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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 6

Inter-Asian Buddhist Connections

In the twentieth century, Buddhist traditions have not only increasingly forged links among themselves in Asia, they have also emerged from Asia, being carried by emigrants, picked up by travellers, and taught by Buddhist missionaries to new peoples of the Western and non-Western world.¹

This chapter dissects the connections or networks established among Buddhist intellectuals, particularly the Asian Buddhists in Indonesia in the early twentieth century. In Chapter Two fundamentally important Buddhist connections that came from outside colonial Indonesia were discussed -- the Western Buddhist networks represented by the Theosophical Society and the JBA, and the Asian Buddhist connection represented by Bhikku Narada. The second connection is paramount to contributing a new perspective to the historiography of Buddhism in Indonesia and the wider historiography of Modern Buddhism.

Chapter Six is crucial to the arguments made in this dissertation for several reasons. Firstly, the history of Buddhism in colonial Indonesia has been largely assumed to have developed under international and European influences. In this view, the spread of Southern Buddhism was mostly

1 L. Learman, "Introduction," in L. Learman (ed.), *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 1.

attributed to the Theosophical Society. Without denying the role of the Society, this chapter will deepen this superficial analysis by arguing that the emergence of Buddhism in Indonesia was also largely influenced by the connection with other Asian intellectuals. This was particularly true when the Peranakan Chinese started their own Buddhist organization. Secondly, this chapter demonstrates that intra-Asian Buddhist intellectuals sustained their connections throughout the third decade of the twentieth century and beyond with only a short break during the Second World War. Thirdly, the inter-Asian Buddhist intellectuals' connection is a historiographical argument that amidst the Western influence in Buddhist thought, the Asian Buddhists developed partnerships and productive connections among themselves that were actually sustained throughout the colonial times. These interactions went beyond school and sect. In other words, adherents to Southern (Theravada) and Mahayana Buddhism interacted and formed durable partnerships. Finally, the Western/European Buddhist institution lost their Dhammic influence after Willem Josias van Dienst left for Japan.

The inter-Asian connections within Indonesian Buddhism are scrutinized using the case of the Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist monk, Bhikku Narada, who was briefly introduced in Chapter Two. As a missionary, Narada was a renowned representative of the Southern/Theravada Buddhist school. His acclaimed knowledge of Buddhism gave him the authority to spread this knowledge to receptive audiences in colonial. It is important to note that for a long time, Buddhists in other regions in Southeast Asia looked to colonial Sri Lanka to revive their monastic lineages. This is because colonial Sri Lanka had historically been a region with a long-standing and positive reputation in the Buddhist world. Thus, Buddhists in other regions in Southeast Asia looked to colonial Sri Lanka to revive their monastic lineages.² Additionally, Sri Lanka had been the origin of many authoritative Buddhist texts. It was also home to famous Buddhist commentators, such as the much-celebrated author, Buddhaghosa, who lived in the fifth century.³

This chapter argues that Southern Buddhism began to take root not only beyond Asia but also within Asian itself due to the influence of Narada. In this particular case it took root in colonial Indonesia where this branch of

2 A.M. Blackburn, "Buddhist Connections in the Indian Ocean: Changes in Monastic Mobility, 1000-500," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58 (2015), 256.

3 Ibid., 256.

Buddhism was not popular at the time of his arrival. Two methods of analysis are used in this chapter. First, the journey of Narada in colonial Indonesia is traced and the interactions he had with the Buddhists there are scrutinized. This research aims to show the extent of the Southern Buddhism's movement in the 1930s South and Southeast Asia, as well as the implications of this movement for Buddhism in Indonesia. It argues that the presence of Narada further developed Buddhist connections with neighbouring regions, such as colonial Singapore, from which Indonesian Buddhists had obtained Buddhist material culture, such as the international Buddhist flag and statues of the Buddha.

Hence, instead of presenting Narada as the most important individual for the spread of Buddhism in (colonial) Indonesia, the purpose of this chapter is to investigate the ways in which he created fundamental conduits for the formation of Buddhist networks at the time, not only during the span of late colonial Indonesia but also for future Buddhists in post-colonial Indonesia. It is interesting to investigate what the Dhammic (or Buddhist) connection between inter-Asian Buddhists meant to Indonesian Buddhism. "Dhammic" is the Anglicized term for *Dhamma*, which was traditionally used by Southern Buddhism. It is used here in order to emphasize the kind of networks and connections that grew between the Indonesian Buddhists and Southern Buddhists from colonial Sri Lanka.

6.1. DHAMMIC CONNECTION WITH COLONIAL SRI LANKA

This section focuses on the Dhammic connection between the Buddhists in colonial Indonesia and colonial Sri Lanka. The historiography on the revival of Buddhism in modern Indonesia has always focused on one central figure -- Bhikku Narada. Particularly in the Theravada Buddhist community in Indonesia, Narada is widely accepted as someone who almost singlehandedly rekindled Buddhism in Indonesia. His name appears in almost every article about Buddhism in modern Indonesia. Being known as the first Southern Buddhist monk who visited Indonesia after the fall of the Hindu-Buddhist Empire, Narada's travel to Indonesia is important, for two reasons. First, it symbolically marks the construction of a new Buddhist community in Indonesia. Second, it defines how this new community saw themselves as part of a global society that traversed colonial state boundaries.

Buddhist connections among Asians was not new. In her research, Anne Blackburn recounts how Asian Buddhists had had interactions and connections among themselves in the eleventh to the fifteenth century. These connections involved the importation of monks to revive Buddhist lineage through higher ordination (Pali: *upasampada*) and the formation of Sangha (the community of Bhikkhu).⁴ Blackburn points out that the importation of Buddhist monastic orders took place from Ramanna to Polonnaruwa in eleventh century Sri Lanka. Then in the fifteenth century, a Sukhothai Buddhist monk (from present-day Thailand) performed a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka. In the same century, Burma sent envoys to Sri Lanka to secure a new higher ordination for bhikkhu in Bago, Burma (presently in Myanmar).⁵ This evidence shows the connection and communication between Asian Buddhist communities.

In modern times, the travels of Sri Lankan monks to different parts of the world led to the “Theravadizing” of local systems of belief, including those of non-Theravada Buddhists.⁶ Colonial Sri Lanka was known as the birthplace of Buddhist revivalists. Several revivalist figures from there were internationally well known. For example, the celebrated revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala was known for defending Buddhism and Buddhist sites. Earlier, Bhikkhu Hikkaduve Sumangala, as portrayed by Blackburn, strove for the stability of Buddhism in the country. The encounters between Buddhism, colonialism and Christianity there created a new popular discourse on Buddhism. An example of this was the birth of the concept of “Protestant Buddhism” as well as the notion of missionary work within Buddhist society. Many Buddhist revivalists started their work in colonial Sri Lanka, and many of them were connected on an individual basis, for example as pupil and teacher, like Hikkaduve Sumangala and Dharmapala, or as contemporaries who maintained a close relationship with each other like Anagarika Dharmapala and Narada.

Being a senior and reputable Buddhism revivalist, Dharmapala was one of those monks who had an international reputation for preaching Buddhism. He possessed a deep knowledge of Buddhism and exceptional English-language

4 Ibid., 238.

5 Ibid., 239.

6 S. Kemper, “Dharmapala’s *Dharmaduta* and the Buddhist Ethnoscape,” in L. Learman (ed.), *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 41.

skills which enabled him to talk about Buddhism to audiences beyond colonial Sri Lanka. This is evident in the interaction between Dharmapala and Narada, especially in their initial meetings. Dharmapala was reported to have purposely visited Narada to invite him to join the inauguration of Mulagandhakuti Vihara in Sarnath (India) because he recognized Narada as possessing exceptional qualities for a *Dhammaduta*.⁷ These qualities included knowledgeability in Buddhism, proficiency in English, as well as the ability to conduct Buddhist ceremonies in English, which were not common attributes at the time.⁸

The connections between Indonesia and Sri Lanka are evidenced by traces of communication between both regions in the pre-modern period. Archaeological findings dating back to 792 CE reveal the connections between Java and Sri Lanka, as shown in an inscription found at the Ratu Boko temple which reads: "This Abhayagiri Vihara here of the Sinhalese ascetics was established."⁹ In support of this inscription, Veronique Degroot, whose research focuses on the history and archaeology of Indonesia, states that the architecture of the Ratu Boko temple and the epigraphic data suggest strong influences from the Sri Lanka style of Buddhism, particularly the meditation monasteries of Abhayagiri-vihara of Anuradhapura.¹⁰ These archaeological traces are proof of a Dhammic connection that was made in the distant past. Robin Conningham et. al. whose research focuses on South Asian archaeology arrived at the same conclusions. They state that the traces at the Ratu Boko temple are evidence of the communication and shared architectural concepts across the Indian ocean regions.¹¹

7 Dhammaduta is Pali term which literally means "Messenger of Truth", usually to designate "Buddhist missionary". According to Jonathan Walters, the term is a late-nineteenth century coinage. Several others Pali terms that rendered "preaching" utilized during the same period of time was *Dhammadesana* (explication of Truth), *Dhammadhaja* (Flag of Truth), *Dhammadāna* (Gift of Truth). J. Walters, *Rethinking Buddhist Missions* (PhD Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1992), 203-05

8 Kemper, "Dharmapala's *Dharmaduta*," 34.

9 M.J. Klokke, "The Buddhist Temples of the Sailendra Dynasty in Central Java," *Arts Asiatiques*, 63 (2008), 164.

10 Ibid., 164; V. Degroot, "The Archeological Remains of Ratu Boko: From Sri Lankan Buddhism to Hinduism" *Indonesia and the Malay World* 34 (2006), 56.

11 R. Coningham et al., "Archaeology and Cosmopolitanism in Early Historic and

Thus, the visit of Bhikku Narada to Indonesia is an indication of the Dhammic connection between colonial Sri Lanka and Indonesia. *De Sumatra Post* reported in 1934 that the *Adjunct-Adviseur voor Inlandsche Zaken* regarded Narada's visit as historical and stated that: "*de Thera is namelijk de eerste monnik sedert de Middeleeuwen, die hier voet aan land heeft gezet*" (the Thera was the first monk since the Middle Ages to set foot on this land).¹² Narada journeyed from colonial Singapore to Batavia, and disembarked in Tanjung Priok on 4 March 1934. He was accompanied by two male *dayaka*.¹³ The first was Jinarajadasa, a middle-aged Theosophist who was fluent in English. The second was B.L. Martin, a Sri Lankan Singaporean who was a jewellery trader.¹⁴ At the port, Narada was met by Willem Josias van Dienst, Tjoa Hin Hoeij and a few Singhalese people.¹⁵ From the port, they proceeded to Kwee Tek Hoay's house on Prinsenlaan 69, where they were hosted for lunch.

It is from this point that the arrival of Narada confirms a crossroad for Buddhism as this 21-day visit further validated the new school of Southern/Theravada Buddhism in Indonesia.

6.2. BUDDHISM AT A CROSSROAD: THE EMERGENCE OF NEW BUDDHIST AFFILIATIONS IN BATAVIA

This section focuses on Bhikku Narada's Dhammic mission during his visit to Indonesia. Through his activities, Narada planted the seeds of Southern (Theravada) Buddhism which created a firm relationship between the Indonesian Buddhist community and other Asian Buddhists, particularly after the Western Buddhist influence had decreased. At that time, the Buddhist

Medieval Sri Lanka," in Z. Biedermann and A. Strathern (eds), *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London: UCL Press, 2017), 29-30.

12 *De Sumatra Post*, (15 March 1934).

13 Dayaka is a Pali word that means lay person whose duty to attend or accompany a monk.

14 It is mentioned that both of Bhikkhu Narada were held for some time at the immigration office. However, later were released. Kwee Tek Hoay, "Bebrapa keterangan tentang Bikku Narada Thera", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie* 24 (April 1934), 929.

15 They were described as *Hindoe* and *Keling* people.

society comprised people from different backgrounds; they had significant roles in promoting Dhammic works on different levels. The Europeans, such as Van Dienst and L. Mangelaar Meertens, were on the frontline in promoting Buddhism and Buddhist rituals. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that Western Buddhists were influential propagators of Buddhism. Nevertheless, despite their enthusiastic dedication, the Western propagators seem to not have served a lasting role. Their influence was strong only during the beginning of the twentieth century; it gradually became less important, particularly in the post-independent period.

The efficacy of the Western individuals and organizations' Dhammic mission waned in the second half of the 1930s. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Van Dienst left for Japan in 1936 and his departure severed the positive ties he had established with the Buddhist groups in Batavia.¹⁶ Consequently, the JBA no longer served as a Buddhist international institution.¹⁷ The only remaining ties that the JBA had with the BBA was sustained by the chairperson of the JBA, E.E. Power, who continued to be actively involved in the BBA.¹⁸

The gap between the Western Buddhists and the Buddhist community in colonial Indonesia is also seen in the case of the Dutch Theosophist Buddhist, Meertens. As noted in Chapter Five, Meertens was invited by the leader of the BBA to join an activity organized by the Peranakan Chinese. However, he declined because he wanted to focus on his Borobudur project.¹⁹ This refusal suggests a gap between the Western and the Indonesian Buddhist groups. Although he was very actively engaged with the Dhammic mission, Meertens did not nurture relationships with the Buddhist group of the Peranakan Chinese.

16 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kabar pergerakan Sam Kauw. Centraal Buddhist Instituut", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 17 (February 1936), 39.

17 Ibid., 39.

18 On the side note, in his prolonged relationship with the Batavia Buddhist Association, E.E. Power was rarely mentioned to be the representative of the Java Buddhist Association. Hence, as assumed in the chapter two that the Java Buddhist Association has terminated its influence after Josias van Dienst left for Japan (1936).

19 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Toedjoean jang tetep", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 46 (July 1938), 4.

The lack of a relationship between the European and the Indonesian Buddhists was overcome by the presence of other Asian Buddhist networks, which assured the continuity of Buddhist adaptation and production of Buddhist knowledge. In particular, Narada's visit in 1934 exemplifies this connection between Asian Buddhist networks and the local community.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in colonial Indonesia laypeople were officially introducing the Southern Buddhism. Narada was not the first prominent Buddhist who introduced Southern Buddhism to Indonesia. There had been previous visits by other laymen and these had paved the way for Narada's visit. This strengthens the argument that Indonesia was not void of Buddhism and its enthusiasts. However, as the first Southern Buddhist monk to visit Java, his presence was extremely significant in accelerating the progress of the movement there.

Furthermore, Narada's visit to Java reveals an important Dhammic connection between Buddhists in Batavia and those in colonial Singapore, a connection that was reinforced by the visit of the board member of the BBA, Visakha Gunadharma, to Singapore to attend a Vesak celebration there in 1939.²⁰

The Dhammic connection with colonial Singapore was part of the missionary circuit of travelling monks. For example, Narada's correspondence with Visakha Gunadharma shows that he was travelling to different places, such as China (1935) and Japan (May 1935),²¹ and he made a stop in colonial Singapore where he preached to a local audience. This supports Kemper's idea that Sri Lankan monks who went on a Dhammic mission often made several stopovers, visiting various places on the way to their final destination.²²

In preparation for Narada's first visit to Java, the Buddhist community of the Chinese society planned the program of his activities. In one of their discussions, Kwee suggested two priorities for Narada's visit, firstly, Narada should have discussions with those interested in Buddhism, in particular with the Mahayana monks who lived at Klenteng Kwan Im Tong in Batavia,

20 Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "Lezing. Wezak di Singapore", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 59 (August 1939), 7-8.

21 Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "Kedatengannja Bhikkhu Narada", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 11 (August 1935), 36-37.

22 Kemper, "Dharmapala's *Dharmaduta*," 37.

to allow him to get some understanding about the Buddhist circumstances in Java and gain more support from the society. Secondly, Narada should encourage Buddhists in Batavia to establish a Buddhist organization so that Buddhism would continue to thrive after his departure.²³

Accordingly, Narada's encounter with the Buddhists in Java took place on several occasions which were collaboratively organized by the JBA and the Peranakan Buddhist community. In his record of Narada's visit, Kwee Tek Hoay reported that sometimes the monk gave lectures in different places in one day. Most of his lectures took place at the klenteng, Theosophical Society headquarters and schools.²⁴ During his visits to different places outside Batavia, such as Buitenzorg, Bandoeng, Solo and Yogyakarta, he frequently gave religious sermons at the klenteng.²⁵

The highlight of Narada's visit was his pilgrimage to the Borobudur temple on 10 March 1934. Newspaper accounts of that visit emphasized that Narada was the first Southern Buddhist monk to visit the temple in about three hundred years.²⁶ During this visit, Narada planted a Bodhi tree, which has been discussed in the previous chapter.²⁷ In a picture taken during this occasion, he is seen pouring water on the tree. Other people in the picture include a Borobudur official, the president of Theosophical Society of Yogyakarta, the president of Java Buddhist Mission -- E.E. Power, and Jinarajadasa, Narada's personal assistant (Pali: *dayaka*).²⁸ After the Bodhi tree planting event, Narada delivered a lecture to an audience composed mostly of Javanese and Dutch people.²⁹

Narada spent two days in Central Java and Yogyakarta, where he delivered a lecture at the Theosophical Society lodge. Reports of this event state that

23 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Soel menjiarken Agama Buddha di Java", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 22 (January 1934), 803.

24 Khong Kauw Hwee School during his visit to Solo, and Batavia English School in Batavia.

25 The headquarter was using the house of A. Van Der Velde.

26 *Malaya Tribune*, (6 April 1934).

27 As it has been explained in the previous chapter, the Bodhi tree was presented to Bhikkhu Narada by L. Mangelaar Meertens.

28 The picture is too poor in condition to display. Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kedatengannja Bikku Narada Thera", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 25 (April 1934), 920.

29 Unfortunately, there are no further details about the names of the audience attended the pilgrim except the group who accompanied Narada. *Ibid.*, 920.

at the end of this lecture five people -- three Dutch men, a Dutch woman and a Javanese -- declared they were embracing Buddhism.³⁰ The last day of Narada's visit to Central Java was spent in Solo. In the morning he visited and delivered a talk on Buddhism to the students of the Khong Kauw Hwee (KKH) school.³¹ In the evening he delivered another lecture at the Klenteng Tien Kok Sie, which was attended by many people despite the pouring rain. In a report about Narada's visit to Solo, Auw Ing Kiong, a member of the KKH school, noted that Narada had delivered his morning talk on Buddhism at the request of Liem Tiang Hwat, the president of the KKH school.³² In his welcome speech, Liem highlighted the importance of Narada's visit to the Confucian klenteng. Liem thought that Narada's lecture would be of benefit to them because there had been a lack of teaching by priests and monks.

Narada's observations during the trip resulted in crucial notes for the future direction of Buddhism in Indonesia. On 20 March 1934, four days before he left Batavia, Narada gave a lecture at the Kwan Im Tong. More than two hundred and fifty people attended, with most men suited up in white and the women wearing tightly-knotted hair. A Mahayana monk, Hwesio Lin Feng Fei, and Poerbatjaraka, a female Mahayana Buddhist nun from Klenteng Tong San Toeng, can be seen in a picture taken at the event (Figure 6.1). Considering the large number and quality of people attending his lecture, the message he delivered must have been impactful.

Narada made several points regarding Buddhism at the lecture. One point pertained to the absence of Buddha statues at Buddhist temples, which later prompted him to send several Buddha statues to colonial Indonesia from colonial Singapore. Another point pertained to the generally poor knowledge of Buddhism possessed by the Buddhists in Java as illustrated by the Mahayana Buddhist nuns who were running an orphanage in Bandoeng.

After visiting the Borobudur temple, Narada spent his remaining days in Batavia, Buitenzorg and Bandoeng delivering lectures. In Bandoeng, Ong Soe Aan, the president of the Theosophical Society in Bandoeng, organized a program for Narada to deliver a lecture at the Theosophical Society lodge. In Bogor where the Theosophical Society was active, Narada gave lectures at

30 Ibid., 920.

31 Khong Kauw Hwee School is a school founded by Confucian association.

32 Auw Ing Kiong, "Bikkhu Narada Thera di Solo. Lezing di dalem Gredja Tien Kok Sie", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 25 (April 1934), 925.

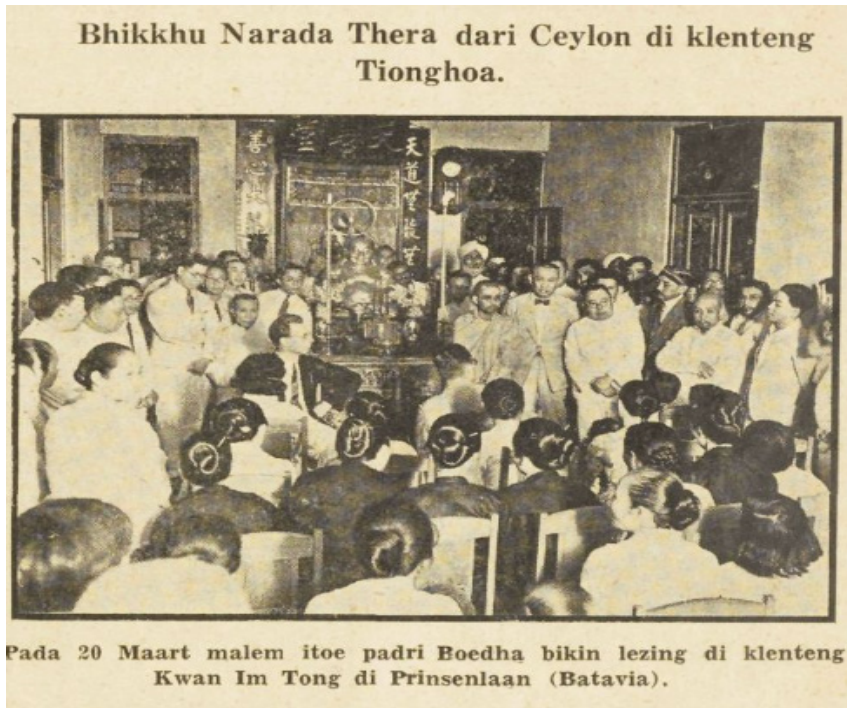


Figure 6.1. Bhikkhu Narada at Klenteng Kwan Im Tong in Batavia. Source: *Sin Po*, 24 March 1934.

two places -- the Klenteng Ho Tek Bio and the Theosophical Society lodge.

Establishing religious institutions was another highlight of Narada's activities during his visit. In Buitenzorg he initiated the establishment of a new Buddhist organization in which local Chinese took part as representatives. The organization was called the International Buddhist Mission (IBM).³³ A branch of this organization was later established in Batavia in Narada's presence.³⁴ Hence, there were two Buddhist organizations in Buitenzorg at that time, making the city central to the development of Buddhism: the JBA and the newly established IBM.

33 Kwee, "Kedatenggannja Bikku Narada", 924. The officials of the new organization is as follow: A. van der Velde (the president), The Teng Hoeij (vice president), and first and second secretaries: Oeij Oen Ho and Ie Tjoen Leng.

34 Detail on the International Buddhist Mission in general has been elaborated in the chapter two.

In Batavia, most of Narada's lectures took place at the klenteng and in Chinese organizations. One of his most noteworthy lectures was held at Lee Tjie Sia, a grand meeting building for Chinese elites.³⁵ In this lecture, he spoke about the core of Buddha's teaching, "The Four Noble Truths" (Cattari Aryasaccani in Pali) to an audience composed of Chinese, Javanese and some Europeans. Additionally, he spoke about the need to establish a branch of the IBM in Batavia ('Afdeeling Batavia dari International Buddhist Mission'),³⁶ which led to another meeting at the Klenteng Kwan Im Tong on 22 March. At this meeting, an agreement was reached and an organization consisting of representatives from different ethnic backgrounds was formed. In what seems to have been an effort to provide representation from various ethnicities, the officers of this organization came from different ethnicities. The president was a European named J.W. de Witt (assistant director of the Java section of International Buddhist Mission). The three vice-presidents, each representing their different ethnic backgrounds, were Kwee Tek Hoay (for the Chinese), Jagannath L. Gandhi (for the Indians), and R. Ng. Poerbatjaraka (for the Javanese). There were two secretaries -- Visakha Gunadharma and Mej. A. Boer. Finally, the treasurer was Chakrabuty.³⁷ This branch of the IBM became the second religious institution established in the presence of Narada.

The progress of the women's community was also an integral part of Narada's introduction of Buddhism. For example, Visakha Gunadharma, who served as the translator for Narada's lectures, and from him she received support and advocacy to engage in Dhammic mission in Indonesia.³⁸ The connection between Narada and Gunadharma continued for decades, during which their relationship turned into that of pupil and teacher. Another example of Narada's interest in women's progress was his connection with the Klenteng Kwan Im Thoeng San Toeng in Petak Sinkian, where a group of Mahayana female nuns (*boedjin*) from the Chinese *Kbe* resided. While in Batavia, Narada frequently gave lectures at this klenteng. To the nuns at this klenteng, he gave instructions on meditation. Additionally, Narada visited the Klenteng Kwan Im Tong in Kroekoet, which belonged to nuns of Chinese

35 Anonymous, "Lezingnja Bikku Narada Thera di Lee Tjie Sia", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 25 (April 1934), 936.

36 Ibid., 936.

37 Kwee, "Kedatengannja Bikku Narada", 924.

38 Ibid., 924.



Figure 6.2. Klenteng “Prampoean” di Batavia (“Female” Klenteng in Batavia). Source: *Sin Po* 669 (25 January 1936).

Hokkien (see Figure 6.2). In this klenteng, only nuns and women were allowed to reside. In a special report on this klenteng, *Sin Po* stated that there were at least five resident nuns there and that they were led by Hoedjin Lim Ko Nio.³⁹ Reportedly one of the nuns said, “We are so underprivileged when it comes to knowledge about Buddhism. Therefore, we will be very pleased to receive guidance from a competent person.”⁴⁰ A report in *Sin Po* also affirmed this remark noting that the teaching of the Buddha, such as on *Kamma* and other fundamental Buddhist values, were not preached at this klenteng.⁴¹ For this reason, Narada gave meditation instructions and held a lecture about Buddhist tenets to this group of Mahayana nuns.⁴²

39 *Sin Po*, 669 (25 January 1936), n. pag.

40 Kwee, “Kedatengannja Bikku Narada”, 922.

41 *Sin Po*, 669 (25 January 1936), n. pag.

42 There is no record of the name of this Singaporean young woman, but her present there had helped translating the Chinese into Malay for Bhikkhu Narada. Apparently, no single nun in the klenteng was able to read Chinese letters. See, *Ibid.*, n. pag.

Another significant aspect of Narada's visit to Batavia was his encounter with a representative of the Batavia Museum, a government institution. This encounter is worth noting because it shows some important highlights. At this meeting, Narada was hosted by the director of the museum, F.D.K. Bosch, and Poerbatjaraka, who was an expert native philologist and a member of the BBA.⁴³ The two officials received Narada and took him on a tour of the museum, during which the monk donated his spare yellow monk robe and alms-round bowl to the museum.⁴⁴

Based on his assessments of the state of Buddhism in Indonesia, Narada offered some important suggestions that seem important for understanding the departure point of the new direction of Buddhism in Indonesia. Narada insinuated the act of affirmation of being Buddhist and administered it himself. In what seems to be a criticism of Buddhists in Indonesia, he emphasized that Buddhists must possess faith in three elements in Buddhism, namely: the Buddha, the Dhamma (the teaching of the Buddha) and the Sangha (the monk assembly). He also emphasized that Buddhists must practice the observance of the Buddhist five precepts (Pancasila Buddhist).⁴⁵ As Learman put it:

Taking the Three Refuges is the Buddhist institutional equivalent of conversion in the sense of a change of affiliation. It is formally marked when a person, in the presence of an ordained member of the Sangha, declares their intention to take the Buddha, his teachings, and the Sangha as their religious guides, to the exclusion of other paths or faiths.⁴⁶

Further, Narada encouraged Buddhists in colonial Indonesia to install an altar in which they could enshrine a Buddha statue or a picture of the Buddha. Apropos to this idea, Narada commented on the tradition of the Chinese offering to deceased relatives. He suggested a reverence ceremony

43 The name of Poerbatjaraka has appeared in the previous chapter particularly in relation with his involvement with the Batavia Buddhist Association such as giving lecture on Borobudur. Meanwhile, F.D.K Bosch further involvement with Buddhist society in Batavia is hardly known except that a few sources indicated him to have great interest in study of Buddha images. He himself was also the head of the Archaeological Service.

44 Kwee, "Beberapa keterangan tentang Bikku, 928-31.

45 Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "Lezingnja Bikku Narada Thera dalam Klenteng Kwan Im Tong", *Moestika Dharma; Maandblad Tentang Agama, Kabatinan dan Filosofie*, 25 (April 1934), 932-35.

46 Learman, "Introduction," 1.

which no longer involved offering living creatures on the altar. He introduced a new practice adopted from Southern Buddhist concept of *pattidana*, which literally means merit transfer, in which the living relatives perform meritorious deeds in the name of their departed ones.⁴⁷

Narada's unequivocal proposal for a new direction of Buddhist tradition at the time is well depicted in the following account. He argued that people should abandon their habit of asking for blessing by doing rituals and paying homage to the Mahayana Buddhist god, Kwan Im. He explained that in the Buddhist perspective the Buddha is not a God, nor was he a deity, dewa or *Toapekong*. Instead, he emphasized the role of the Buddha as a teacher through his preaching on the life of the Buddha.⁴⁸

Another highlight of Narada's visit was his introduction of meditation, a new practice for the Buddhist community in Batavia at the time. In fact, there were several occasions when Narada gave instructions on how to meditate in the communities he visited. Thus, it can be said that emphasis on meditation was a core element of Southern Buddhism which Narada emphasized.

Finally, other than lectures and instructions, books on the teaching of Buddhism were crucial materials that introduced the Buddhist community in Batavia to Southern Buddhism during Narada's visit. For example, Narada's magnum opus titled *Buddhism in a Nutshell* (*Ringkesannja Agama Buddha*) and another book, *Life of Venerable Sariputta* (*Penghidoepean Bhagawan Sariputta*), were presented to the community. Later, the BBA translated these books into Malay. Narada's magnum opus was used by the BBA to commence their course program (*studieklas*) on Buddhism that they launched for the first time in 13 December 1934.⁴⁹

Given all of the encounters and connections between the Buddhist community and Narada discussed above, it may be said that his 21-day visit to different places in Java definitely exposed the Buddhist community in Indonesia to a new source of knowledge of Buddhism. More importantly, the new Dhammic connection inspired by Narada imbued them with a new desire to further develop their Buddhism project that is evidenced by the establishment of Buddhist organizations or institutions in Indonesia.⁵⁰

47 Mrs. Tjoa, "Lezingnja Bikku Narada Thera", 932-35.

48 Ibid., 932-35.

49 Kwee, "Kabar redactie", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, 2 (November 1934), n. pag.

50 Anonymous, "Lezingnja Bikku Narada Thera di Lee Tjie Sia", 936.

As for Narada himself, the visit gave him a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding Buddhism on Java Island. In the final days of his visit, he made several important remarks about Buddhism in Indonesia. These remarks focused on the direction which the Buddhist society in Indonesia must take in the future. Narada's influence encouraged the growth of the Southern Buddhism's influence through symbols, networks and knowledge production.

6.3. BUDDHIST MATERIAL CULTURE: THE BUDDHA IMAGE, THE BUDDHIST FLAG AND THE BUDDHIST NETWORKS

In Chapter Five, the concept of material culture was applied to the discussion on the Borobudur. In this section, the concept is again utilized to see how the exchange of cultural materials continued to take place after Bhikku Narada's visit. Such an exchange was especially obvious after the establishment of the Batavia Buddhist Association (BBA) by the Peranakan Chinese Buddhists, when various Buddhist material cultures, such as the Buddha's image, the Bodhi tree and Buddhist modern symbols such as the Buddhist flag, were transferred and adopted by the Buddhists in Java. Such material culture is regarded as one of the most important contributors to the sustainable relationship between the BBA community and the inter-Asian networks. The cultural material exchange also served to make Indonesia part of the Pan-Asian Buddhism.

Material culture in Asian religions is not limited to artefacts and inscriptions.⁵¹ Unlike the traditional approach of using only texts as objects of study in the school of religious studies, this dissertation uses religious texts in conjunction with other religious cultural materials, which include religious sites, articles on temples, statuary, pilgrimage sites and even newspapers and manuscripts.⁵² Altogether, these aspects of religious material culture can be utilized to reconstruct the history of an individual religion.

The issue of the Buddhist material that was brought to Indonesia at

51 B.J. Flemming and R.D. Mann, "Introduction: Material Culture and Religious Studies," in B.J. Flemming and R. D. Mann (eds), *Material Culture and Asian Religions: Text, Image, Object* (London: Routledge, 2014), 2.

52 Ibid., 2.

the time has a very interesting connection with Anne Blackburn's work on Ceylonese Buddhist ritual experiments and alliances in colonial Singapore.⁵³ The success of the Ceylonese in forming a foothold in Singapore resulted in several outstanding outcomes, among which was the increased interest of Singaporeans in the Southern Asian Buddhist tradition. It appears that Ceylonese wealthy Buddhist donors rendered their support to the missionary work in a number of ways. One of these ways was through the Ceylonese monks. An example was sponsoring Bhikkhu Narada's trip to Indonesia, which has been discussed previously. Also crucial was their support in the founding of new Buddhist centres where Ceylonese monks coming from Sri Lanka could reside during their missionary work in Singapore, Malaysia and later Indonesia. One of the most fundamental places established in the 1930s was a meeting hall at 67 Spottiswoode Park Road in Singapore. The building later became an important Ceylonese enclave at the time. It was leased to house the incoming monk, Mahaweera, who later became the resident monk. Mahaweera was a fellow missionary monk of Bhikkhu Narada, who also resided in this building during his visit in 1935.⁵⁴

Narada's 21-day visit to Indonesia inspired the budding Buddhist society in the cities he visited. The formation of organizations which united people of different ethnic groups further inspired the establishment of more organizations in Batavia. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Batavia Buddhist Association (BBA) was formed only a couple of months after Narada's visit. It was the first Buddhist association that was established by the Peranakan Chinese in Batavia which showed consistent progress in propagating Buddhism.

According to the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* publication published in 1935, the BBA wanted to invite Narada to Batavia again, and it communicated this plan to the IBM since one of the IBM's roles was to facilitate all communication between Buddhists in Indonesia and Buddhist networks outside of Indonesia. As the IBM's Deputy Director General as well as a representative of some international Buddhist organizations, this plan was also communicated to Van Dienst.

However, the IBM, particularly Van Dienst, did not respond favourably

53 A.M. Blackburn, "Ceylonese Buddhism in Colonial Singapore: New Ritual Spaces and Specialists, 1895-1930," *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 184 (2012), 6.

54 Ibid., 20.

to the BBA's plan to invite Narada again. There were several reasons for this unfavourable response. First, the IBM was preoccupied with another activity, which consisted of Van Dienst going to Japan to invite Buddhist monks from Japan to convert 65,000,000 Indonesian Muslims to Buddhism. (This was reported in the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*.) Second, Van de Velde, the deputy of Van Dienst, informed the secretary of the BBA that the IBM was unable to share or take financial responsibility for Narada's planned visit. The third reason was that since the IBM was an extension of a Burmese organization and since Narada was not from Burma, the IBM could not invite him.⁵⁵

The BBA was disappointed with the IBM's response. They believed that the IBM had been untrue to its responsibility as an international representative. Kwee Tek Hoay, the president of the BBA, accused the IBM of being insincere with regard to their role as an international organization. Kwee expressed his disappointment when he wrote: "So what does the word "international" mean, if their actions actually run counter to the objective of the International Buddhist Mission or the Central of the Buddhist Institute for Java. Such fallaciousness should be publicized in order to make people know the real quality of the organizations led by Van Dienst and his friends."⁵⁶

The BBA's disappointment with the IBM, particularly with Van Dienst, forced them to plan Narada's visit by themselves. Eventually, this experience led them to making more independent decisions with regards to the progress of their work on Buddhism. Rather than going through the IBM, the BBA appeared to have communicated with Narada through the help of the secretary, Visakha Gunadharma, Kwee's daughter. This direct communication with Narada signalled that the BBA no longer depended on the IBM for its networking, and consequently the BBA assumed the leadership of the progress that took place later in Buddhism.

The plan for Narada's second visit was cancelled; nevertheless, communication between Narada and the BBA continued to flourish. For example, Narada updated the BBA on the progress of his missionary work, such as when he visited mainland China.⁵⁷ Further, in a 14 November 1935 letter which Narada sent from colonial Singapore, he encouraged Buddhists

55 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kabar pergerakan Sam Kauw. Kedatengannya Bikku Narada", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 12 (September 1935), 37.

56 Ibid., 37-38.

57 Bhikkhu Narada, "Letter to Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan*

in Java to send one or two men to colonial Sri Lanka to learn Buddhism there. These men could then become monks who would later return to Java and teach Buddhism there. The letter also described a plan for Narada and an unspecified fellow Sri Lankan monk in colonial Singapore to create a periodical containing Narada's teachings as well as those of other Southern Buddhist monks. These examples show that there were attempts from the Ceylonese monks and the Buddhist community in Indonesia to develop Buddhism in Indonesia. Through such networking, Buddhists in Indonesia were introduced to a range of Buddhist customs practiced outside Indonesia.

Meanwhile in Java, the Buddhist programs and publications continued to thrive, and Buddhism continued to echo among the Chinese society in Batavia. As the only Peranakan Chinese Buddhist organization, the BBA became the primary source of information about Buddhism. They also maintained the Dhammic connection with Narada. For example, when the BBA received a letter from a young Chinese man from East Java who was interested in becoming a monk or *upasakha* (Buddhist laymen), the BBA publicly announced that anyone with such an interest should contact the BBA, which could then arrange for them to learn Buddhism in colonial Sri Lanka under the tutelage of Narada.⁵⁸

Besides disseminating information about Buddhism, Buddhists in Indonesia through the BBA also started to engage themselves in adopting Buddhist regalia, such as Buddhist symbols, arts and traditions. This practice led to the use of more Buddhist products from abroad by Buddhists in Indonesia. The 1930s was especially significant in this regard. During this period, Indonesian Buddhists connected to the wider Buddhist world through religious symbols. Examples of these symbols include the Bodhi tree, the statue of the Buddha and the Buddhist flag. Buddhist items such as statues and flags were sent from Singapore, along with Narada's exhortations to Buddhist organizations in Indonesia.

In the previous discussion on the *klenteng*, mention was made of the presence of Buddhist symbols, such as the statue of Kwan-Im. There was no mention of a Buddha statue. Sources indicate that the modern Buddhist

dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong, 15 (December 1935), 35.

58 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Kabar pergerakan kebatinan", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 15 (December 1935), 38.

material culture was only collected by the Peranakan Buddhist Chinese in Indonesia in the mid-1930s. To illustrate, a letter from Narada to Visakha Gunadharma mentioned that five Buddha statues had been sent to Java for the Buddhist community in Batavia via Soedjijono, a Buddhist from Batavia who visited colonial Singapore.⁵⁹ This was confirmed in a publication indicating that the statues had been distributed to some Buddhist centres.⁶⁰

The above discussion highlights the fact that the Buddhist community in Indonesia adopted new material objects related to Buddhism in the form of Buddha statues from their inter-Asian networks rather than their Western/European networks. This reinforces the idea that European Buddhists devaluated material objects because they signified idolatry and were thus contrary to modernity.⁶¹

In addition to the Buddha statue, the Buddhist flag was another crucial addition to the Buddhist modern symbols that arrived in Indonesia. Thus, the Buddhist flag is discussed here as an important feature in the participation of Indonesian Buddhists in the spread of Southern Buddhism through the use of conventions devised at the time.

Figure 6.3 depicts the Buddhist flag. The flag is made up of six different strips of cloth, each of which is in a colour that is believed to have been exhibited in the aura of the Buddha. From left to right, these colours are blue, yellow, red, white and orange, with the sixth and last strip being a combination of the five previous colours.⁶²

The flag is a profoundly important object because of its historical significance. It is a modern Buddhist symbol which was created in colonial Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century around 1885 as a symbol of the unification of the Buddhist nation. As noted by Olcott in his diary, "It was this time that our Colombo colleagues had the happy thought of devising a flag which could be adopted by all Buddhist nations as the universal symbol

59 Unfortunately, there is lack of reference on the detail about Mr. Sudjiono.

60 Bhikkhu Narada, "Letter to Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 7 (April 1935), n. pag.

61 Flemming and Mann, "Introduction," 7.

62 Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "Bendera Buddhist", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, 59 (Augustus 1939), n. pag.; H.S. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1883-87. The Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2011), 351.

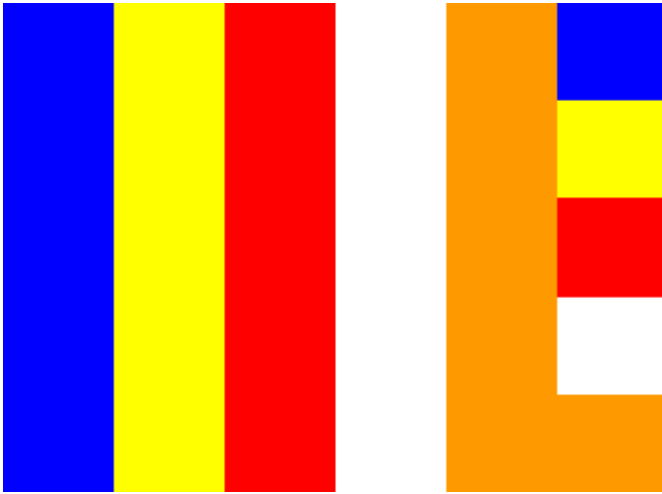


Figure 6.3. The Buddhist Flag. Source: Rendered by Yulianti.

of their faith, thus giving the same purpose as that of the cross does for all Christians.”⁶³

Since the time it was approved and accepted by the chief of the orthodox monks in colonial Sri Lanka, the flag had been raised at the temples and Buddhist residences during the commemoration of the Buddha’s birthday in colonial Sri Lanka and beyond.⁶⁴ Before the flag was acknowledged as the international Buddhist symbol in 1950, it was the exclusive property of the colonial Sri Lankan Buddhists. However, before 1950 the Ceylonese monks had used it as an emblem for Buddhism during their missions abroad. The same had also been done by Theosophists, such as Olcott.

Commenting on the significance of the flag to Buddhists, Olcott noted in his diary that to Buddhist nations, the flag “may be measured with that of giving, say, to the Christians the Cross symbols, or to the Moeslems the Crescent.”⁶⁵ To him as well as to Buddhist activists the construction of the flag coincided with his aspiration to unite the Buddhist world. In addition, Olcott noted that the flag signified “far-reaching potentialities as an agent in

63 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 351.

64 Ibid., 352.

65 Ibid., 352.

that scheme of Buddhistic unity..."⁶⁶ and that the flag might also have the potential of dealing with the differences between the Southern (Theravada) and Northern (Mahayana) Buddhism.

In Southeast Asia, Ceylonese monks who conducted missionary work brought the flag along with them. In colonial Singapore, where Ceylonese Buddhist settlers gained stable footing in the region, the Buddhist flag became a part of the decorations for Buddhist celebrations. *The Straits Times* reported that the Buddhist flag had not been known in the region until it was publicly raised in Singapore for the first time on 17 January 1904 at the Buddhist Mission house in Havelock Road.⁶⁷

In Batavia, the flag was raised for the first time in 1939, almost five years after the visit of Narada. The BBA had received instructions from the monk to raise the flag on Vesak Day. In a letter he sent to Visakha Gunadharma in April, a month before the Vesak celebration, Narada gave the following instruction: "Please try to hold a Wezak celebration at one of the strategic regions and then encourage the Buddhists to hoist Buddhist flag...."⁶⁸ Fifteen days after this letter, Narada again addressed the same issue and exhorted the Buddhists in Indonesia to raise the Buddhist flag at their residences.⁶⁹

The practice of flag raising by the Buddhists in Batavia had its origin in a new connection with Singapore Buddhists. It was in May 1939 that the BBA received an invitation from the Singapore Buddhist Association to attend the Vesak celebration in Singapore. The BBA responded by sending Visakha Gunadharma, the BBA's secretary, to the event. At this occasion, Gunadharma became acquainted with the Ceylonese monk Bhikkhu Mahaweera, who gave her the Buddhist flag. At the Vesak celebration in Batavia in the same month, the flag was unfolded for the first time to decorate the main altar in the Klenteng Kwan Im Tong.⁷⁰

From 1939 the Buddhist flag was placed next to the Sam Kauw flag at the

66 Ibid., 351.

67 *The Straits Times*, (January 1904).

68 Bhikkhu Narada, "Letters to Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 56 (May 1939), 35. Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij received two letter from bhikkhu Narada which both of them were sent from Singapore. The first letter dated 10 April 1939 and the second letter dated 25 April 1939.

69 Ibid., 36.

70 Ibid., 35.

Klenteng Kwan Im Tong in Batavia.⁷¹ In a later edition of the *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, it is reported that following the practice of the BBA in Batavia, the Menado Hoed Kauw (Menado Buddhist Association) also raised the flag, though they positioned it differently from the BBA by placing the Buddhist flag between the Dutch national flag and the Chinese flag.⁷² The BBA began to make copies of the Buddhist flag for their own use.

Through the circulation of Buddhist material culture, Buddhists in Indonesia became indirectly linked to global Buddhism, that is, exposure to Buddhist material culture made the Buddhist society in Indonesia aware of Buddhist organizations and movements beyond their own regions. The arrival of Buddha statues, the Buddhist flag and other Buddhist rituals, such as the Vesak tradition were instrumental in continuing the Dhammic mission in the Indonesia archipelago.

In particular, the exchange of Buddhist material culture between Indonesian Buddhists and Ceylonese monks contributed significantly to the future Dhammic connections between the two countries. This explains why Buddhists in Indonesia continued to rely on their Asian Buddhist counterparts for knowledge of Buddhism until the 1950s. The Dhammic connection with Sri Lanka has been a most enduring relationship. Evidence shows that this relationship with the Batavia Buddhist Association was maintained and only temporarily interrupted by the Second World War.

CONCLUSION

The inter-Asian Buddhist connections discussed in this chapter attest to the critical Dhammic connection between Buddhists in colonial Indonesia and other Asian regions in the 1930s. Along with the Western/European Buddhist activists and intellectuals that influenced Peranakan Buddhist society, the Indonesian Buddhists also developed partnerships and productive connections with other Asian Buddhists. In the process, the connection between Asian Buddhists that started in Java strengthened over time, resulting in the transfer of Buddhist material culture into Indonesia, a phenomenon that did not take

71 Ibid., 36.

72 Kwee Tek Hoay, "Dikiberkannja Bendera Buddhist jang pertama di Manado", *Sam Kauw Gwat Po: Orgaan dari Batavia Buddhist Association, Sam Kauw Hwe Batavia, Menado dan Telokbetong*, 74 (November 1940), n. pag.

place during their relationship with Western/Europeans Buddhist activists.

The Dhammic connections between the Peranakan Buddhists in Indonesia and the Asian Buddhist networks persisted through the exchange of Buddhist material culture between them. As a result, the emerging Southern Buddhism became part of global/transnational Buddhism. The Buddhist material culture affirmed the position of Buddhists in Indonesia, who had become part of a wider context of transnational notions of Buddhism. To Buddhists in Indonesia, this was the beginning of a firmer Dhammic network that led to more confidence in the development of Buddhism in post-independence Indonesia. These inter-Asian Buddhist connections served as one of the foundations of the future of Buddhism in Indonesia, particularly in the 1950s when Buddhists in Indonesia officially imported the (Southern) Theravada Buddhism lineage by performing the Bhikkhu ordination.