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SYSTEMATIZING 'CHINESE RELIGION'
THE CHALLENGES OF 'THREE-TEACHING'
ORGANIZATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY
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SYSTEMATIZING ‘CHINESE RELIGION’. THE CHALLENGES OF ‘THREE-TEACHING’ ORGANIZATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

ABSTRACT Since the fall of the Soeharto regime in 1998, socio-political conditions for ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have drastically improved, while the governmental supervision of religious institutions has been weakening. This article focuses on the relatively inconspicuous yet significant on-going changes regarding ‘Chinese Religion (*Agama Tionghoa*)’ in Post-Soeharto Indonesia. In the early 20th century, Peranakan Chinese (ethnic Chinese who had become localized both in a cultural sense and in terms of descent) intellectuals in the Dutch East Indies discovered Confucianism and developed ‘Three-teaching (*Sam Kauw*)’ in their effort to seek for ‘a spiritual pillar for Chinese’. This move was stimulated by the Chinese nationalist movement, and the Christianization of ethnic Chinese. ‘Three-teaching’, or ‘*Tridharma*’ in Indonesian, was conceptualized as a holistic ‘Chinese traditional religion’ encompassing Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism as well as ancestral worship and folk religious practices in Chinese temples. From the mid-1960s under the Soeharto regime, however, the organizations holding up *Tridharma* functioned merely as protectors of Chinese temples, and carried out few ‘religious activities’. In the Post-Soeharto era, following the changes in the landscape of ‘Chinese Religion’ caused by, among others, the re-acknowledgement of Confucianism as an officially recognized religion, the *Tridharma* organizations have started reasserting their *raison d’être* by establishing doctrines and standardizing ritual. In this article, I offer an overview of these historical processes, before reviewing the recent substantial attempts of religious systematization made by three *Tridharma* organizations; one in West Java (*Majelis Agama Buddha Tridharma Indonesia*), one in East Java (*Perhimpunan Tempat Ibadat Tri Dharma se-Indonesia*), and the latter’s branch in Central Java. Further, I analyze the sources of religious knowledge drawn on to support these systematizing efforts.

Keywords ‘Chinese Religion’, *Tridharma* (Tri Dharma), post-Soeharto Indonesia, the ethnic Chinese

I. INTRODUCTION

In May 1998, when the New Order regime in Indonesia collapsed after more than thirty years under President Soeharto, a sweeping review of oppressive policies targeting residents of Chinese origin (from here on referred to as the ‘ethnic Chinese’) commenced. In the process, laws banning public expressions of culture originating in China were abolished. The tide of major political changes concern-

ing and affecting the ethnic Chinese included their area of belief as well. Chinese New Year became a national holiday and Confucianism regained its status as the sixth religion officially recognized by the state. These changes are bringing about significant shifts in the landscape within ‘Chinese Religion (*Agama Tionghoa*)’¹.

¹ In this article, ‘Chinese Religion’ refers to what are commonly considered to be ‘traditional religions of the ethnic

During the Soeharto era, Chinese temples (*klenteng*) had been prohibited from organizing activities in public under the rationale that *klenteng* fell into the category of ‘alien cultural systems (*tata budaya asing*)’ unsuitable for ‘Indonesia’s individuality (*kepribadian Indonesia*)’² (Tsuda 2012b, 389-390). Today however, some Chinese temples are even conducting regular Mandarin Chinese language classes on their premises. This is part of a wider transformation that has become noticeable in local communities in many parts of the country, with a shift toward (re-)assigning a function to Chinese temples that had been gravely impaired during the Soeharto era, that of working as cultural hubs for their respective ethnic Chinese communities (Tsuda 2012b, 396-397).

Another function provided by Chinese temples, perhaps traditionally more significant, is that of a place for worship. On temple premises, people are raising incense sticks, holding palms together in prayer, and burning joss paper to worship well-known deities in the Chinese pantheon. At first glance, these ‘ordinary’ sights evoke a sense of ‘tradition’, of ritual practices passed down from generation to generation among Chinese people, transcending the boundaries of time and geography. However, this realm, though commonly understood as ‘the religion of the ethnic Chinese’, has by no means maintained a ‘traditional’ existence. Rather, adapting to social and political conditions, it has undergone significant changes. The most notable change occurred at the turn of the twentieth century under the colonial structure of the Dutch East Indies, when Peranakan Chinese intellectuals sought and quite consciously advocated the concept of a distinct ‘Chinese Religion’ as a spiritual pillar for the modernization of ‘Chinese people’³.

Another distinct tide of change developed when the then new nation-state promoted the concept of ‘religion (*agama*)’ which was modeled on monotheistic Islam and Christianity. This change was prompted by the same factors experienced by oth-

er religious groups such as Balinese Hindus, who through a process of immense effort which continued more than five decades, worked to reconcile their faith with the state’s model of ‘religion’. That is, to be officially recognized as a ‘religion’, a monotheistic God, a prophet, a scripture, and a house of worship were critical requirements (Ramstedt 2004). These changes accelerated under the Soeharto regime, during which the state philosophy *Pancasila* was absolutized as an ideology opposing communism. Moreover, the Soeharto regime added a series of policies to make ‘things Chinese’ (anything relating to China or the ethnic Chinese; if described negatively in Indonesian, ‘*hal-hal berbau Cina*’) invisible in public places, which it legitimized as in the interests of security. The invisibilization process was intensified when the regime later tried to mobilize the economic strength of the ethnic Chinese while carefully avoiding inviting the jealousy of indigenous people (Tsuda 2011, 11-14; 2012b). This severely oppressive framework came to an end at the turn of the twenty-first century, when ‘things Chinese’ started to become not only politically but also socially increasingly accepted. In addition, the state has become increasingly unwilling to keep ‘religions’ under centralized control⁴.

With these changes, people are today freer to publicly express views associated with ethnicity or religion. Accompanying this, spearheaded by the religious organizations in the realm of ‘Chinese Religion’, a sudden rise of movements are aiming to establish doctrines and standardize rituals which have hitherto governed and protected Chinese temples. In previous articles I have described the situation at Chinese temples across Java today, as well as a set of issues individual temples are facing in local contexts (Tsuda 2012b). In this article, I will instead focus on religious organizations⁵ and provide a concrete description of the systematization of ‘Chinese Religion’ as it is currently developing—in their attempts to establish both ‘correct doctrinal interpretation (orthodoxy)’ and ‘correct ritualistic practice (orthopraxy)’—within the context of these socio-political changes.

Chinese’. As conveyed in this article, this term in no way implies a traditionality in the sense of a religion of an older time having been preserved in its original form.

² See the instruction of the Minister of Home Affairs issued in 1988 (*Instruksi Menteri Dalam Negeri Nomor: 455.2-360 tahun 1988 tentang Penataan Klenteng*) that stipulated the Chinese elements observed in Chinese temples had to be rejected as being unsuitable for ‘Indonesia’s individuality (*kepribadian Indonesia*)’.

³ In this process, they rethink and reshape the nature and meanings of beliefs and rituals which until that point had been simply passed down with little conscious inquiry. To some extent, this movement shared common ground with a change in the domain of ‘religion’ that was taking place both in mainland China and elsewhere. This movement was a result of coming face to face with the ‘modernity’ embodied by the West, i.e. Christian society. In this sense, the concept of ‘religion’ was—as was the concept of ‘Chinese people’ as a group—a new discovery at the turn of the 20th century (Dura 2008, 54-64; Yang 2008).

⁴ This of course does not mean religious activities are completely devoid of surveillance; strict action continues to be taken against any activity which presents a risk to ‘security’ and ‘order’. Further, events such as attacks against a group viewed as ‘heretic’ Muslims, and some Christian churches struggling to obtain building permits, demonstrate an eruption of religious issues. These issues have to some extent been released from the state’s grip into the social sphere, where they manifest in tensions among ‘sects’ or neighboring residents (Hasan 2008).

⁵ The organizations examined in this article are limited to those in Java, Indonesia’s political, economic and social center. This is because though organizations governing Chinese temples in many parts of Indonesia do have some branches in the ‘Outer Islands’, the headquarters and activities have always been centered in Java.

II. THE HISTORY OF 'CHINESE RELIGION'

1. *The Early Twentieth Century: Kwee Tek Hoay and Sam Kauw Hwee*

The majority of Chinese temples in Java seem to have been constructed or renovated at the turn of the nineteenth century (Salmon and Siu 1997). They were generally maintained and managed by their respective local ethnic Chinese communities, in other words, temples were not connected to centralized religious organizations⁶. During the early twentieth century, however, a movement emerged to search for a religion that could serve as a spiritual pillar for the ethnic Chinese—a 'Chinese Religion'.

From the late nineteenth century to 1920s, some groups—at first for the progressive purpose of modernizing ethnic Chinese society, and later as a conservative backlash to the waves of modernization and westernization—used the teachings of Confucius as a spiritual pillar for their respective ideas (Coppel 1989). Against this, Kwee Tek Hoay (郭德懷, 1886-1951), who was also known as an expert in Peranakan literature, was critical of how those who promoted modernization or assigned the teachings of Confucius an exclusive position, generally rejecting ancestor and deity worship as being old-fashioned. He was also concerned that they had failed to gain broad support among the ethnic Chinese society, while conversely failing to become an effective pillar to push back the tide of Christian conversion. In 1934, he established a different organization known as *Sam Kauw Hwee* (三教會) or the Three-teaching Society (Rees 1987, 48, 53-54). 'Three-teaching (*Tridharma*)'⁷ is a term that conceptualizes the religious traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, ingrained deeply among the people of China, which are well-blended and essentially inseparable. Needless to say, the concept of 'Three-teaching' or similar conceptions had had a presence in Chinese philosophy for centuries. But Kwee himself, who was said to have had hardly any Chinese reading ability, had clearly been exposed to the tradition of Chinese thought through either

Westerners or Western literature⁸, and had arrived at the concept of 'Tridharma' while attempting to recapture 'Chinese Religion' as a more inclusive concept.

Soon after the establishment of *Sam Kauw Hwee*, branches were established across Java and in major cities on other Islands. *Sam Kauw Hwee* followed preceding groups which sought the establishment of 'Chinese Religion', though it was conceived as an organization that would be more open to the masses⁹. Regarding Christianity as threatening¹⁰, by the end of the 1930s Kwee himself had come to view Tridharma as constructing one religious system (Rees 1987, 67-68). The Chinese temples were regarded as the equivalent of churches. As such, further activities aimed to change the role of the temple from being a place of customary worship only, to being a place of preaching which would deepen the understanding of the newly focused 'philosophy' of 'Chinese Religion', namely the teachings of Shakyamuni, Confucius, and Lao-tze.

In part due to the chaos during the period of Independence, *Sam Kauw Hwee* experienced a temporarily standstill of activities. In 1952, six months after Kwee's death, its branches were combined to form *Gabungan Sam Kauw Indonesia* (三教聯合會, GSKI). In 1963, the formal name was changed to the Indonesia Tridharma Association (*Gabungan Tridharma Indonesia*, GTI). With its headquarters in Jakarta, it expanded its base, primarily in West Java (Tsuda 2012b, 392-393).

2. *The Soeharto Era: PTITD*

In 1967, in the process of resolving the chaos caused by the 30 September Movement, Soeharto

⁶ There are isolated examples of several Chinese temples in the easternmost region of Java. It has been suggested that they were built with the ritual of 'division of incense and fire (分香火)' from a single main temple (Salmon and Sidharta 2000). Nevertheless, such cases of historical relationships among Chinese temples that remain or are remembered today are extremely rare. Such exceptions include *Tay Kak Sie* (大覺寺) and *Sam Poo Kong Bio* (三保公廟) in Semarang, Central Java.

⁷ Tridharma is sometimes spelled as 'Tri Dharma', in two words. As detailed later, the organization that followed in the line of *Sam Kauw Hwee*, and which would go on to expand its base in West Java employed 'Tridharma' in order to emphasize the oneness of the three religious elements, while the organization that developed later on in East Java has used 'Tri Dharma'.

⁸ Though exact details from where Kwee drew the knowledge concerning Chinese philosophies are unclear, he is known to have been influenced by the works of J.J.M. de Groot (1854-1921), Lin Yu Tang (林語堂, 1895-1976), as well as the activities of Batavia Buddhist Association and the Theosophical Society (Rees 1987, 66; 1989, 197-199, 203).

⁹ Kwee is thought to have understood 'Chinese Religion' as comprising two levels: the higher one—the 'philosophy' comprising the teachings of Shakyamuni, Confucius, and Lao-tze—which was for those who had achieved a heightened degree of spiritual awareness—and the lower one—'religion' centering around deity and ancestor worship. Initially he is said to have had a negative view of the latter, from the standpoint of modernization. However he eventually came to think that worship falling into the latter category should not be rashly rejected, as it may be used as a means for raising the consciousness of those who remain in the latter (lower) level, to that of the former (higher) level (Rees 1987, 65-66, 69-70).

¹⁰ In the early twentieth century, Christianity was strongly tied to the Dutch colonists, and conversion to it was consequently interpreted as a loss of ethnic identity. However in the 1930s, missionaries and churches exclusively serving the ethnic Chinese began to appear, and the resistance towards conversion among the ethnic Chinese began to generally decline (Rees 1987, 41-46, 67, 73-76).

seized power. Standing precisely at the intersection of policies on ‘religion’ and ‘things Chinese’, Chinese temples in general faced a difficult situation during the regime, which finally collapsed in 1998. To protect the existence of Chinese temples, a different group espousing the concept of ‘Three-teaching’ emerged in East Java. The All Indonesia Association of Tri Dharma Worship Sanctuaries (*Perhimpunan Tempat Ibadat Tri Dharma se-Indonesia*, abbreviated as PTITD) was founded in Surabaya in 1967¹¹. It was headed by Ong Kie Tjay (王基財). The PTITD shared basic characteristics with West Java’s GTI, upholding the three religious elements while promoting its identity as a sect of Buddhism, an officially recognized ‘religion’. PTITD had a prominent characteristic as a self-protective umbrella organization; it declared Chinese temples to be legitimate ‘religious’ facilities, while federating them under its leadership.

In 1979, as the Soeharto regime entered a period of stability and the state’s control and monitoring of Chinese temples was further intensified, the ‘Three-teaching’ organizations in East and West Java were integrated to form a unified organization named *Majelis Rohaniwan Tridharma Seluruh Indonesia* (Martrisia). The organization took on the function of ‘a sole container (*wadah tunggal*)’ representing the interests of Chinese temples across Indonesia. Needless to say, this merger conformed to the late 1970s trend, when under the leadership of the Soeharto regime a demand was placed on all Buddhist organizations in Indonesia to organize under a unified framework¹². At the same time, the merger was also a result of efforts to find a way for Chinese temples to somehow maintain their existence.

Martrisia, which was headquartered in Surabaya and run by a few board members, primarily from Surabaya¹³, focused its activities on persuading government agencies and the Indonesian society that ‘Tri Dharma’ be acknowledged as an officially approved religion, and that Chinese temples or ‘Tri Dharma Worship Sanctuaries’ were its ‘religious facilities’. As a result, it organized few activities typically associated with religious orders, such as the establishment of doctrine, the standardization of

ritual, or leading integrated activities bringing its affiliated temples together¹⁴. This situation frustrated members in West Java who had a history of working toward systematization with the hope to establish a ‘Chinese Religion’. This frustration finally led to the simultaneous secessions of all branches in Jakarta and West Java Provinces from Martrisia in 1997. In 1999, these branches came together once again as the Tridharma Buddhist Council of Indonesia (*Majelis Agama Buddha Tridharma Indonesia*, from hereon referred to as the ‘Majelis Tridharma’), headquartered in Jakarta (Satyadharma 2004, 9-15). This remains so, with two ‘Three-teaching’ organizations coexist, one representing East Java and the other West Java. After the pressure from the state targeting ‘things Chinese’ and ‘religion’ was removed, led by some leaders of these organizations, movements have been developing for the establishment of doctrine and standardization of ritual. In the next chapter, I will present specific details of such movements toward religious systematization, focusing on each organization.

III. ESTABLISHING DOCTRINE, STANDARDIZING RITUAL

1. *In the Footsteps of Kwee Tek Hoay: Majelis Tridharma*

Majelis Tridharma, which was formed almost concurrently with the collapse of the Soeharto regime, is a direct descendant of Kwee Tek Hoay’s *Sam Kaw Hwee*¹⁵. A leader of the organization explains that it seceded from Martrisia because it lacked ‘*keimanan*’ (belief). In other words, they were discontent that the organization’s efforts to establish a pillar for belief had effectively been disregarded¹⁶.

¹⁴ However, many of the Chinese temples proclaiming ‘Tri Dharma’ have additional alters enshrining the ‘Three Saints (三教聖人, *Tri Nabi*)’, i.e. Shakyamuni, Confucius, and Lao-tze (Tsuda 2012b, 392). In that aspect, one could conclude that Martrisia has in fact maintained its appearance as a unified order.

¹⁵ At its general conference held in 1976 shortly before merging with PTITD in Surabaya, GTI, the direct successor of *Sam Kaw Hwee*, had passed a resolution to recognize Kwee Tek Hoay as the ‘Father of Indonesia’s Tridharma (*Bapak Tridharma Indonesia*)’ in order to honor his contributions to Indonesian Buddhism—and in particular Tridharma. Also included in the resolution was the decision to celebrate his birthday on July 31st as ‘Tridharma Day (*Hari Tridharma*)’. GTI also required the administration boards of its affiliated temples to display a photograph of Kwee within their facilities as an expression of due reverence (Ruslim 2002, 3-4).

¹⁶ This account is based on an interview conducted on August 27th, 2010, with Budiyo Tantrayoga. In 1996, WALUBI (cf. Footnote 12) fell into internal conflict regarding the formulation of its charter. The ensuing disruption led to its dissolu-

¹¹ The organization was initially formed as an association of East Java Province’s Chinese temples. ‘All Indonesia’ was not included in its name until late 1968.

¹² As a part of its policy to maintain control over religions, from around 1976 the Soeharto regime endorsed the movement toward the establishment of a coordinating and consultative body among the various Buddhist sects, and in 1979 WALUBI (*Perwalian Umat Buddha Indonesia*) was formed. Since the time of WALUBI’s inception, Martrisia has been a member organization.

¹³ Martrisia, formed as a result of the merger of East and West Java’s priests’ departments, was essentially the same entity as PTITD; the organization sometimes called itself ‘*PTITD-Martrisia*’ when communicating externally with government authorities.

How, then, is this organization now attempting to implement 'keimanan'?

A noteworthy article entitled 'Tridharma as a unified body of teachings' was published in a brochure for 'Tridharma Day' in 2009¹⁷. The author, Budiyo Tantrayoga, the Premier Priest (*Pandita Utama*) of Majelis Tridharma until 2010, begins the article by expressing a sense of crisis. He states that in this age of 'modernization' and 'computerization', the substance of values warranting protection are being lost, and that people are being drawn to the idea of being Buddhist more than that of the Tridharma. According to Budiyo, Buddhism is just one element of the Tridharma. However, people are now tending to become devoted believers not of the Tridharma but only of Buddhism. He insists that 'Tridharma-ness (*ke-Tridharma-an*)'—a state in which the three teachings mutually complement each other and comprise one truth (*hakekat*)—must be established and adhered to as a policy. In the latter half of the article, he explains that the essential elements, which in each teaching provide a method for reaching a state of understanding and mastery of the complete truth, share common frameworks and meanings. He presents the table below to demonstrate the correlation among the three teachings.

Consistency in 'Five' (Padanan Yang Lima)

Taoism	Confucianism	Buddhism
Five Phrases (<i>Panca Bhuta/ Lima Elemen/ Ngo Heng</i>)	Five Virtues (<i>Panca Utama/ Lima Utama/ Ngo Siang</i>)	Five Precepts (<i>Panca Sila/ Lima Sila/ Ngo Kai</i>)
Wood (<i>Mu/ Bok/ Kayu</i>)	Benevolence (<i>Ren/ Jin/ Cinta Kasih</i>)	No killing (<i>Tidak Membunuh</i>)
Metal (<i>Cin/ Kim/ Logam</i>)	Righteousness (<i>I/ Yi/ Kebenaran</i>)	No stealing (<i>Tidak Mencuri</i>)
Fire (<i>Huo/ Hwe/ Api</i>)	Propriety (<i>Li/ Lee/ Susila</i>)	No sexual misconduct (<i>Tidak Berjinah</i>)

tion at the hands of some members of the leadership in 1998, followed by the establishment of a separate new organization (*Perwakilan Umat Buddha Indonesia*), though its abbreviated name remained the same. In 1999 several Buddhist organizations who were against this new WALUBI came together to form the Indonesian Great Sangha Conference (*Konferensi Agung Sangha Indonesia*, abbreviated as KASI). It was in this situation that the PTITD-Martrisia remained within the framework of the new WALUBI, while Majelis Tridharma joined KASI. The breakup of the unified 'Three-teaching' organization was thus complexly intertwined with political and personal elements, and should not be understood simply as a result of frustration toward its religious activities.

¹⁷ The original title is 'Tridharma sebagai Satu Kesatuan (*Sam Kauw It Lee/ Tridharma Eka Marga*)' (Panitia Peringatan Hari Tridharma 2009, n.pag.).

Water (<i>Sui/ Cui/ Air</i>)	Wisdom (<i>Che/ Ti/ Kebijaksanaan</i>)	No intoxicants (<i>Tidak Memabukkan</i>)
Earth (<i>Tu/ To/ Tanah</i>)	Fidelity (<i>Xin/ Sin/ Dapat Dipercaya</i>)	No false speech (<i>Tidak Berdusta</i>)

Budiyo links the components in each of the three teachings to their equivalents by equal signs ('='). For example, the connection between the components of the third row in the table are shown as 'one who enjoys sexual misconduct = one without propriety i.e. one who lacks ethics = a lack of fire'. He argues that 'this correlatedness of each element exemplifies the consistency in "Five" within Tridharma, which apparently point to a single truth'. He concludes by saying it is not advisable that one leans only on an understanding of Buddhism, but that rather one should practice the mental training of Taoism, the propriety of Confucianism, and the discipline of Buddhism on a daily basis.

To debate the religious validity of the doctrine of 'Sam Kauw It Lee (三教一理)' is not my purpose here. What is remarkable, however, is the extraordinary effort made by the organization's top person to establish the 'Three-teaching' as a single unified 'religion' without leaning disproportionately on the Buddhist teaching. The fact the article had originally been prepared as an educational piece to teach a younger audience about the essence of Tridharma may also be important¹⁸. Although religious knowledge relating to Tridharma has conventionally either been obtained through self-study or passed down through informal mentoring relationships, Majelis Tridharma currently runs a training institute for clergy in Cipinang, a suburb of Jakarta. Now that the institutionalization of the method to transfer such knowledge, as well as the systemization of that knowledge itself, is in process, there is a clear sign that those who are trained formally will implement rituals and preach Tridharma in Chinese temples across West Java¹⁹.

¹⁸ In the preface, it states that the article was originally written to be presented at the time of the 'Forum for Educators of Tridharma Sunday Schools and Schools of Youth on Educational Improvement', held in December 2008 in Banten. Note that the Great Priest Sasanaputera Satyadharma, who I introduce later in this article, also discusses '*Sam Kauw It Li*' (Satyadharma 2004, 17-22). Therefore the style of explanation I cited in this article pertaining to the correlation among the three teachings cannot necessarily be assumed to be an original creation by Budiyo. Note additionally that according to Budiyo, since scriptures already exist for each of the teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, Majelis Tridharma has no plans to create a new scripture of its own by recompiling the three. In regards to rituals, he states that they are being implemented in accordance with each of the teachings, and that the rituals existed in a well-blended and mutually inseparable state even before the time of Kwee Tek Hoay.

¹⁹ This account is based on an interview conducted on August 27th, 2010 at Budiyo Tantrayoga's office.

2. As a 'Decent' Religious Order: PTITD Headquarters

Facing the secession and the vigorous movement of the West Java's members (Majelis Tridharma) who are intently seeking to establish 'Tridharma-ness', how is the unified organization based in East Java (PTITD-Martrisia, from hereon referred to as the 'PTITD headquarters'), which in the past did not perform much religious activities, responding? The PTITD headquarters, which in the Soeharto era occupied the position as 'a sole container' representing Chinese temples, seems yet to have found a way out of its state of stagnation.

Of course, efforts have been made. In November 2006, a national conference was convened in Surabaya. At the three-day conference, board member appointments were renewed for the first time since 1988, and five-year targets for activity programs were presented in order to refashion the organization's image to one suitable for 'decent' religious order²⁰ (Panitia Munas dan Kongres 2006). These five-year plans were organized into major categories including (1) organization and members, (2) religion and religious art, (3) economics, welfare and education of believers, and (4) international partnering²¹. The second category clearly reveals the intent for religious systematization. In fact, almost half an A4-size booklet distributed to participants at the conference was devoted to a forty-page instruction manual for 'Tri Dharma style' rituals. This ritual manual (儀式唱礼) includes four categories, 'Ritual for Worshipping Deities', 'Ritual for Board Appointments before Deities', 'Marriage Ceremony', and 'Funeral Ceremony'. The words to be chanted—all uniformly in Mandarin—by the persons taking on the role of the 'Ritual Official (執事, *Petugas Upacara*)' and the 'Ritual Director (主祭官, *Pimpinan Upacara*)' are prescribed, as well as rites to be performed during each ceremony. These rites include the 'three kneelings and nine kowtows', as well as incense and tea offerings to be carried out in

²⁰ It is worth noting that the decision to hold the conference was somewhat hastily made, due to the fact that leadership in Surabaya was prompted by a sense of urgency upon facing the movement of the newly formed Majelis Tridharma as well as the development of Confucianist and Taoist organizations which had been vigorously engaging in activities since the start of the 2000s (Tsuda 2012b, 395-396). Hence, the categories that were declared as five-year key activity programs had not been thoroughly prepared, and as it turns out most of them have not been realized at present.

²¹ While in the second category 'religion and religious art', 19 concrete subcategories are listed in total, including: creating Tri Dharma guidance documents, books of sermons, and ritual manuals; promoting relationships among believers through mutual visitations between Chinese temples; and the implementation of regular worship services, the last category 'international partnering' includes no description other than a simple statement: 'In this age of globalization, we will open up international relationships pertaining to the religiosity of Tri Dharma'.

chronological order, with side-by-side descriptions in Chinese characters, pingyin, phonetic transcriptions to aid Indonesian readers, and the Indonesian translations for these. The last pages of instruction manual list items for each ritual which are to be offered at the main altar installed for the respective ritual, along with a layout diagram. This ritual instruction manual, however, is not necessarily implemented uniformly at all PTITD-member Chinese temples. Rather, each Chinese temple also has specific ways of performing rituals which have been passed down. To illustrate this point, I will briefly introduce the case of Chinese temples in the town of Rembang, Central Java, where I have conducted research for many years²².

*

In the town of Rembang there are two Chinese temples, *Tjoe Hwie Kiong* (慈惠宮) and *Hok Tik Bio* (福德廟). Both have been managed under one foundation since 1978 (Tsuda 2011, Part 2). In the 1970s, rituals at these temples were handled solely by a man named Cheng Shu Hong, who would read out the prayer sentences (*Surat Doa/ Cee Boen*) in Hokkien while the rituals were performed. When Cheng died in the 1980s, however, the prayer sentences could no longer be reenacted, as no one else had understood the meanings of the words in the prayer sentences. Tan Ging Hwat, who at the time was in charge of a secretariat at the foundation, freely created new prayer sentences in Indonesian to replace the prayer sentences in Hokkien. From that point on, during rituals at both temples, these prayer sentences in Indonesian have been displayed at the altar and read out. This 'tradition' continues today²³. Cheng and his wife had also been in charge of preparing all the food offerings placed on the altar. After his death, Hian Khing, his assistant, took over as his successor. However, as Hian Khing reached old age, the concern emerged that all knowledge concerning offerings would be lost²⁴.

²² Although Rembang's Chinese temples have not been affiliated with PTITD (Tsuda 2011, 101-102), the case described below would highlight how the knowledge concerning ritual practices has been maintained at each temple.

²³ The Pot Master (爐主, *Locu*) at *Tjoe Hwie Kiong* is newly elected using divination blocks every year at the time of the birthday festival of the goddess *Tian Shang Sheng Mu*. In the past, prayer sentences in Hokkien were read before the throwing of divination blocks. Cheng's son remembered these prayer sentences, but only the sound of the words remained in his memory which had become vague. However recently, upon hearing that Mandarin prayer sentences for the ritual of throwing of divination blocks are still remembered in Semarang, the capital city of Central Java, a member of the temple's management — Liong Kiam Kiat — compared that version against what Cheng's son remembered, which was found to have been extremely accurate. As a result, since 2009, prayer sentences in Hokkien have been reinstated at *Tjoe Hwie Kiong* solely for the election of Pot Masters. This account is based on an interview with Liong Kiam Kiat at his home on August 12th, 2011.

²⁴ When in 1996 the Chinese temples of Rembang decided on a major status change, a substantial reorganization of the

As such, around 2000, Liong Kiam Kiat, who at the time had just taken the role of the Pot Master (*Locu*) at *Tjoe Hwie Kiong*, took notes on the types and positional arrangements of the offerings as Hian Khing had told him. Liong Kiam Kiat then compiled 'The list of Altarages at Tjoe Hwie Kiong and Hok Tik Bio, Rembang' (Yayasan Dwi Kumala Rembang n.d.). At present, the person who actually positions the offerings is the foundation's officer in charge of rituals. This is neither a hereditary nor lifetime position, the officer can change along with reappointments. The set up of the altar has been conducted in line with 'The List of Altarages' as a guide since 2001²⁵.

'Traditions' such as these which have been passed down in communities are, however, in no way static in nature. A constant sense of a 'lack of confidence' about the knowledge itself indirectly expresses itself in not-so-unusual changes. For example, concerning the offerings for the annual ritual held on the 9th day of the Chinese New Year (敬天公, *King Thi Kong*), a 'tradition' already existed. However, one day in 2001 Liong, the very person who had compiled 'The List of Altarages', came across an old booklet titled 'King Thi Kong'²⁶, which belonged to his acquaintance in town. A particular type of rice cake (*bie-ko*, *gunungan wajik*) was described in this booklet as a mandatory offering for the occasion, but it had not been included in Rembang's 'tradition'. From that point on, this cake was added to the altar at both temples, to be in accordance with this 'older and correct' guideline²⁷. As can be observed from this example, 'traditions' have been passed down in individual Chinese temples and their surrounding communities. However, due to the general lack of a firm base upon which those seeking ritual knowledge can rely on, the 'traditions' themselves have been subject to influences. These influences include various interpretations, seemingly authoritative literature, and 'learned persons' (including even those commonly termed

'paranormals') knowledge about rituals²⁸, and have been constantly changing.

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As is the case in Rembang, where efforts are being made to pass down ritual procedures in the community surrounding Chinese temples, there seems to be less tendency to follow swiftly standardized ritual procedures and methods that are introduced by PTITD headquarters or any other organizations. At the same time, however, many Chinese temples are currently finding themselves in a situation where there is nobody left with concrete knowledge of ritual procedures, or where the people who are responsible for rituals have reached old age. As such, people have a strong sense of uncertainty about the continuity of ritual practice at their temples. In the case of Rembang, knowledge concerning rituals was successfully passed down within the community with its newly-created Indonesian prayer sentences and 'The List of Altarages', but such cases are by no means the norm²⁹. I hypothesize that there is a considerable number of Chinese temples where they want reliable knowhow on how to perform ritual activities. If this is the case, the day may not be far when ritual instruction manuals provided by an umbrella organization will exert a powerful influence.

3. A New Interpretation of 'Tri Dharma': PTITD Central Java Branch

While the PTITD headquarters in Surabaya has not managed to fully exercise its organizational leadership, the PTITD Central Java branch (*PTITD Komda Jateng*) has begun to walk an independent path.

Central Java is another region with a large number of Chinese temples, and many of them are affiliates of the Central Java branch of PTITD³⁰. During the Soeharto era, there were not many activities

management organization (the foundation) was implemented at the same time (Tsuda 2011: Part 2). It is highly unlikely a coincidence that the period when knowledge concerning rituals belonged solely to one elderly individual became a consciously perceived problem overlapped with the period when the role-sharing arrangements within the organization were reconsidered.

²⁵ This account is based on an interview with the current officer in charge of rituals at both temples in Rembang, on August 11th, 2011.

²⁶ This is a small booklet, 26 pages in total including advertisements, and the original title is as follows; Lie Ping Lien. 1950. *Tentang Sembahyang Tuhan Allah (King Thi Kong)*, Semarang: Khong Kauw Hwee Semarang. The fact that this type of expository booklet had been circulated in large numbers since early in the twentieth century suggests not only a thirst for knowledge pertaining to religion and tradition, but also that the 'lack of confidence' was a phenomenon historically seen broadly across the ethnic Chinese society.

²⁷ This account is based on an interview with Liong Kiam Kiat at his home on August 12th, 2011.

²⁸ With the majority of ethnic Chinese being without interest in knowledge pertaining to rituals, the fact that the continuity of rituals are being maintained by 'highly dedicated lay researchers' such as Liong, is a point which cannot be overlooked.

²⁹ It should be noted that, broadly speaking, the actual details of rituals do not differ drastically among individual temples. In this light, the use of Indonesian prayer sentences in Rembang may appear to be peculiar when compared with the 'great tradition' that is usually expected. However, I observed a remarkably similar case in Lasem, the town adjacent to Rembang. It is possible that there may have been similar responses concerning prayer sentences, not only at Chinese temples in Rembang's surrounding areas but also in areas in other parts of the country as well, due to background factors such as social pressure against 'things Chinese', as well as the issue of language ability within communities.

³⁰ In contrast to East Java where Chinese temples nearly uniformly belong to PTITD, several Chinese temples in Central Java are affiliates of other organizations, such as Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist organizations (Tsuda 2012b, 391-393).

at this branch, which remained subordinate to the Surabaya headquarters and performed its main role in providing a legal umbrella within the Central Java administrative area. However, in the post-Soeharto era, its activities have been greatly vitalized since David Herman Jaya (Liem Wan King, 1952-), who runs a car sales company in Magelang, took over the role of branch director. Of particular note is the certification of 73 new Tri Dharma clergy (*Pandita*) conducted by the Central Java branch in June 2007. This ceremony was performed in response to the fact that ‘there is a great demand for people who can take a leading role at occasions such as weddings, funerals, sermons, lectures and seminars’ (Martrisia Komda Jateng 2007, 1). A textbook compiled specially for this occasion included the following: rules that clergy must comply with, a manual for weddings and samples of sermons to be given during the wedding ceremonies, a marriage certificate and its request form³¹, and matters to be understood concerning birth and funerals. Prior to the certification ceremony, training based on this textbook was apparently provided as well³².

In 2009, a conference was held to bring together the branch’s newly-appointed clergy. At the conference, it was acknowledged that the Chinese temples spread across Central Java each have their own ways of performing ritual and praying to deities, thereby making immediate standardization difficult. Despite that, Herman Jaya made a proposal suggesting that agreement be reached, at minimum, that prayer be to the one and only god, ‘*Tian* (天)’. This was not such a new concept. During the Soeharto era in particular, it had been thoroughly enforced at Chinese temples, in accordance with the ‘belief in the One and Only God’, the first principle of Pancasila (Tsuda 2011, 80-81). Interestingly, another proposal introduced at the conference suggested that the existing interpretation of ‘Tri Dharma’, which had been clearly specified to mean the three teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, be changed to ‘my soul, my heart, my dharma (*Jiwaku, Hatiku, Dharmaku*)’. With Confucianism being officially (re-)recognized around 2006, the activities of various Taoist sects suddenly became vitalized, while various Buddhist organizations were already well-established. As such, an urgent need emerged to define a new ‘Tri Dharma-ness’ in order to avoid the image of ‘Tri Dharma’ as being an incomplete hotchpotch of these three ‘religions’. This proposal,

which is said to have been originally from Herman Jaya, received the consent of the Tri Dharma clergy. It is now beginning to be formally espoused as a new definition of the Tri Dharma from the PTITD Central Java branch³³.

As we have seen, even though the PTITD Central Java branch is subordinate to the Surabaya headquarters, under its powerful leader it is not merely an umbrella organization of Chinese temples. In fact, it appears to be engaged in an intense effort to establish a ‘religious’ order as a new common foundation³⁴.

4. The Background of the Systematization of ‘Chinese Religion’

After the collapse of the Soeharto regime in 1998, the organizations which had served to protect Chinese temples lost their *raison d’être*. They were then faced with the realization that they lacked the appropriate formality as religious orders. On the one hand, various organizations such as Confucianist and Taoist organizations which previously had not been able to engage in activities openly, were beginning to make their presence felt. In the case of Confucianism, its doctrine and ritual has already been equipped with adequate formality through history. Among the various Taoist denominations also, some are beginning to acquire powerful models for their references, for example by independently connecting with mainland China or Singapore (Tsuda 2012b, 395-396). Within this context, in spite of having been approved as religious organizations for many years and having Chinese temples under them across the country, both organizations upholding the ‘Three-teaching’ are also facing the issue of their ‘inner substance’ coming into question.

Majelis Tridharma in West Java, which takes pride in the fact that it has to a certain extent pursued ‘inner substance’ (*keimanan*) as a ‘Chinese Religion’, has quickly realized this critical situation, and has chosen to follow in and advance the path pioneered by Kwee Tek Hoay.

The PTITD headquarters in East Java, which experienced the secession of West Java’s members, has a little belatedly started searching for a way

³¹ Marriage in Indonesia today, as a general rule, is deemed official when the couple is blessed in the presence of a cleric of their faith, who then submits a certificate to a civil registration office. This is a public approval process in the domain of civil registration which the PTITD Central Java branch, as an officially recognized religious organization, is actively working to become involved in.

³² This account is based on an interview with the secretary of the PTITD Central Java branch, conducted at the branch’s office on August 1st, 2001.

³³ This account is based on an interview with David Herman Jaya on July 31st, 2011, at his business office in Semarang. He was educated in Protestant schools until secondary level. Later, while working as a board director at a Chinese temple in Magelang, he became actively involved in the activities of the PTITD Central Java branch. According to him, he arrived at this new interpretation of Tri Dharma through a process that included reading independently and debating with family members and clergy.

³⁴ These initiatives of the PTITD Central Java branch have not reached a point where the organization is intervening in every aspect of the religious practices of believers. According to Herman Jaya, the current aim of the branch is to focus on the aspect of instilling doctrine (*ajaran*).

to respond to the situation, having been inspired by the success of other organizations that espouse 'Chinese Religion'. In order to preserve its cohesiveness, PTITD seems to be placing a particular focus on providing specific instructions and knowledge pertaining to ritual in Chinese temples.

The PTITD Central Java branch is attempting to enhance its autonomy while avoiding being pulled apart by, and disappearing under, the forces of the three separate 'religions' by establishing a new interpretation of what 'Tri Dharma' is.

In these ways, the 'Three-teaching' organizations, which in the sociopolitical environment of the post-Soeharto era are experiencing increased freedom in their areas of activity, are now facing mounting pressure to establish new *raison d'être*. This is needed both in terms of the formality of their religious organizations, and of systematicity of their 'inner substance' as a religious order. With these increasing freedoms, the organisations' *raison d'être* seems to no longer be the state, but rather a pool of competing organizations of 'Chinese Religion'.

When considering the development of each organization toward the implementation of an established doctrine and a standardized ritual in respective ways, it is worth asking whether an explicitly formalized 'inner substance' is actually necessary for religious practice at Chinese temples. To make this question easier to understand, it may be useful to juxtapose the classical contrasting concepts of 'founded (revealed) religion' and 'folk (natural) religion'. If we hypothesize that in religious practice at Chinese temples a greater emphasis is placed on 'folk religion', it becomes clear that a search for a solid religious system is an enormous leap. Moreover, the hypothesis reveals how the very conceptualization of 'Three-teaching' shows an attempt to explain the 'folk religion' through 'founded religion'. That is, deliberately identifying a customary religious system that has long been 'embedded in society' as being derived from the three elements of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, and then preaching their oneness (syncretization). This method of explaining the concept of 'Three-teaching' is circuitous, yet in the very fact that they are making enormous effort to further refine such a method of explanation, one could see the historicity in the concept of 'religion' which has been nurtured by the colonial modernity and the unique socio-political context of twentieth-century Indonesia³⁵. After more than three decades of the Soeharto regime, the unique principles defining 'what religion should be', which were established from a standpoint heavily biased towards monotheistic 'founded religion', became thoroughly instilled both institutionally and social-

ly. In this situation, religious organizations cannot help but be fully aware of the lack of the systematicity of 'inner substance'. The lack of systematicity can lead to a pressure on the organizations themselves.

On another level, a common concern in Indonesia's ethnic Chinese society today is that the younger generation in particular are moving away from faith surrounding Chinese temples³⁶. These faiths are often perceived as old-fashioned and unattractive, and younger generations are increasingly turning to other religions such as Christianity, which are perceived as more sophisticated in both outer form and inner substance³⁷. Despite the increased religious freedom in the post-Soeharto era, these pressures have continued and evolved.

IV. SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

1. Intellectual Origins

In the post-Soeharto period, and coupled with factors such as the official recognition of Confucianism and the upsurge of Taoist organizations, the landscape within 'Chinese Religion' is undergoing a major shift. Under pressure to reorganize, organizations are rushing toward systematization in order to achieve further development while maintaining cohesiveness. More research is still needed to present a comprehensive conclusion about the current situation. As a preliminary study, however, a close look at the sources of religious knowledge for individual organizations will reveal several characteristics of the movement towards religious systematization.

a) Majelis Tridharma

The lineage of the organization Kwee Tek Hoay founded, *Sam Kauw Hwee*, was passed down to Majelis Tridharma in West Java. After Kwee's death, the Great Priest (*Maha Pendeta*) Sasanaputera Satyadharma³⁸ played a central role in supporting

³⁶ Note the fact that the attempt by Majelis Tridharma to implement '*keimanan*' was made in the context of improving youth education. See Footnote 18.

³⁷ The trend toward Christianization among Indonesia's ethnic Chinese grew rapidly during the mid-1960s and beyond, first in the form of conversion to Catholicism and then to Protestantism. However, as mentioned previously, grave concern about Christian conversion among the ethnic Chinese had been continuously expressed by many, starting as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, and particularly in the late 1930s when ethnic Chinese missionaries and churches began to emerge. This concern was especially apparent in the discourse of Peranakan intellectuals about their 'ethnicity' and 'tradition' (Rees 1987, 48-61).

³⁸ Born in 1930 in Bogor, his Chinese name was Thio Liang Ek. In 1977 when the East and West 'Three-teaching' organizations entered into joint consultation he represented the West and subsequently continued working within the unified

³⁵ We can already see in Kwee Tek Hoay's view of the 'Three-teaching', described in Footnote 9, in which he took the approach of imparting meaning to customary religious practices by philosophical thought.

the ideological aspects of the organization until recently. A noticeable characteristic in his writings is the emphasis on Tridharma as a religion unique to Indonesia, which was born as a response to ethnic Chinese Buddhists' successive conversions to Christianity beginning in the late 19th century, as well as the failure of the movement in the early 20th century to turn the teachings of Confucius into the 'Chinese Religion' (Satyadharma 2004, 6). He then lists several major figures in Chinese history, such as Lü Dongbin (呂洞賓), Wang Chongyang (王重陽), Li Chunfu (李純甫), and Zhu Xi (朱熹), who would normally be mentioned when discussing the philosophical roots of 'Three-teaching' outside of Indonesia (Satyadharma 2004, 6). However, whether there are any concrete genealogical connections between the philosophy of these figures and Majelis Tridharma is largely unclear. Indeed, Majelis Tridharma is showing no signs of moving toward partnerships with overseas organizations in China or elsewhere, nor of any dependence on entities outside Indonesia. Rather, it is working inwardly to refine the path that succeeded from Kwee.

b) PTITD Headquarters

Oei Bie Ing, who until his death in 2001, had worked for many years as the Deputy Board Director and the head of the Religion Sector of the PTITD headquarters, argued in his writings that belief practice in Chinese temples is rooted in 'old-time religions of the East (*Agama Timur Kuno*)' (Oei n.d.). Naturally, these roots date back a great deal farther than Kwee Tek Hoay³⁹. Identifying Tri Dharma as a form of belief toward 'what is holy (*suci*)', something fundamental and universal for all human beings and therefore not something that should be rashly cast away overlaps with the argument the organization repeated in official documents under the rule of the Soeharto regime (Tsuda 2012b, 392). From that point of view, the PTITD headquarters appears to be trailing behind Majelis Tridharma in establishing concrete doctrine. However, the PTITD is one step ahead in terms of the standardization of ritual, legitimized by implying the universal religiosity (toward the 'holy') of human beings (in the 'East'). It can be argued that the organization has consistently emphasized orthopraxy as a supplement for 'inner substance' since the start of the Soeharto era until today. And yet, even the PTITD

headquarters are not exempt from the pressing necessity to establish doctrinal orthodoxy⁴⁰.

c) PTITD Central Java Branch

As mentioned previously, the PTITD Central Java branch has launched a new interpretation of Tri Dharma. Aside from that, the branch has recently published a series of books compiling more concrete knowledge covering various topics, including both its doctrine and practice guidelines. One example is the book *Get to know Chinese Customs and Teachings (Berkenalan dengan Adat dan Ajaran Tionghoa)*, published in 2011. The 300-page plus book provides an overview of Tri Dharma and each of the three teachings, followed by explanations on the meaning of traditional festivals, methods of prayer, detailed descriptions and commentary on various folk-cultural symbols such as the dragon or Bagua diagrams (八卦) and ends with brief guidelines for practicing self-discipline as good Tri Dharma believers. The book seems to be structured to directly support the needs of believers seeking both knowledge and practical guidance⁴¹. Further, there is a thick, recently published book by the same branch titled *The Deities of Tridharma (Dewa-Dewi Tridharma)*. The book sorts deities enshrined in Chinese temples into categories, such as those derived from Buddhism or Taoism as well as those derived from folk beliefs, providing commentary on the legends and the powers of over 140 deities⁴². Furthermore, the branch has distributed a booklet (*Kumpulan Surat-Surat Doa*) containing prayer sentences for all the seasonal festivals and deity-related rituals that were celebrated at *Hok Tek Tong (福德堂)* in Parakan, Central Java in 2007. These prayer sentences were created by a man named Tan Sioe An (Handoko), who was born in 1951 in Parakan. They all have a basic structure comprising three chants in the beginning, 'Aum Ah Hum', followed by invocations in Indonesian, and concluded by three chants, 'Sian Cay'. Incidentally, Tan is also the author of an explanatory text in the booklet prepared for the clergy certification ceremony at the PTITD Central Java branch, in which he quotes extensively from a commercial book on *Feng Shui (風水)*. In the book, Tan provides information on topics such as the Five Phrases (五行) to understand the universe, the Eight Characters (八字) for fortune-telling, and how to choose a good Chinese name for a baby (Martrisia Komda Jateng 2007, 23-26). In short, at

organization as a spiritual leader of West Java. When Majelis Tridharma was established, he was appointed the head of the clergy council (Satyadharma 2004, 355-358).

³⁹ Though PTITD does not deny the achievements of Kwee, the person it positions and hails as the 'father of Indonesia's Tri Dharma (*Bapak Tri Dharma Indonesia*, 印尼三教之父)' is Ong Kie Tjay, the founder of PTITD. West Java's Majelis Tridharma does not ignore the contributions of Ong either; it in fact venerates him to a certain extent as a savior of the Chinese temples during the great tribulations of the Soeharto era.

⁴⁰ See Footnote 21.

⁴¹ This book, edited by Tjan K and Kwa Tong Hay, was created by making major revisions to a book of a similar type which was published earlier; Bidang Litbang PTITD and Martrisia Jawa Tengah. 2007. *Pengetahuan Umum tentang Tri Dharma*. Semarang: Benih Bersemi.

⁴² No information is shown on the book concerning the editors or the publication year, but the content of the book is almost identical to a book published earlier in Semarang; E. Setiawan and Kwa Tong Hay eds. 1990. *Dewa-Dewi Kelenteng*. Semarang: Yayasan Kelenteng Sampookong Gedung Batu.

the PTITD Central Java branch, a small handful of intellectuals such as Tan Sioe An and Kwa Tong Hay⁴³ provide the intellectual support in terms of both doctrine and ritualistic practice.

2. Reference Points for ‘Correctness’

In their religious systematization, none of the organizations is seeking knowledge or reference points by looking to places commonly regarded as the ‘center of the Chinese Civilization’, namely China and Taiwan, nor even in Hong Kong or Singapore. Furthermore, there is no sign that any of these organizations are developing a partnership with an entity (sect) outside Indonesia. One of the reasons is the language barrier (Tsuda 2012a, 191-192), but a more important reason is that all of these organizations have sought, and are seeking, ‘correctness’ in their own ways. It is true that throughout modern and contemporary history, movements aiming to reshape various traditions, beliefs, or even the domain of ‘religion’ itself as ‘Chinese Religion’ unfolded across mainland China and Southeast Asia (Duara 2008; Yang 2008). However, the various Indonesian organizations (sects) which were successfully established through these movements have been more locally focused, making concessions to cope with the local/national socio-political situation, and looking inward rather than abroad in their endeavors to maintain or find ‘correctness’ acceptable to their respective standards. As such, even if an organization (sect) abroad were to hypothetically espouse a fusion of the same religious elements by using terms such as ‘Oneness of Three Teachings (三教合一)’ or ‘Three Teachings merging into One (三教歸一)’; it would not be an option for the Indonesian ‘Three-teaching’ organizations to import the doctrinal interpretation and the methods of ritual as a whole, though they may be able to borrow some small fragments. Majelis Tridharma is a prime example of this. For them, ‘correctness’ is something to be sought within the ultimate source—namely, the respective teachings and scriptures of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism—as well as within the religious traditions passed down from Kwee Tek Hoay. In this sense, there is virtually no need to seek a so-called ‘correct mainstream of Chinese tradition’ elsewhere.

3. Disparity of Knowledge, Pervading Sense of a ‘Lack of Confidence’

The contents of religious knowledge critical to these religious orders are maintained by a very limited number of intellectuals. This situation may not be unusual in religion in general. However, a distinct characteristic of ‘Chinese Religion’ in contemporary Indonesia is the extreme disparity of knowledge that is apparent not only in the realm of religious knowledge in a narrow sense, but in broader realms covering ‘things Chinese’ including custom, tradition and thought (even how to choose a good Chinese name for a baby). One of the major reasons for this in today’s Indonesia may be that information regarding ‘Chinese culture’ is neither circulated widely nor in easily readable formats: there are limited printed materials and they are not in Indonesian. Even though the ban on printed materials in Chinese was lifted in the post-Soeharto era, the number of people who can read Chinese well is extremely limited (Tsuda 2012a, 191-192). The suppression of and self-regulation among ethnic Chinese during the Soeharto era, and the increasing tendency to become detached from ‘Chinese culture’ (especially amongst youth and young adults) are more fundamental issues. As such, knowledge about ‘Chinese culture’ is no longer shared within large portions of the ethnic Chinese society. As I discussed earlier in the case study of the Chinese temples in Rembang, a large number of ethnic Chinese are neither able to respond with confidence nor refer to an actual source when asked what exactly is the ‘correct teaching’, and what might be the ‘correct way’ concerning rituals from ‘Chinese Religion’. This situation makes it possible for a handful of intellectuals to play a major role in reshaping ‘Chinese Religion’. It is the fact that they recognize the loss of the ability to sustain religious knowledge as something ‘embedded in society’ as a serious problem that has driven a surge of organizations to provide systematized knowledge of doctrine and ritual procedures, as if to compensate for what is missing. Such knowledge includes not only the doctrines and the ritual procedures supporting religious organizations, but also matters that usually fall into the categories of ‘culture’, as if to supply complementary information concerning areas where people experience a ‘lack of confidence’. With this, the domain of ‘Chinese Religion’ has the potential to expand and reshape a much wider domain, even to include ‘Chinese culture’ itself.

At the beginning of this article I mentioned deity worship and usage of incense and joss paper as an ‘ordinary’ practice in Chinese temples today. These various practices still prevail, though with diverse regional as well as personal variations among regular temple visitors. This point, when considered alone, appears to support James Watson’s famous argument that a powerful aspect of practice is in

⁴³ Kwa is known for being knowledgeable about Chinese traditions. He is frequently interviewed by the media, and played a central role in the birth of the two books mentioned above.

China's rituals (Watson 1988)⁴⁴. It may therefore be tempting to conclude that the activities of the various religious organizations detailed here are largely detached from the everyday reality of the people. At the end of the previous section, my argument may be interpreted as suggesting that the organizations leading Chinese temples in the three regions of Java, if viewed extremely cynically, are attempting to systematize the religion by establishing standardized doctrine and ritual, in order to improve their outer appearance to compete with other religions or religious organizations⁴⁵. However, such a view is one-sided in its perception of reality. Rather, I presume that these organizations are not merely fixing their sights on other organizations, but are actively trying to keep track of and adapt to actual conditions in ethnic Chinese society. If we view the transformations in religious systematization as attempts to respond to an ethnic Chinese 'lack of confidence' concerning doctrine and ritual, it may be fair to conclude that it is not an either/or issue: organizations do not necessarily have to choose between 'correct doctrinal interpretation (orthodoxy)' and 'correct ritualistic practice (orthopraxy)'. These organizations, which see themselves as possessing religious knowledge, are attempting to restate 'Chinese Religion' in terms both of ideology (content) and of practice (form), as well as 'culture'. These modes of belief, which have existed in forms similar to socially-embedded 'folk (natural) religion' have been equipped with language associated with systematicity, and provide the people with guiding

⁴⁴ However, as Watson himself points out, his statement that between 'belief (content)' and 'ritual (form)' the Chinese have been concerned primarily with the latter, is only a hypothesis which he is presenting for the purpose of discussion. Also, we should refrain from presuming the state of 'Chinese Religion' in China to be more or less identical with that in Indonesia, which has been greatly impacted in its local socio-political context.

⁴⁵ Related to this type of cynical viewpoint, one often comes across theories that suggest the 'nature of the ethnic Chinese' as expressed in the saying 'better to be a head of a rooster than a tail of a bull' to be the reason organizations seek an independent path (cf. Tsuda 2011, 303, 315-316). I will not discuss here the validity of this sort of essentialist argument, but note that this type of tone of discussion in which a worldly 'nature of the ethnic Chinese' is claimed when criticizing a spate of creations of new religious organizations was already seen in the 1920s (Rees 1987, 51).

principles for both 'correct orthodoxy' and 'correct orthopraxy'.

The scope of this article is limited to introducing and analyzing various activities being pursued by the leaders of individual religious organizations, especially in the post-Soeharto era, which has seen a liberalization of the social arena. Is it possible for these organizations to gain more meaning (*raison d'être*), or to provide more meaning ('correctness'), to the Chinese temples under their umbrella and to their followers? Before we can present a concrete answer to this question, or investigate new modes of belief that develop out of the systematized 'Three-teaching' we will need to wait some time.

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