
Belonging without Conversion: The Establishment of Buddhism in Muslim Village

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Abstract

This paper investigates networks and strategies that the Thai missionary monks initiated with Muslim and Christian groups in Indonesia. It questions how has the monks reinterpreted Theravada Buddhism to establish itself in a Muslim village. Based upon an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2015-2016, it found that the forms of rituals have been adapted to respond to the local culture, Javanese in particular, while religious teachings are mostly transmitted in secular ways. Social welfare is a tool adopted to negotiate with other religious followers. Interestingly, monks seemed to be respected as much as Muslim Imans. This phenomenon portrays the successful adaptability and negotiations that eventually lead to the new form of religion. These processes help Thai monks to attract the new patrons who can still remain in Islam and Christianity without conversion, which can be seen as an interesting method of missionary work in the global era.

Keywords: Buddhism, Multiculturalism, Secular religion, Thai missionary

Introduction

Religions in new lands studied by various scholars have been showing the changing forms and dynamic identities of these religions. This paper scrutinizes the case study of Buddhism in Central Java, where Muslims are the majority. Some previous scholarly works should be provided here. A temporary ordination program of monks initiated by Singhalese monks in Toronto is an example. In the past, ordination, especially in Sri Lankan Theravada, was from the decision to maintain the monastic life until death (ordination for life). As a result, few people were interested to join the monastic life. Nonetheless, when the Singhalese missionary monks in Toronto began the project of short-term ordination (ordination for education) in 2007, it successfully attracted Sri Lankan migrants and ultimately the project has also been widely accepted and practiced in Sri Lanka itself until today. This case clearly shows the changing form of religion in the new context and its influence in its motherland as well (Bhikkhu, 2011). Similarly to Kristina Dohrn's study of the Hizmet teachers in Tanzania, who had to secularize Islamic ideas in the secular schools (Dohrn, 2013). In addition, John Borup

(2013) addressed that Japanese Buddhists in Aloha must correspond to the global stream of Buddhism, emphasizing in rational doctrine and meditation rather than traditional practices.

These cases reveal the new forms of religion adopted corresponding to the new context. Thai Buddhism has been officially imported to Indonesia since 1966, starting with the missionary work of four monks led by Bhante Win (Phramaha Win Vijjano, Wat Bowornnives Vihara). Of course, they were invited by Bhante Jinarakkhita, the first Indonesian monk who ordained in Burmese Theravada tradition in 1953. Though in the very beginning, Thai monks worked under Jinarakkhita's support, they later developed their own organizations and eventually can establish Thai Buddhism in this land. Thai Buddhism was therefore scrutinized its new adaptability in a Muslim village in Indonesia with the research question, how have the Thai Dhammayutta missionary monks negotiated with Muslim villagers and what are the new invented forms of Buddhism in that area? The new findings in this paper will portray more complex interactions, agencies, as well as the new forms of missionary work that needs no conversion. Methodologically, in-depth interviews and participant observations in ethnographic ways had been conducted in village X, Indonesia, for two months (January 2015 and June 2016). The author, at that time, as a monk, stayed in an ongoing-constructed temple with Muslim workers. Beside that, some accessible villagers nearby were also interviewed. However, in order to avoid the sensitivity and protect the dignity of informants as well as their village, anonymous names of informants and village will be used here.

Sub-contents of this paper are contained of three parts: (1) Two Main Muslim Groups in Indonesia: elucidating some general information on Islam in Indonesia, its diversity and social welfares, in order to avoid the view of generalization. (2) Social Welfare as a Tool for Relationship: discussing the ways that monks create relations with the local Muslims in village X, where 60 houses of Buddhists are not available, which is not allowed by law to build a Buddhist temple, but it was finally built with the agreement of all villagers and regional officials, (3) Belonging without Conversion: demonstrating additional information on the networks initiated with Christians who facilitated missionary work of Thai monks in Indonesia. These two cases will portray Theravada Buddhism in the secular form, in which Thai monks are able to reinterpret Theravada to satisfy and invite other religious believers to join their activities without conversion.

Two main groups of Islam in Indonesia

This section provides some background of Islam in Indonesia and then focuses on village X that the Thai missionary monks generated relationships by adopting social welfares. Before having discussed about local Muslims, Islam in Indonesia should be briefly mentioned to portray the general figures of Indonesian Muslims. Around 99 per cent of Indonesian Muslims are Sunnis. And only one per cent or about two million are Shias. Shia Muslims are mostly in Aceh Province, Sumatra (Kingsbury, 2007, p. 169). Historically and currently, many Islamic groups, such as, Carriers of Revivalism (Media Dukwah) in the 1980s and the Army of Maryrs (Lasykar Jihad) in the late 1990s, tried to promote Islam as a state religion. Islamic law, for those groups, must be implemented. However, they were rejected by other Islamic groups, especially the leading associations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama (NU), on the

grounds that such values need to be adapted to Indonesian contexts and have to appreciate other non-Muslim sections of the population (Federspiel, 2009, p. 172).

Though Muslims in Indonesia are not like Muslims as found in the Middle East, it should not be assumed that all Indonesian Muslims will be secularized in every aspect. Some religious intolerance can also be found in the case of 2011. When Tajul has claimed that the Quran was not God's original scripture, instead it was revealed to the Mahdi, the prophesied redeemer of Islam at the end of times. The Indonesian Ulama Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI) released a fatwa (legal ruling), by which Tajul was finally punished by the local district court by five years in prison (Platzdasch, 2014, pp. 3-4). In addition, data asserts that religious intolerance, such as, the percentage of Muslims who reject the building of a church, or who refuse to have non-Muslim teachers in their children's schools, increased from 200 cases in 2010 to 244 in 2011. However, it should not be understood that Muslims in Indonesia are increasingly conservative, because Muslim values in politics are also changing by increasing number of Muslims support secular state and secular political parties (Bush and Rachman, 2016, p. 17).

In Indonesia, there are two main Muslim groups. (1) Muhammadiyah was established in 1912, and consists of twenty-five million members. (2) Nahdlatul Ulama or NU, was established in 1926 and consists of forty million members nowadays. Many scholarly works such as Latief and Nashir (2020, p. 293) identify Muhammadiyah as a modernist movement regarding its welfare-oriented activities. That is quite true in terms of conducting social works but its religious interpretations in many cases are opposite. Based on my observation conducted when I studied in Muhammadiyah University for a year, Muhammadiyah is considered as conservative in the sense that many teachers denied democratic system and supported Islamic state, transgender was viewed as mental disorder and needed to be cured by religious camp, it also encouraged Muslims to ban the up-coming concert of Black Pink in Makassar in 2019. In contrast, NU is more modernist in terms of accepting the differences in religious, political, as well as human rights. However, these two groups are important players in the ongoing discourse on religious freedom in Indonesia. Their networks of branch offices cover the provincial, district, and sub-district levels. Thousands of schools and clinics, hundreds of universities and hospitals, and NGO groups mostly belong to these two organizations (Bush and Rachman, 2014, p.16). However, both of them seem to adapt corresponding to the modern world by promoting human rights. Abdurrahman Wahid, for example, head of NU from 1984-1999, supported an NGO subculture within NU that strongly advocated for minority rights during the 1990s-2000s (Bush and Rachman, 2016, p. 21).

These issues are raised on the ground that Muslims in Indonesia should not be generalized as a single group who promotes a single ideology. Beside those two groups, many other minority assemblies can also run their organizations themselves. It is important to note that Muslim group in village X, the case I am going to discuss below, is not necessarily the same as the other groups in order to avoid generalization of Islam in Indonesia. The case of village X demonstrates how Thai monks created networks with the Muslim community and how Thai medical knowledge helped to attract those Muslim villagers.

Social welfare as a tool for relationship

The Friendship Garden, also known as The Buddhist Camp in village X, is aimed to be used as a Thai Buddhist center for big activities, such as meditation retreats and Moral Training programs for youths. It covers eleven acres. The project was started in 2005 and gradually developed since then. By the time of my fieldwork in January 2015 and June 2016, various trees had been planted over the years (mostly emphasizing different kinds of fruit trees; mango, rambutan, jackfruit, avocado, etc.). A big pool had already been dug in order to preserve water in the summer. One big residence for monks (containing of three rooms) and one big house for a family of employees had been built. Financial donations for the project had been gained from the Chinese in different parts of Indonesia. A businessman in Jakarta had also provided a Backhoe and a Round tank to support working there. Initially, the tension between Thai monks and the local Muslims started when the village leader argued that the Buddhist temple cannot be constructed in places where sixty Buddhist households are not available. Local ruffians also threaten to harm Thai monks and employees who stayed there. Reconciliation efforts between Thai monks and the villagers were conducted on several occasions. Finally, Thai monks were allowed to continue their project.

Negotiations happened both with local politicians and with ordinary villagers. One of these meetings was held in that garden. All related people, including the village leader, villagers, policemen, as well as the Imam (the leader of Muslims who plays a religious role in the village) were invited. The meeting began with lunch provided by Thai monks, followed by some intensive discussion. Monks started by introducing themselves and showing their Official Passports to support their official status as having a close relationship with the Thai Embassy and Indonesian government. They added that due to their status, policemen and security from Jakarta are always provided whenever requested. Monks comforted their audiences that The Buddhist Camp is not a temple but only a garden in which to carry out activities. Buildings symbolizing Buddhism, such as the Chanting Hall (Uposatha), Buddha images, and pagoda, would not be constructed. Therefore, the Camp should be considered as a resort rather than a religious place. Interestingly, monks had introduced some advantages for the villagers to benefit from this project. In terms of transportation, construction of The Buddhist Camp also brought a new wide road to this village. The big pool could also contain some water for agricultural purposes for the surrounding villagers in the dry season. Moreover, the fruits in this camp are freely accessible for all villagers.

In general, Christian churches, Buddhist temples, and other religious worship-places will be permitted to build in the Muslim-majority area in Indonesia with three reasons, (1) being supported by local government and police, (2) being supported by religious elites, ulama, (3) successful dialogue with the Muslim community in that area (Bush and Rachman, 2016, pp. 19-20). For the case of Friendship Garden, it can be categorized as a successful dialog with the Muslim villagers.

A Pre-Primary Education Center was also initiated in that village by Thai monks (led by Bhante Kamsai) in order to open more opportunities for the poor families who could not send their children to the remote center. In 2015, approximately 30 children were taking part at the center, which was managed by Muslim teachers. Most of the funds for lunches and milk were provided by donations from Buddhist Chinese in Jakarta. At this point, it can be said that

there is no intention to convert the Muslim villagers. As stated by Kamsai, his effort is to accomplish the Buddhist Camp project and compromise as much as possible with the Muslim villagers. It will be best if the project positively affects all related people. He stressed that conversion is something he never tries. Nowadays, the project is still going on, and Kamsai has become a trusted monk who often informally gives Dhamma talks at that center. Thai monks often visited there and give a sermon in the secular way, while in villagers' perspective, monks seemed to be respected as much as Iman.

On the occasion of his birthday, around 40 Muslims from this village attended the celebration in Buddha Metta Arama, Jakarta. Similarly, many souvenirs from Thailand are always distributed to the villagers when Kamsai and Wongsin have temporarily visited their homeland. Such phenomena remind us that development (especially in rural area) is an important tool in facilitating negotiation among the different groups. As suggested by Laliberté (2011) in his article on "Buddhist Revival under State Watch," a local Chinese government may encourage international NGOs to develop the area that it does not have enough funds. Nevertheless, it should be said that the Thai monks' policy of providing aid without attempting direct conversions may have helped to increase its relationship with the locals who are afraid to lose their own religious identity. Similarly to case studies of Soka Gakkai in Brazil by Clarke (2005), Buddha's Light of Foguang Shan by Chandler (2005), and The Compassion Relief of Tzu Chi by Huang (2005), these international religious organizations are growing in Asia and other continents due to their emphasis in social activities, which opens an opportunity to the new local devotees without requiring to abandon of their own faiths.

In addition, many Muslim families have close relationships with Kamsai as their alternative doctor. It is important to note that most Thai missionary monks are from different provinces of Northeastern Thailand. Most of them used to stay in the traditional forest monasteries. As a result, they are experts in herbal medicines. Ibu Bunda who recovered from Diabetes and Ibu Yani who was denied treatment by the local hospital and could not walk for two years, are examples of those who were cured by Kamsai. Leaves and roots of herbs for medication can be found in their village. Interestingly, not only do these two women always visit the center, their family members as well as other relatives often spend holidays there. Mr. Herman and Mr. Supriyanto used to be ruffians in that village. Their behavior was ultimately changed by Kamsai, who employs them to work in the garden. Kamsai revealed that he never teaches them the Buddha's teaching. Instead, they are recommended to be responsible for one's own work, taking care of family, and not to harm others. By this task, Kamsai has been accepted by that Muslim village. This case is similar to the case study of Kristina (2013). Muslim teachers in the secular space (Tanzania) must present themselves as good exemplars through daily behaviors, instead of formal religious teachings.

During my fieldwork observation in village X in May 2016, I also assisted two Muslim employers to build a new small meditation hut. They informed me about their bad life before knowing Kamsai. More interestingly, they used to profess their willing to convert to Buddhism but Kamsai did not allow this. A reason given by Kamsai is that becoming Buddhists may cause a lot of problems for them as members of the Muslim community. This story was restated by Kamsai himself. He also added that

“I do not want to convert anyone, but aim to change their behavior. If they are already good, in my opinion, they are already Buddhists. It is needless to discuss about God or the Buddha, because all of us cannot witness and listen to the sermons directly from the Buddha or God. The most important thing is that we must develop our moral behavior in order to stay with other people. Any religious teaching that can develop our life should be accepted and practiced.”

Of course, Kamsai’s rejection to convert two Muslim men can be seen as his strategy to comfort the Muslim leader about the purpose of Thai monks coming and establishing in this area. Indeed, the Triple Gam (Tiratana: Pali) is needless and the Buddhist Five Precepts (Pancasila) has not been directly taught in this village. Many Muslims who visit the garden often ask for some religious objects. Monks have given bracelet beads with some moral requirements such as not to harm other people, not to steal, not to commit sexual misconduct and so forth without saying that these regulations are Buddhist precepts. Some of them, according to Kamsai’s interview, come again after few months with the thankful speech that those holy souvenirs and guidance make his and her family happier. Notably, bracelet beads are often used by Indonesian Muslims for their religious purposes, it is not the symbol of Buddhism only.

From this case, strategies adapted by Thai monks, especially Kamsai, to compromise with the local Muslims clearly show their adaptability to establish Thai Buddhism in a Muslim community. It has been used to arrange activities for Buddhists, mostly from Jakarta. At the same time, the settlement of this garden also helps many Muslim families in terms of physical and moral recovery. Kamsia’s skill in traditional herbal medication opens him an opportunity to cure villagers. It can be said that various advantages of the garden occurring in that village helps Thai monks to generate network with the locals. Moreover, Kamsai’s definition of being a Buddhist in this case is fascinating. It has been changed from taking the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha as their highest refuges into being those who want to develop one’s behavior and responsible for one’s society. This kind of interpretation may occur due to the transnational mission in the land of other religions. Though Muslims do not obviously support the Thai mission, their allowance in constructing the temple and relationships as close neighbors are enough for Thai monks to continue their religious work there.

In terms of religious symbols, it is important to trace the arts and architectures initiated in this center. Of course, the Dhammasala, or pavilion for arranging various activities, is in Javanese style. There is no Buddha image or Buddha’s picture that has been settled. Only a small Buddha statue has been put inside the monk’s room for the purpose of personal chanting. Interestingly, the big sculpture of Semar, one of Javanese puppets (Wayang) was established in the center of the garden. According to the Javanese narrative, he is one of the clowns (punokawan), but is divine and very wise. He is also the guardian spirit of Java. He was a spiritual advisor and magical supporter of the Javanese royalty, while his descendants also protect the people in Java (Geertz, 1976, p. 23)

Surprisingly, the statue of Semar was aimed to replace the Buddha image in the Muslim village. Characteristics of Semar, for example his intelligence and sacredness, can be aptly compared to the Buddha. The Buddha statue, according to the interview with Kamsai in 2016,

was a symbol to remind devotees of his characters that we must learn and adopt to change our behaviors. By referring to Semar, Kamsai always introduces the local Muslims to follow Semar's behaviors, while he encourages Indonesian Buddhists to perceive Semar as the symbol of Sakyamuni Buddha. This case clearly shows the adaptability in adopting Javanese culture to teach Buddhism in the Muslim community.

The statue of two white Elephants holding the red heart is another piece of architecture established in the garden. In Vihara Vipassana Graha, Bandung, those two elephants are holding Dhammacakka (Wheel of the Dhamma). This art signifies the wheel of Dhamma or Buddha's teaching spreading everywhere. To avoid the religious tension with Muslims in village X, Dhammacakka was replaced by the red heart, which symbolizes loving kindness spreading everywhere. Originally and Internationally, Dhammacakka is carried by a couple of deers; but in Vipassana Graha, it has been changed to elephants probably to signify one of Thai national animals. Nowadays, Semar and the couple of white elephants holding the heart become outstanding landmarks of Friendship Garden that most visitors, including Muslims, use as backgrounds to take photos. This is a case of transnational mobility of ideas and forms, while some contents must be adapted. The next section deals with Indonesian Christians, another religious group that Thai monks create and maintain relationships with.

Belonging without conversion

Christianity in Indonesia is also referred as a minority. Many native Indonesians (Pribumi) have been converted to Christianity since the colonial period. Catholicism has been established in Maluku since 1534. Nowadays, Indonesian Christians consist of twenty-four million. It constitutes ten per cent of the country's population. Seven per cent are Protestant and three per cent are Catholic (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010). However, about thirty-five per cent of Chinese are Christians. Due to the shared ethnicity, based on the interview with Ibu Windy in 2016, Christian Chinese also has close relationships with Buddhist Chinese, and often attends Buddhist ceremonies with their Buddhist friends and family members. Similarly, many Buddhists always participate in the church on Sunday. Victor and Cittagutto, who ordained in Wat Thepsirintravas, Bangkok, by the help of Wongsin in 2013, were from Christian families. They are interested in Theravada Buddhism from reading the book Parita Suci (Morning and Evening Chanting). Similarly, many Chinese Buddhists have been converting to Christianity. To understand relationships between Thai monks and Indonesian Christians, three cases, such as, Gema group, Ibu Rusi, and Ibu Jotiang, are accordingly demonstrated.

Gema or Catholic Student Church (Gereja Mahasiswa Katolik) is a choir group of Catholic Church in Bandung. It is formally called Caelicola Choir. The members consist of mainly Christian students from Universities in Bandung. They always sing songs in Sunday Church. Besides that, they also perform a lot of social activities for both Christian and non-Christian villagers. Five small pavilions for practicing meditation in Friendship Garden (Kebun Persahabatan) in village X were donated by Gema. With the cooperation with Thai monks, Gema used to distribute materials to Muslim villagers around this garden. So, it can be said that Christians and Buddhists as minorities, also join to disseminate their religions. Most of Gema members are also Chinese. Some of them also participate Buddhist activities in Vipassana Graha in order to attend the sermon.

In addition, a Catholic businessman also gave Kamsai a new car in 2011. This man attended Kamsai's Talk Show in Jakarta. Remarkably, the Talk Show signifies the sense of non-religious activity, comparing to the sermon, it therefore attracts audiences from different religious followers. He was interested and had a conversation with Kamsai. After he knew that Kamsai's car was quite old, he immediately offered the new one. One of reasons told by Kamsai is that, the old car is not safe for using in rural areas such as in village X, where Friendship Garden is located. In fact, these two cases, Gema and Businessman, can be interpreted as the actions motivated by sympathy among the religious minority groups who must collaborate in a Muslim country. However, it indicates religious tolerance among the different groups of devotees in Indonesian contexts.

Ibu Rusi was a 35-year-old Catholic woman who served Kamsai by taking him to different places where he was invited to give a Dhamma Talk. She was also the one of administrators in Facebook Page "Bhante Kamsai" who helped promote his religious activities. After graduated Bachelor Degree in Business from Universitas Pelita Harapan in Medan, Rusi began to run a small business at her own house in Jakarta. Some employees were working at her shop, so she could go out for various purposes, one of them was to serve Kamsai, whenever she wanted. She declared that her family members are not devoted Christians. Notably, in Indonesia, Buddhist Dhamma Talk is also arranged on Sunday as found in Christian mass praying. She often decided to attend Sunday Dhamma Talk in Buddha Metta Arama. It means that she rarely participated the Church's activities. These following words were told by Rusi in May 2016.

"I love meditation. I have learned it through YouTube channel. I follow many famous teachers such as, Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hunh, Ajahn Brahm, and Ajahn Sumedo. Those monks' teachings are accessible because I know English. My Buddhist friend persuaded me to attend Kamsai's talk in Bahasa Indonesia. His teaching is very simple in terms of examples witnessed in everyday life and easy to be applied to solve my problems. He never talks about God, but our thinking, speech, and action for instead as key factors to control our destiny. He teaches me to observe whatever that happens in my daily life and interact it with compassion and wisdom. I also practice meditation on breathing under his guidance. It really makes me feel comfortable and helps reduce anxiety. Nirvana in my opinion is that we can accept whatever happens to us and respond in the appropriate ways."

From Rusi's interview, the main reason why she preferred to participate in Buddhist activities is not clearly revealed. However, it can be assumed that the global trend of Buddhist meditation is one of important factors. Such knowledge can also be accessed via high technology. People in different countries, according to John Urry, can share and consume religious philosophy and rituals via high technological devices (Urry, 2000, p. 105). This eventually facilitates the network with other people who also share the same interests. In addition, accessibility to Kamsai, whose teaching seems not to directly convert other devotees to Buddhism, reduces the tension between religious boundaries.

This case can be compared to the Filipino Chinese that has been studied by Sapitula (2015). Those Filipino are middle-class Christians who like to practice Buddhist meditation. However, there is no conversion or identifying themselves as Buddhists. For Catholic Filipinos, meditation is not religious because it does not require belief in a divine being. Rather, it should be seen as a tip to develop one's awareness to reduce anxiety and gain inner peace (Sapitula, 2015, p. 150). Sapitula viewed this phenomenon as "dual belonging" that the Buddhist way of practice can be done while their Christian identity is not abandoned.

Ibu Jotiang, another Catholic woman, is an interesting case to demonstrate relationships between Kamsai and an individual Christian, which reveals that definitions of being a Buddhist, for Kamsai, are different from ordinary Buddhists. Also, his acceptability in diversity helps to create network with other religious person more easily. While Kamsai was giving me interview in Vihara Buddha Metta Arama, Ibu Jotiang, a 40-year-old woman came and made two cups of coffee for us. "This woman, Kamsai stated, is a Christian, comes and makes a cup of coffee for me every Monday to Friday or as often as possible. I never invite her to be a Buddhist, because in my opinion, she is already a real Buddhist" (Interview with Kamsai, March 2015). Perhaps, similarly to Muslim cases in village X, not to convert other religious people to Buddhism can be considered as a strategy of Thai monks to gain trustfulness and reduce competition with other religious leaders. Moreover, giving freedom to those who are interested in Buddhism without requiring them to do and not to do something is the best way in terms of reducing the devotees' anxiety. However, it can be said that, according to Kamsai's claim, identifying oneself as a Buddhist and joining every Buddhist rituals are not necessary, not even to worship the Buddha image, but he should follow the core teachings such as, developing one's behaviors and helping others (Kamsai's Talk in Kalbis Institute, Jakarta, on the occasion of the day of Waisak, June 4, 2016).

"There is no any problem, stated Ibu Jotiang in March 2015, though my Christian friends know that I often go to a Buddhist temple. That is because I do not ignore the Sunday Church. I perceive my coming to make a cup of coffee for monks as one of moral behaviors. Some of my friends in the office are Buddhists. They share with me some translated books on Buddhist teachings, mostly written by Ajahn Brahm, Ajahn Chah, and Luangta Maha Bua. Though my parents are Christians, my grandparents were actually Buddhists. Many dead relatives and other ghosts in different forms are often seen in my meditation. It means that I also believe that we can make merit and transfer to our ancestors, though I am a Christian."

Jotiang's case clearly shows that she is interested in Buddhism due to her Buddhist friends and Buddhist books, on the one hand. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that her old belief, Chinese tradition of ancestral worship, parallel to the Buddhist belief has been affecting her idea much more than Christian doctrine. This phenomenon can be conceptualized through Cultural Network Analysis (CNA). CNA is characterized as a network of the culturally-shared concepts, causal beliefs, values, rules, expectations, and procedures that influence key decisions in a particular context (Rasmussen & Smart, 2010, cited from Sieck,

2010, p. 260). It means that people in different groups who believe in the same things or share some cultures can easily create networks. Going to temple and offering some beverages, according to Jotiang's understanding, can produce merits, which can be transferred to her dead relatives. However, due to the religious boundaries, she chose not to perform any Buddhist ritual. This kind of reinterpretation of Buddhism, ignoring ceremonies, can be viewed as a modern religious identity, in which individuals can choose to practice religion as an alternative choice. Only some parts of religious teachings are selected, not all provided packages. On the contrary, though the response from Kamsai seems to be very passive, that can also be considered as good response in terms of trying not to directly convert anybody to Buddhism on the grounds that Thai monks want to gain trustfulness and reduce competition with other religious leaders.

The concept of "believing without belonging" widely discussed nowadays can also be adopted to explain the Muslim and Christian cases in this paper. This concept portrays the phenomenon that some religious believers, mostly young Christians, tend not to attend the Sunday Prayer, however, they still claim having strong belief and study it themselves. Someone mentions that to love or take care of the neighbors is more important than attending the church. This is a new way of interpretation of Christian identity which seems to be secularized (Cornelio, 2016, pp. 6-8). In some senses, Muslims and Christians who are interested in learning Buddhism and help Thai monks to run their missionary work can be viewed as believing without belonging as well, if the word "belonging" denotes the status of conversion or registration as new members.

Nonetheless, it may not correct to interpret this particular concept broader in order to serve my field-data. Therefore, to generate the new term "belonging without conversion" is probably more suitable regarding this analysis, in the sense that Muslims and Christians also learn Buddhism, discuss with Thai monks, participate in some ceremonies, sermon-listening for example, help Thai monks to establish a new temple (though in the name of garden), and so forth, without conversion or being asked by Thai monks to be converted. This case obviously reveals the new method of teaching religion in non-Buddhist villages, in which the vow "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha" is no longer required. Instead, to interpret religious essence in the form of universal moral conducts can allow other religious people to enjoy and consume Buddhism without abandoning their religious identity.

Conclusions

All cases discussed in this paper portray how Thai monks have been creating networks in Indonesia with Muslims and Christians. For these groups of people, Thai monks seem to be passive especially in terms of religious conversion. However, it can be seen as their strategy to propagate Buddhism in an Islamic land and Christian communities, where they must negotiate with other religious leaders. However, the adaptability of Thai monks, especially Kamsai in this paper, in giving sermons in secular forms and adopting the Javanese hero to imply the Buddha's characters opens an opportunity for other religious devotees to learn Buddhism and generate relations with Thai monks without anxiety, which eventually facilitates the establishment of Thai Buddhism there. In some cases, it cannot be denied that the influence of reinterpretation of Buddhism in the secular ways, emphasis on social welfares, flourishing of

the Dhamma books written by famous teachers such as the Dalai Lama, Ajahn Brahm, and so forth, also pave the way for consuming Buddhism without religious conversion. In consequence, the global trend of Buddhism as well as negotiations with other religious followers in the local area help to generate Thai Buddhism in the new forms, which rituals, religious symbols, and religious identity can be abandoned in various aspects.

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