connected with the construction of the Borobudur temple. Likewise, when he wrote about finding the *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan*, Van Dienst was writing about an old Buddhist text that belonged to the Tantrayana Buddhist tradition, not to the Southern/Theravada Buddhist tradition.⁷⁶

Van Dienst explained in his 1936 article that aside from the Javanese people of Bali and Lombok, there were four other groups associated with Buddhism in Indonesia -- Chinese Buddhists, Japanese Buddhists, Indians sympathetic to Buddhism and European Buddhists and sympathizers. He pointed out that Buddhism was prevalent in the Chinese community and co-existed with other Chinese religions such as Confucianism and Taoism. He also pointed out that there were Chinese Buddhist priests who lived in the Chinese Buddhist shrines or *klenteng*, but they did not have the competence to preach about Buddhism,⁷⁷ despite the fact that several Buddhist organizations had been established in Indonesia and that there were nearly five million

74 The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are two great epics originally from India. The epics were introduced into Indonesia and the peninsular countries in Southeast Asia around 200 CE and have remained popular ever since.

75 Van Dienst, "Present religious condition", 387.

76 Ibid., 387.

77 Ibid., 388.

Chinese who had declared themselves to be Buddhists.⁷⁸

Van Dienst also claimed that there were several thousand Japanese living in Java in 1936. The Buddhist organization that he co-founded had tried to reach out to these people, but the Chinese members of the organization refused to support this effort because the Japanese were their business competitors. On the other hand, the Indian sympathizers often funded Buddhist activities and organizations even though they were not Buddhists. Van Dienst noted that although most Europeans were Christians, a number of them adhered to other religions, such as Islam and other Asian religions.⁷⁹ He pointed out that there were at least thirty European Buddhists in Java.⁸⁰

Another important source of information on Buddhism in Indonesia is the publications of the Theosophical Society. According to these sources, the first chapter of the Theosophical Society was established in the late nineteenth century in Pekalongan. This was followed by other chapters in several other cities. These chapters of the Theosophical Society ran many newspaper advertisements for talks and discussions on Buddhism. When other Buddhist organizations, such as the Java Buddhist Association and the Batavia Buddhist Association, were established later, some of their officials were also members of the Society. Many preachers who gave sermons on Buddhism at these other Buddhist organizations were also Theosophists.

Another important source of information on Buddhism in colonial Indonesia are found in the literature about efforts to preserve the Borobudur. A recently published article co-authored by Dutch historians, Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff states that the Dutch colonial government initiated the restoration of Hindu and Buddhist temples in Central Java, among which was the Borobudur. The restoration of the pyramidal monument was started in 1907-1911 under the supervision of the Archaeological Commission (1901) and later continued by the Dutch East Indies Archaeological Service (*Oudheidkundige Dienst*) in 1913.⁸¹ The

78 Ibid., 388. It is important to bear in mind that there is no statistical evidence for the number of Chinese Buddhists that Van Dienst mentioned.

79 Van Dienst's observation is in line with the *Volkstelling* described in above.

80 Ibid., 387.

81 M. Bloembergen and M. Eickhoff, "Decolonizing Borobudur: Moral Engagements and the Fear of Lost. The Netherlands, Japan and (Post)Colonial Heritage Politics in Indonesia," in S. Legêne, B. Purwanto and H. Schulte Nordholt (eds), *Bodies and Stories: Imagining Indonesian History* (Singapore:

authors explain that the restoration project arose from the sense of a moral obligation to preserve the remains of the now-gone civilizations for the peoples of colonial Indonesia, and at the same time to reinforce the legitimacy of the colonial state.⁸² Despite the non-religious motive for the restoration, the Borobudur remains largely a religious legacy. It became central to those interested in spirituality in general and Buddhism in particular, as evidenced by the fact that it gradually became an important site for both Buddhist enthusiasts and followers when the Buddhist missionaries began to proselytise colonial Indonesia in the late 1920s.

A visit to the Borobudur by Bikkhu Narada in the 1930s further heightened the significance of the monument. The Theosophical Society also contributed to the significance of the monument to Buddhism by holding a Vesak ceremony on the site. The restoration of the monument indirectly allowed Buddhists and their sympathizers to establish a symbolic linkage with the monument.

CONCLUSION

Buddhist revivalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been understood as ideological revivalism and a revival without revivalism. This ideological revivalism fits the situation in colonial Sri Lanka where Buddhism was the majority religion and where Buddhist revivalists used technological advances in communication and transport, (introduced by British colonial authorities) to advance the revival of Buddhism by confronting colonial rule and Christian missionary activities. The notion of ideological revivalism also fits cases like Cambodia where Buddhism was the majority religion and where Buddhist revivalists used notions of modernism (introduced by French colonial authorities) to create Buddhist modernism or Modern Dhamma. However, the Cambodian-style ideological revivalism lacked the sharp political and religious confrontation that characterized Buddhist revivalism in colonial Sri Lanka.

In the archipelagic Southeast Asian regions, where Buddhism was not a majority religion and largely confined to a particular community, such as the Chinese community in Malaysia, Buddhist revivalism can be best understood

University of Singapore Press, 2015), 36.

82 Ibid., 36.

as “revival without revivalism” which featured the birth of associational Buddhism. The Buddhist revival in Indonesia fits the understanding of a revival without revivalism, but with specific differences. As in Malaysia, Indonesian Buddhist revivalism was driven by the growth of Buddhist associations. However, unlike what happened in Malaysia, the Indonesian laity played a leading role in establishing these associations and opening them to Buddhists (and their ideas and practices) from South and Southeast Asia and beyond.