



## Theravadization of Buddhayana under the discourse of modern Buddhism and Indonesian politics

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### ABSTRACT

Scholars have presented the Buddhayana Movement as a diverse and localized form of Indonesian Buddhism, which was facilitated by the cooperation of transnational Buddhist networks. This paper raises two questions: (1) what were the impacts of Theravada Buddhism that facilitated the rise of Buddhayana? and (2) when Theravada became a symbol of authentic Buddhism and its identity could satisfy the state rather during assimilation policy, how did Buddhayana members balance the needs of the Chinese patrons and of the government? Based upon documentary methods combined with in-depth interviews, the data collected are analyzed through the concepts of transnationalism and the discourse of modern Buddhism. This paper proposes that (1) the birth of Buddhayana in the 1960s was facilitated not only by transnational relations, but also by the discourse of modern Buddhism, which led to an emphasis on Theravada Buddhism. Therefore, even though Buddhayana claimed to be open to Mahayana and Vajrayana as well, its official doctrines and ritual performances presented in public tend to be Theravada in character. (2) The politics of discrimination against the Chinese Indonesians helped to marginalize Mahayana Buddhism, a tradition that its image links to the Chinese culture. In consequence, Mahayana tended to play a role in the daily practices of the Chinese in their houses and *klenteng*, meanwhile Theravada in terms of philosophical teachings and huge rituals was chosen to be presented in the public sphere in accordance with the state's needs.

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## Introduction

Buddhayana is chosen as a case study in this paper because it is a biggest Buddhist movement in Indonesia and claims to be non-sectarian that can include all the three mainstream Buddhist orders: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, in which those followers can live and learn together (Dharmawimala, 2012: 43). Buddhayana has been growing under Indonesian context since the 1960s, meanwhile its first organization named Indonesian Buddhist Lay Organization (*Persaudaraan Upasaka Upasika Indonesia: PUUI*) has been initiated since 1955. Previous studies such as Juangari Edij (2016) and Bunki Kimura (2003) focus on Jinarakkhita's charismatic leadership. This paper suggests that various factors especially the voices of other members and Indonesian politics should be emphasized as well. In her PhD dissertation, Yulianti (2020) shed light on the influence of international Buddhist networks, which finally led to the birth of Buddhist organizations in colonial and independence periods (1900-1959). Similarly, Jack Meng-tat Chia (2020) asserts that the move of Chinese immigrants between China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) and Southeast Asian countries paved the way for the growth of Mahayana Buddhism in Indonesia. Nonetheless, Yulianti (2020), Chia (2020), Edij (2016), and Kimura (2013) tend to overlook the prioritization of Theravada in Buddhayana movement, probably since they take it for granted of being an open platform for all sects of Buddhism. In addition, the modern Buddhist movements, as found in Malaysia by Sri Dhammananda (McDanial et al, 2016: 2) and in Indonesia by Jinarakkhita in the 1960s tried not to identify their organizations as belonging to a single tradition, instead they used the term *Buddhadharma* (Buddha's teaching) to include Buddhist patrons from different backgrounds. However, when

we look closer, scriptures, technical terms, ideas, as well as rituals represented to their followers clearly show the sect or tradition they belong to.

To answer why Theravada seems to become the mainstream idea of Indonesian Buddhism since the colonial period until today, and Jinarakkhita, the Buddhayana founder, chose Theravada for his early identity and for Buddhayana organization, we need to look at the trend of global Buddhism especially in Myanmar where Indonesian Buddhists had relationships with. In the second part, it discusses political impacts in the 1960s-1990s towards the Chinese, who were the patrons of Buddhayana, and demonstrates the rituals of Waisak of Buddhayana to show how Buddhayana negotiated and adapted to serve the government and traditional practice of the Chinese patrons as long as it does not lose its authentic image under the gaze of the modern state. Simply put, this paper raises two questions: (1) what were the impacts of Theravada Buddhism that facilitated the rise of Buddhayana? and (2) when Theravada became a symbol of authentic Buddhism and its (Indian religion) identity could satisfy the state rather than the Chinese culture during assimilation policy, how did Buddhayana balance the needs of the Chinese patrons and of the government?

## Method

In terms of data and analysis, magazines i.e. *Buddhis* (Vol.1-5/1958) *Waicak* (1958-1959), and *Dharma Prabha* (1987-2007), as well as Buddhayana books, are used as selected sources in how, when, and the contexts of Buddhism and Buddhayana have been represented by their members. In-depth interviews with three Buddhayana senior monks: Dhammayano (pseudonym), Dharmawimala, and Suryanadi, were conducted in 2022-2023 in Central Java. I

prefer to use a pseudonym for Dhammayano because he considered his talk sensitive. In terms of concept, this paper employs the idea of transnationalism to explain the diversity of Buddhayana as from the flows of religious practices among different countries. Peggy Levitt (2002: 2) asserts that global religious institute allows people to create new arenas, which also allow them to belong in two places. Steven Vertovec (2001) views life across borders as involving resistance to the nation-state and allows previously marginalized groups to challenge the social hierarchy.

This concept can explain the conflict between Buddhayana and Walubi, in which Buddhayana chooses to belong to the World Buddhist Sangha Council instead. Interestingly, Levitt also points out that both the migrants and non-migrants who live within a transnational social field are exposed to a set of social expectations, cultural values, and patterns of human interaction shaped by at least two (home and host countries) (2002: 6-7). This means that although some Buddhayana members do not move to another country, as long as they are within a global/transnational context and consume religious ideas from the magazine and internet for examples, their attitudes or practices will be impacted by those factors. However, the discourse of authentic Buddhism based on the Theravada tradition had become an important factor that caused Indonesian Buddhists to choose Theravada Buddhism to construct their religious identity in the 1960s, a period when Buddhism was under state intervention.

## Results and Discussion

### *Jinarakkhita under the trend of Theravada*

This part provides the journeys of Jinarakkhita and the diverse versions of

Buddhism he faced. The purpose is to discuss why, even if he experienced different forms of Buddhism, he prioritized Theravada tradition as his identity. Ashin Jinarakkhita (1923-2002), an Indonesian-born Chinese, is also known as Tee Boan-an. According to Jack Chia (2018: 30-32), Tee was familiar with the Chinese shines, Mahayana chanting, vegetarianism, and Mahayana monks who were ritual specialists but did not teach Buddhism. He liked meditation and was familiar with *Kejawen*, a traditional Javanese belief (Ekowati, 2012: 2). He was interested in Theosophical Society, the association that promoted non-sectarian learning, since his teenage. At this stage, being a non-sectarian characteristic of Jinarakkhita and Buddhayana movement is arguably influenced by the TS, besides the Indonesian motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" (Unity in Diversity) alone. He also learned Pali and Sanskrit languages, and acquired fluency in English, German, French, and Dutch. He studied Chemistry in the Netherlands and studied world religions, especially Buddhism, in Paris and London (Chia, 2020: 120).

In 1951, soon after returning to Indonesia, he became an *Anagarika* (a *Theravada practitioner whose status is between monk-hood and layperson*), and played an important role in the Indonesian Sam Kauw Union (*Gabungan Sam Kauw Indonesia: GSKI*). This organization has a good relationship with Myanmar. In 1954, Tee and some other members were sent to join the Sixth Buddhist Council (of Theravada) in Myanmar (Yulianti, 2022: 11). However, Tee decided to become a Zen (Chan/Mahayana) novice under Pen Ching in 1953 because of the impression from discussions on Buddhist teaching. Notably, Pen Ching (1878-1962), Zen monk, is known as the first Fujian monk who came to teach Buddhism in Semarang, Central Java, and Surabaya in 1901. In particular, the ordination ritual of Tee was conducted on July 19, 1953,

the birthday of Avalokiteshvara (Chia, 2020: 122). A recognition of Buddhist auspicious days is something that a modern Buddhist like Tee did not deny.

Jack Chia (2020: 123) argued that Tee got ordination in Myanmar because Buddhism in China was in crisis since the cultural revolution in 1949 until many monks moved to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao, and Southeast Asia. However, in Malaya, since 1948, Kek Lok Si, Mahayana temple in Penang, could arrange the ordination rite, and in one year, more than 350 monks and nuns got ordination there. This is the first temple in Malaysia where the ordaining ceremony was held (Tan, 2020: 42). I propose that Tee preferred Theravada ordination either in Sri Lanka or in Myanmar because the modern trend of Theravada Buddhism was more popular among Indonesians since the establishments of Theosophical Society (1883) and the Batavia Buddhist Association (1929) (Yulianti, 2022: 2-5). It was not a problem of being different sects between Pen Ching (Zen tradition) and Kek Lok Si (Pure Land tradition), because they are Mahayana and Tee (Jinarakkhita) also sent his pupil, Jinakumari, to receive ordination there in 1965 (Harpin, 2013).

In Myanmar, Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) is known as a modern founder of the meditation movement. Because of his initiation, laypeople also start to practice meditation, not only supporting material objects to the monasteries as before (Braun, 2013: 4). He responded to the colonial pressures by claiming that Buddhism is scientific, modern and Nirvana can be reached in this real life (Braun, 2013: 73-80). He wrote *Paramatthadipani* (Explanation of the Ultimate Truths) as a sub-commentary of *Abhidhamma* in 1901 to link Buddhist knowledge to meditation. Notably, this movement has been developed under the birth of the print capital in colonial Myanmar. With the influence of Christian missionary,

Ledi adapted his teaching in simple and engaging language, and gave a sermon on Sunday as conducted in Christianity. These new ways of preaching are often followed by Theravada reformists, as in the cases of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu of Siam (Thailand) and Anagarika Dhammapala of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) (Braun, 2013: 94).

Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-1982), also known as U Sobhana, was a Buddhist educated monk, who used the same method of meditation as promoted by Ledi. The relationship between the two monks is not mentioned, but it cannot deny the merit of textbooks and the popularity of *Vipassana* raised by Ledi (Braun, 2013, p. 161). Sayadaw's *Vipassana* center has been popular throughout Asean counties. It attracted Thai monks such as Phimontham (1903-1980) to study meditation in Myanmar in the 1950s and helped to popularize *Vipassana* in Thailand. More importantly, Jinarakkhita, a Zen novice from Indonesia, was recommended by his Mahayana teacher to ordain and learn meditation in Myanmar in 1953. Notably, the influence of *Vipassana* reached Indonesia since the colonial era. Van Dienst, the founder of Java Buddhist Association, wrote an article titled "Voor Mediteerenden" (For Meditators), which discusses *Vipassana* meditation techniques based on *Vipassana Dipani: A Manual of Insight* by Ledi Sayadaw. This 25-page-long article was published in *Journal Namo Buddhaya* (Yulianti, 2020: 82).

Because of some difficulties in going to Sri Lanka, Pen Ching sent Tee to Myanmar in 1953 for ordination and practicing meditation under a Theravada monk, Mahasi Sayadaw. Finally, Tee was ordained as a Theravada monk in 1954 and received a new name, Jinarakkhita. This journey was also recommended and facilitated by the Embassy of Myanmar in Jakarta in order to promote Mahasi Sayadaw and *Vipassana* (Edij, 2016: 55). Before returning to

Indonesia, in 1954, Jinarakkhita attended the Third Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) in Yangon, and then he traveled to Malaya and Singapore to join the opening ceremony of a Buddhist school. This journey affirms that (1) the relationship among Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore has been maintained in the 1950s, so, the Mahayana ordination can be conducted there, not in China only. Second, though Jinarakkhita could not speak Mandarin as mentioned by Kimura (2003: 57), he was fluent in English and Hokkien (Arya Kusalo, 2023: Interview), which already guaranteed that he could travel to those countries. This evidence suggests that Jinarakkhita's ordination in Myanmar was caused by the popularity of Theravada and *Vipassana* meditation.

The World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) was established in Sri Lanka in 1950. It aims to unite the three schools of mainstream Buddhism to work together. This idea could affect Jinarakkhita as well until he formed the first Indonesian Buddhist Lay Organization (*Persaudaraan Upasaka Upasika Indonesia: PUUI*) in 1955 (Chia, 2020: 137). Corresponding to the ideology of WFB, the PUUI was a non-sectarian organization since it was designed to bring Buddhists from different backgrounds to work together. Nowadays, the PUUI is developed to be the Indonesian Council of Buddhayana (*Majelis Buddhayana Indonesia: MBI*). Parallel with the lay organization, in 1960, Jinarakkhita established the monastic institute named Indonesian Holy Sangha (*Sangha Suci Indonesia*) and since 1974, it has been known as the Indonesian Supreme Sangha (*Sangha Agung Indonesia: SAGIN*) (Edij, 2016: 81).

The trends of Theravada in the Buddhist world is demonstrated in this part to argue why Jinarakkhita, even interacted with Mahayana and Chinese shrines, preferred the Theravada tradition for his monastic life and meditation technique. The next

part will examine how Jinarakkhita and other Buddhayana members designed their newly invented movement in early period to respond to the government, who viewed the Chinese tradition going against the assimilation policy.

### *Theravadization of Buddhayana under Indonesian politics*

This part examines the forms of early Buddhayana (1960s-1980s). The first section discusses the ways Buddhayana interpreted Buddhism to serve the state policy. However, those adaptations should be viewed as skillful means to survive in a theistic country like Indonesia, instead of perceiving Buddhayana as a pro-nationalism movement. The Waisak celebration provided in the second section will show how Buddhayana prioritized Theravada in the context of modern Buddhism.

#### *Contextualizing Buddhayana under Indonesian politics*

Although Jinarakkhita became a Theravada monk, his relationship with Pen Ching, Mahayana master, was not cut off. In the Mahayana tradition, the relationship between teacher and follower is quite strong, even if a novice becomes a monk in another tradition, he is still considered a lineage of his first master (Dharmawimala, 2022: Interview). This is a reason why Buddhayana teachers do not hesitate to send their followers to be ordained in other countries or traditions. However, Jinarakkhita seemed not to attach to any tradition, in which Jack Chia (2018) identifies Jinarakkhita as neither Theravada nor Mahayana. Moreover, he seemed not to care about the names or identity of religions as well. As noted by Edij Juangari (2016, p. 99), when Jinarakkhita was asked why he decided to become a Buddhist monk, the answer is that he learned every religion

and was also impressed by Catholicism, but he saw a lot of Catholic priests working in Indonesia, meanwhile Buddhist monks were less, so he chose to work as a Buddhist monk. Nowadays, the picture of Jesus is still put in Jinarakkhita's room in Vihara Vimala Dharma, Bandung, as when he was alive.

Though Jinarakkhita also chanted Mahayana mantras in his room, he had to limit his outside identity in Theravada, because religious freedom in Indonesia is limited, and the syncretic or new hybrid movements are in danger when they are accused against the national security (*keamanan*) of Indonesian law, like cases of Ahmadiyya and Lia Eden (Bagir and Arianingtyas, 2020 and Makin, 2016). In 1976, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, a spiritual leader of Vajrayana Buddhism, visited Indonesia and had a conversation with Jinarakkhita. When he was asked "to what sect of Buddhism do you belong? He answered, "I am just a servant of the Buddha" (Edij, 2016, p. 210).

Phao Krishnaputra, a Buddhist from Medan, is one of many scholars who play a significant role in forming the Buddhayana identity. He became a member who interpreted the concept Adi-Buddha as Almighty God in Buddhism. Notably, this interpretation was conducted by a team, not by Jinarakkhita alone (Suryanadi, 2023: Interview). In Suharto's regime, the reinforcement of Pancasila made Buddhists confirm their belief in Supreme God. On July 23, 1975, *Sanghayang Adi Buddha* or the Primordial Buddha is interpreted as God, and finally Buddhism has been officially recognized by the government (PP. No.21/1975) (Chia, 2018: 58 and Ekowati, 2012: 4). This Almighty God concept is from the book *Sanghyang Kamahayanikan*, which is considered as Javanese (tantric) Buddhism written around the tenth century. And until now, only Buddhayana members say or chant "*Namo Sanghyang Adi Buddhaya, Namo Buddhaya, Bodhistwanya, Mahasatwanya* (I pay

respect to the Almighty God *Sanghayang Adi-Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and Mahasattvas*), meanwhile other Buddhist groups say "*Namo Buddhaya*" (I pay respect to the Buddha). That is because non-Buddhayana groups do not accept the *Adi-Buddha* suggested by Buddhayana. This rejection causes an intra-conflict among Indonesian Buddhists so far (Syukur, 2022).

However, the interpretation of Adi-Buddha makes Buddhayana members proud on the ground that Buddhism can survive in Indonesia because of their teachers. The state intervention comes again in the form of the establishment of the Indonesian Federation of Buddhist Trustees (*Perwalian Umat Buddha Indonesia: Walubi*) in Yogyakarta in 1978. The government aimed to be able to control or make sure that Buddhist groups base their faith on the Supreme God, prophet, and religious scripture, as other Abrahamic religions (Buaban, 2018: 141). Interestingly, in 1988, a new Buddhist movement from Japan named *Nichiren Syosyu Indonesia* (NSI) was excluded from Walubi under the reason that its teaching was not based on Tripitaka. And in 1992, Buddhayana (SAGIN and MBI) were accused of heresy and expelled from Walubi with a reason that its tradition was syncretic by worshiping Sai Baba (an Indian guru) and pro-Chinese culture, not corresponding to the assimilation policy (Husen, 2013: 44 and Ekowati, 2012: 6). Notably, being a desirable religion in Indonesia must not promote syncretism or cross-religious/doctrinal practice. This becomes a reason why religious groups in Indonesia, including Buddhayana, try to base their teachings on scriptures and claim to be authentic, at least in the public sphere. When Buddhayana was expelled from Walubi, its members chose to represent their organization status as belonging to international organizations like the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) and the World Buddhist Sangha Council (WBSC), which are more authentic than

Walubi, that they initiated relationships since the very beginning of the establishment of Buddhayana.

In 1958, during the Sukarno regime, in the law No. 62/1958, all Chinese Indonesians were required to choose between Chinese and Indonesian citizenship by confirming their statement at the nearest district court, and approximately 390,000 Chinese rejected Chinese citizenship (Setiono, 2008: 751 and Purdey, 2006: 9). In 1959, according to law No. 10/1959, those who were not citizens were prohibited from doing business outside of urban areas (PERPRES, 1959). Because of the uncertainty of legal status, 136,000 Chinese left for China on ships sent from China (Tan, 2008: 28). Remarkably, those laws required not only the citizenship in the official documents, but also the Chinese-less identity that reaffirmed they were really Indonesians. During 1963 to early 1965, the situation for the Chinese became more stable, meanwhile the Chinese-language schools and Chinese-language press flourished, even though some minor attacks on Chinese Indonesians in some areas could be found (Purdey, 2006: 13).

Another important period of the discrimination of the Chinese in Indonesia was the assimilation policy, which had been adopted during the New Order of Suharto's regime (1966-1998). Pancasila was used as a tool to assure political stability and security, in which religion (*agama*) and ethnicity (*suku*) had been restricted (Hoon, 2006: 151). Under the Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967, Chinese Indonesians were allowed to expend their own wealth, which helped to expend the national economics, meanwhile their culture, language, politics, and so forth were marginalized and erased (Heryanto, 1999: 326; Setijadi, 2016: 4; Sutrisno, 2023: 33). However, speaking Mandarin at home was possible (Aizawa, 2011: 52-58). In July 1966, According to Suryadinata (2014: 32), the Chinese language schools were closed, and

the Chinese names must adopt Indonesian-sounding names. In addition, new temples in this assimilation period were expected to be in the less-Chinese architecture, which is called Indonesianization of *Klenteng*. Of course, when Mahayana Chinese identity was banned, Theravada and Javanese architectures like in Vihara Jakarta Dhamma Cakka Jaya (since 1976) are its product.

Chinese shrines are changed into Vihara, renamed in Pali and Sanskrit. Vihara Buddha Prabha in Yogyakarta is an example, even though in practice, it has been known by the locals as *Klenteng* 'Fuk Ling Miao' until now. Moreover, inside the temple, the altars of the Buddha, Confucius, Daoist deities, as well as other Chinese gods and goddesses still maintains the same. One of the products of assimilation policy is a magazine named "*Dharma Prabha*" (1987-2007), published by this temple to educate their members in the teaching of Theravada. Buddhist teachings presented by Bhante Viriyanadi (1987: 4-7) and other authors always depicted stories and keywords from the Pali scriptures of Theravada. However, worshiping in the temple or *klenteng* could be conducted as usual, for example the Chinese could pray to Guan-Yin in Mandarin language, could even invite Theravada monks to perform Mahayana rituals, of course inside the temple area only (Dhammayano, 2023: Interview). It can be said that while Theravada plays a role in promoting modern Buddhism in theological aspect in books, magazines, and official rituals like Waisak (as will be demonstrated below), Mahayana maintains its role in cultural and everyday practice in *klentengs*.

In fact, in the national curriculum by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemdikbud, 2018), the subject "Buddhism and Moral Education for School Students" are still based on Theravada. It demonstrates the basic teachings of Theravada like the Four Noble Truths. In addition, technical

terms are only in Pali. So, according to the government's curriculum, Indonesian Buddhists rarely learn the teachings of Mahayana, Vajrayana, and other doctrines like Maitreya and Nichiren, though these sects are also recognized by the government. As a result, it clearly witnesses that the Theravada trend is the most popular in Indonesia since the colonial period until now.

In the eye of Jack Chia (2020: 134), nationalism can be found in Buddhayana since the national anthem of Indonesia was inserted in the first page of the book *Penuntun Buddha Dhamma* (A Guide to the Buddha Dhamma published in 1967). This book is compiled by Waicakajaya Ananda Susilo under the supervision of Jinarakkhita. Chia's observation is interesting, however, I argued that it is just an attempt to present Buddhism as a religion of Indonesia in order to make Buddhism, a religion of the minority, not alienated in this country. It should not be interpreted in a patriotic feeling. Notably, Jinarakkhita did not attach even to religions or doctrines, therefore, to categorize him as a nationalist is quite odd. Based on the state intervention discussed above, it is normal to find that Buddhist groups must respond to the state's need.

In the book titled *Tuntunan Puja Bakti* (Guide for Devotional Rituals) compiled by PMVBI (1991: III-IV), Jinarakkhita does not say what Buddhists should do for Indonesia, he rather mentions Buddhists must be motivated in learning and practicing based on *Tipitaka* (Theravada), *Tripitaka* (Mahayana), and *Kawi Pitaka* (the book "*Sanghyang Kamahayanikan*" based on Javanese Buddhism). So, he obviously tended to promote Indonesian Buddhism rather than involving with nationalism, though the Java-centric form can be seen since the Buddhayana's identity relates to *Sanghyang Adi-Buddha*. Krishnanda Wijaya-Mukti (2020), a Buddhayana scholar, dedicated one

chapter titled *Agama dan Kebangsaan* (Religion and Nation) in his book. It is written in an academic style, not interpreted Buddhism to serve the state or government. It does not even imply what Indonesian Buddhists should do for the nation (2020: 579).

*Ettavata*, a popular mantra chanted at the end of Buddhist rituals to transfer merits to other beings, is partially generated to serve the state's need. Moreover, it is used by many Buddhist groups. It has been chanted in Sri Lanka and Myanmar; however, some words are added when using in Indonesia. This mantra in a printed book can be traced to 1958 in Magazine *Waicak* (2502), which was published during the early period of the Buddhayana (then known as PUUI) settlement and the editorial team led by Sariputra Sadono. This 68-page-long book is annually published to be used as the guideline for Waisak celebration. The chanting is in Pali and followed by Indonesian translation. The following mantra, *Ettavata*, is cited from *Waicak* (1959: 64), Romanized Pali and Indonesian translation were original, meanwhile English translation is mine.

ĀKĀSATTHĀ CA BHUMMATTHĀ

*Semoga semua makhluk di angkasa dan di atas bumi*

The creatures that are in the sky and on the earth

DEVĀ NĀGĀ MAHIDDHIKĀ

*Dewa-dewa serta Naga-naga yang penuh dengan kekuatan*

The mighty gods and nagas

PUÑÑAM TAM ANUMODITVA

*Setelah menerima buah jasa kita*

After they share in our benevolence

CIRAM RAKKHANTU INDONESIA

*Selalu melindungi Indonesia*

Please always protect Indonesia



Notably, the mantra used by Buddhayana to satisfy the government is in Pali language of Theravada tradition. This evidence shows that Buddhist chanting in the public sphere is less-Chinese. The following section is another evidence to express the Theravada identity of Buddhayana.

***Waisak: Representation of Theravada as modern Buddhism in public sphere***

This section describes the national Waisak celebrations of the 1960s, in which the main players changed from educated laypeople to Theravada monks. This research suggests that Waisak is not only a tradition invented to express a modern form of Buddhism by showing its character of the world religion, but it is also an area of power struggle between monks and laity, as well as being a stage for displaying Theravada identity to the eyes of Buddhists. This success was facilitated by the weakness of the Mahayana monks, who had been involved with traditional rituals on the one hand, and by the Indonesian policy in reducing the Chinese identity on the other. Focusing on Waisak in the 1960s, this research proposes that Theravada Buddhism fully played a significant role in forming modern Buddhism in the public sphere. The invitation of famous monks from Theravada countries to participate in the Waisak celebration helped to establish Theravada Buddhism in these archipelagos. Therefore, Waisak in the 1960s did not represent diversity as understood, it rather became one of the important events in the establishment of Buddhism in Indonesia, which was dominated by Theravada.

Waisak (for Indonesia) or Vesak (for international) is a Buddhist festival that has been celebrated to commemorate the Buddha's birthday, enlightenment, and passing away. Donald K. Swearer points out that it is a symbol of modernity in Buddhist countries in the sense that Buddhism can be

compared to Christianity as a world religion. In 1885, Sri Lankan Buddhists gained legal recognition of their right to celebrate Vesak, and this event was declared as a public holiday. In fact, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries have been celebrating the Waisak festival before that but it seemed to be limited to individuals' temples. Waisak began to take place beyond the temple and involved both monks and laypeople in the colonial era (Swearer, 2010: 47).

Historically, the first Waisak celebration in colonial Indonesia was held by the Theosophical Society in 1929. The ceremony was conducted in Bandung, Giri Lojo Center (Yulianti, 2020: 170). Also, Waisak was celebrated at Mendut and Borobudur for the first time on 20 May 1932, hosted by the Theosophical Society in cooperation with the colonizers and immigrant Chinese (Brown, 2004: 51). According to Yulianti, Waisak has been represented as a new Buddhist practice in colonial Indonesia. It was initiated by laypeople from the Theosophical Society and Peranakan Chinese, due to the lack of Buddhist monks (Yulianti, 2020: 169). Notwithstanding, before the coming from Myanmar of Jinarakkhita in 1954, Mahayana monks in Indonesia were available and ran their daily activities, mostly performing rituals to serve the Chinese. Those monks reportedly could not speak Bahasa Indonesia (Chia, 2020: 125). This is, I argue, a reason why Jinarakkhita has to reform the hierarchy between educated laypeople and ordinary monks in order to maintain the higher status of monks in both private and public spheres according to the Theravada tradition. Modern Buddhism in colonial Indonesia was in the hand of educated laypeople, meanwhile modern Buddhism under Jinarakkhita must be dominated by Theravada monks.

In 1955, Waisak was celebrated in Borobudur and led by Jinarakkhita. Buddhists from Java, Bali, and Makassar were invited to attend. On May 6, 1955,

there were the circumambulation ritual of the pagoda and chanting the Pali Stanzas of Victory (*Jayamangala Gatha*), a popular mantra chanted in Theravada countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, etc. On May 7, the ceremony was attended by government officials, which was noted as the first time that Waisak gained cooperation and attention from the state (Chia, 2020: 126). In 1956, Waisak was celebrated as a very special occasion in many countries since that year (2500 for Buddhist era) is considered as the midpoint of Buddhism, in which Buddhists believe Buddhism will last for 5000 years. Jinarakkhita was invited to attend Waisak in Singapore, hosted by Sri Lankan Buddhist temples. He realized that this special time could be used to attract Indonesians. Therefore, not only Buddhists around Indonesia and members of Indonesian Sam Kauw Union were persuaded to attend Waisak as before, the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) and foreign ambassadors in Jakarta were also invited (Chia, 2020: 130). The popularity of Waisak, arranged as an international event, successfully awakened the Indonesians of the existence of Buddhism.

Some contents in Magazine *Buddhis* (*Madjallah Buddhis*) Volume 5/1958 shown how the writers employed cases from other countries to promote Buddhism in Indonesia, and the way they prioritized the Theravada tradition. On page 1, the editor introduced Bodh Gaya in Sarnath (India) as a place that the Buddha got enlightenment. In the end of the paper, the editor provided the detail of Borobudur and persuaded Indonesian Buddhist to perceive it as a center of Buddhism as well. In the next page, written by Oka Diputhera, he compared Waisak with Mawlid, the holy day of Islam to commemorate Prophet Muhammad, in which the Buddha was represented as one of the prophets of the world religions

(Diputhera, 1958: 2). In addition, the Buddha is represented as not a legendary figure but an historical person, which can be witnessed through his relics. Narada, a Sri Lankan monk who also attended the Waisak celebration in 1958, offered the Buddha's relics to Jinarakkhita, and it has been kept in Vihara 2500 Buddha Jayanti, Semarang.

In his article, Oka Diputhera dedicated six pages to explain the basic teachings of Buddhism namely Dependent co-arising (*Paticca Samuppada*), Four Noble Truths (*Ariyasaccani*), Compassion (*Metta*), and the Law of Cause and Effect (*Karma*). Notably, these teachings are from Theravada tradition, and they become a theme for designing the basic beliefs of Buddhism in the national curriculum of Indonesian schools so far. Notably, Diputhera had been playing a leading role in teaching Buddhism and during 1980–1990 as the director of Buddhist Affairs. Under the support of Department of Religious Affairs, the translation of Buddhist text project had been conducted in 1983–1990. All selected books are from the Pali Canon of Theravada, such as *Majjhimanikaya* (the Middle-length Discourses), *Diganikaya* (the Long Discourses) and so on (Diputhera, 1958).

In 1959 (2503 B.E.), Waisak was celebrated in Mendut and Borobudur. The representatives from embassies like India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, as well as Myanmar were invited. Some also sent their speech to be published in the Annual Waisak Guidebook (Waicak, 1959: 4–8). It is worth noting that the foreign monks who participated in the Waisak ceremony in 1959 were all Theravada, namely;

1. Narada: Vihara Vajirarama, Colombo
2. Mahasi Sayadaw: Vihara Tathana Yeiktha, Rangoon
3. Visalsamanagun (Punnavaddhano): Vihara Sudasna Thepvararam, Bangkok

4. Mahanama: Vihara Vajirarama, Colombo
5. Piyadassi: Vihara Vajirarama, Colombo
6. Maha Samseong: Vihara Benchamaborpitra, Bangkok (Waicak, 1959: 36-37).

Perhaps, Mahayana monks could attend the ceremony, but they were not so important until their names and photos were not available in the guidebook. In addition, the rituals were conducted in Theravada tradition and chanting was in Pali. Biographies of those six Theravada monks were provided in detail (Waicak, 1959, pp. 11-17). The schedule of ceremony in 1959 May, 21-22 also shows the priority of Theravada, for example the ordination ritual by Theravada monks. The ritual was arranged in three places namely, *Vihara Buddha Gaya* (Semarang), *Candi Mendut*, and *Candi Borobudur* (Magelang) (Waicak, 1959: 18-19). Notably, Waisak festival in other countries is celebrated during daytime. Buddhists go to temples and offer food to monks, listen to a sermon, and perform circumambulation around the Chanting Halls or pagodas for three times. The ritual normally finishes by 9 p.m. In contrast, Waisak in Indonesia is different since it needs to find the exact time to identify as a Waisak moment based on the fullest moon (Buaban, 2017: 151). This tradition is probably modeled after Ramadan, in which the exact time of fasting must be publicly announced.

Two significant speeches by Jinarakkhita himself and Waraprasat, the representative from the Thai Embassy, clearly shown the core ideas of modern Theravada. Jinarakkhita used this opportunity to explain the monastic practice of Theravada monks, based on the Pali scriptures. It is quite odd when we perceive Waisak as an observance of the Buddha's birthday, enlightenment,

and passing away, but Jinarakkhita chose to discuss another issue. However, it can be understood that Jinarakkhita, a Theravada monk, had to educate Buddhists who were always familiar with Mahayana (Chinese) monks (Waicak, 1959: 9). Even though Jinarakkhita did not mention directly the relationship between monks and laypeople, his speech implied that the monastic life has a higher morality and plays a leading role in the Buddhist community. This assumption was proven when he initiated the monastic organization named *Sangha Suci Indonesia* in 1959 (nowadays known as *Sangha Agung Indonesia: SAGIN*). The monastic organization operates parallel to the lay organization PUUI (now known as *Majelis Buddhayana Indonesia: MBI*), however, MBI's mission clearly states that its duty is to support the spread of Buddhism and it is subordinate to the monastic order of SAGIN (Buddhayana, 2021). This was Jinarakkhita's success in placing monks in a higher status even though they were surrounded by educated laypeople.

The peak of Theravada and *Vipassana* identity could be found in the speech of Waraprasat, the representative from the Thai Embassy. The rational teaching of Buddhism and the criticism of traditional beliefs like praying for good luck and property had been highlighted to portray the real doctrine as interpreted by modern Buddhists as follows:

*"Do we lead the Buddhist life because we hope that by being good and attending the monastery or Vihara on all holy occasions, that the Lord Buddha will reward us with better luck or fortune, or do we lead the Buddhist life with a true understanding and conviction that it is only by a moral Buddhist life that one may prepare oneself for Samma Samadhi (right meditation) and thereby gain wisdom of Vipassana (insight understanding), which will enable us to see Things as They Really Are?"*

Not only providing such a radical speech, Waraprasat also gave yellow robes, bags, and books about Buddhism to the monks and novices who participated in the Waisak ceremony (Waicak, 1959: 20-21). Besides the chanting of Theravada Suttas, presenting incenses, candles, and flowers to Buddha statue is also the product of Theravadization, in which the material objects for worshipping are minimized to express the emphasis on learning the doctrines rather than involving with rituals as ever conducted in the Chinese *klenteng*. In addition to the Waisak celebration in 1959, Jinarakkhita invited Theravada monks from Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka to perform an ordination ceremony in Semarang (Rizzo, 2024: 44). This event could be considered a starting point of the revival of Theravada monastic order in post-colonial Indonesia. It can be said that the status of Modern Buddhism in Indonesia during the 1960s referred not only to the rational or scripture-based religions as found in *Vipassana* meditation in Myanmar (Braun, 2013), it also symbolizes a world religion or state-recognized religion. This is probably why Jinarakkhita invited Theravada monks from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand, countries that Buddhism is a religion of the majority, to join the ceremonies.

Conceptually, Jinarakkhita's ordination and learning *Vipassana* in Myanmar, which had been facilitated by the Embassy of Myanmar in Jakarta, and the support of Theravada Buddhism to reduce Mahayana Chinese identity in Suharto's regime, according to Fjelstad and Hien (2011, p. 5), can be called 'transnationalism from above', in the sense that the power relations and the spread of transnational religion are officially supported by the nation-state. Meanwhile the consumption of religious ideas from various places of Jinarakkhita and other members like Phao Krishnaputra, and the invitations of Theravada monks from Theravada countries to attend Waisak, is 'transnationalism

from below.' This kind of transnationalism occurs when people develop fewer formal networks among transnational religious groups themselves. However, Buddhayana identity is diverse in character, for example, 1) it accepts the concept of Supreme God, meanwhile other Theravada do not, 2) Jinarakkhita did not agree with a clear-cut religious identity, so he personally practiced Theravada and Mahayana simultaneously even in private sphere and viewed trans-doctrinal practices like Theravada monks performing Mahayana rituals as something acceptable. According to Peggy Levitt (2002, p. 2), global religious institute allows people to create new arenas, which also allow them to belong in two places or identities. On the other hand, rituals in the private sphere in Buddhayana temples can be seen as against the government like Steven Vertovec (2001) asserts that the life across borders can resist the nation-state and allows previously marginalized groups to challenge the social hierarchy. Besides the transnational flows of religious ideas, objects, and practices, the criterion that Buddhayana used for the selection of Theravada was the discourse of modern Buddhism. This means that the modern trend of religious teaching by Sri Lankan monks which was also popular in Malaysia and Singapore, and the growth of *Vipassana* meditation in Southeast Asian countries, symbolized modern forms of Theravada Buddhism. Meanwhile, Mahayana modernity was not popular in Indonesia. Instead, its image represented the Chinese culture, which was the target of assimilation policy in post-colonial era.

## Conclusion

This research purposes that the contexts of Indonesian politics and the trend of modern Buddhism, especially Sri Lanka, Southeast Asian countries, and China in colonial and post-colonial eras paved the way

not only for the openness of Buddhayana, but also the priority of Theravada tradition over Mahayana and Vajrayana. Based on the flow of religious ideas tied through the transnational connection, it argues with other scholars that the ordination in Myanmar of Jinarakkhita, instead of China, was not because of the Cultural Revolution in China, because Mahayana ordination could be found in Malaysia. This paper proposes that the popularity of modern style of teaching of Sri Lankan monks and *Vipassana* meditation, which have been symbolized as modern Buddhism, in mainland Southeast Asian countries succeeded in attracting Jinarakkhita and Indonesian Buddhists to choose Theravada tradition.

Moreover, the Theravada identity could respond to the state's policies such as the affirmation of citizenship of the Chinese in 1959 and the assimilation policy during 1965-1998. It can be said that political interventions helped to intensify Theravada Buddhism and suppressed Mahayana, a tradition that tied to Chinese identity. Not only the name of Chinese shrines had been changed to Pali-Sanskrit, but Theravada-based magazines, like *Dharma Prabha*, *Waicak*, and so on had been used to promote the Theravada teaching, eventually the Theravada impact can be witnessed in the current national curriculum of Buddhism education subject. Waisak celebration is an example that Buddhayana arranged, reformed, and adopted Theravada practices to standardize Indonesian Buddhism, which is considered 'modern'. In addition, this form of Buddhism seemed to be desirable in the state's eye. Meanwhile, Mahayana (and some Vajrayana) practice had been maintaining its role in everyday life of the Chinese in *klenteng*.

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## Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

## Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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