

AL-ITQĀN

JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Volume No. 2

Issue No. 2

June 2018

EDITOR IN-CHIEF

Dr. Wan Mohd Azam Mohd Amin

MANAGING EDITOR

Dr. Masitoh Ahmad

EDITORIAL BOARD

Dr. Muhammad Afifi al-Akiti, Oxford

Dr. Muhammad Kamal Hassan, IIUM

Dr. Syed Arabi Aidid, IIUM.

Dr. Hassan Basri Mat Dahan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia,
Nilai, Negeri Sembilan

Dr. Kamaruzaman Yusuff, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,
Kota Semarahan, Kucing.

Dr. Kamar Oniah, IIUM.

Dr. Mumtaz Ali, IIUM.

Dr. Siti Akmar, Universiti Institut Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam
Dr. Thameem Ushama, IIUM.

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Dr. Muhammad Afifi al-Akiti, Oxford University, UK
Dr. Abdullah M. al-Syarqawi, Cairo University, Egypt.
Dr. Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu, Kwara State University, Nigeria.
Dr. Anis Ahmad, Riphah International University, Islamabad.
Dr. ASM Shihabuddin, Uttara University, Dhakka, Bangladesh.
Dr. Fatimah Abdullah, Sabahattin Zaim University, Turkey.
Dr. Ibrahim M. Zein, Qatar Foundation, Qatar.
Dr. Khalid Yahya, Temple University, USA.

© 2017 IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia. All rights reserved.
eISSN:26008432

Correspondence

Managing Editor, *Al-Itqān*
Research Management Centre, RMC
International Islamic University Malaysia
P.O Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: +603 6196 5558
Website: <http://journals.iium.edu.my/al-itqan/index.php/alitqan/index>
Email: al-itqan@iium.edu.my

Published by:
IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia
P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Phone (+603) 6196-5014, Fax: (+603) 6196-6298
Website: <http://iiumpress.iium.edu.my/bookshop>

Table of Contents

An Evaluation of The Implementation of <i>Shari'ah</i> Law of Malaysia in Protecting the Rights of a Child	5-19
<i>Mahamad Naser Disa</i>	
Recapturing the Meaning of <i>Akhlāq Islāmiyyah</i> : An Analysis of the Article “Akhlak” in the <i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i>	21-39
<i>Amilah Awang Abd Rahman</i>	
Irfan Abdul Hameed Fattah’s Discourse on Religious Thought in Response to The Challenges of Modernity	41-55
<i>Adibah Abdul Rahim</i>	
The Chinese Mahayana Buddhist Community in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor	57-82
<i>Nur Suriya Mohd Nor</i>	
Cash <i>Waqf</i> in Sustaining Of Indonesian Society “In Legal & Economic Perspective”	85-99
<i>Sukarmi</i>	
<i>Argo Victoria</i>	
A Preliminary Survey of Issues of Shiism in Malaysia with Special Reference to the State of Malacca.	101-129
<i>Hamzah Jantan</i>	
<i>W Mohd Azam Mohd Amin</i>	
<i>Amilah Awang Abd Rahman</i>	
Political Salafism in Malaysia	131-146
<i>Maslee Malik</i>	
An Analysis of the Conceptual Framework of <i>al-Hākimiyyah</i> of Sayyid Quṭb	147-167
<i>Ibrahim ‘Abd Allāh al-Bannā</i>	
<i>Noor Amali Mohd Daud</i>	

Author Guidelines

1. Manuscript article can be either in English, Malay or Arabic using software Microsoft office (Word, and Excel), Font 12 Times New Roman. Only tables, figures and appendix can be written using Font 10, Times New Roman.
2. If there is a usage of Quranic verses or Hadith from Prophet P.B.U.H., it only needs to be done by translation only.
3. The manuscript should be in 1.5 single spacing and justified, with the margin of 2.5cm.
4. Article needs to have a title and author's name and second author's name along with the full address (institution's or university's address, e-mail, handphone's number, office's number, fax together with the second author's details).
5. Every article must include an 'abstract in Malay and English. The length of the abstract is no more than 150 words including 5 keywords.
6. The length of each article must not exceed 6000 words.
7. The Arabic words in manuscript should be in a transliterated form.
8. Reference for each article must be written according to **Chicago Manual**.
9. Notification Letter :
10. Letter of Acceptance – editorial board will send an e-mail to the author to notify that the manuscript is received.
11. Letter of Acceptance/Rejection for Publication – editorial board will send a letter by an e-mail to the author to notify if the manuscript judged by the panels is approved or declined to be published.
12. Letter of Publication – editorial board will send a letter by e-mail to the author if the article has been judged, repaired, and corrected to be published in the college's journal.
13. Certificate of Appreciation– editorial board will send a certificate of appreciation by mail to the authors who have sent their articles.

The Chinese Mahayana Buddhist Community in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor

Nur Suriya binti Mohd Nor *

Abstract

This study offers an observation on contemporary Chinese Mahayana Buddhist community in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, Malaysia. The author focuses on the contemporary Chinese Mahayana Buddhist community in Malaysia as represented by the three selected Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temples in Jalan Kelang Lama of Kuala Lumpur, and Shah Alam and Ampang of Selangor. The methodology that is employed in this research is qualitative methodology that includes interviews and non-participant observation on the members of Malaysian Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temples and organizations in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Although generalization cannot be made to other Buddhist associations outside Shah Alam and Kuala Lumpur, findings indicate that the Malaysian Chinese Mahayana Buddhist is an organized association and there are many programs and activities offered to its members.

Keywords: Ethics, Mahayana Buddhism, Chinese, Philosophy, Malaysia

Introduction

The Demographic Statistic First Quarter (Q1), 2018 recorded that the total population of Malaysia is 32.4 million.¹ The Census of 2010 shows that Malaysian citizens consist of the ethnic groups Bumiputera (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and others (0.7%). With regards to the religion, the Census shows that Islam was the most widely professed religion in Malaysia with the proportion of 61.3 per cent. As a multi-racial nation, other religions embraced were Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%).² According to the Census of

* Assistant Professor, Department of Uşul al-Dīn and Comparative Religion, Kulīyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Gombak, Selangor. E-mail: nursuriya@iium.edu.my

¹ Department of Statistic Malaysia Official Portal “Demographic Statistic First Quarter (Q1), 2018 << [² Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010 <\[http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=articl\]\(http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=articl\)](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=430&bul_id=azJaVIY0RjVKWkwwaURWTENxMVBhdz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09>>” (Retrieved 3rd May 2018).</p></div><div data-bbox=)

2010, the total population of Chinese in Malaysia is 6, 392, 636 which consists of 3, 289, 411 males, and 3, 103, 225 females.¹ Out of total population of Chinese in Malaysia, 1, 441, 774 are in Selangor and 655, 413 in Kuala Lumpur.² Chinese population in Selangor are consist of 24.4% are Buddhists, while 0.5% are the followers of Confucianism, Taoism, and other Chinese religions. Out of total population of Chinese in Kuala Lumpur, 35.7% are Buddhists, 1.1% are the followers of Confucianism, Taoism, and other Chinese religions.³

The figures of 2010 from the Department of Statistics Malaysia show that Buddhists are the second largest population in Malaysia. Buddhism is among the oldest religions in Southeast Asia introduced by trade and conquest. The majority of Buddhists in Malaysia today is Chinese and is followers of the Mahayana Tradition. Thus, it is significant to study the Buddhist community in Malaysia with special focus to three selected temples of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism.

The Background of Buddhists Community in Malaysia

The Buddhist Sangha

The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs stated that literally *sangha* means congregation. In Buddhism it refers to the community of monks, nuns, and all enlightened followers of Buddha.⁴ According to this Encyclopaedia, Buddhism differentiated between ‘conventional *sangha*’ which consisting only ordained disciples and ‘spiritual *sangha*’ which comprising of all enlightened disciples.⁵ It states that becoming a monk in Buddhism is a personal decision and there is no coercion in Buddhist teachings on it though the benefits of monkhood are mentioned regularly in the scriptures.⁶ According to this Encyclopaedia, “all male above the age of 20 in the Theravada *sangha* who are free from debt and crime and healthy are qualified to become monks. Firstly, they have to

e&id=1215%3Apopulation-distribution-and-basic-demographic-characteristic-report-population-and-housing-census-malaysia-2010-updated-2972011&catid=130%3Apopulation-distribution-and-basic-demographic-characteristic-report-population-and-housing-census-malaysia-2010&Itemid=154&lang=en> (Retrieved 21 December 2011).

¹ Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010.

² Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010.

³ Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010.

⁴ Benny Liow Woon Khin, “Buddhist Worship and Practice,” in *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs*, 67.

⁵ Khin, “Buddhist Worship and Practice,” 67.

⁶ Khin, “Buddhist Worship and Practice,” 67.

learn the teachings of Buddha and then make request to a senior monk to be accepted into the *sangha*. Once permission is granted, they shave their heads, don saffron robes and observe the ‘Ten Precepts’¹ as novice monks (*sramanera*). These Ten Precepts are similar to the Five Precepts of the Lay Buddhists and additional five precepts specific to monks. In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, one can leave monkhood whenever he wishes as the vows are not life-long.”²

Benny Liow mentioned that “in the Mahayana ³ *sangha*, the variations are cultural rather than doctrinal. Women are admitted to the *sangha* as nuns. Monks and nuns observe rules similar to the monastic rules of the Theravada⁴ monks. Mahayana monks and nuns usually take life-long vows and are strictly vegetarians.”⁵ Ang Choo Hong stated that, “there are about 1000 monks and nuns who reside in temples in Malaysia. They are often looked upon by the Buddhist community at large as religious, teachers, and counsellors. They command great influence over the Buddhist community and have played a crucial role in the development of the religion in the country. Among the outstanding ones are Venerable (Ven.) Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda and the late Ven. *Chuk Mor*, who are well known for their written works and lectures. Ven. *Chuk Mor* was also a distinguished calligrapher. The late Ven. *Kian An* was active in social welfare work and the late Ven. *Kim Beng* was renowned for his writings and lectures.”⁶

¹ I undertake to abstain from destroying life; I undertake to abstain from taking things not given; I undertake to abstain from fornication/ adultery or immoral misconduct; I undertake to abstain from false speech, I undertake to abstain from intoxicants. (Five Precepts), I undertake to abstain from eating at forbidden times; I undertake to abstain from dancing, singing, and shows; I undertake to abstain from adorning or beautifying myself by the use of garlands, scents, unguents, ornaments, and finery; (Eight Precepts); I undertake to abstain from using a high or large couch or bed; and I undertake to abstain from accepting gold or silver.

² Khin, “Buddhist Worship and Practice,” 67.

³ Mahayana Buddhism is a form of Buddhism which is dominant in North, Central, and East Asia, found mainly in China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Tibet, and Mongolia. The Chinese translation is Ta-ch’eng which means ‘the Large Vehicle’, later on translated into English as ‘the Greater Vehicle.’

⁴ Theravada Buddhism or Southern Buddhism is a tradition which is dominant in Southeast Asia including Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Literally, Theravada means ‘Way of the Theras’ or the Way of the Elders. This tradition is known as Theravada because it was established by a council of five hundred theras soon after the final enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha.

⁵ Khin, “Buddhist Worship and Practice,” 67.

⁶ Ang Choo Hong, “Buddhist Organizations and Movements,” in *The Encyclopedia of*

According to Benny Liow, “numerous Buddhist groups in Malaysia organized novitiate programmes for their devotees in order to inspire Malaysian Buddhist to practise monkhood. The Buddhist Missionary Society of Malaysia organizes an annual novitiate programme at the Buddhist Temple in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. During two weeks, the novice learns about the scriptures, the need to practice discipline and humility towards others, sound morality, and the virtues of a simple life.”¹

Benny Liow mentioned that “historically, Buddhist temples have been centres of religious education and cultural activities. Temples were often the seat of education for the masses before the rise of secular schools and colleges. For the lay Buddhists, the temple is the place they come to worship and make offerings. In Theravada temples, devotees are present every day as they come to make offerings to the monks. Buddhists believe that they gain merit when they offer food to monks. Occasionally, devotees invite monks to their houses for food offerings, although this is usually a temple activity. Temples are also used to conduct Buddhism classes and meditation.”² He also stated that religious talks are usually held on Sunday mornings after the usual chanting and meditation classes. In some temples, ‘Sunday *Dharma* School’ have been set up for children. Many Buddhist temples carry out social and welfare projects including schools, orphanages, clinics and homes for the elderly. The first Buddhist orphanage, for example was established by the *Phor Tay* Temple in Penang in 1936.”³

The Buddhist Organizations in Malaysia

According to Ang Choo Hong, “apart from several temples, there are more than 700 registered Buddhist organizations in Malaysia. They provide religious education for Buddhists and are actively engaged in social and welfare work. There is also an active Buddhist youth movement headed by the *Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia*. Buddhist societies are also found in some universities, colleges, and schools.”⁴ He also stated that among other Buddhist organizations in Malaysia are the Malaysian Buddhist Association, the *Buddhist Maha Vihara*, and the Malaysian Buddhist *Sangha* Council. The Malaysian

Malaysia, p. 68.

¹ Benny, “Buddhist Worship and Practice”, p. 67.

² Ibid, p. 79.

³ Ibid, p. 79.

⁴ Ang Choo Hong, 68.

Buddhist Association (MBA) was formed in 1959, two years after Independence. Its membership is open to Buddhist societies and temples, as well as to organizations and individuals. Its objective is to promote unity, friendship, and social welfare among Malaysian Buddhists. This association became the umbrella body of the Buddhist organizations in Malaysia and its membership currently stands at around 30000. However, organizations which do not adopt Mandarin as a medium of communication or not Mahayana are not affiliated with it.”¹

Ang mentioned that “The *Buddhist Maha Vihara* in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur was founded in 1894 as the Brickfields Buddhist Temple. It is managed by the *Sasana Abdiwurdhi Wardhana* Society (established in 1895) and is an important centre for Buddhist learning. Operating within this temple is Buddhist Institute Sunday *Dharma* School, which conducts weekly religious classes for Buddhist students in institutions of higher learning. They often congregate here to study the *dharma* and to take part in leadership and personal development programmes. An annual training programme for novice monks is also conducted at this temple. The Buddhist Missionary Society (BMS) also operates within the premises of the Buddhist *Maha Vihara*. This society is recognized for its publications, such as *Voice of Buddhism* and numerous booklets. It is one of the very few English-medium Buddhist organizations in Malaysia. Most other Buddhist Organizations use Mandarin as the medium of education and communication.”²

As mentioned in the *Encyclopedia of Malaysia*, “historically, the Malaysian Buddhist community has been dependent on the immigrant *sangha* from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and China to minister their religious and spiritual needs. Lately, more Malaysians have become Buddhist monks, thereby helping to create an indigenous Buddhist *sangha*. In Malaysia, all members of the *sangha*, be they Theravada or Mahayana Buddhists belong to the Malaysian Buddhist *Sangha* Council, which was formed in April, 1995.”³

Ang also mentioned that “Buddhist organizations, unlike temples, are generally managed by laymen, with monks and nuns as advisors. They are devoted to the study and practices of Buddhism. Chanting sessions and services are held regularly within the premises of these organizations. From time to time, lectures on Buddhism are organized.

¹ Ang Choo Hong, 68.

² Ang Choo Hong, 68.

³ Ang Choo Hong, 68.

Apart from these, Buddhist organizations are also actively engaged in social and welfare activities, such as blood donation drives, free medical services and charity for the elderly and underprivileged members of society. Many of these organizations are based in residential homes or modest commercial premises though some, among them the Taiping Buddhist Association, the Klang and Coast Buddhist Association, and the Sandakan Buddhist Association, own large premises. Some of these buildings resemble temples and are often regarded as such.”¹

The Chinese Buddhist Temples in Malaysia

According to Benny Liow, “the pure Buddhist temples are few in number in Malaysia, many temples house both Buddhist and non-Buddhist deities. Most of the temples have a hall or series of halls where the deities are housed. Larger temples have several halls, starting with the prayer pavilion where worshippers offer prayers before moving on to the main hall where the shrine of the most venerated deity is kept together with the temple bell and drum. A temple is considered to be Buddhist if the patron deity is a Buddhist deity and it is considered syncretic or mixed if both Buddhist and Taoist deities are displayed in addition to housing the numerous ancestral tablets. However, a Taoist temple houses only Taoist deities.”² He also mentioned that “majority of the Chinese Buddhist temples in Malaysia belong to the Mahayana tradition. Although there is no clear boundary between Chinese Buddhism and other Chinese religions, especially for everyday worshippers who take part in both systems, the separate identity of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism may be discerned from an examination of temples which are purely Buddhist as compared with those which include elements of both Buddhism and Chinese Religion.”³ He added that “in pure Mahayana Buddhist temples, only Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas*, such as Amitabha, Avalokitesvara (*Guanyin*), and Mahasthamaprapta ⁴ are worshipped. Comparatively, more numerous are *si* (Buddhist) temples in Malaysia that house many non-Buddhist deities in addition to the patron deity of Buddhist origin. For example, the *Cheng Hoon Teng* Temple in Melaka, the oldest Chinese temple in the country (built in the late 16th century), is not a Buddhist temple although it houses resident Buddhist

¹ Ang Choo Hong, 68.

² Benny, “Buddhist and Chinese Temples,” 78.

³ Benny, “Buddhist and Chinese Temples,” 78.

⁴ Amitabha, Avalokitesvara (*Guanyin*), and Mahasthamaprapta known as Three Sages in Mahayana Buddhism.

monks who perform daily prayer. The few pure Mahayana Buddhist temples are largely in the Pure Land tradition, meaning that worshippers must not offer meat dishes on the temple premises.”¹

The Chinese Mahayana Buddhist Community in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor

This research aims to understand the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist community in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Thus, this study selected one organization and two temples in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor as the representative of the Chinese Mahayana Buddhists community in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. The organization is the Shah Alam Buddhist Society (SABS) which is located in Shah Alam, Selangor. While the other two temples are the *Sam Poh Thong* Temple which is located in Ampang, Selangor and the *Tham Wah Wan* Temple which is located in Jalan Klang Lama, Kuala Lumpur.

The Shah Alam Buddhist Society (SABS)

This research has selected the Shah Alam Buddhist Society (SABS) as one of the respondents to represent the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist community in Selangor. Although SABS is a non-sectarian Buddhist organization that welcomes all devotees from Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana², the respondents of this research are only Chinese Buddhists who are affiliated to Mahayana Buddhism.

History

The *Stepping into Freedom* mentioned that “the Shah Alam Buddhist Society (SABS) was officially registered on December, 15, 1990 in Sri Muda, Shah Alam, and first Management Committee established on January, 13, 1991.”³ Over the years, as its activities increased, so were the members. It was obvious that the current premise was inadequate to meet the growing membership. In April 2003, SABS acquired a one-acre

¹ Benny, “Buddhist and Chinese Temples,” 78.

² Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism (the Diamond Vehicle) formed its teachings in about the seventh century where there were new developments from within the Mahayana. This tradition was a growth of Buddhist tantra motivated by the communal influence of Mahayana and Hinduism. Literally, tantra means “web” or “woof”. Tantra refers to a system or collection of teachings. Tantra teaching began as a literary form in the early Gupta period in India. Tantra is also a shortened form of the mantras. Mantras are perceived as manifestations of Buddhas and are usually given by a teacher to a student for use in meditation.

³ Benny, *Stepping Stone into Freedom*, 9.

land in Bukit Rimau, Shah Alam from the Selangor State Government to set up a Buddhist temple. Under the leadership of the President, Dato' Vincent Lim, efforts were made to raise funds to complete the temple soonest possible. On January 16, 2005 construction work started after a ground breaking ceremony, and on April 22, 2007, the *Bodhi Tree* and *Sala Tree*, flown in from Sri Lanka, were officially planted in the new temple. On April, 2007, the *Shakyamuni Buddha* statue was consecrated while on May 1, 2007, Wesak was celebrated in the temple. Regular activities, including *Dharma Talks* and the Sunday *Dharma School*, commenced on July 15, 2007.”¹

According to the *Stepping into Freedom*, “in 2007, President Dato' Vincent Lim steered the Committee to adopt the ISO 9001 Quality Management System. As a Buddhist society, SABS's aim was to use the ISO as a tool to create a well-documented management system that is guided by the *Dharma*, and continually improved. After two years of effort, SABS succeeded in achieving the ISO 9001: 2008 certification. Other significant milestones of SABS include the opening of the *Avalokitesvara* Gallery on July 28, 2007, Income Tax exemption from the Government on January 1, 2008, establishment of a Weeding Registrar on August 16, 2008, and the opening of *Jivaka* Free Chinese Medical Consultation Clinic and *Manjushri* Library on February 22, 2009.”²

Spiritual Advisors

Shah Alam Buddhist society has appointed two Spiritual Advisors, Venerable B. Sri Saranankara Nayaka Maha Thera representing the Theravada tradition, and Venerable Shih Chuan Wen, representing the Mahayana tradition.

Mission

As stated in the *Stepping into Freedom* “the overall aim of SABS is to propagate Buddhism among members of the Buddhist community. As a Buddhist centre, it provides an opportunity for those interested in Buddhism to study and practice the Teachings of the Buddha. While the study of Buddhism (or *Dharma*) and meditation is strongly emphasized, members can also participate in various devotional activities such as chanting, food offerings to the *Sangha*, and ‘Three Steps One Bow’. There are also welfare activities to care for the less fortunate and

¹ Benny, *Stepping Stone into Freedom*, 9.

² Benny, *Stepping Stone into Freedom*, 9.

fellowship programs to foster closer bonds among members of the Buddhist community. Activities at SABS are conducted in both English and Mandarin, and cater to the needs of a large cross-section of the Buddhist community, especially those living in Bukit Rimau and Kota Kemuning.”¹ In short, the *Stepping into Freedom* mentioned that the Mission of SABS is as follows:

1. “To propagate the Buddha’s teachings
2. To unite the Buddhist Community
3. To elevate the understanding of the *Dharma*
4. To advocate the Buddhist way of life
5. To promote a spirit of goodwill
6. To promote social and educational welfare
7. To help establish a just and liberal society.”²

Activities

As contained in the *Stepping into Freedom*, “the activities at SABS can be broadly categorized into three categories, first category is *Dharmadutta*: Chinese and English Sunday *Dharma* Classes, *Dharma* camps for children and youths, meal offerings (*dana*) to the *Sangha*, and co-curricular activities such as drawing, calligraphy, and *wushu*. Sunday *Dharma* School is available every Sunday morning except the first Sunday of the month. Students between the ages of 6-12 are admitted to the Sunday *Dharma* School, while those between the ages of 13-18 are enrolled in the Teen Class. There is a nominal fee for enrolment to cover reading materials and refreshments. Classes start from 9.00 a.m. starting with a short religious service (*pūja*) and ending with light refreshments at 12.30 p.m. When the students are attending the Sunday *Dharma* School, their parents are encouraged to attend the *Dharma* Talks that are held around the same time to deepen their knowledge of Buddhism.”³

The syllabus which is used in the Sunday *Dharma* School in SABS is from the unpublished series of books known as *The Buddhist Series: the Life of the Buddha*. *The Buddhist Series* used in SABS consist of eight series which discuss the different stages in the life of the Buddha. These books were prepared by the Buddhist Institute Sunday *Dhamma* School of *Maha Vihara*, Brickfields and the distributions are for non-Muslims only. These series come in three languages – English, Mandarin, and Malay.⁴

¹ Benny, *Stepping Stone into Freedom*, 10.

² Benny, *Stepping Stone into Freedom*, 10.

³ Benny, *Stepping Stone into Freedom*, 10.

⁴ The researcher referred to unpublished series of *The Life of the Buddha* (Level 2 to Level 8).

The second category of activities in SABS is “Welfare: Blood donation, visits to the needy, donations, and scholarship awards.” While the third category of activities in SABS is “Fellowship: Chinese New Year celebration, *Wesak* Day celebration, holiday trips, mid-autumn festival, hymn singing, Buddhist weddings, and workouts such as line dancing, *Yoga*, and *Qigong*.”¹ According to *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, *Qigong* is “cultivation for health and spiritual advancement.”²

Logo

As stated in *Stepping into Freedom*, “the logo, with a white background, depicts two hands holding the world with three lotus stalks rising from it. While white symbolizes purity, the two hands represent the socially-engaged approach of the Buddha through the twin pillars of wisdom and compassion to benefit sentient beings in the world. The three lotus stalks originating from the same point signify the unity of the teachings (*Dharma*) found in the three traditions – Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The lotus grows from the mud (*samsara*), becomes clean on the surface (purification), and finally blossoms into a beautiful flower (enlightenment). The saffron lines, which embody renunciation and contentment, denote the third of the Three Jewels – the community of disciples (*Sangha*).”³

Affiliation

As stated in *Stepping into Freedom*, “as a Malaysian Buddhist organization, SABS is non-political and non-profit oriented. It is also espouses a non-sectarian and ecumenical approach towards all Buddhists traditions, and strongly believes in inter-religious dialogue and discussions. The corner stone of its philosophy is to champion mutual respect, harmonious relationships, and co-operation among the various ethnic groups that make up our multi-racial and multi-religious harmony.”⁴ SABS has also composed an anthem that reflects its affiliation called ‘Walking the Buddha’s Path.’

The Buddhist Statues in SABS

The *Stepping into Freedom* mentioned that “an important way in which Buddhists demonstrate their respect is by paying reverence to the

¹ Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*, 10.

² Edwards, 397.

³ Edwards, 11.

⁴ Edwards, 10.

Buddha and *Bodhisattva* statues. In doing so, however, Buddhists do not worship the statues as actual incarnations invested with supernatural powers. Instead the physical images function as symbolic reminders of the particular Buddha's or *Bodhisattva*'s inherent virtues and ideals which devotees hope to cultivate within themselves. Statues are also a medium for concentration and inspiration. Among the major statues of *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas* found at SABS are Shakyamuni Buddha, Bhaisajjaraja, *Bodhisattva* Kshitigarbha, Three Sages Statues, *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara, *Bodhisattva* Maitreya, and *Bodhisattva* Manjushri.”¹ The details of these statues are as follows:

The Statue of Shakyamuni Buddha

The statue of Shakyamuni Buddha in SABS is located in the *Tathagata* Hall. The *Stepping into Freedom* stated that “The *Tathagata* Hall is the main Shrine Hall and it houses the white marble statue of Shakyamuni (*Gautama*) Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. The word *Tathagatha* refers to one who had attained supreme enlightenment. As such it is another title of the Buddha which he himself used when speaking of himself or other *Buddhas*. In the absolute sense, *Tathagatha* is often equated with wisdom and emptiness. There is another statue of *Shakyamuni Buddha* located in the Meditation Hall on the second floor of the Temple.”²

The statue of Bhaisajjaraja

The statue of *Bhaisajjaraja* in SABS is located at the *Tathagata* Hall. The *Stepping into Freedom* mentioned that “in Chinese, he is known as *Yaoshifu*. He is known as Bhaisajjaraja which literally means ‘Medicine King,’ symbolizing the healing or perfected quality of *Buddhahood*. He is depicted in the SABS statue wearing a robe draped over the left shoulder, seated in a lotus position. His hands are in *Dhyana mudra* or meditation gesture, and hold a miniature pagoda. The pagoda is a treasure-house of *Dharma*, the spiritual medicine that will help sentient beings get rid of greed, hatred, and delusion, the three poisons that bind men to the cycle of birth and death. On his chest is an ancient symbol of *sauvastika* which means ‘to be well.’ The *ushnisha* or protuberance on top of the head is covered with slightly raised curls symbolizing wisdom. The dot at the centre of his forehead is called the Wisdom Eye.”³

¹ Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*, 39.

² Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*, 9.

³ Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*, 39.

The statue of Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha

According to the *Stepping into Freedom*, Kshitigarbha statue in SABS is located in the Kshitigarbha Hall located on the right corner as one enters the Temple. *Bodhisattva* Kshitigarbha or *Dizang* in Chinese literally means ‘Womb of the Earth’ and is venerated as a saviour from the torments of hell and helper of deceased children. He is well known for his vow not to achieve *Buddhahood* until all hells are empty. His statue is white in colour with a shaven head, dressed in a monk’s robe. He is the only *Bodhisattva* portrayed as a monk.”¹

The Three Statues in the Three Sages Hall

As stated in the *Stepping into Freedom*, the three statues in the Three Sages Hall, located behind the *Tathagatha* Hall are, Amitabha Buddha, *Bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara, and *Bodhisattva* Mahasthamaprapta.² In Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, *Bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara is with *Bodhisattva* Mahasthamaprapta, often depicted as a companion of Amitabha Buddha.³ “Amitabha statue at SABS, his left hand is in the *Dhyana* (meditation) *mudra* (gesture) holding a lotus, while his right hand depicts the *Varada mudra* (Gift Bestowing gesture). Avalokitesvara is depicted in SABS statue with her left hand holding the vase sprinkling the sweet nectar of wisdom and compassion, while the right hand is in blessing gesture, called the *mudra* of peace. On her crown is the image of Amitabha Buddha. Though Avalokitesvara is more popularly depicted in a female form, it can also be in a male form, as enlightened beings have transcended the dualism of maleness or femaleness. Mahasthamaprapta or *Da Shi Zhi* in Chinese literally means *Bodhisattva* of Great Strength. In Pure Land School of Mahayana Buddhism, Mahasthamaprapta is often depicted as a woman in a trinity with Amitabha Buddha and *Bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara. The SABS statue of Mahasthamaprapta shows her holding a stalk of lotus with both hands, and a water jar or jewelled pitcher adorning her crown.”⁴

The statue of Bodhisattva Maitreya

The *Stepping into Freedom* mentioned that “Maitreya is derived from the Sanskrit word *maitri* meaning ‘loving kindness.’ As a future Buddha, Maitreya will appear as a radiantly compassionate Buddha inspiring

¹ Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*, 43.

² Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*, 47.

³ Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*.

⁴ Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*.

people to practice the path of virtue, especially loving kindness, and attain enlightenment. In Chinese culture, he is popularly depicted as the ‘Laughing Buddha’ which some historian traced to *Bu Dai*. The statue of Maitreya *Buddha* is located in the refectory of SABS.”¹

The statue of Bodhisattva Manjushri

The *Stepping into Freedom* stated that “Manjushri is the *Bodhisattva* of Wisdom. In Chinese he is called *Wenshu*. In the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* (Discourse on the Perfection of Wisdom), Shakyamuni Buddha praised him for his perfect understanding of the *Dharma*. He is usually depicted ichnographically with two lotus blossoms at the level of his head, on which his attributes – a word and a book of *Prajnaparamita* literature are placed. These attributes stand for the wisdom embodied by Manjushri, which dispels the darkness of ignorance. The statue of Manjushri in SABS is located in the library, which is appropriate as the library is the source of knowledge on all aspects of Buddhism for one visiting the temple.”²

The Sam Poh Thong Temple

The study has selected the *Sam Poh Thong* Temple as one of the representative of Chinese Mahayana Buddhist community in Selangor. This temple is located at Kampung Baru Ampang, Ampang, Selangor.

History

As mentioned in the official website of *Sam Poh Thong* Temple, “originally, the *Sam Poh Thong* temple was located in *Lembang Jaya*. The temple was later relocated in 1952 to its present locality within *Ampang* Chinese Village. The relocation is part of the British Colonial Government resettlement program. In the village also known as *Kampung Baru Ampang*, the *Sam Poh Thong*, from its humble abode in a seemingly quiet village, with small wooden structure with *attap* roof, slowly transformed over the years into a magnificent Chinese Buddhist Temple under the helm of Venerable (Ven.) *Da Yin*, who took over the temple upon the founder’s demise. Subsequently, Ven. *Ji Yuan* ‘inherited’ *Sam Poh Thong*, continuing to provide a conducive place of worship for the villagers.”³

¹ Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*, 85.

² Benny, *Stepping into Freedom*, 87.

³ <<www.sampohtong.org.my>> (Retrieved 13 July, 2012).

In 2008, the present abbess, Ven. Sing Kan, took over the guardianship of the temple maintenance. Since then, new temple activities were introduced and diversified to cater for the growing needs of the villagers especially the youths. Under the capable hands of Ven. Sing Kan, being an educator herself, an education system and Sunday *Dharma* syllabus were introduced. Today, *Sam Poh Thong* serves as an icon for Buddhist learning and activities in this Chinese community part of Selangor suburbs. Devotees, young and old, literate or otherwise convene on a regular basis to participate and contribute their services in many ways.¹

Spiritual Advisors

Throughout history, the present *Sam Poh Thong* temple was run by a nun. This is one of the features of the Mahayana temple where women are admitted to the *sangha* as nuns as mentioned in the *Encyclopedia of Malaysia*.² According to Ven. *Sing Kan*, Ven. *Da Yin* took over the temple after the demise of the founder, the Ven. *Zun Liang*, and continued with Ven. *Ji Yuan*. Today, the Spiritual Director of this temple is Ven. *Kai Sau*, while the Abbess is Ven. *Sing Kan*. Although this temple is run by a nun, this temple also has the Chief Abbot, Ven. *Zhu Mo*.³

Activities

Today, *Sam Poh Thong* Temple conducts several activities and continues to expand to cater for the growing needs of the community. The activities are divided into two; the activities for youths and the activities for the devotees.

¹ <<www.sampohtong.org.my>> (Retrieved 13 July, 2012).

² Benny, "Buddhist Worship and Practise," 67.

³ Venerable *Sing Kan* was born on 6 November 1957 in Kuala Kubu Baru, Selangor. Her year of Ordination was in 1985 under the Preceptor, the Late Venerable *Bai Sheng* at the *Kek Lok Si* Temple, Penang. She obtained her Diploma in Pali & Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka in 1999. She is currently holding the post of The Head of *Dharma* Propagation and Malaysian Buddhist Association (KL/Selangor Branch) and Committee Member of MCCBCHST (Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism), and Assistant *Dharma* Propagation Officer Malaysian Buddhist Association Headquarters. Venerable *Sing Kan*, informal interview by the Author, *Sam Poh Thong* Temple, Ampang, 28 February, 2012.

Activities for Youths

a) Sunday *Dharma* School

The Venerable *Sing Kan* mentioned that in the Sunday *Dharma* School at *Sam Poh Thong* Temple, there are Sunday *Dharma* class and Smart Reader English session.¹ The Sunday *Dharma* class commenced in January 2008 with an initial registration of 50 students. To date, the attendance has recorded about 150 youths, ranging from the age of 5 years old to teens. Classes are conducted in both English and Mandarin. The *Dharma* class are divided into 4 classes; *Dharma* Class 1, *Dharma* Class 2, *Dharma* Class 3, and *Dharma* Class 4.

According to Venerable *Sing Kan*, the objectives of *Dharma* Class are to teach the children the teachings of Buddha, to instil good moral values in children, and to emphasize the importance of repaying gratitude to one's parents. On the other hand, the objective of the English programme is to help the children in reading through fun and creative approach of learning.

b) Weekly *Dharma* Sessions

The weekly *Dharma* sessions of one and a half hours covers *Heart Sutra* recitation, Great Compassionate meditation and *Dharma* talks by the Abbes, Venerable *Sing Kan* and other members of the temple.

c) Participating in *Dharma* Knowledge Competition

The official website of the *Sam Poh Thong* mentioned that “in the past 2012, the *Sam Poh Thong*'s students participated in the *Heart Sutra* (writing) competition organized by the Malaysian Buddhist Association (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor) branch and *Kuan Yin Teng*, Petaling Jaya.”²

d) Field Trips were organized to the National Monument, the Kuala Lumpur Bird Park in addition to a theatrical experience when the youths attended a choral singing presentation by all American Boys International Choir.³

¹ Venerable *Sing Kan*, informal interview by the author, *Sam Poh Thong* Temple, Ampang, 28 February, 2012.

² <<www.sampohtong.org.my>> (Retrieved 30 December, 2012).

³ <<www.sampohtong.org.my>> (Retrieved 30 December, 2012).

- e) Extra Curriculum Activities in Choral Singing, Taekwondo, and Chinese Martial Arts (*wushu*) were held weekly for the youths.
- f) Holiday Camps were also conducted for students to emphasize on the importance of teamwork, building up their skills and increasing their self-esteem which included visit to the Sunbeam Orphanage Centre.

Activities for the Devotees

According to Venerable *Sing Kan*, the *Sam Poh Thong* Temple organizes occasionally the *Dharma* talks and Eight Noble Precepts ceremony for the devotees.¹ Venerable *Sing Kan* mentioned that the devotees also are able to participate in sharing activities such as chanting as well as visit to centres for the handicapped such as *Taman Sinar Harapan* at Kuala Kubu Baru, Selangor.² She said that the Annual events of the *Sam Poh Thong* Temple include New Year chanting, *Guan Yin* Festival, *Wesak* Day celebration, *Amitabha* Buddha Festival, and *Ullambana* Festival.³

According to Venerable *Sing Kan*, the significance of *Ullambana* Festival is chiefly to reinforce the concept of filial piety, to make offerings to the departed ones and share merits with them as the Buddha said in the *Sigalovada Sutta*, “make offerings to the dead is the duty of a child.”⁴ Thus, Venerable *Sing Kan* mentioned that one must also help the departed ones to gain rebirth in good realms and stop their suffering. As for the living may they enjoy longevity, be mentally and physically healthy. It also signifies the importance of performing ‘good deeds’ to accumulate spiritual merits through *dana* (offerings to the *sangha*, the practice of generosity as an antidote to greed (one of 3 evil roots that cause suffering and rebirth)).⁵ As mentioned in the *Ullambana Sutra*, Buddha told all the good men and women, “every year on the 15th day of the 7th month, they should always, out of filial compassion, recall their parents who bore them and for their sakes, perform their offerings to the *Buddhas* and *sangha* during the *Ullambana* and thus repay the loving kindness of the parents who raised and nourished them.”⁶

¹ Venerable *Sing Kan*, informal interview by the author, *Sam Poh Thong* Temple, Ampang, 28 February, 2012.

² Venerable *Sing Kan*.

³ Venerable *Sing Kan*.

⁴ Venerable *Sing Kan*.

⁵ Venerable *Sing Kan*.

⁶ Venerable *Sing Kan*.

The Buddhist Statues in the Sam Poh Thong Temple

From personal observation of the researcher, there are several statues of *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas* in *Sam Poh Thong* Temple. Among of them are *Shakyamuni Buddha*, *Amitabha Buddha*, *Maitreya Buddha*, *Bhaisajjaraja*, *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara* and *Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta*. All of these statues are located in the Shrine Hall of this temple.

In *Sam Poh Thong* Temple, the statue of *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara* or *Guanyin* can also be found in the Shrine Hall. *Avalokitesvara* is depicted in the *Sam Poh Thong* statue with her left hand holding a vase sprinkling the sweet nectar of wisdom and compassion, while her right hand is in the blessing gesture called the *mudra* of peace. The other statue of *Shakyamuni Buddha* found in *Sam Poh Thong* Temple is located in the Middle Hall. The statue of *Bhaisajjaraja* or Medicine King is located in the Middle Hall in the *Sam Poh Thong* Temple.

The Tham Wah Wan Temple

This research has selected the *Tham Wah Wan* Temple in Jalan Klang Lama as the respondents to represent the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist Community in Kuala Lumpur.

History

According to Mr. *Ooi Chooi Seng*, an authority in *Tham Wah Wan* Temple, this temple is a branch of *Than Hsiang* Temple. Due to that reason, this temple is also known as *Than Hsiang* Buddhist Welfare Association, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor *Darul Ehsan*. *Than Hsiang* Temple is located in Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah, Bayan Lepas, Penang.¹ Mr. *Ooi* mentioned that this temple was co-founded by the four late Dharma brothers *Xu Yue Zhi*, *Cai Hong Qing*, *Koh Ben Ming* and *Wu Yi Hua*. The temple was built by Master *Ping Xian*, together with Dharma brothers *Wong Pin Zheng* and *Teoh Pu Liang*.²

As stated in the official website of the *Tham Wah Wan* Temple, “in August 1993, Venerable Master *Wei Wu*, the founder of *Than Hsiang* Foundation was on a Buddhist propagation mission road show to *Fo Zhong* on a theme ‘Rediscover the Love that is Lost’. During the *Dharma* talk, Master *Wei Wu* proved his compassion in action by making a commitment to establish a series of welfare activities which are to be promoted in Kuala

¹ Informal interview with Mr. *Ooi Chooi Seng* by the researcher in *Tham Wah Wan* Temple on 23rd April, 2012.

² Mr. *Ooi Chooi Seng*.

Lumpur for the people who requested for it. On the next day, a group of Buddhists fellowship journeyed to the *Thang Hsiang* Foundation for a meeting with Venerable *Wei Wu*. They immediately established a committee comprising a group of 9 members. It was led by the Penang Welfare team leader, *Dharma Sister Mei Er*. After a series of discussions and brainstorming, the committee formulated a programme starting with welfare activities in Kuala Lumpur. In the beginning when the welfare programmes were in the stage of planning, several Buddhist members and *Dharma* brother *Xu Yue Zhi* established a friendship with Venerable Master *Wei Wu*. Buddhist members felt grateful to the Venerable *Wei Wu* for lending the premises to them. In return, the Buddhist members contributed their effort to organise other activities at the *Tham Wah Wan* Temple. Under the leadership of the capable Venerable *Zhen She*, they started cleaning up the temple and maintaining the compound.”¹

It is stated in the website that “the positive contribution shown by the Buddhists members and the adherence to the philosophy and conviction of the *Than Hsiang* Foundation led to the increase of temple activities. The responsibilities of the temple were shouldered by Venerable Master *Wei Wu*. On 2nd of September, 1997, an official opening ceremony was held. After this ceremony a series of activities were organised.”²

Spiritual Advisors

This temple is run by a nun. The nun in charge of this temple is Venerable *Zhen She*. The Venerable *Wei Wu* is the Chief Monk or Abbot of this temple, who lives outside the temple.³

Principles

Mr. *Ooi Chooi Seng* mentioned that all activities in the *Tham Wah Wan* Temple are based on the four principles of *Than Hsiang* Foundation known as the *Than Hsiang* Conviction. These four principles are: “*The young to learn, the strong and healthy to serve, the aged and sick to be cared for, and the departed to find spiritual destination.*”⁴

¹ <<www.thanhxiang.org.kl>> (Retrieved January 15, 2012).

² <<www.thanhxiang.org.kl>> (Retrieved January 15, 2012).

³ Informal interview with Mr. *Ooi Chooi Seng* by the researcher in *Tham Wah Wan* Temple on 23rd April, 2012.

⁴ Unpublished 2012 Booklet *Activities* of the *Tham Wah Wan* Temple.

Activities

Based on the four principles of *Than Hsiang*, welfare activities were the core foundation of the *Tham Wah Wan* community. As stated in the official website of this temple, “activities such as volunteering to help at old folk’s homes, free ‘hotline’ telephone counselling and consultation on welfare, organised *Dharma* talks, youth Buddhist camps, training for Buddhist volunteers and English and Chinese *Dharma* classes were organised on a regular basis. These activities established loving kindness in the community and opportunity for fellow Buddhist to practice Buddha’s teachings and thus reaping the merits of cultivating wisdom and virtues.”¹

Referring to unpublished *2012 Booklet Activities of Tham Wah Wan Temple*, the researcher found that there are six types of activities which are conducted regularly in this temple every year. Among those activities are Chinese New Year Activities, *Qing Ming Dharma* Assembly, Celebration of Buddha’s Day or *Wesak* Day, *Liang Huang Bao Chan* Filial Piety *Dharma*, and Moon Cake Festive Gathering.²

The Regular Activities

From the participant observation of the researcher, she found that the regular activities conducted in the *Tham Wah Wan Temple* are educational as well as religious activities. Among the educational activities are Computer Class, English Class, *Mandarin* Class, and Children *Dharma* Class. While, religious activities cover Life Liberation, *Samadhi* Water Repent, Eight Precepts Cultivation, *Amitabha Sutra* Chanting, and *Guanyin* Chanting.

Life Liberation

One of the regular activities conducted in the *Tham Wah Wan Temple* is One Step One Bowl and Liberation of Life. *Tan Kong Sing* mentioned that walking and bowing is a cultivation practice common to Chinese Mahayana Buddhism held outdoor and cover over varying distances. Generally, the practice is to walk three steps followed by one bow, called three steps, one bow. The *Tham Wah Wan Temple* has introduced one step, one bow cultivation practice, held every forth Sunday of the month, starting from Persiaran Klang, walk and bow towards the temple and ending at the Buddha Hall, covering a distance of about 100 meter, starting at 6.30 a.m.

¹ <<www.thanhxiang.org.kl>> (Retrieved January 15, 2012).

² Unpublished *2012 Booklet Activities of the Tham Wah Wan Temple*.

and ending before 8.00 a.m.¹ The walk and bow *Dharma* practice is led by a *Dharma* Master. Buddha's name, great compassion *mantra*, *Heart sutra*, praise of Buddha are recited at the commencement and then walk one step and bow once begins and continues until the temple is reached and ends at the Buddha Hall. Throughout the journey, Buddha's name is recited by each participant silently '*Namo Fundamental Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha*' or in Chinese '*Na Mo Ben Si Si Jia Mo Ni Fwo*'.² The one step one bow ends in the Buddha Hall of the temple. The recitation of the ten vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva (*Bodhisattva Samantabhadra*) concludes Buddha's name recitation and bowing ceremony.³ After One Step One Bow concludes, the devotees will start the Life Release Ceremony. An unpublished booklet, *Life Release Protocol* mentioned that "life release is a Buddhist tradition of saving lives of animal that are destined to be killed."⁴

Sunday Dharma Class

From personal observation of the researcher, she found that Sunday *Dharma* Class at *Tham Wah Wan* Temple Classes starts at 9.30 a.m. and ends at 11.30 a.m. every Sunday. There are two classes, one consisting of children from the age of seven to eight whereas the other is comprised of children from the age of nine to twelve. A total of approximately 50 students attend these classes on a regular basis. Due to the increasing number of students, a new building for Sunday *Dharma* School was built beside the temple.

The Vision of this Sunday *Dharma* Class is to help children develop a balanced personality, emotionally and intellectually, which will produce a society filled with wisdom, compassion, and gratitude. This class also aims to educate children in the wisdom of the Triple Gems, thus develop faith in the Triple Gems; to develop morality, spiritual right view and a balance character in children, to develop compassion and wisdom in children, and to inspire children to integrate *Dharma* into daily activities.⁵

The Syllabus of the Sunday *Dharma* Class is based on the syllabus

¹Tan Kong Sing, <<<http://thanhsiang.org/kl/archive/2007/sreligion/OneStepOneBow/tanOneStepOneBow07.htm>>> (Retrieved 16 February 2013).

² Tan Kong Sing.

³ Tan Kong Sing.

⁴ Unpublished booklet, *Life Release Protocol* used by *Tham Wah Wan* community in the Life Release Ceremony.

⁵ Mr. Ooi Chooi Seng, informal interview by the Author, *Tham Wah Wan* Temple, Klang Lama, 25 August 2013.

suitable for primary level designed by the Young Buddhist Association Malaysia. Classes are conducted in group discussion and group activities. There is no examination and no specific textbook is used in this class. Outdoor activities such as visiting old folks' home and interacting with students from the Pajam's Sunday class are part of the course.¹

Activities for parents

The parents who send their children to Sunday *Dharma* School in this temple can attend the Sunday Morning Blessing and Chanting Service which starts from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. They can also choose to be teachers or volunteers at the Sunday *Dharma* School or in the Temple's Buddhist Library or at the kitchen to prepare lunch and refreshments for students and visitors. From her observation, the researcher found that vegetarian lunch is served for both Sunday school students and parents who attend the chanting service.² This is considered as part of meal offering in this temple.

Offering

The *Tham Wah Wan* Temple conducts special meal offerings before the *Buddhas*, (*Shang Gong*) twice a month on the first and fifteenth day of the Lunar month that is on the "New Moon day" and the "Full Moon day". The temple also conducts meal offerings whenever there is a *Dharma* assembly and during the weekly Sunday. Usually, there are seven types of meal offered in this temple, a bowl of rice and six other types of dishes.

Wesak Day Activities

In the *Tham Wah Wan* Temple, there are several activities during *Wesak* Day Celebration. Among them are the *Diamond Sutra* Chanting, Bathing the Buddha Ceremony, Lamp Lighting, and Vegetarian Food Fair. The decoration works for the *Wesak* Day Celebration are handled by a group volunteers known as 'Deco Group'. "Basically, this newly setup group is responsible in the following areas:-

1. To decorate the Temple for regular activities e.g. *Pujas* (Prayers) and Chanting.
2. To handle the decoration works of special events organized at the Temple.

¹ Mr. Ooi Chooi Seng.

² Mr. Ooi Chooi Seng.

3. To refurnish all the notice boards of the Temple's Main Entrance and Halls.
4. To plan and adorn the venue for outside events organised by the Temple.
5. To help in maintaining the cleanliness of the Temple and its compound.”¹

During the celebration of *Wesak* Day, the temple offers food to anybody who comes to the temple. This event is also known as Vegetarian Food Fair, where all food offered is vegetarian.

E-Learning Master Degree in Buddhist Studies

The E-Learning Master (MA) program in Buddhist Studies is collaboration between *Than Hsiang* Foundation with the International Buddhist College (IBC) in Thailand. This program is based on IBC MA Program. It is course-based (eight courses, three credits per course) with a thesis (about 25000 words, 12 credits). The MA entrance exams and the assignments of each subject can be done online at <http://ibc.ac.th/exam>. Malaysian students have to sit for their final exam either in *Tham Wah Wan* Temple in Kuala Lumpur or *Than Hsiang* Temple in Penang. From the personal observation of the researcher, the E-Learning program is a new method used in MA in Buddhist Studies. Previously, the visiting professor from IBC will come to *Tham Wah Wan* Temple to conduct classes for this program.

The Buddhist Statues in Tham Wah Wan Temple

From personal observation, the researcher found that there are several statues of *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas* in the *Tham Wah Wan* Temple. Among the statues are Shakyamuni Buddha, the statues of Three Sages i.e. Amitabha Buddha, *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*, *Bodhisattva Mahasthanaprata*, and *Maitreya* Buddha. In addition, the researcher found that there are also statues of other Chinese deities such as the Kitchen God in this temple.

Conclusion

This research discussed the three selected Chinese Mahayana Buddhist community in Kuala Lumpur from several aspects including their historical background, spiritual advisors, missions and principles, activities, facilities,

¹ Goh Boon Chin, *Decor Group* <<http://thanhsiang.org/kl/articles/s-other/g-decor/decor.htm>> (Retrieved 10 February, 2013).

as well as the Buddhist statues found in the three communities.

From the above discussion, the researcher found that the three communities shared some similarities in many aspects. Firstly, the *Sam Poh Thong* Temple and *Tham Wah Wan* Temple are run by nuns and have spiritual advisors who live outside the temples. The nun in charge for *Sam Poh Thong* is Venerable *Sing Kan*, while for *Tham Wah Wan* is Venerable *Zhen She*. This is one of the features of the Mahayana Temple where women are admitted to the temple as nuns as stated in the *Encyclopedia of Malaysia*.¹ Although Shah Alam Buddhist Society is managed by a group of layman it has appointed two spiritual advisors representing the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

Secondly, the activities or practices in all three communities can be divided into three categories; religious education, welfare, and cultural activities. The basis for all these activities is for the welfare or benefit of other beings. The examples of religious education activities are the Chinese and English Sunday *Dharma* Classes, *Dharma* camps for children, *Dharma* Talks, chanting Mahayana *Sutras*, meditation, offerings to *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas*, offerings to the temple, *Wesak* Day Celebration, and *Ullambana* Festival. The welfare activities include blood donation, visits to the needy such as orphanages and old-folk homes, and donation. The cultural activities include co-curricular activities for children such as drawing, calligraphy, and *wushu*, celebration of Chinese New Year and Moon Cake Festive Gathering.

Thirdly, the activities or practices in the three communities show that these three selected temples and organization not only play roles as centres for religious education and cultural activities, but also carry out social and welfare projects including schools, orphanages, clinic, and homes for the elderly.

Fourthly, the facilities provided by the temples and organization are similar. All of them have a number of halls as Benny Liow mentioned in *Encyclopedia of Malaysia*, "Most temples have a hall or series of halls where the deities are housed."² These halls are used for several purposes such as chanting, *Dharma* talks, and official occasions. Two of them have their own libraries, while one of them i.e. *Sam Poh Thong*, has only a resource centre which provide sources related to Buddhism. Another similarity is that all of them have a kitchen which serves only vegetarian food for Sunday services or special occasions.

¹ Benny, "Buddhism and Chinese Religion," 67.

² Benny, "Buddhist and Chinese Temples," 78.

Fifthly, the researcher found that all the three communities have similar statues of Buddha and Bodhisattvas. All of them have the statues of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Three Sages i.e. Amitabha Buddha and the two companions *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara* or *Guanyin* and *Bodhisattva Mahastanaprata*, *Maitreya* Buddha, and *Kstigharba Bodhisattva*, and other deities of Chinese Religions such as *Bhaisavajra* or the Medicine King and the Kitchen God. Out of these three communities, only one temple which is *Sam Poh Thong* Temple has the Taoist deities in the temple. This shows that the Chinese Mahayana Buddhists in this temple accept some degree of syncretism between Buddhism and Taoism in their practices.

Lastly, all the communities have volunteers who are willing to serve for the temples. For example, they are voluntarily handling the kitchens to serve the people, taking care of the temples, as well as decorating the temples for special occasions.

* Acknowledgement: This work is supported by the International Islamic University Malaysia (Project no: RIGS16-171-0335)

References

- Ang, C. H. "Buddhist Organizations and Movements." In Kamal Hassan (Ed), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 2005).
- Benny, L. W. K. "Buddhist Worship and Practice." In Kamal Hassan (Ed), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs*. Kamal Hassan ed. (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 2005).
- Benny, L. W. K. "Buddhist and Chinese Temples." Kamal Hassan (Ed), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs*. (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 2005).
- Benny, L. W. K. *Stepping into Freedom*. (Shah Alam: Shah Alam Buddhist Society, 2010).
- Goh, B. C. "Decor Group." Accessed February 10, 2013. <http://thanhsiang.org/kl/articles/sother/g-decor/decor.htm>. Huat, S. H. "Chinese Beliefs and World-View." In Kamal Hassan. (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 2005).
- Huat, S. H. "Chinese Festival," in Kamal Hassan. (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 2005).
- Huat, S. H. "History of Chinese Religions in Malaysia." Kamal Hassan. (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 2005).
- Tan, K. S. Accessed February 16, 2013. <http://thanhsiang.org/kl/archive/2007/sreligion/OneStepOneBow/tanOneStepOneBow07.htm><http://thanhsiang.org/kl/archive/2007/sreligion/OneStepOneBow/tanOneStepOneBow07.htm>.
- Torocco, Francesca, *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism: Attaining the Dharma*, (London: Routledge, 1970).

AL-ITQĀN

JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Volume No. 2

Issue No.

June 2018

EDITOR IN-CHIEF

Dr. Wan Mohd Azam Mohd Amin

MANAGING EDITOR

Dr. Masitoh Ahmad

EDITORIAL BOARD

Dr. Muhammad Afifi al-Akiti, Oxford

Dr. Muhammad Kamal Hassan, IIUM

Dr. Syed Arabi Aidid, IIUM.

Dr. Hassan Basri Mat Dahan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia,
Nilai, Negeri Sembilan.

Dr. Kamaruzaman Yusuff, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,
Kota Semarahan, Kucing.

Dr. Kamar Oniah, IIUM.

Dr. Mumtaz Ali, IIUM.

Dr. Siti Akmar, Universiti Institut Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam

Dr. Thameem Ushama, IIUM.