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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 3

Peranakan Chinese: The “Northern Wind” Buddhists

Parallel to the previous chapter, this chapter introduces another wind of Buddhists who were the followers of the Northern schools of Buddhism. The school alone refers to Mahayana Buddhism. In colonial Indonesia, the school is attributed to the society of Peranakan Chinese who, by tradition, claimed themselves to be accustomed with the Northern school. This chapter argues that the Peranakan Chinese was an important community for the (re) emergence of Buddhism in Colonial Indonesia. This was because of their desire to preserve their traditional Chinese identity. The Peranakan Chinese wanted to do this by reinvigorating their culture and Mahayana Buddhism, which was their traditional religion. However, they faced difficulties finding resources to do so. As a result, they connected with Theravada Buddhism networks, which became their main source of knowledge about Buddhism and Buddhist practices. Three people were key to achieving the Peranakan Chinese goals, namely Kwee Tek Hoay, an intellectual who helped to articulate the reforms needed to align the Peranakan Chinese's beliefs, ritual practices and organization with modern ideas of Buddhism that favoured the Southern (Theravada) School of Buddhism; Ong Soe Aan, a member of the Khong Kaw Hwee who connected the Peranakan Chinese community to transnational Buddhist networks operating both inside and outside of Indonesia; and

Visakha Gunadharma, an intellectual and the first Peranakan Chinese woman whose preaching made the reformation of Buddhism acceptable to her community and who helped to maintain the community's connections with Buddhist networks from abroad.

In order to understand the Peranakan Chinese interest in Buddhism, it is important to know the backdrop of Chinese society in colonial Indonesia.

3.1. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHINESE SOCIETY

Colonial Indonesia society was classified into four racial groups, namely native Indonesians (*Indonesiër*), Europeans (*Europeanen*), Chinese (*Chineezen*) and other foreign orientals (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*) (see Table 3.1).¹ These racial categories become legal and political realities in 1854. The Chinese population comprised 1,233,214 or 2.0 per cent of the total population of colonial Indonesia.² They inhabited several regions, such as Java, Madura, Sumatra, Borneo, Sulawesi and other regions.

In Java and Madura, the Chinese population born in Indonesia was over 460,000 or almost 80 per cent of the total Chinese population in the islands.³ Most Chinese in Java settled in urban areas such as Batavia, Bandung, Semarang, the *Vorstenlanden* (princely lands, such as Yogyakarta and Surakarta), Surabaya and Malang. George W. Skinner, an American anthropologist and scholar of China reckons that by 1930, 58.4 per cent of the Chinese in Java lived in urban areas, comprising 10 per cent of the total urban population in the island.⁴ The Chinese urban settlement was partly the result of a colonial policy which encouraged the Chinese to live in specific urban quarters (*wijkenstelsel*). However, not all of them did so. Ong Eng Die, a Chinese Indonesian politician and economist, states that some of them settled

1 *Volkstelling: Census of 1930 in Netherlands India, deel VIII: Overzicht voor Nederlandsch- Indië= vol. VIII: Summary of the volumes 1-VII. Department van Economische Zaken ((Nederlandsch-Indië)* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1936) 2.

2 *Ibid.*, deel VII, 10.

3 *Ibid.*, 10.; M.S. Heidhues, "Chinese Settlements in Rural Southeast Asia: Unwritten History," in A. Reid (ed.) *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Sydney: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin, 1996), 166-67.

4 G.W. Skinner, "Java's Chinese Minority: Continuity and Change," *Journal of Asian Studies* 20, 3 (1961), 357-58.

Table 3.1. Chinese Population in Indonesia in 1930

Region Inhabited	Number	%
West Java	259,718	2.3
Central Java	130,360	1.2
<i>Vorstenlanden</i>	33,864	0.8
East Java	158,489	1.1
Java and Madura	582,431	1.4
Sumatra	448,552	5.4
Kalimantan	134,287	6.2
Sulawesi	41,402	1.0
<i>Elders</i>	26,542	0.6
<i>Buitengewesten</i>	650,783	3.4
Total	1,233,214	2.0

Source: *Volkstelling: Census of 1930 in Netherlands India, deel VIII: Overzicht voor Nederlandsch- Indië= vol. VIII: Summary of the volumes 1-VII. Department van Economische Zaken ((Nederlandsch-Indië) (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1936) 2.*

in rural areas.⁵ This is in line with the Australian historian Charles Coppel's finding that the distribution of the Chinese population in colonial Indonesia varied from area to area.

According to the *Regerings Almanak* which was published in 1910, the Chinese population was the second largest racial group in colonial society, the first being the native population. This was the case in almost in all the regions and cities. The Europeans comprised the third largest group, and they were followed by the Arabs and other foreign orientals (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*).⁶ Based on these statistics, the Chinese population in the different regions and cities of Indonesia was indeed sizeable compared to the other non-native populace. For instance, in Batavia, the number of the Chinese was 9,252. Compared to this number, the number of Europeans was 13,808); the Arabs

5 E.D. Ong, *Chineezzen in Nederlandsch-Indië: Sociografische monografieën* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V, 1943), 16. Also see *Volkstelling: Census of 1930 in Netherlands India*, deel VII, 19.

6 *Regerings Almanak*, (1910), 4-10.

was 2,772 and other foreign orientals (*andere vreemde oosterlingen*) was 277. Other cities such as Semarang, Surabaya, Surakarta and Padang also showed similar patterns.⁷ In other words, the Chinese comprised the largest group among the foreign orientals (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*).

The Chinese population was generally divided into two major groups on the basis of their birthplace -- *Totok* and *Peranakan*.⁸ The *Totok* referred to those born in mainland China; the *Peranakan* referred to those born in Indonesia. Lea E. Williams also indicates that the *Totok* (also known by him as *singkeh*), usually resided in rural areas; the *Peranakan* were more likely to be found in urban areas.⁹ However, Donald E. Willmott, author of the book titled *The Chinese of Semarang*, offers a rather fluid definition of the *Totok*. To him not all *Totok* were born in China.¹⁰ According to Willmott, in the twentieth century when another wave of Chinese migrants arrived in Indonesia, they brought their own wives; thus, their descendants were called *Totok*. His definition is based on a person's ancestry rather than his birthplace.

On the other hand, to Leo Suryadinata, an eminent scholar on Chinese Indonesians, interracial marriage and birthplace did not immediately earn a person the status of Chinese. He postulates that the terms "Totok" and "Peranakan" were used in a more cultural sense. Suryadinata offers a different insight on the definition of a *Peranakan*. According to him the language that the community used was what determined whether they were *Totok* or *Peranakan*. In short, when they lost fluency in the Chinese language at home and used Indonesian instead, the Chinese became *Peranakan*.¹¹ In line with Suryadinata's perspective, Skinner asserts that birthplace cannot be the basis for determining whether one is Chinese or not. He strongly disagrees with Williams' definition that being *Totok* and *Peranakan* were determined solely by one's birthplace. This is because a Java-born Chinese could still be growing up in the twentieth century as a *Totok*.¹²

7 Ibid., 4-10.

8 L.E. Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia, 1900-1916* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), 10-11.

9 Ibid., 11.

10 D.E. Willmott, *The Chinese of Semarang: A Changing Minority Community in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960), 103-04.

11 L. Suryadinata, *Pribumi Indonesians, the Chinese Minority and China: A Study of Perceptions and Policies*, 3rd edition (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1992), 2.

12 Skinner, "Java's Chinese Minority," 358.

The Chinese of Java and Madura were mostly Peranakan.¹³ Those in Java mostly lived in Central and West Java. Those who lived in East Java were predominantly Totok.¹⁴ Ong Eng Die defines the Peranakan Chinese as being heavily acculturated to local customs and habits, and they used Malay and other vernacular languages as their medium of communication.¹⁵ As for the Totok, they maintained a separate cultural identity from the Peranakan.

Unfortunately, the population census of 1930 contains little information on the distinction between the Totok and the Peranakan Chinese. This census classified both groups under the category of “Chinese” and included them under the classification of “foreign oriental.” However, some previous historiographies on the Peranakan Chinese offer useful help on identifying the Peranakan Chinese. An example is Skinner’s analysis of the 1930 census, which was used by Mary F. Somers in her work on Peranakan Chinese politics in Indonesia. In her work, Somers used Skinner’s figures pertaining to the local population to refer to the Peranakan Chinese, and his figures pertaining to the foreign-born Chinese to refer to the Totok.¹⁶

The discussion on the cultural identity aspect of Chinese society in colonial Indonesia still uses the classification of the group as the point of reference. Leonard Blussé, a Dutch scholar on the history of European-Asian relations, points out that “the cultural identity and the position of the Chinese population group in Indonesia society is a contentious one.” Underlying this issue is the question of whether or not the Chinese were allowed to maintain their own cultural identity or integrate their culture with the Indonesian culture.¹⁷ This question was relevant not only in the post-colonial period, but even more so before Indonesia gained independence.

The end of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century marked the rise of Chinese nationalism, hence the heightened awareness of Chinese cultural identity throughout Asia. The Chinese living

13 Ibid., 6.

14 C.A. Coppel, *Studying Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia* (Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies, 2002), 106.

15 C.A. Coppel, “The Origin of Confucianism as an Organized Religion in Java, 1900-1923,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 12 (1981), 180.

16 M.F. Somers, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia*, (PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 1965), 24.

17 L. Blusse, “The Role of Indonesian Chinese in Shaping Modern Indonesia Life: A Conference in Retrospect,” *Indonesia, Southeast Asia Program Publication at Cornell University* (1991), 1-11.

overseas were urged to return to their ancestral traditions. Chinese Nationalist figures, such as Sun Yat Sen, exercised their influence to raise patriotic sentiment among the Chinese overseas and encouraged them to improve their ethnic status overseas.¹⁸ During this period the Chinese started to evaluate and define their “Chineseness” (*ketionghoaan*).

In discussing the Chinese cultural identity in Indonesia, Claudine Salmon, a prominent scholar in Indonesian-Chinese studies, states that the attempt to preserve the Chinese identity started in the 1900s. She writes that in Java, such as in Surabaya and other regions, there were attempts to preserve and revive Chinese customs.¹⁹ In particular, this revival movement was launched to counter the trend among the Peranakan Chinese to turn their backs on their traditions and embrace other religions, such as Islam.²⁰ Salmon’s argument is based on the study of two Chinese *klenteng* (a Malay word for Chinese shrine) -- the Hokkien Kong Tik Soe (the Temple of the Merits of Fujian) in Surabaya and the Hokkien Kong Soe (the Fujian Collective Ancestral Temple) in Makassar. These shrines had been established in the mid-nineteenth century as a response to weakening Chinese traditions. They were built on the initiative of the heads of the local Chinese community for conducting Chinese rituals, such as marriages and funerals. In this regard, Salmon reveals two elements related to Chinese society. First, the Chinese struggled to keep their traditions alive, both locally and regionally. Second, the Chinese shrine appears to have been central to Chinese longevity-related customs because these were performed in these shrines. Salmon also postulates the idea that the cultural identity of the Peranakan Chinese requires a careful study as this community comprised two groups -- those whose inclination towards Chinese culture and tradition are apparent and those who have merged their identity with local customs resulting in the invisibility of their Chineseness.²¹

A study conducted by Lea E. Williams focused on the nationalism of the Chinese overseas. Unlike Willmott whose perspective was rather lenient,

18 Ibid., 3.

19 C. Salmon, “Ancestral Halls, Funeral Associations, and Attempts at Resinicization in Nineteenth-century Netherlands India,” in A. Reid (ed.), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press), 183-204.

20 Ibid., 183.

21 Ibid., 184.

Williams argued that the attitude of the colonial state towards the Chinese society's customs and traditions was unsympathetic. According to him the growth of Chinese nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a direct result of the hostile colonial policy towards the Chinese.²²

During the awakening of the Pan-Chinese movement, a wave of Chinese nationalism arrived in Java where the first modern Chinese organization called *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* (THHK) was established in 1900. The organization was concerned with the reawakening of Chineseness among the Peranakan Chinese.

The following section discusses the *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* and *Khong Kauw Hwee*, two organizations that were established to revive the Chinese culture. This is followed by a discussion of two organizations established by the Peranakan Chinese, namely the *Sam Kauw Hwee* (SKH) and the *Batavia Buddhist Association* (BBA), which were seen as a Peranakan Chinese reaction to the emergence of a Chinese cultural movement popularized by the THHK.

3.2. PERANAKAN CHINESE IDENTITY: CULTURE AND RELIGION

3.2.1. *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* (THHK) and *Khong Kauw Hwee* (KKH)

In 1900 a feeling of national solidarity or Chinese nationalism emerged among the Chinese in Indonesia which, according to Leo Suryadinata, resulted in different political notions among them. Both the *Totok* and the Peranakan Chinese began to orient themselves toward China.²³ Consequently, several Chinese organizations were established. These included the *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* (THHK), *Sing Hwee*, *Khong Kauw Hwee* (KKH), *Sam Kauw Hwee*

22 These grievances include unreasonably large taxes, the pass system (*passenstelsel*), the maintenance of separate residential areas for Chinese (*wijkenstelsel*), and also the position of Chinese under the jurisdiction of the courts for natives (*politierol*). Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 27-28.

23 Suryadinata, *Pribumi Indonesians, the Chinese Minority and China*, 48. For more detailed elaboration on Peranakan Chinese politics in Indonesia in early the 1900s. See, Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*; M.F. Somers, *Peranakan Chinese Politics*; L. Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976).

(SKH) and Soe Pa Sia or Reading Clubs.²⁴

It was the establishment of the THHK that marked the emergence of the Chinese movement in colonial Indonesia. It was founded in 17 March 1900 by a Peranakan Chinese named Lie Kim Hok.²⁵ Its goal was to promote Chinese culture and reform Chinese customs and traditions based on Confucianism. In other words, it sought to awaken interest in Confucianism and promote Confucianism thought and conduct.

Interestingly, the Confucian movement in mainland China had not been a success. In 1895, there was a proposal to make Confucianism the state religion and convert all unauthorized temples into Confucian shrines. However, the proposal was rejected by the emperor Kuang-hsu. Consequently, the Confucian movement was crushed.²⁶ However, it generated similar efforts beyond mainland China, such as Singapore and Malaya.²⁷

This revivalism also spread to Java.²⁸ There the Confucian revivalism was very much a Peranakan Chinese phenomenon. Charles Coppel states that unlike in Singapore and Malaya, most of the leaders of the THHK in Java were Peranakan Chinese.²⁹ This is evidenced by the existence of Peranakan writings on Chinese tradition and the first Malay translation of Confucian classics in Java. These writings also reveal a connection between Java and Singapore. In one of these writings, Tan Ging Tiong, mentions his meeting in colonial Singapore with Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang, who were promoters of Confucianism and who established The Chinese Philomatic Society in 1898 in colonial Singapore.³⁰ Suryadinata states that the revivalism movement which developed in Singapore served as a model for Indonesia.³¹ As Williams describes it, “reborn Confucianism was a stone dropped into the overseas

24 Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 110.

25 Ibid., 57. Lie Kim Hok was a Peranakan Chinese who received his education and served as an assistant teacher in mission schools.

26 Coppel, “The Origins of Confucianism,” 182.

27 Y. Ching-hwang, “The Confucian Revival Movement in Singapore and Malaya, 1899-1911,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 7 (1976), 34.

28 Ibid., 34.

29 Coppel, “The Origins of Confucianism,” 180.

30 Lohanda, Mona, *Growing Pains: The Chinese and the Dutch in Colonial Java, 1890-1942* (Jakarta: Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka, 2002), 51; Also see Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 55.

31 L. Suryadinata *The Chinese Minority in Indonesia: Seven Papers* (Singapore:

Chinese pond; the ripples it generated spread and, under the force of breezes and gales from every quarter, grew to be waves of great size and power."³²

In his book, *Origins of the Modern Chinese Movement in Indonesia*, Kwee Tek Hoay presents the three main objectives of the THHK, namely,

- to improve the customs of the Chinese, by using Confucianism to civilize conduct and broaden Chinese knowledge of language and literature;
- to establish and maintain in Batavia and in other places in Indonesia, quarters that would serve as meeting places for the members of the association to discuss the affairs of the association and matters of general interest and to maintain schools to achieve its goals without violating the law; and
- to build up a collection of books that would be useful for acquiring knowledge and understanding.³³

To achieve these objectives, the THHK focused on education and in 1901 it founded its first school in Batavia. Govaars-Tjia states that special attention was given to adult education since the aim was to promote the status of the Chinese and their children.³⁴ Hence, the lectures given in the school focused on Confucianism and Chinese culture. Furthermore, the education project also provided advice and information about Chinese culture and Confucianism, which were important to the Chinese community.³⁵ Finally, the project promoted a new style of education in elementary schools, which included the teaching of Mandarin. This Chinese language became the medium of instruction. It was not long before the THHK was able to expand their network of schools throughout Indonesia.³⁶

The role of schools as a catalyst in promoting Confucian teaching according to Chinese culture is aptly described by Kwee below:

Thus, the initial purpose of the THHK School for the Confucian religion was like the Bible or mission school for Christianity or the Mohammadijah

Chopmen Enterprises, 1978), 35; Ching-hwang, "The Confucian Revival Movement," 40.

32 Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 54.

33 Kwee Tek Hoay, *Atsal Moelanja Timboel Pergerakan Tionghoa jang Modern di Indonesia*. Lea E. Williams (trans.) *The Origin of the Modern Chinese Movement in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1969), 7.

34 Govaars-Tjia, *Dutch Colonial Education*, 55.

35 Ibid., 55.

36 Kwee, *Atsal Moelanja Timboel Pergerakan*, 62.

school for the Moslems. People felt it was necessary to revive the teachings of Confucius among the overseas Chinese here, because thirty or forty years ago our marriage and funeral precepts and customs were so confused and full of superstition which caused many difficulties so they had to be changed and improved.³⁷

The Confucian revival movement also aimed to improve the moral and spiritual quality of the Chinese people's lives through the teaching of Confucius. The first step to achieving this goal was by teaching them how to read Chinese characters and language.

As the number of the schools increased, the educational aspect of its efforts became increasingly vital to the organization. With increasing support from the Chinese community, in 1908 the number of the THHK schools increased to 15.³⁸ Later, the focus of the THHK shifted from promoting Confucianism to a focus on Chinese nationalism.

The popularity of the THHK schools among the Chinese, both Totok and Peranakan, soon caught the attention of the colonial government. Consequently, as Mona Lohanda, an Indonesian historian, states the introduction of English as the second language at the Sekola Tjina THHK aroused the suspicion of the colonial authorities, hence the establishment of the Hollandsch Chineesche School (HCS) or Dutch-Chinese School in 1908. This school was meant to counter the effect of the nationalist movement. This was followed by the removal of the Dutch policy on Chinese society, such as the pass and quarter system, and the inclusion of the Chinese in the Dutch civil law. The Peranakan Chinese reacted positively to this school because its use of the Dutch language as the medium of instruction made it relevant to the Indonesian situation.³⁹

Relations between the Totok and Peranakan Chinese weakened in the late 1920s, partly because they preferred different schools. The Peranakan Chinese preferred the HCS while the Totok preferred the THHK schools. However,

37 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Lezing tentang Khong Kauw", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 2 (November 1934), 26-27. Kwee's marriage and funeral drew specific attention because they were costly and seen as being heavily influenced by indigenous practice found in the region of West Java.

38 J. Goan, "Pendidikan THHK Setengah Abad," in *Hari ulang tahun ke-50 Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan Djakarta* (Jakarta: Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan, 1950), 8; Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 53.

39 Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 54-55; Govaars-Tjia, *Dutch Colonial Education*, 85.

the weakened connection also came about with the establishment of political organizations. The gap between the Totok and Peranakan grew wider when the THHK officially terminated the Confucian movement in 1928⁴⁰ and the educated Peranakan Chinese who were pro-Dutch established Chung Hwa Hui (CHH). In 1932, the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI) was formed by a group of Indies-oriented Peranakan, while those who were China-oriented established *Sin Po*,⁴¹ a Malay language magazine which openly questioned the accuracy of Confucianism as religion. *Sin Po* openly accused the Khong Kauw Hwee (KKH) of not supporting the Chinese cultural movement in Indonesia and countering the spirit of democracy which had developed in mainland China.⁴²

Despite opposition, interest in Confucianism continued. The role of promoting it was assumed by the KKH, which was established in 1923 in Solo. One of its moves was the establishment of the Sin Bin publishing house in Bandung. Its magazine, *Sin Bin*, published Tan Hwan Tjiang's⁴³ article titled "Kapentingannja Khong Kauw Hwee Boeat Bangsa Tionghoa" (The Importance of the Khong Kauw Hwee for the Chinese People) in 1923. Tan Hwan Tjian had earlier declared that "*Khong Kauw* had for thousands of years been in the real religion of the Chinese ... if people said that Khong Kauw was not a religion, it followed that Chinese were a people with no religion."⁴⁴

By 1925, the KKH had established thirteen branches, most of which were in East Java, Yogyakarta, Central Java, West Java and Madura.⁴⁵ To publicize its progress, the organization held a conference in Yogyakarta in

40 Ibid., 55. The THHK later received a smaller subsidy from the *Kong Koan* because the THHK discontinued maintaining the Confucian portrait and altar. The THHK also prohibited any form of form of worship within the vicinity of the school. See: Coppel, "The Origins of Confucianism", 185-86.

41 Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics*, 51-53.

42 Ibid., 130.

43 Tan Hwan Tjian was a pseudonym of Dr. Chen Huanzhang, a disciple of Kang You-wei who established the Confucian Religion Association (Kongjiaohui) while still a student at Columbia University in 1907. See C.A. Coppel, "Is Confucianism a Religion? A 1923 Debate in Java," *Archipel* 38 (1989), 132.

44 Coppel, "Is a Confucianism a Religion?," 132-33.

45 Ko Keng Yam, "Lijst nama-nama Hoofdbestuur dan Bestuur Khong Kauw Hwee di seloeroeh tempat", *Khong Kauw Goat Po: Orgaan Khong Kauw Tjong Hwee Bandoeng Java*, 20 (21 June 1925), 24.

1925.⁴⁶ Representatives from almost all of its branches attended, and Ong Soe Aan, president of the KKH Bandung branch, served as the chairman of the conference. The conference program highlighted the issue of the progress of the KKH, one of which was to set up Fonds Khong Kauw or Khong Kauw Kie Poen Kiem. These funds were meant to support propagandists invited to join the KKH. They were also meant to support inviting Confucian propagandists from mainland China, such as Ko Hong Bing, Khang Jow Wie and Nio Kee Thiau.⁴⁷ The conference highlighted the importance of Confucianism to the Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia and affirmed the idea that Confucianism was a religion, which was a response to the attack by the THHK.

The KKH's defence of Confucianism as a Chinese religion was criticized by some Peranakan Chinese in Batavia. Their criticism focused on two points: the KKH's definition of religion and the failure of the KKH to mobilize the Peranakan Chinese to defend the Chinese religion. Such criticism led to the formation of another Chinese Peranakan religion-based organization in Batavia, the Sam Kauw Hwee.

3.2.2. Sam Kauw Hwee (The Association of Three Religions)

The Sam Kauw Hwee (SKH) was founded by a Peranakan Chinese named Kwee Tek Hoay in May 1934. After a conference held by the KKH in August 1931 in Solo, Kwee appeared to respond to the indicated problem discussed during the meeting. These problems were about the deterioration of Chinese religion and the need for the purification of religious practices. In 1932, Kwee decided to publish his periodical called *Moestika Dharma*; it targeted mainly Peranakan Chinese readers. *Moestika Dharma* sought to address the issue of spirituality in general, and the issue of Chinese spirituality in particular. In the periodical, Kwee discussed a concept of Chinese religion called Sam Kauw (Three Religions) which comprised Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Later, the SKH also became involved in defying the influence of Christian missionaries, which according to Kwee contributed to the deterioration of the Chinese tradition.

46 The conference was held at Centrale Vereeniging Tionghwa, in Sajidan. See Ko Keng Yam, "Conferentie Khong Kauw Tjong Hwee 26 September 1925 di Djokjakarta", *Khong Kauw Goat Po: Orgaan Khong Kauw Tjong Hwee Bandoeng Java*, 22-23 (August 1925), 34.

47 *Ibid.*, 35.

Many Chinese disagreed with the establishment of the SKH because they believed that the Confucian organization had not made any significant progress. The Chinese partly suggested that there was no need to establish the SKH, since there were already a Confucian and a Buddhist organization.⁴⁸ Despite this setback, the SKH continued to conduct its activities.

Like the Theosophical Society, the SKH was pluralistic and accommodating of other religions. As a matter of fact, Kwee Tek Hoay, the founder of SKH, had been an active member of the Theosophical Society. He admitted using the structure of the Society as a model for the SKH. As Kwee declared, "Sam Kauw Hwee is comparable to the Theosophical Society but on a smaller scale. In this sense that it does not work for all religions, but only for the three religions known as the Chinese Religions."⁴⁹ In other words, the SKH aimed to facilitate communication among the three religions.⁵⁰

The influence of the Theosophical Society could also be seen in the structure of the SKH, which adopted a western style executive committee. Further, the members of this committee came from different spiritual backgrounds. The members included Kwee himself (chairperson).⁵¹ Kwee's daughter, Kwee Yat Nio (chairperson for the women's section) and the Venerable Lin Feng Fei, a Mahayana Buddhist monk (chairperson for Klenteng Kwan Im Tong).⁵² The SKH also replicated the Theosophical Society's program of activities. These included lecture series and discussions, to which speakers from the Theosophical Society were often invited.⁵³

48 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kenapatah moesti berdiriken Sam Kauw Hwee?", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 2 (November 1934), 2.

49 Ibid., 3.

50 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Toedjoen jang djelas dan tetep", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 5 (February 1935), 1-7.

51 Kwee Tek Hoay also later became the chairperson of the Batavia Buddhist Association (BBA).

52 Kwee Tek Hoay,, "Toedjoenna ini maandblad", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 1 (Oktober 1934), 16.

53 Among the Theosophical Society members, Soekirlan and Mg. Mangoendisandjoto appeared to consistently give lectures at the headquarters of the organization. See Mg. Mangoendisandjoto, "Penjakit batin dan obatnja"

However, the SKH was not formally structured. In speaking about the organization's regulations or the "Sam Kauw Hwee Reglement", Kwee explained that both the SKH and the Batavia Buddhist Association did not have statutes or decrees. Kwee emphasized that the SKH was only designed to pursue objectives and tactical matters to reach its goals concerning the Chinese religions.⁵⁴

Rather, the SKH focused on programs that allowed better access to the learning of the three religions, such as conducting lectures. As stated below,

By becoming members of the Sam Kauw Hwee, Buddhists would be able to participate in the lectures or any religious activities organized by Confucians; In the same manner, the Confucians also would have the opportunity to partake in the Wezak celebration. In the house of Sam Kauw Hwee, both Confucian and Buddhist leaders might be invited to deliver lectures.⁵⁵

The SKH soon gained the attention of people outside Batavia. Tan Khoen Swie (1894 -- unknown), a Chinese man from Kediri in East Java, established a branch of the SKH in his region.⁵⁶ Tan believed that the SKH was the Chinese ancestors' legacy by which people could reach the highest spiritual achievement, that is, the discovery of Truth (*membuka resianja Toeban*).⁵⁷ He also believed that the SKH could halt the declining influence of the THHK. He wrote, "The THHK and the Khong Kauw in Indonesia are

Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong, 4 (January 1935), 25-27. R. Soekirlan, "Apa jang diwariskan oleh kake-mojang kita", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po:Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 4 (January 1935), 28-43.

54 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Sam Kauw Hwee dan reglement-nja", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po:Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 4 (January 1935), 7-8.

55 *Ibid.*, 7-8.

56 Tan Khoen Swie was one of the prominent Chinese who was also a writer, mystic, and the publisher of Boekhandel Tan Khoen Swie from Kediri. He was also a committee member of the THHK and also an advocate for Chinese Women Association (Hoe Lie Hiap Hwee) in Kediri. See L. Suryadinata, *Prominent Indonesian Chinese: Biographical Sketches* 4th Edition (Singapore: ISEA-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2015), 289-90.

57 Tan Khoen Swie, "Soecal Sam Kauw, tiga Agama Tionghoa", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po:Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 5 (February 1935), 32.

not flourishing but they are undergoing a series of ups and downs just like that of an unhealthy plant. Is it because of improper work? The SKH is expected to close that gap and rise together with the rest (of the organizations).”⁵⁸ Tan added that the SKH would also enable the Chinese in Indonesia to reconnect with China as well as establish relations with other countries such as Hindustan and America.⁵⁹ With the increasing interest in Chinese *kebatinan* (spirituality), the SKH became more appealing to the Chinese. Hence, Tan was also able to establish another SKH branch in the region of Tulungagung (16 April 1935) and Kertosono (March 1935).⁶⁰ Additionally, outside Java, Oeij Pek Yong established a branch of the SKH in Manado.⁶¹

With the growing number of SKH branches, this dissertation argues that the SKH became one of the most stable religious organizations formed by the Peranakan Chinese in early twentieth century Indonesia. The steady growth was followed by another periodical exclusively dedicated to the work of the organization. The periodical was named *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong* (October 1934-1941). Like the *Moestika Dharma*, the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* was targeted at the Peranakan Chinese. Thus, it was published in Malay, the vernacular language of the Peranakan Chinese. Being an owner of a publishing house in Kediri, Tan also published a monthly journal called *Soeara Sam Kauw Hwee*, further increasing the number of periodicals focused on Chinese religion.⁶²

The *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* was interesting in that it contained information about the goals of the SKH as well as the debate about Chinese religions. Thus, with this publication the SKH not only served one but many other religions. After the establishment of the Batavia Buddhist Association, a movement pioneered also by Tan Khoen Swie, the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* officially served

58 Ibid., 33.

59 Ibid., 33.

60 Kwee Tek Hoay, “Roepa-roepa kabar tentang pergerakan Sam Kauw”, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 8 (May 1935), 37.

61 Kwee Tek Hoay, “Kabar pergerakan Sam Kauw”, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 8 (May 1935), 9 (June 1935), n.pag.

62 Kwee tek Hoay, “Kabar pergerakan Sam Kauw”, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 6 (March 1935), 37.

both the SKH and the Batavia Buddhist Association. On its cover, it said *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*.

In addition to its objective to facilitate communication among the three religions, as stated earlier, the SKH also sought to counteract conversion into Christianity and other religions among the Chinese. Michonne van Rees discussed this topic in his master's thesis entitled "Sam Kauw Hwee and Christian Conversion amongst the Peranakan Chinese in Late Colonial Java." Van Rees states that "the increased exposure to Western education and modern technology heightened the feeling of uncertainty in what was already an unstable environment. The emergence of the SKH and the increased popularity of Christianity are seen as the consequences of those backgrounds."⁶³ The Christian missionary penetration into Peranakan Chinese society appears to have propelled the development of the religious organization among the Peranakan Chinese. They felt the urgency to preserve their traditions and religious and cultural identity. As reported in *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, the Peranakan Chinese saw the popularity of Christianity as a threat to their group. For instance, in the November 1940 edition of the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, it was reported that in Manado out of 7,000 Chinese, 400 had converted to Catholicism. The number of converts increased when the H.C. Jongens School was established because the Chinese who studied there were attracted to Catholicism.⁶⁴ The conversion into Catholicism was also facilitated by Catholic charity projects. In other words, the Chinese receivers of the charity would convert to Catholicism. The SKH was also particularly concerned about the conflict between Catholic and Chinese traditions. An example was the Chinese tradition of burning incense as a gesture of respect for deceased families and relatives, a practice prohibited by Catholicism. Additionally, upon their death the Chinese who had converted to Christianity had to be buried according to Christian, not Chinese, traditions.⁶⁵

63 M. Van Rees, *The Sam Kauw Hwee and Christian Conversion amongst the Peranakan Chinese in Late Colonial Java*. (Master's Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1987), 17.

64 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Hatsilnja pergerakan Sam kau di Manado", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 74 (November 1940), 5-10.

65 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Lezing: Khong Tjoe dan Buddha", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 51 (December 1938), 14.

It appears that the above conversion trend was not regarded by the Peranakan Chinese simply as a religious issue. Kwee stated that for the Peranakan Chinese religious conversion was also a form of cultural conversion and that the Chinese who converted into other religions had abandoned customs associated with Chinese religion and beliefs. Not only that, they were also forbidden to pray for their ancestors as well as to pray to the Chinese *Thian* (God or Allah).⁶⁶

These statements by Kwee suggest that he was concerned about the impact of Christianity on Chinese tradition and culture. To Kwee, religion and culture were interrelated and he was concerned that exposure to Christianity would result in the unwanted conversion. Consequently, in the October 1934 issue of the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* it was emphasized that “The Sam Kauw Hwee is to spread the essence of the three religions, it is aimed not only to achieve spiritual enlightenment and a union between the followers of the three religions, but also with the intention of upholding Chinese religions, most of which arise from those religions.”⁶⁷ It could thus be concluded that the main goal of the SKH was not only to keep the Chinese religions (*Sam Kauw*) alive and practised by the Peranakan Chinese, but also for them to withstand the influence of the Christianity.

3.2.3. The Batavia Buddhist Association (BBA)

Aside from the SKH, another Chinese *kebatinan* organization established by the Peranakan Chinese was the Batavia Buddhist Association (BBA). This was the first Buddhist organization established by the Peranakan Chinese in Batavia, Indonesia in 1934. It was established by the same community that was headed by Kwee, and they did so not long after they founded the SKH. Until the end of the colonial times, the BBA was the only Buddhist organization founded by non-Europeans in Indonesia.

Kwee attributed the founding of the BBA to the growing interest in Buddhism after the establishment of the SKH. This is unlike Iem Brown’s

66 Kwee Tek Hoay, “Mengapa pendirian Sam Kauw Hwee ada perloe”, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 6 (March 1935), 4.

67 Kwee Tek Hoay, “Sam Kauw Gwat Po”, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 1 (October 1934), 9.

perspective of the BBA as a reincarnation of the Java Buddhist Association (JBA). To Brown the JBA changed its name to the BBA because it was trying to distance itself from western influence.⁶⁸ The source, *Moestika Dharma*, though demonstrates differently. The finding shows that when the BBA was formed on 17 May 1934 the JBA still existed. Besides, as stated in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the JBA was succeeded by another organization, Het Centraal Boeddhistisch Instituut voor Java.⁶⁹

The establishment of the BBA raises an interesting point regarding the centre for Buddhist existence in late colonial Indonesia. In his article, Yoneo Ishii claims that Buitenzorg (now Bogor) was one of the important sites for the Theosophist and Buddhist movements.⁷⁰ While his argument about the Theosophical Society's contribution to Buddhism in this period is plausible. However, the evidence obtained for this dissertation indicates that the centre of Buddhism was in Batavia. The first evidence is the presence of the BBA in Batavia where it became an enclave for Buddhist enthusiasts and intellectuals. The second evidence is the conversion of the klenteng into the centre for Buddhist activities and the headquarters of the BBA. In other words, the klenteng was made into the formal site for Buddhists to perform their religious activities. (The klenteng will be discussed further in a later chapter.)

Kwee emphasizes that the formation of the BBA resulted from an organic process. In other words, it was established due to a need to give full attention to Buddhism as independent from the Sam Kau Hwee (SKH). In fact, it was the heightened interest in Buddhism which encouraged Kwee to establish a separate organization mainly for Buddhism. Prior to this decision, there were two meetings with the community which were held at Klenteng Kwan Im

68 I. Brown, "The Revival of Buddhism in Modern Indonesia," in M. Ramstedt (ed.), *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia: Minority Religion Between Local, National, and Global Interests* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 51.

69 The Java Buddhist Association was terminated due to two main reasons: (1) the request from the International Buddhist Missionary in Thaton, Burma requested its termination and (2) the president, Mr. Power, had left Indonesia for America for personal reasons. See Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kabar pergerakan kebatinan", *Moestika Dharma: Maandblad tentang Agama, Kabatinnan dan Filosofie*, 29 (August 1934), 1111.

70 Y. Ishii, "Modern Buddhism in Indonesia," in G. Dhammapala, R. Gombrich and K.R. Norma (eds), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Hammalava Saddhatissa*. Hammalava Saddhatissa Felicitation Volume Committee (Sri Lanka: University of Srti jayawardenepura, 1984), 109.

Tong. These were held on 10 May 1934 and on 17 May 1934. The decision to establish the BBA was made at the second meeting, which was attended by around eighty people.⁷¹

The BBA had the same organizational structure as its predecessor, the SKH. Hence, it also used the same Dutch terms as the SKH, such as *studieklas* (study class), *hoofdbestuur* (mainboard), *statuut* (statute) and *voorzitter* (chairperson). The different positions and responsibilities in the BBA were assigned to the founders and members. For example, the head of Klenteng Kwan Im Tong, Hwesio Lin Feng Fei, was appointed as honorary president; Kwee as president and Vogelpoel as vice-president.⁷²

However, unlike the SKH which catered primarily to the Peranakan Chinese and other Chinese communities, the BBA catered to people from different ethnic backgrounds. In fact, the organization increasingly gained more attention from native Indonesian intellectuals. An example of this feature was the teaching programs, which were conducted primarily by Javanese individuals active in the organization.⁷³ These included Mangoensoesilo, K. Mangoenpoernomo, R.M. Ng. Poerbatjaraka,⁷⁴ Kadiroen,⁷⁵ Mg. Mangoendisandjoto⁷⁶ and R. Soekirlan,⁷⁷ who gave lectures on various topics about spirituality (*kebatinan*).⁷⁸ Unfortunately, other than this activity little is known about the Javanese involvement in the BBA. However, there was brief mention of a relevant fact in the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* periodical under the topic “Mengapa Moesti Berdiriken Sam Kauw Hwee?”

71 Kwee Tek Hoay, “Pergerakan kaoem Buddhist di Batavia”, *Moestika Dharma: Maandblad tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 27 (June 1934), 1013-20.

72 *Ibid.*, 1013-20

73 As far as sources are concerned, there is no indication that the BBA recorded the names of its members.

74 He was an expert in *horoeft dan babasa Djawa Koeno* (Old Javanese script and language). He delivered a lecture on “Buddhism in the Old Times” (Agama Buddha pada Djeman Koeno) and “Guides to Borobudur” (Beberapa keterangan tentang Borobudur) at the Batavia Buddhist Association’s lecture series. See Poerbatjaraka, “Hal Agama Buddha di Java pada djeman koeno dan bebrapa katerangan tentang Boroboedoer”, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, 4 (January 1935), 18-24.

75 Member of the Theosophical Society of Batavia.

76 Executive member of *Kebatinan* (spirituality) from Pekalongan.

77 He was a theosophist at one of lodges in Batavia.

78 The lectures on Buddhism by the Javanese named above appeared in various issues of the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, (1935-1941).

(Why should Sam Kauw Hwee be established?) It indicated that after being involved in the BBA, the Javanese spirituality (*kebatinan*) group in Batavia led by Mg. Mangoendisandjoto established an organization called Agama Djawa Koeno on 11 November 1934. Its aim was to introduce ancient Javanese beliefs, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and the belief in ancestors, which was similar to practiced during the Majapahit period.⁷⁹ Thus, it seems that the emergence of the above organizations was not a mere coincidence. Rather, it was a result of interconnection existed between individuals and organizations who shared similar interest.

The membership of the BBA also indicates visible cosmopolitanism. The teaching schedule reveals that aside from Peranakan Chinese, and Javanese, there were also Indians and European who participated in the organization's lecture program. Table 3.2 presents a list of the weekly lectures (*studieklas*) delivered in the month of June 1934.⁸⁰

Table 3.2. Weekly BBA Lectures Delivered in June 1934

Speaker	Ethnic Background	Title of Talk
Visakha Gunadharmas	Peranakan Chinese	Buddhism in Household Life (<i>Agama Buddha dalam Rumah tangga</i>)
Nanda Lal Punj	Indian	The Sin of Meat-eating (<i>Kadoaannja memakan daging</i>)
Gouw Key Lok	Chinese	The First Step to Buddhism (<i>Tindakan Pertama ka Agama Buddha</i>)
E.W.P. Vogelpoel	Dutch	De Weg van Een Bhikkhu (<i>Tjara Penghidoepannja Satoe Bhikkhu</i>)
Jaganath L. Ghandy	Indian	Comparison of Buddhism and Jainism (<i>Perbandingan antara Agama Buddha dengan Agama Djain</i>)
Chinese Hwesio Lin Feng Fei	Totok Chinese	Three Refuges and Five Precepts in Buddhism (<i>Sam Kwie Ngo Kha</i>)

* Kwee, "Pergerakan kaoem Buddhist", 1013-20.

79 Kwee, "Kenapatah moesti berdiriken Sam Kauw Hwee?", 6.

80 Kwee, "Pergerakan kaoem Buddhist", 1020.

Given the variety of nationalities involved in the BBA's teaching program, it could be said that the organization had a cosmopolitan nature. It provided people from different races and ethnic backgrounds space to commingle.

The rich dynamics of the BBA's membership is evidence of the presence of pluralism in late colonial Indonesia. Although the members of Islamic organizations at that time were not as diverse as those of the BBA, in his dissertation Muhammad Ali, Indonesian scholar on Islamic history, presents evidence of the pluralization of Islamic knowledge and orientations in colonial Indonesia. Ali claims that the Islamic world in the early twentieth century was largely pluralistic and dynamic. Many "modernist" Muslims did not see a problem in adopting the Dutch and Christian organizational model.⁸¹

Members of Buddhist organizations had always come from various backgrounds. Thus, the Peranakan Chinese denied that their attempt to form a Buddhist organization of their own meant that they were withdrawing from the European Buddhist organizations. As previously mentioned in this dissertation, Brown claimed that at the beginning of its existence, the BBA aimed to detach distance itself from the influence of Western Buddhism, which in this case referred to the JBA. However, sources indicate otherwise. There is evidence to show that the BBA maintained a good relationship and continued its collaboration with the JBA which was led by Europeans, Power and Van Dienst. The BBA also continued to sponsor guest lectures given by Europeans. Further, the founder of the BBA, Kwee, also evidently remained dedicated to translating books and articles written by European writers into the Malay language.⁸²

Another interesting aspect of the BBA's nature was the fact that apparently not all members were Buddhists. An example was Jagannath L. Gandhi, the vice-president. Although he was one of the most active and supportive board members of the BBA, he was not a Buddhist but a follower of Jainism. In referring to him, the magazine, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, considered it a privilege to have a BBA member who was a follower of Jainism and who was able to share his knowledge of Jainism. Gandhi frequently gave lectures on

81 M. Ali, *Religion and Colonialism: Islamic Knowledge in South Sulawesi and Kelantan, 1905-1945* (PhD Dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 2007), 176; M. Ali, *Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern in Indonesia and Malaya* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 36-37.

82 Among which a book written, *Buddhism in Java (Agama Buddha di Jawa pada Djerman Koeno)*, by Arthur Fitz.

the comparative study of Buddhism and Jainism at Klenteng Kwan Im Tong.⁸³ One such lecture which he gave on 18 October 1934 was titled “Consciousness of Karma” (Kasadaran dari Karma). He ended this lecture with the following Buddhist verse: *Nammo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa!* (I pay homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Enlightened One!) Kwee Tek Hoay translated this lecture into the Malay language.⁸⁴

The BBA was effective in introducing Buddhism to those who were interested in knowing more about this religion. This can be seen in the intensity with which they pursued their Buddhist-related activities. Additionally, the weekly lectures and discussions were often conducted by more than one speaker in English, Chinese or Dutch. They were translated into Malay and then published in the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*. These lectures and discussions provided more opportunities for dispersing knowledge about Buddhism.

As mentioned earlier, the Peranakan Chinese had limited sources of information about Buddhism. To solve this problem, the BBA invited individuals and organizations to share their knowledge of Buddhism. For instance, the chairperson of the Theosophical Society in Batavia, Kadiroen Mangoenpoernomo, delivered a lecture about “Wet Gaib atawa Karma” (Supramundane Law or Karma), the basic tenet of the Buddha’s teaching. The BBA is also said to have received support from Gonggrijp,⁸⁵ the chairperson of the Pakoempoelan Theosofie Batavia (Batavia Theosophical Society), who attended a lecture at the BBA headquarters.⁸⁶

Unlike in the SKH, the BBA lectures and discussions covered a wide range of topics about Buddhism. The first lecture was given by Hweshio Lin Feng Fei, the honorary president of the BBA and abbot of Klenteng Kwan Im Tong. The title of his lecture was “Tong Siang Hwat Hoed” (Performing Devotion to the Buddha at Home).⁸⁷ Some lectures were interesting such as

83 J. L. Gandhi, “Consciousness of Karma”, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 2 (November 1934), 8.

84 *Ibid.*, 9.

85 Full name not recorded.

86 Unfortunately, there are no details of what kind of support was provided by the Theosophical Society in Batavia. Kwee, “Roepa-roepa kabar”, 38

87 Lin Feng Fei, “Tong Siang Hwat Hoed. Berbakti pada Buddha di dalem roemah sendiri”, *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam*

that delivered by Nanda Lal Punj⁸⁸ on 29 November 1934. Titled “Why I like to be a Buddhist,” it focused on the speaker’s testimony on being a Buddhist. In the lecture, the speaker discussed the five reasons why he chose Buddhism as his religion. These were:

1. Buddhism gives freedom of thought;
2. The Buddha does not require anyone to follow his teaching rigidly;
3. Buddhism gives a unique perspective on God;
4. Buddhism invites its followers to prove its teaching and not to blindly believe; and
5. The Buddha has boundless loving kindness and compassion.

Throughout its existence the BBA coexisted and cooperated with the SKH. For instance, the BBA lectures and discussions were open to members of the SKH. The relationship between these two organizations was documented in the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* which published a record (*verslag*) and transcripts of the BBA lectures (*lezing*). The collaboration with the SKH and other organizations, such as the Theosophical Society and the JBA allowed the BBA to remain active and flourish until the World War II.

Since the BBA had its own headquarters, it could conduct religious activities. In 1935, in collaboration with the SKH and the Theosophical Society, the BBA organized the first celebration of Vesak, which is a Buddhist celebration to commemorate the life events of the Sakyamuni Buddha. It is attributed to Southern (Theravada) Buddhism, not Northern (Mahayana) Buddhism. (A more detailed discussion of Vesak is found in the following chapter.)

Without doubt, the role of the BBA in bringing back Buddhism to Indonesia was very significant. Being the first Buddhist organization established by the Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia, the BBA was often overshadowed by other international organizations. However, the BBA proved to be; it lasted until just before the start of the Second World War. (This topic will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.)

Among other nature conceived by the organization, the pluralism in the BBA is prominent and is become key factor to Peranakan Chinese for being more receptive to welcome and to accept other tradition which is Southern Buddhism. In spite of traditionally belonged to Mahayana Buddhist tradition

Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong, 1 (October 1934), 27-37.

88 The speaker was also the vice president of the BBA.

they welcome Buddhism from the Southern tradition. The reception of this group to this new Buddhist tradition is attributed to some major factors such as the fact that it was in conjunction with the time when Southern Buddhism was on the rise and revival. That in term of networks, they have more connection with the people of the Southern tradition that become the source for Buddhism knowledge and inspiration. The lack of financial ability of the Peranakan Chinese to invite Buddhism expert from China also become another determining factor Buddhist society in Batavia to eventually opted for the Southern/Theravada Buddhist networks.

3.3. INDIVIDUALS IN THE BIRTH OF BUDDHISM

The establishment of Buddhist organizations and the publication of literature about Buddhism by laypeople were two defining characteristics of the modern Buddhism which developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸⁹ In other words, during this period, the laypeople, both men and women, were said to have enjoyed equal opportunity in term of becoming leading figures in Buddhism. It was common for an organization to address both religious and nonreligious issues at the time. For example, the first nationwide Muslim movement, Sarekat Islam (founded in 1909), was a religious organization but it also dealt with economic concerns.⁹⁰

Furthermore, in the context of modern Indonesia Buddhist organizations were curated by intellectuals who foresaw the need for organizations to accelerate the development of Buddhism in colonial Indonesia. It was the Peranakan Chinese who emerged as initiators and curators of Buddhism for the Batavia Buddhist organization.

Three individuals are worthy of note in this regard -- Kwee Tek Hoay, Ong Soe An and Visakha Gunadharma. Their involvement and work were critical to the spread of knowledge about Buddhism. They were particularly instrumental in establishing contact with other Buddhist networks and later maintaining these connections.

Furthermore, it is very important to mention here that while the first two individuals are men, the last figure is a woman. The males are named Kwee Tek

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

90 Ali, *Islam and Colonialism*, 112.

Hoay and Ong Soe Aan and the female is named Visakha Gunadharma. She is a deserving figure who should be reckoned separately to show her outstanding participation in Buddhist society. Additionally, discussing her role also helps defining the pivotal role of Buddhist women which has so far been rarely discussed in the historiography of Modern Buddhism. Taking Gunadharma into account opens a new perspective of activism in modern Buddhism. Within the Indonesian context, Gunadharma represents a historical period during which adult women started to take on social roles through education and social engagement. For Gunadharma, her participation in women's emancipation was performed through religious activism and literature.

3.3.1. Kwee Tek Hoay (1886-1952): The Founding Father of the Buddhist Institution

Kwee Tek Hoay was a Peranakan Chinese who was a talented writer, novelist, playwright, philosopher and religious scholar.⁹¹ Less known is the fact that he was also a Theosophist. He was born on 31 July 1886 in Buitenzorg. His parents were Kwee Tjiam Hong and Tan An Nio, who were originally from Fujian Village in mainland China. Kwee Tek Hoay was the first generation in his family to be born in colonial Indonesia. He had three children, -- a daughter named Kwee Yat Nio,⁹² who followed her father's footsteps,⁹³ and two sons, who both pursued careers in business.⁹⁴

Kwee's career was very much influenced by his linguistic ability. In his publications, he used at least three different languages, namely the Malay language, English and Dutch. Kwee learnt English from S. Maharaja, an Indian teacher at the THHK in Buitenzorg. Kwee perfected his Malay language with the help of his mother's friend who worked at a Church. Finally, he learned

91 L. Suryadinata, *Southeast Asian Personalities of Chinese Descent: A Biographical Dictionary* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: Chinese Heritage, 2012), 464.

92 Kwee Yat Nio was the only daughter of Kwee who followed the path of his father and became an important figure. She is discussed in a later section.

93 V. Gunadharma, "Riwayat Hidup Kwee Tek Hoay," in M. Sidharta (ed.), *100 Tabun Kwee Tek Hoay: Dari Penjaja Tekstil sampai Pendekar Pena* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1989), 267.

94 Kwee Tjun Gin studied at Institute Dudley Richard and later worked at China Life Insurance; Kwee Tjun Kouw studied in MULO and later worked at water company.

Dutch from two Dutchmen -- Dirk Van Hinloopen Labberton and Wotman⁹⁵ -- who were members of the Theosophical Society in Bogor.⁹⁶ His proficiency in these three languages enabled him to write multilingual texts, often using all three languages in the same text. Suryadinata has described Kwee as having an “interesting education background because he was very literate although he had no advanced formal education. Despite his lack of formal education, Kwee mastered three languages, namely, Dutch, Melayu and English.”⁹⁷

Kwee’s keen interest in literature was crucial to his writing career. Claudine Lombard Salmon in her *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia* states that Kwee was an active contributor to several publications, such as the weekly *Li Po*, *Sin Po* and the newspaper *Bintang Betawi*. One of his well-known writings published in *Sin Po* is titled “Pemandangan Perang Dunia ke-1, tahun 1914-1918”. Furthermore, within the Chinese society, Kwee was known for his endearing work in literature. Kwee was a brilliant writer with extensive knowledge, as shown by this statement: “His writings were so brilliant and good. People would not have thought that he himself had written them. He wrote of broad topics, spanning from chronicle to literatures, politics to philosophy. These works were written with clarity and lucidness.”⁹⁸ John B. Kwee, whose dissertation was titled “Chinese Malay Literature of the Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia, 1880-1942,” wrote an article about Kwee. In this article he called Kwee one of the most productive Chinese writers at the time⁹⁹ and highlighted Kwee’s most significant works, namely *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* (The Rose of Cikembang, 1927), *Drama Dari Krakatau* (Drama of Krakatau, 1929), *Drama di Boven Digoel* (Drama in Boven Digoel, 1938) and *Nonton Tjapgomeh* (Watching Tjapgomeh, 1930), one of Kwee’s most well-known novels. According to John

95 Full name not recorded.

96 Unfortunately, there is no further information about the name of the Dutch teachers. However, I think that it was Hinloopen Labberton who was the president of the Theosophical Society in 1920s Indonesia. For further details, see Gunadharma, “Riwayat Hidup Kwee Tek Hoay,” 260.

97 L. Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa & Identitas Indonesia: Dari Tjoe Bou San sampai Yap Thiam Hien* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2010), 40.

98 *Orang-orang Tionghoa jang Terkemoeka di Java (Who’s who)* (Solo: The Biographical Publishing Centre, 1935), 194.

99 Yoneo Ishii noted that Kwee Tek Hoay was a prolific Hokkien Peranakan writer. See Ishii, *Modern Buddhism in Indonesia*, 110.

B. Kwee, many of Kwee's works contain reflections of society at that time.¹⁰⁰ *Watching Tjapgomeh*, for instance, is a novel critiquing Chinese closed-mindedness, such as their disapproval of men and women holding hands in public.¹⁰¹

Kwee's literary career advanced when he put up his own publishing house which published periodicals and books. He was the director of two monthly magazines, namely *Moestika Dharma* (1932-1934) and *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* (1934-1941).¹⁰² Yoneo Ishii claims that through his writing Kwee played a major role in the production of Buddhism knowledge in colonial Indonesia.¹⁰³ Kwee's published work on Buddhism can be seen as early as 1927. For instance, he penned *Agama Buddha Jang Betoel* (The Right Buddhism), a book about genuine Buddhism, that is, Buddhism that is not idolatry nor blind worship. In other words, genuine Buddhism is different from Chinese worship traditions practiced at the klenteng.¹⁰⁴ This particular work reflects Kwee's concern about the religious practices at the klenteng, which he compared and contrasted to the practices of Buddhism.

Kwee chronicled the life of the Buddha in his book titled *Hikajat Penghidoepan dan Peladjaran Buddha Gautama* (The Life and the Teaching of the Gautama Buddha). The book was serialized in ten parts and published between 1931 and 1933. It was the first of its kind ever to be produced in

100 For complete details on the list of Kwee Tek Hoay's work, particularly his novel, see Sidharta (ed.), *100 Tahun Kwee Tek Hoay: Dari Penjaja Tekstil sampai Pendekar Pena*, 306-14.

101 J.B. Kwee, "Kwee Tek Hoay: A Productive Chinese Writer of Java (1880-1952)," *Archipel* 19 (1980), 87-88. John B. Kwee's article is among the few that are specifically dedicated to study Kwee Tek Hoay. However, just even though it gives good information about the topic, the writer has overlooked several fundamental aspects important to the life of Kwee. For instance, the stated year of Kwee's birth (1886) does not match his actual birth year (1880). Another instance is that John Kwee's claim about Tridharma being a Theosophy organization, is untrue. Also see, J. Sumardjo, "Kwee Tek Hoay sebagai Sastrawan," in M. Sidharta (ed.), *100 Tahun Kwee Tek Hoay: Dari Penjaja Tekstil sampai Pendekar Pena* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1989), 89-165.

102 In 1925, Kwee was appointed to be the chairperson in the daily *Sin Bin* in Bandung. In the year that followed, he became the chairperson of the weekly, *Panorama*, a position he held until 1932. He later also become the chairperson for monthly magazine, *Moestika Panorama*, from 1930 to 1932.

103 Ishii, *Modern Buddhism in Indonesia*, 110.

104 Kwee Tek Hoay, *Agama Buddha jang Betoel* (Tj'itjuroek: 1927), 465.

the Malay language.¹⁰⁵ Another of Kwee's publications about the life of the Buddha was *Sembahyang dan Meditatie: Menoeroet Atoeran dan keterangan Buddha Gautama* (Prayer and Meditation, in Accordance to and Explanation of the Gautama Buddha). It was published before the coming of Bhikku Narada. The first book was published in 1932 and the second edition was published in 1935.

Table 3.3 lists all of Kwee's publications which contributed to the production of Buddhist knowledge.

Table 3.3. Kwee Tek Hoay's Publications about Buddhism

No.	Title of Publication and Translation	Year Published
1	<i>Agama Buddha jang Betoel</i> (The Right Buddhism)	1927
2	<i>Penghidoepan Prins Sidharta di waktu moeda</i> (The Life of Young Prince Sidharta)	1931
3	<i>Buddha Gautama, 10 volumes</i> (Gautama Buddha, 10 volumes)	1931-33
4	<i>Hikajat Penghidoepan dan Peladjaran Buddha Gautama</i> (The Life and the Teaching of the Buddha)	1931-33
5	<i>Sembahjang dan meditatie</i> (Prayer and Meditation)	1932
6	<i>Omong-omong Tentang Agama Buddha</i> (Discussions on Buddhism)	1935
7	<i>Agama Buddha di Java</i> (Translation from Dr. Arthur Fitz: Buddhism in Java)	1935
8	<i>Kehidupan Disananja Kubur</i> (Life after Death)	1935
9	<i>Bimba Dewi (Yasodhara), Istrinja Prins Sidharta</i> (Bimba Dewi (Yasodhara), Wife of Prince Sidharta)	1938
10	<i>Hikmah Adjaran2 Buddha Gautama Udjar2 Emas Buddha</i> (Golden Words from the Buddha)	1961
11	<i>Moral dan Batin</i> (Moral and Soul)	1961

Source: Books collected by author of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁵ Melajoe Rendah was the lingua franca of Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia at the time.

During his time, Kwee was a leader in the field of publishing Buddhism books. Some of his publications were translations of his own work, while others were adaptations (*saduran*) of them.¹⁰⁶

Kwee's books on Buddhism reflect the influence of the knowledge of Buddhism at the time. His first Buddhist book, *Buddha Gautama*, was clearly inspired by *The Gospel of Buddha* (1894)¹⁰⁷ and *The Light of Asia* (1879). These books have been shortlisted as the most celebrated works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *The Gospel of the Buddha* was co-authored by renowned scholars and Western orientalists such as Thomas William Rhys Davids,¹⁰⁸ F. Max Muller,¹⁰⁹ Edmund Hardy, Spence Hardy, Bhikkhu Nyanatiloka,¹¹⁰ Karl Eugen Neumann and others.¹¹¹ In the world of Buddhism at the time, the book was respected and well received. For instance, Japan and colonial Sri Lanka officially adopted the book for their Buddhist schools and temples. A prominent Buddhist abbot of Kamakura, Rev. Shaku Soyen, had the book translated into the Japanese language. *The Light of Asia* (1879) was written by another Western Orientalist named Sir Edwin Arnold.¹¹²

Kwee was not only a leader in the production of knowledge about Buddhism. He was also a leader in the institutionalization of Buddhism among

106 D.S.M. Singgih, *Tridharma Selayang Pandang* (Jakarta: Yayasan BAKTI Balai Kitab Tridharma Indonesia, 2011), 2.

107 The book was first published in 1879. P. Carus, *The Gospel of The Buddha: Compiled from Ancient Records* (Chicago and London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1915).

108 His name is usually shortened into Rhys Davids, a notable British Buddhist scholar and the founder of the Pali Text Society in London.

109 Frederich Max Muller was a German-born philologist and orientalist.

110 He is known as the first European Theravada Buddhist monk born in Germany, 1878. His first publication was *Das Wort des Buddha*, published in 1907. In the following year, the English version, *The Word of the Buddha*, was published. Since then the book has been reprinted at least ten times included the reprint by the Young Men Buddhist Association in Colombo, 1948. The book also has been translated into multiple languages such as French, Bengali, Czech, Finnish, Russian, Japanese, Hindi, Bengali, Sinhalese and even Pali, under the title *Sacca-Sangaha*. The later was published in 1914. See Nyanatiloka, *The Word of the Buddha: An Outline of the Teaching of the Buddha in the Words of the Pali Canon* (Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1967), VIII.

111 Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha*, preface.

112 *Ibid.*, preface.

the Peranakan Chinese in colonial Indonesia. Inspired by the Theosophical Society, Kwee established two of the most important organizations which worked for the progress of the Chinese religion (Sam Kauw or Three Religions), which was the aim of the SKH, and Buddhism, which was the aim of the BBA.

Kwee was also the key figure that allowed the meeting between the Northern Wind Buddhist and Southern Wind Buddhist took place. It is known that before fully putting his confidence on the Southern Buddhist as his partner in reviving Buddhism and *klenteng*, Kwee hesitated to accept the element of Southern Buddhism on the reason that the school was not belonged to the Peranakan Chinese community. At this point, Ong Soe Aan, another Peranakan Chinese convinced him to invite Bhikkhu Narada, a Southern Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka.¹¹³ Further discussion on this will be elaborated in chapter four.

As he was living in Indonesia when the spirit of nationalism was arising, Kwee's writings reflected his politics. According to Suryadinata,¹¹⁴ these were rather conservative. Moreover, Kwee's writings seemed to also represent the voice of Chinese society. For instance, he expressed his disagreement with the Communist revolt in colonial Indonesia in 1926-27, and claimed that, in general, the Chinese did not support the revolt. On the other hand, Kwee also showed his alignment toward Indonesia. When the Dutch government attempted to crush the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI) in 1929, he encouraged the Chinese in Indonesia to support the organization.

In summary, given Kwee's work cited above it can be said he was not only a leader in the production of knowledge about Buddhism but also a leader in the institutionalization of Buddhism among the Peranakan Chinese in colonial Indonesia. Thus, he can be rightfully called a reformer of Chinese religion and Buddhist modernist in colonial Indonesia.

113 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Siapatah lagi jang aken toeroet?", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 11 (February 1933), 382.

114 L. Suryadinata, "Kwee Tek Hoay sebagai penulis masalah masyarakat Tionghoa dan politik: sebuah pengkajian awal," in M. Sidharta (ed.), *100 tahun Kwee Tek Hoay: Dari Penjaja Tekstil sampai Pendekar Pena* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1989), 1.

3.3.2. Ong Soe Aan (1884-Unknown): *Pendekar Anti Madat* (The Knight of Anti-Opium)

Ong Soe Aan's role in the Buddhist revival in colonial Indonesia focused on two aspects -- the purification of the *klenteng* and initiating contact between the Sri Lankan monks and the Peranakan Chinese in Batavia, both of which resulted in the introduction of Southern Buddhism. Ong's enthusiasm for the resacralization of the *klenteng* was also evident in his professional career as a member of an anti-drug or opium movement. In *Panorama*, a publication headed by Kwee Tek Hoay, there is a section in which Ong's agenda of the resacralization of the *klenteng* influenced his fight against the use of opium.¹¹⁵

Ong's role in the emergence of Buddhism is mostly outshined by other figures. In many writings, he is only briefly mentioned, consequently diminishing the centrality of his role in the process. Iem Brown, however, is an exception as she provides many details on Ong's contribution.¹¹⁶ In support of Brown's perspective on Ong, this dissertation argues that Ong was as important as Kwee. Sources demonstrate that he displayed much interest in the Chinese *kebatinan* (spirituality) and its project, including planting the seed of Buddhism in Indonesia. In this connection, one of the most highlighted points was the understated dispute between Kwee and Ong in connection with the momentous visit of Bhikkhu Narada from Sri Lanka.

In this section, much of the personal information about Ong is derived from a book published in Solo in 1935.¹¹⁷ It presents much evidence that Ong was an interesting intellectual and that he was very active in many *kebatinan* organizations, both Chinese as well as Western ones, and organizations affiliated with the colonial government. Ong was popular among the *Sia Hwee* as well as the *kebatinan*. He was a member of the THHK committees and the *Chineesche Werkloozenfonds* (Chinese Funds for the Unemployed). He was an officer of the *Nederlandsch-Indische Anti Opium Vereeniging*¹¹⁸ and one of the awardees of the *Star Orde van Oranje Nassau*, a military and civil Dutch order of chivalry.¹¹⁹

115 *Panorama*, 194 (December 1930), 26.

116 Brown, "The Revival of Buddhism", 49.

117 *Orang-orang Tionghoa*, 178-79.

118 He was once sent to Madras, India by the colonial government to study the method to control opium addiction. Brown, "The Revival of Buddhism," 49.

119 *Orang-orang Tionghoa*, 178-79.

Ong was also active in several spiritual organizations, and he held important positions in some of them. For example, he was a member of the board (*hoofdbestuur*) of the Theosofie Vereeniging as well as the chairperson (*voorzitter*) of the Giri Lojo lodge in Bandung.¹²⁰ The annual report (*jaarverslagen*) of the Theosophical Society stated that Ong actively supported the activity of Theosophy. For instance, the 1928 annual report indicated that many of Theosophy activities, such as *studieklas*, were held at Ong's house. As a prominent leader of the Theosophical Society, he travelled to Adyar in India to study about the kebatinan movement, during which he met with Krishna Murti and Annie Besant.¹²¹ Outside the Theosophical Society, he led a group called Perkoempoelan Lahir Batin Oetama (Lahir Batin Oetama Association) and he was an honorary member of the JBA. He was the leader of the Khong Kauw Tjong Hwee, a Confucian association in Bandung, and the administrative director of the periodical, *Kong Kauw Goat Po*. Indeed, Ong's involvement in various organizations and networks showed him to be very cosmopolitan.

Sources indicate that in the third decade of the twentieth century, when the Peranakan Chinese community was most concerned about reviving its identity, Ong offered an option. He proposed that Bhikku Narada be invited to preach Buddhism in order to help the Peranakan Chinese realize their objective of reviving their cultural identity. Because he was the chairperson of the Theosophical Society lodge in Bandoeng, as well as an officer of the Nederlands-Indische Anti Opium Vereeniging, he had access to a wide network. During the height of opium addiction in Indonesia in 1932, the Dutch government sent Ong to Madras, India to learn methods of controlling opium addiction. This work assignment occurred at the same time as a Theosophical Society conference in Adyar, which he was also assigned to attend. In the conference he met Jinarajadasa, one of the leaders of the Theosophical Society. This meeting resulted in an exchange of information regarding the situation of Chinese kebatinan in Java, and an agreement to send a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk to Java.¹²²

120 See *Lijst van loges, centra en adressen. Theosofie in Nederlandsch-Indië = Theosophie di tanah Hindia Nederland : Officieel Orgaan van de Nederlandsch-Indische Theosofische Vereeniging* 7 (July 1928), 211.

121 *Ibid.*, 211.

122 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kedatengannya padri-padri Buddha dari Ceylon", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 12 (March

Accordingly, on his way to Madras, India, Ong made a brief stop in Sri Lanka during which he met a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk named Bhikku Narada. Ong's visit to Sri Lanka was significant because it exposed him to a different religious environment. It is not clear how long Ong stayed in Sri Lanka, but in his letter to his fellow Peranakan Chinese, Kwee, he described his first encounter with the Sri Lankan Buddhist community and its setting. In his letter, Ong expressed his fascination with the interior of the Sri Lankan Buddhist shrine which was well ordered and which had a space for meditation. Although the altar was the focal point of the shrine, it was minimally decorated with flowers, water and candles. He added that the religious rites in the shrine was unlike those held in the Chinese *klenteng* in Indonesia.¹²³ Ong also remarked on how the Buddhist shrine and *klenteng* were different in terms of their interior design. The Buddhist shrine (*vihara*) in Sri Lanka was decorated with a few pieces of wood carvings depicting the Buddha's life. Ong was also fascinated by the appearance of the monks who lived in the Buddhist monastery. Of these monks he wrote, "The monks or *hweshio* are clad in yellow robes and appeared well educated. Most of them speak English and are modern."¹²⁴

Given his experience with the Buddhist monks and the environment of Sri Lanka, Ong expressed his hope that Buddhists in Indonesia would invite Sri Lankan monks to visit. Thus, he wrote, "In my opinion, *klenteng* in Java that practice Buddhism must learn or invite Buddhist monks from Colombo in order to learn from them."¹²⁵ He emphasized that it was time to restore and purify Buddhism in Indonesia. Thus, he asked Kwee to assist him in his plan to invite a monk from Sri Lanka.¹²⁶

Unfortunately, Ong's proposal did not get an affirmative response from Kwee. In his response to Ong's letter, Kwee gave three reasons for his refusal,

1933), n. pag.

123 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Siapatah lagi jang aken toeroet?", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 11 (February 1933), 382; Brown, "The Revival of Buddhism," 49.

124 Hoay, "Siapatah lagi jang aken toeroet?", 382.

125 *Ibid.*, 382.

126 It was not the first time that Ong urged Kwee to reinvigorate Buddhism in the Archipelago. Previously he had suggested inviting Buddhist monks from China. See, Kwee Tek Hoay, "Memperbaiki *klenteng-klenteng* di Java", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 12 (March 1933), 418.

a response that subtly disparaged Ong's ideas. First, Kwee believed that Java was not ready for change. Second, unlike the Buddhism in Sri Lanka which consisted of only one strand, the one in Indonesia was composed of two different strands, namely Mahayana and Hinayana (Theravada). Third, the Chinese *klenteng* in Indonesia were mostly of the Mahayana Buddhism tradition.¹²⁷

Kwee's aversion to Ong's plan was based on the difference between the Buddhism that Peranakan Chinese followed and the Buddhism followed by the Sri Lankans. For Kwee, it was inappropriate to invite a Buddhist monk from colonial Sri Lanka, a country which was oriented to the Theravada tradition. As Kwee declared, "Hence, if Buddhist monks from Colombo are invited to reform the Chinese *klenteng*, it would be the same as inviting Protestant priests to reform Catholic churches."¹²⁸ Kwee added that inviting a Buddhist monk of a different tradition would raise confusion in the Chinese community.

Although there is no record of how the disagreement between Ong and Kwee was finally resolved, this event offered valuable insight. Aside from presenting a picture of the situation of the Buddhists in Java, it revealed different perspectives within the community regarding the purification of the *klenteng*. Ong's deep impression of the Buddhist environment in Ceylon served as an inspiration and a model for a Buddhist site and Buddhist practices. This, in turn, would further inspire Buddhist activists in their endeavours to reclaim the *klenteng* as Buddhist sites and centres.

It is interesting to note that Kwee's refusal of Ong's proposal reflects the desire to maintain the Chinese Buddhist tradition. The events in the lives of Ong and Kwee show that the acceptance of Theravada Buddhism in Indonesia underwent considerable examination and consideration, particularly with regard to the interests of the Peranakan Chinese.

3.3.3. Visakha Gunadharma: Daughter of the Buddha (1907-1993)

This dissertation has suggested that one of the core features of modern Buddhism was women's active participation in the introduction of Buddhism

127 *Ibid.*, 419.

128 *Ibid.*, 419.

to colonial Indonesia.¹²⁹ However, previous research on the Buddhist revival in Indonesia has mainly focused on the role of men or Buddhist monks. Hence, this section provides evidence of Buddhist women's involvement in bringing modern Buddhism to colonial Indonesia.

Despite being a marginalized group in colonial society, Chinese women in particular secured an important leading position in society through various intellectual endeavours, such as producing literary works and being involved as decision-makers in organizations to which they belonged. Accordingly, this section focuses on the public life of Kwee Yat Nio, a Buddhist woman of Peranakan Chinese descent, as an example of women's participation in the Buddhist revival of Indonesia. Hereafter we will use her Buddhist name, Visakha Gunadharma, which was given her by Bhikkhu Narada.

Visakha Gunadharma was born into a literary family in 1907 in Bogor; she was the oldest daughter of Kwee Tek Hoay.¹³⁰ She studied at the THHK school in Bogor and the Methodist Girls' School, also in Bogor, where she stayed on as a teacher. As a young woman, Gunadharma established Chie Mey Hwee (CMH), an organization for young, unmarried Peranakan Chinese women based in Bogor.¹³¹ The organization's main goal was to provide education for women and promote the equality of women in society. The members of organization were mostly students of the local Hollandsch-Chineesche School (HCS) and the Methodist Girls' School.¹³²

After her marriage to Tjoa Hin Hoeij, Gunadharma continued to teach at the Batavia English School from 1928-1932.¹³³ In the 1930s she started to contribute articles to *Moestika Romans* and *Moestika Dharma*, periodicals founded by her father. She also contributed to leading Sino-Malay newspapers -- *Sin Tit Po*, *Mata Hari* and *Keng Po*, and edited the *Dames Rubriek* (ladies' column) in *Sin Tit Po*.¹³⁴

Gunadharma's concern for women's emancipation coupled with the

129 A. Turner, L. Cox and B. Bocking, "A Buddhist Crossroads: Pioneer European Buddhists and Globalizing Asian Networks 1860-1960," *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14 (2013), 2.

130 Gunadharma, "Riwayat Hidup Kwee Tek Hoay," 268.

131 F.Y. Chan, "Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij (1907-1990): Peranakan Chinese Women Write in Late Colonial Indonesia," *Archipel* 42 (1991), 24.

132 *Ibid.*, 24.

133 After which she was also known by Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij.

134 Chan, "Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij," 24.

supportive circumstances in which she grew up led her to become one of the key figures in the development of Buddhism in modern Indonesia. In this regard, Faye Chan asserts that the Peranakan Chinese women's emancipation during this period was a result of changes in education, increasing western influence, the rise of Indonesian nationalism and the growth of Chinese nationalism among the Chinese diaspora.¹³⁵

As the daughter of a prominent writer and founder of organizations, Gunadharma was exceptionally literate compared to most of women of her time. Under the tutelage of her father, she started writing very early. Her publications presented her as bold and original. Unlike most Chinese women writers of her time who concealed their true names, Gunadharma preferred to use her married name, Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij. Kwee seemed to have played a major role in nourishing Gunadharma's passion for writing. He himself was generally a great advocate of female literacy, which distinguished him from the traditional Chinese view on women. He believed that women should at least acquire reading and writing skills. It could be said that he translated this belief into action by consistently publishing the work of women writers in *Panorama*, *Moestika Dharma* and *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*.

Given his progressive view on women, Kwee urged Gunadharma not only to write but also to translate English stories and articles from the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *The Guardian* into the Malay language for publication in local newspapers such as *Sin Po* and other Sino-Malay newspapers.¹³⁶ In September 1935, Gunadharma started her solo career in publication with a Malay language monthly magazine for Peranakan Chinese women called *Maandblad Istri*. She published this magazine from 1935 to 1959 with a nine-year hiatus due to the Japanese Occupation (1942) and the Indonesia revolution (1945-1949). Through this magazine, she exhorted readers to not neglect the Chinese standards of decorum in their haste to become western or modern. Her objective was driven by her aspiration to make traditional values from becoming estranged from modern Chinese society. This concern particularly aimed at Western-educated Chinese women who, according to her, were prone to be lacking in knowledge of their traditions and thus liable to bring shame on the Chinese race despite their intelligence.

135 F.Y. Chan, "Chinese Women's Emancipation as Reflected in Two *Peranakan Journals* (1927-1942)," *Archipel* 48 (1995), 45.

136 Interview with Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, 23/11/89 in Chan, "Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij," 24.

Maandblad Istri was meant to reach women, both Peranakan Chinese as well as Indonesian, belonging to the urban middle-class.¹³⁷ In an interview with Chan, Gunadharma mentioned that the magazine was intended to primarily educate women. Based on its goal, the magazine featured a “Social Problems” section which addressed a broad range of social issues, such as women’s emancipation, education, employment, marital relationships and the declining morals of the younger generation. Gunadharma wrote most of the articles in the magazine.

As briefly mentioned earlier, women’s emancipation became a topic of lively discussion starting in the early twentieth century. Claudine Lombard-Salmon divides the Chinese women writers’ participation in this discussion into several periods, namely, before 1924, 1925-1928 and 1929-1942.¹³⁸ Lombard-Salmon and Chan conclude that formal education introduced in early twentieth century led to this effect. The establishment of schools both by the THHK (1901) and the Dutch-Chinese School (Hollandsch-Chineesche School, HCS) in 1908 gave women access to formal education which changed women’s perspective of their place in colonial society.¹³⁹

In the 1920s, literacy in colonial Indonesia was very much an urban phenomenon. More women were attending schools which increased women’s literacy from 9 per cent to 13 per cent between 1920 and 1930 in Java alone, especially among the Peranakan Chinese women.¹⁴⁰ The establishment of the THHK school accelerated the process of education among the Peranakan Chinese and increased their exposure to the rest of the world.¹⁴¹ Interestingly, the rate of women’s literacy surpassed that of men. Along with this rise came the emergence of women’s organizations.

137 Ibid., 46.

138 C. Lombard-Salmon, “Chinese Women Writers in Indonesia and Their Views of Female Emancipation,” *Archipel* 28 (1984), 149-71.

139 The first THHK school for girls was established in Batavia in 1903. Another school was an American mission school that started accepting girls around the same year. See M. Boecquet-Siek, “The Peranakan Chinese Women at a Crossroad” in L. Manderson (ed.), *Women’s Work And Women’s Role: Economic and Everyday Life in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1983), 43; Chan, “Chinese Women’s emancipation,” 60.

140 E. Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies 1900-1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), 19.

141 Chan, “Chinese Women’s Emancipation,” 45.

The increase of literate Peranakan Chinese is evidenced by the growing number of women's writing which appeared in periodicals. More education gave more women the opportunity to publicly express their ideas about the social circumstances of women's lives. Print publications became a space for discussing ideas between the writers and readers. This has been said to be the impetus for the creation of Soera Persatoean Kaoem Prempeoan Tionghoa Indonesia (The Voice of Chinese Women's Federation) formed in 1928.

Chan states that topics related to education, employment, emancipation, economic independence and sexual equality in the personal and public sphere were examined by women. She adds that women journalists and freelance writers played a role through their writings as these provided a means of communication with other women in different geographical areas of Indonesia.¹⁴²

The rise in women's education also helped women to enter professions like teaching and being a board member of an organization. This led to idea that Peranakan Chinese women had, to a certain extent, effected social reform.¹⁴³ Visakha Gunadharma's role in the religious public space will be elaborated on in the following section.

As described above, Gunadharma was an active writer, translator, journalist and publisher who had a special interest in women's emancipation. However, she also became interested in Chinese kebatinan in Indonesia and she wrote a variety of articles regarding spirituality/religion in *Moestika Dharma* magazine.

Reflecting on the new social roles of women in Peranakan society, Gunadharma integrated her concerns on women's role into her writing. She stated that

Without women's presence and involvement no movement of any kind would make good progress and development. The reason for that is because women and men should exist side by side -- like Yin and Yang -- where men and women should be in balance. Hence, since the olden times women have been playing important roles in politics, society and religion, as well as household matters.¹⁴⁴

She saw a connection between education, home and religion which she

142 Ibid., 49.

143 Ibid., 50.

144 Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "Prampoean Tionghoa dengen agama", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 3 (June 1932), 109-10.

articulated in an article titled “Agama Dalem Roemah Tangga” (Religion in the Household). For her, education began at home and home was where religion had to be rekindled.¹⁴⁵ This connection was a solution to a problem: Peranakan Chinese families had too little concern for religious matters. In particular, the younger generation of Peranakan Chinese were ignoring religion. One telling example of this situation was the younger generation’s neglect of the practice of venerating their ancestors’ ashes.¹⁴⁶ To Gunadharna the solution lay with mothers. They were the most critical agents for producing a better generation, and their work began with teaching their children religious values.¹⁴⁷

Gunadharna published a number of articles on spirituality. In one article, she discussed the belief in reincarnation held by some religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism. Gunadharna proved her skills in writing and public speaking when religious reform began in Peranakan Chinese society. Being active in the Batavia Buddhist Association, the first Peranakan Chinese Buddhist organization in Batavia, she frequently delivered lectures at different *klenteng* in Batavia and elsewhere.

Furthermore, the topics of her lectures were unconventional and critical. They reflected her comprehensive knowledge of Western writers who were largely unknown to her audiences. The following are two examples of her lecture topics.

- “Dari Mana Kita Dapetken Kita Poenja Roh?” (Where do our souls come from?): This was a lecture delivered in Surabaya.
- “Agama Zonder Pandita” (Religion without priests): This lecture questioned whether a religion could exist without a priest acting as an intermediary between human beings and God. This topic particularly captures how well-read she is as she cites several Westerners’ knowledge.¹⁴⁸

The Buddhist Torch Bringer

In 1934, Bhikkhu Narada, the Southern (Theravada) Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka gave a series of lectures to the Buddhist community in Batavia which

145 Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, “Agama dalam roemah tangga,” *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 6 (September 1932), 216.

146 *Ibid.*, 216.

147 *Ibid.*, 216.

148 Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, “Agama zonder pandita,” *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 13 (April 1933), 462-3.

were organized by the Theosophical Society and the JBA. Because Visakha Gunadharma was well-educated and had good English language skills, she became Narada's interpreter when he delivered his lectures on Buddhism at Chinese shrines and temples, Theosophical Society lodges and other venues. He noted that she was the first and only female interpreter he had ever had during his missionary work in Asia.¹⁴⁹ Her role as translator continued when Narada encouraged her to translate several books on Buddhism into the Malay language. This made her the first Peranakan Chinese woman to be involved in producing books on Buddhism in modern Indonesia.

Furthermore, Gunadharma was among those (mostly men) who established the Batavia section of the JBA in the presence of Narada on 22 March 1934 at Klenteng Kwan Im Tong.¹⁵⁰ She was appointed as secretary and she worked with J.W. de Witt, Assistant Director-Java section from the International Buddhist Mission as the president; three vice-presidents, namely, Kwee Tek Hoay for the Chinese members, Jagannath L. Gandhi for the Indian British members living in Batavia and RM. Ng. Poerbatjaraka for the native Indonesian members.¹⁵¹ When the BBA was created, Gunadharma also served as its secretary from 1934 to 1938. Being in this position put her in frequent communication with Bhikkhu Narada after he left Batavia. In their exchange of letters Narada often encouraged Gunadharma to continue her work in promoting Buddhism.¹⁵² Her correspondence with Narada extended across several decades after the first of his many visits to Indonesia.¹⁵³ She seems to have valued her relationship with Narada greatly as she wrote, "As the first female interpreter since Bhikkhu Narada first arrived in 1934, I have

149 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Lezing oleh Bikku Narada Thera di Thoeng San Toeng", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 25 (April 1934), 940-41.

150 However, Brown wrote in her article that the formation of the Batavia Buddhist Association was changed to the Java Buddhist Association. The Batavia Buddhist Association then severed its link with the International Buddhist Mission in Burma. See Brown, "The Revival of Buddhism," 51.

151 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kedatengannja Bikku Narada Thera", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 25 (April 1934), 924.

152 Bhikkhu Narada, "Letters to Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwee Batavia, Manado dan Telok Betong*, 34 (July 1937), 38.

153 Further detail on this account will be discussed in the chapter on Bhikkhu Narada.

experienced and gained *virīya*¹⁵⁴ to overcome exhaustion in spreading the Dhamma.¹⁵⁵

Gunadharma was not only active as a writer and organizer of Buddhist activities. Her zeal for promoting Buddhism was such that she could also be called a teacher. Her enthusiasm in promoting new social roles for women in society made her an influential figure in the propagation of Buddhism throughout Indonesia. In addition to the dynamism she brought to the process of popularizing Buddhism, she was also an outstanding representative of Buddhist modernity by her use of new methods to promote Buddhist activities. Through her, Buddhism became a new space for women to be socially and religiously engaged, and consequently a vehicle for women's emancipation.

CONCLUSION

The argument of this chapter revolved around the importance of the Peranakan Chinese society to the (re)emergence of Buddhism in Indonesia. The Peranakan Chinese community was important to the (re)emergence of Buddhism in colonial Indonesia for two reasons. First of all, the Peranakan Chinese wanted to preserve their Chinese identity primarily by reinvigorating their culture and religion, which by tradition was Mahayana Buddhism. In other words, their main desire was to maintain their Chinese identity, not specifically Mahayana Buddhism. Secondly, however, there was a complication. The Peranakan Chinese could not find references that would help them relive Mahayana Buddhism. Since Southern (Theravada) Buddhism was able to provide them with the knowledge of Buddhism that they wanted, they accepted this school of Buddhism.

These two points are related to the main argument of this dissertation that the (re)emergence of Buddhism in colonial Indonesia was not solely prompted by the Peranakan Chinese desire to revive Buddhism. Rather, it was the result of larger causes such as the rise of global Buddhist transnational networks outside of colonial Indonesia and the rise of Chinese nationalism in Asia, which led the Peranakan Chinese to oppose the modernization of

154 *Virīya* is a Pali term for zeal or effort.

155 V. Gunadharma, *Mengenang Ven. Narada Mahathera* (Jakarta: Yayasan Dhammadipa Arama, n.d.), 3.

Indonesian Chinese society and the conversion of Indonesian Chinese to Christianity.

This chapter also introduced three Peranakan Chinese whose roles were crucial for the (re)emergence of Buddhism in Indonesia: Kwee Tek Hoay, Ong Soe Aan and Visakha Gunadharma. These three people played a major role in introducing Southern (Theravada) Buddhism to reinvigorate the Northern (Mahayana) Buddhist tradition traditionally followed by the Peranakan Chinese. In particular, the chapter focused on Visakha Gunadharma to highlight the expanding social roles of women within the Peranakan Chinese society which had been traditionally male dominated -- an aspect of the Buddhist revival in Indonesia that has been overlooked. Chapter Three detailed how Gunadharma actively and publicly engaged as a leader, organizer and teacher.

Equally overlooked is the role of laypeople in the (re)emergence of Indonesian Buddhism. The role of laypeople as leaders, organizers and producers/distributors of knowledge about Buddhism was something unique to the (re)emergence of Buddhism in Indonesia. Their involvement was a major feature of modern Buddhism in parts of South and Southeast Asia in the late colonial period. This point will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Finally, Kwee Tek Hoay, Ong Soe Aan and Visakha Gunadharma can be seen as “curators” of Buddhism in the sense that they played a key role in (1) deciding to use Southern (Theravada) Buddhism to reform the Northern (Mahayana) traditions of the Peranakan Chinese and (2) planning and implementing the means to successfully convince the Peranakan Chinese community to accept the reform of their religious traditions. Their work as “curators” of Buddhism will be discussed more fully in Chapters Four and Five.