

THE SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN A MAHAYANA BUDDHIST TEMPLE 'VIHARA LOTUS' SURAKARTA

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ABSTRACT

The symbols contained in a vihara is intentionally used to remind the people to something that is believed, both cultural and spiritual values. This article aims to analyze the meaning and value of spiritual and cultural symbols in Vihara Lotus Surakarta. This is a qualitative research. This article shows that (1) the meaning and value of spiritual symbols in Vihara Lotus can be found on the category of altar and statue which consist of ancestor altar, Amitabha Buddha Altar, Avalokitesvara Altar, Three Buddhas Alta, Si Mien Fo Altar, Maitreya Buddha, Si Da Tian Wang Statues, And Earth Gods. Then in category of Prayer tools consist of Ching/Gong, Muk Ie, He Che, and Tan Che. Those spiritual symbols have meaning and value in term of the Buddha teaching such as the Sigalovada sutta, sukhavati realm, reflection of Buddhas nature, concept of Tri Kaya, affection state, four nobles qualities, dharma wheel turning, awareness, equanimity concept, introspection, and catumaharajika realm. (2) Meaning and Value of Cultural Symbols in Vihara Lotus can be found on the category of altar and statue consists of Thian Kong Altar, Chinese Generals, Earth gods, and Horse statues. Then in plant and food category consist of soy bean, Candy and Cookie, cigarette, wine, Chinese evergreen, and pineapple. Those cultural symbols have meaning and value in term of Chinese tradition and habit, such as Tradition of Sky Praising, merits appreciation, Chinese mythology, traditional food, hope of better life, special service to idol, and hope of sustenance.

Keywords: *Semiotic, vihara, Chinese, Buddha, symbols*

INTRODUCTION

Every religion or spiritual belief has a place or building for doing spiritual activities to communicate with the most absolute one. In Indonesia there are 6 official religions, besides many local beliefs that have been recognized by the government. Each religion Indonesia has its own worship place, such as Islam has mosques, Christianity has churches, Hindu has Pura (Hindu temple), Buddhism has *Vihara* (Buddhist monasteries) and Konghucu has Miao/Bio, often called as Kelenteng.

In Indonesia, misconception often occurs between *vihara* and kelenteng. Many people assume that both are the same but actually - different. A place can be called as *vihara* when it meets some criteria, such as there must be

a statue of the Buddha in a respectable place, a *Dharmasala* (a place to preach) and a *kuti* (a place to stay for Buddhist monks/nuns) (Widyadharm, 2007: 296) whereas, Kelenteng has many statues of god/goddess and prophets, such as Lao Zu, Buddha and Kong Fu Tse. Kelenteng is the worship place for three religions, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, while *vihara* is only for Buddhism.

The architecture of the Kelenteng is typical, which refers to Chinese's culture. The red color which is dominant, the dragon, the shrine's gate, the yin-yang symbol, candles, and many more ornaments are among the unique characteristic of Kelenteng's building. But, it has different appearance with *vihara*, the dominant ornaments are lotus, stupa, The Buddha's statue, Dharma

wheel, and many more. There is no specific color that is dominant and refers to certain ethnic's culture in the *vihara*. In Solo Central Java Province, meanwhile, there is a *vihara* which has characteristics similar to kelenteng, red color dominant, dragons, god/goddess statues etc. Yet, it is officially not a kelenteng but 'Vihara Lotus'. It is located in Kadipiro Village, Banjarsari Subdistrict, Surakarta City of Central Java Province.

Vihara Lotus is a *vihara* for Mahayana Buddhist tradition. It is not only the place for worship or other spiritual activities but also for social activities. As other worship places, Vihara Lotus is a sacred building that contains values that must be upheld in order to maintain its sanctity and sacredness. The existence values are often pinned to the symbols found in the *vihara* building.

The symbols contained in the *vihara* are usually used by the owner or builder to remind themselves and the people who visit to such sacred building in terms of its cultural and spiritual values. In Vihara Lotus there are many symbols found, i.e., in the form of statue, image, ornaments, and so on. It is rich - with Chinese tradition motifs that are close to the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Symbols in Vihara Lotus cannot be directly interpreted, especially by visitors who are not members of the temple. Thus, it is required to make a special study to understand the values of the symbols in the Vihara Lotus.

Based on the explanation, the writer tends to use semiotics theory to reveals the meaning and values of the spiritual and cultural symbols in Vihara Lotus. This is because semiotics is a study of signs in order to express the meaning behind the signs implied within the symbols. The various symbols that exist imply the meaning of richness contained in both spiritual values of Buddhism and the value of Chinese culture or others. Therefore, this article is aimed to reveal the meaning and value of spiritual and cultural symbols in Vihara Lotus Surakarta.

The spiritual symbols in this study are the symbols that have meaning and value derived originally from the teaching of the Buddha, *Dharma*. Whilst, the cultural symbols are the symbols used in Vihara Lotus which have so and were influenced by Chinese or local cultures.

This study is important. This can contribute to broadening insights and increase the horizons of knowledge in the subject of semiotics especially religious semiotics. Moreover, it can add to have more on Buddhist studies and enrich the literature of Buddhist semiotics. Practically this study can be a tool to introduce the culture of Chinese Buddhist or Mahayana Buddhist. It is very useful for, at least, *Dharmaduta* Students or Buddhist leaders to understand each Buddhism branch in order to give full services to all Buddhists. Besides, this study is useful to show that Buddhist values can be blended and found in various cultural backgrounds.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many researches in semiotics field, several studies are related to this study. The two of them are used as the previous studies. First is a study entitled 'Semiotic Analysis of the Auspicious Images of a Taiwanese Folk Religion Temple' which is written by Chao-Ming Yang and Tzu-Fan Hsu published at Vol. 5 No. 5 (2016) *Journal of Arts and Humanities*. This article describes the functional aspects of the auspicious images that mostly belong to the categories of symbol and homonymy, whereas their mental aspects belong to the categories of psychological and physiological requirements. In sum, humans perceive the world through signs and that human life is the semiotization of the world, although Eastern and Western cultures are characteristically different, they share much similarity in communication methods. The findings of this study can foster the understanding of the truth, goodness, and beauty of the architectural decoration of temples in Taiwan and the modesty, hospitality, generosity, and religiosity of Taiwanese society.

The second is an article written by Saefu Zaman on *Paradigma Jurnal Kajian Budaya*

Vol. 7 No. 2 (2017) entitled 'Pemaknaan Ruang Pada Masjid Kubah Emas: Kajian Semiotik Ruang'. The result of this research shows that the mosque creators and the people make the meaning of this mosque in its thirdness level, which is annotative in the notational dimension, analogical in structural dimension and dynamic in the temporal dimension. The conclusion of this research is the meaning of a cultural sign is on its thirdness level where it is based on individual free interpretations.

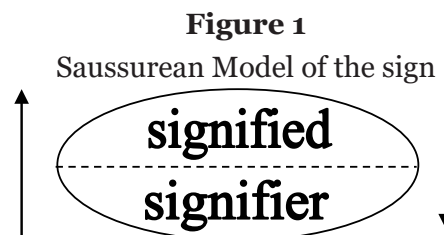
This study is indeed different from the first previous study in terms of the object of the study. The first previous study examines only on the auspicious images on the temple. It is very specific to only one aspect of the temple but this article reveals more than one. It studies the building, statue, carving, ornament and so on. Then the similarity is the semiotics model used, both use the Saussure model. The second previous study is also different, especially in its analysis method. It uses the method of Danesi and Perron. However, those previous studies are very meaningful to this research because the researcher has guidelines and portrayals how to conduct the research in the Semiotics field, especially in the symbolic things.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Semiotics is a study that explains the connection between signs, their function and production of meaning (Tinarbuko, 2008:12). The word "Semiotics" itself is derived from the Greek "Semion" which means sign. Chandler (2007:2) states that semiotics could be anything which has relation with signs. It is not only in the form of objects or things, but words, images, sound, and gestures are also considered as "signs". Muzakki (2007:11) tells that semiotics is a branch of sciences that considers culture, society and social phenomena as signs. It studies about correlation of signs and the community who use those signs.

Saussure's model of the sign is dyadic or two-part model of signs. He classifies the sign into two elements which represent a material element, signifier, and an abstract or conceptual element, signified. In other words it can be described that

the signifier as the form that the sign takes and the signified as the concept to which it refers.



Saussurean diagram is called 'Signification' which shows the relationship between the signified and the signifier. The relationship in this diagram is represented by the two arrows in the left and right. The two elements of sign, signified and signifier, are divided by the horizontal line which is called 'the bar'. Signifier is something that is in the form of material or physical, so that it can be seen, touched, smelt, or tasted. Signified is in form of concept, so it is abstract. The concept comes to people's mind when they see, hear, smell, or taste certain thing. Saussure states that the bound between signified and signifier is purely physiological, and the sign is the whole result of the association or interpretation of the signified and the signifier. However, there is no logical reason why a certain word can represent or describe the two elements.

The linguistic example of the signification is presented by Chandler (2007: 15), in the word 'open' on a shop doorway. The word 'open' is a sign which consist of:

- a signifier: the word 'open' itself
- a signified concept: the shop is open for business.

A sign cannot only consist of a single signified or signifier. It should have both of them. If it is not, it cannot be called as a sign. A sign can be recognized if there is a combination between signifier and appropriate signified. Those two elements of sign have different meaning when they are associated with other signified or signifier. Every signifier can stand for different signified and of course it will bring different

meaning of sign. For example: the signifier the word 'open', on a push-button inside a lift. The signified concept will be: push the button to open door. Certainly, those two examples are different signs, although they have same signifier.

While the word 'symbol' is derived from Greek *symbollein* which means 'to throw together'. The Greek verb *symbollein* is used to unite or throw together a thing which has been split into two parts. The two parts of the thing is called *symbola* in Greek, which gradually change to be 'symbol' in English word then it has broader meanings (Dharmojo, 2005). Van Zoest (cited in Muzakki, 2007: 9) states that symbol is something that can represent ideas, feelings, things, and behaviors. It is in the form of arbitrary and conventional. Furthermore, Ogden and Richard (1923, cited in Muzakki, 2007: 9) say that symbol is something that is used to refer to something else according to agreements of certain group who uses the symbol. It can be in the form of words, things, gestures, etc. for example the installation of the red-white flag in front of the house on August to show respect to the national heroes' merits and love to Indonesia.

From those explanations, it can be said that the meaning of symbol and the form of symbol depend on society. The society uses the symbol which has been agreed together by the members of society to represent their ideas. There is no limitation of what the form or shape of the symbol is, it can be in the form of words, things, behavior and so on. Likewise, the symbol and what it refers to, has no natural relationship. It is in line with the theory from Muzakki (2007: 9), who mentions that symbol can represent anything, whether it is feelings, ideas, thought, things or behavior.

The same symbol can have different meaning in different society. For the example is blue color. Some say that it has good association, such as: prestige, harmony, happiness, or intelligent. However, others consider that blue color represent the sadness. Those opinions of the association or the meaning of the blue color are not wrong. It depends on which group or society

people belong to.

Blumer (cited in Dharmojo, 2005: 32) states that symbols can be in the form of language, gestures, or anything that can deliver meaning and the meaning is arranged from social interaction. Blumer's explanation is supported by Woods (1992, cited in Dharmojo, 2005: 32) who proposes two kinds of symbols; verbal and non-verbal symbols. Verbal symbols are the symbols which are expressed through language, such as, words, speeches, paralinguistics, poem, and so on. While non-verbal symbols are the symbols expressed through movement of parts of body, behavior, sights, settings, equipments, and other relevant things that can deliver any meaning to the people. In line with Woods, a German semiotician, Winfried Noth (1995: 116) also explains the two kinds of symbols, verbal and non-verbal. Those kinds of symbols have same objective to deliver meaning to people. Verbal symbols contain language in story, parable, song, and poem. While non-verbal symbols contain body movements, eye contact, hair style, costume, and actors.

Considering that symbols are something that has no natural relationship between the things and the meaning. They will lead people to many interpretations and make the symbols meaningful. Dharmojo (2005: 40-41) proposes four types of symbols meaning as follow:

a. Symbols meaning in the religious context: the symbols system is used as communication tool between human-cosmic communication and inner-outer religious communication.

b. Symbols meaning in ethic context: the symbols can deliver meanings which relate to something that is considered as good or bad action in social interaction of certain society. Ethic only concern with the deliberate actions or behaviors of people, which are the actions that come from self will and have been thought before.

c. Symbols meaning in aesthetic context: the meaning of symbols that concern to the concept of norms and values in society whether is precious or not. Besides, aesthetic is actually one

of the branches of philosophy which always deal with the beauty things.

d. Symbols meaning in philosophical context: the symbols related to the meaning of something which deals with attitude of people in their life and the universe. Philosophy always involves the thinking of life and universe problems from whole sides and also tries to combine all into one relationship. The philosophical behaviors can be seen from the broadminded behavior, critical thinking, wise actions and so on.

Thus, the conclusion is the symbols meaning does not only exist on a single aspect of society and culture but it can be found in various aspects. Symbols meaning is very essential to the society, people, and culture. It is confirmed by Cassirer (cited in Dharmojo, 2005:39), who reveals that human or people never see, find, and identify the universe directly, but through symbols. The symbols can refer or represent the basic characteristics and conditions of people and society who use the symbols. The characteristics and conditions can be in the form of material and non-material things.

In addition, Dharmojo (2005:41-45) also proposes the functions of symbols. He classifies them into four types of functions: Symbols function as knowledge, as communication, as participation, and as mediation.

a. Symbols function as knowledge

Symbols are representation of culture which can be learnt according to the knowledge about world. The symbols as knowledge are distributed through social interaction. Thus, the function of symbols as knowledge is related to people ideas involving collective idea, social organization, outlook on life, group solidarity and aesthetic institution.

b. Symbols function as communication

The function of Symbols as a communication has two segments, vertical and horizontal. Vertical refers to the relationship between human and his faith (god, God, or goddess). While horizontal segment, is related to the relationship between human and him/herself, others, surrounding,

environment, and nature.

c. Symbols function as participation

The meaning of symbols function as participation is the society support, whether it is individually or group to the norms and values that are applied to their daily behavior. Symbols can create and influence people or group of people to do something.

d. Symbols function as mediation

Symbols as mediation is something that appears or exists between subject and object to convey messages. It is used by human to fulfill the life needs. So, symbol as mediation has duty to deliver the meaning which is related to norms and values of human life. The mediation can be in the form of mediation of education, adoration, togetherness, and beauty expression.

In this article, the writer conducts the study in Vihara Lotus Surakarta which contains symbolic modes in the form of architecture, ornaments, building, carving and so on. Those symbols can convey values of life useful for the symbols' user. The values may be embedded in the meaning of spirituality and also culture. Furthermore, the intended meaning of those symbols will be discussed based on theories applied.

Semiotics and Architecture

To signify, semiotics is a socio-cultural process, depending on the social contract, in which once signification is established, the relationship between the components of the sign cannot be changed and is irrefutable. This was a problematic aspect presenting a difficulty of applying Saussurian Semiology on architecture, as this limits the interpretation due to this implied constancy even over time (Ostwald & Tucker: 2004: 386-387). At the same time, determining the social contract in architectural languages is more difficult than in textual ones. First work to introduce the theory of semiotics into architecture is the 'La Dimension Amoureuse in Architecture' in 1967 by George Baird. In this work, Baird formally links the metaphorical association of semiotics with language to architecture. This was

considered an innovative method on reading the built environment.

Focusing on architecture, Jencks tends to be in between the Saussurian and the Peircean tradition of semiotics or rather to mediate or conflate them. His model is a triad, formed of thought, symbol and referent. Referent is different from the Peircean interpretant, as it is not the individual but the act itself that allows interpretation. For Peirce, by introducing the referent (mental-image), the role of the architect is stressed and has the same value as the role of the observer or receiver. Architecture by this way can be described, or interpreted, in addition to being able to be created and inhabited (Ostwald & Tucker: 2004: 389-390).

By his triad, Jencks succeeded in opening the discourse for both the architect and the observer for emancipated intentions in design. Yet it is still open for free interpretation by the user or observer as well.

By over viewing Jencks contribution, we realize that it is not only introduction of architecture into semiotics but rather releasing architectural semiotics from abstract theoretical realm of thought and introducing it to more experiential mode of thought. (Ostwald & Tucker: 2004: 390). As for Umberto Eco, the Italian semiotician, the definition of semiotics is a research program dealing with cultural processes as communication in the role of a reader. Eco defines semiotics to be the science of 'recognized systems of signs' studying cultural phenomena, depending on that culture can be understood as communication. Eco explains that architecture communicates, by the example of the stone age shelter cave changing from function to communication. His explanation illustrates the production of meaning in architecture (Eco, 1997: 196).

Semiotics, Culture, and Religion

There are a lot of different definitions of culture. It occurs because experts arrange the definition of culture through different point of views. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952: 43-71) in

their book entitled 'Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions' have collected 176 definitions of culture. They group those definitions into six types based on the characteristics, they are:

- a. Descriptive: emphasis on enumeration of content
- b. Historical: emphasis on social heritage or tradition
- c. Normative: emphasis on culture as rule of life and behavior
- d. Psychological: emphasis on culture as device of learning, habit and problem-solving
- e. Structural: emphasis on patterning or organization of culture
- f. Genetic: emphasis on culture as human creation or human product, including ideas and symbol.

Although the definitions of culture are very various, Chaer and Agustina (2004: 164) give three components that should be included in a culture definition, namely, laws of the society, customs and habits, and education or leaning. They propose a definition of culture that fulfills those three components. They say that culture is everything which relates to human life, including laws, habits, traditions, and also the interaction and communication tools whether it is in the form of verbal language or others non-verbal communication tools.

In the meantime, Koentjaraningrat (cited in Chaer and Agustina, 2004) argues that culture is only owned by human. It grows and develops together with the human society. Also, he proposes two aspects of culture. First is cultural form and the second is cultural content. Cultural form can be ideas, behaviors, and physics or concrete things. While cultural content consists of seven universal elements of culture. Those elements always exist in all human society in this world. They are: language, technology, economical system, social organization, knowledge system, religious system, and art.

Talking about culture, Indonesia cultures are plenty and various. It has various cultures in forms of arts, traditional beliefs, languages, religious system and many more. They are from thousands ethnicities which exist in Indonesia. Almost each single ethnicity in Indonesia has its own traditional culture, when those traditional cultures interact with foreign culture, the wealth of Indonesian culture wealth also increases. Koentjaraningrat (1975) states that the Indonesian art form is not the same with some other countries which are based on folklore. The art form in Indonesia sometimes is developed because it is inheritance of former kingdom in Indonesia. For the example, in Bali, arts are also part of religious ceremonies. The dances and dramas in Java and Bali are usually derived from Hindu mythologies.

Koentjaraningrat (1975) argues that Indonesian culture has been shaped by a long interaction between original indigenous customs and multiple foreign influences. Indonesia has very strategic position in the center of old trading routes between the Far East and Middle East, resulting in many cultural practices which influence many religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam. The mixture of many elements which build Indonesian culture makes culture of Indonesia so complex.

Religion is a belief and practice system that has been united relating to sacred matters, beliefs, and practices which unite into a single moral value (Durkheim cited in Hussein, 2000). There are two elements of a religion based on the definition. First is sacred element of religion and the second is ritual practices. Those two elements cannot be separated from religion. Durkheim (Durkheim cited in Hussein, 2000) continues to consider that the sacred elements of religion are essential because the religion is always completed by tight rules that separate the worldliness with something beyond the worldliness. This element is something that is very important above the all important things. Then, the ritual practice is used by the followers to actualize their faith to the religion. The ritual can carry peaceful and happy

feelings to whom do it sincerely.

Suparlan (1994) says that religion can be considered as culture. By doing this consideration, religion become a guideline of people life which its truth is fully accepted by the members of society. Besides, religion can also be considered as knowledge and faith embraced by a society. By doing so, sacred knowledge and faith can be differentiated from profane knowledge.

Eco (1976: 48) proposes that linguistic and culture semiotics are a branch of communication theory which investigates sign systems and representation modes which use human to deliver feelings, thought, ideas, and ideology. Additionally, semiotics analysis seeks for cultural and psychological patterns that are basis for language, art and other cultural expression. Eco's explanation above, implies the tight relationship between semiotics and culture.

Geertz (1973: 90) states that religion is a system symbol which intends to create strong feeling and motivation in order to be easily spread. It is hard to lose in one's mind by creating a concept of general order of existence and apply the concept to factual things. Consequently, the feeling and motivation will be a unique reality.

Statement of Geertz above clearly proves that semiotics especially symbol has relationship with religion and of course with culture, since we know that religion is one of elements of culture. Moreover, Spradley (cited in Sobur, 2006: 177) says that the all meanings of culture are created by using symbols. In line with him, Geertz (cited in Sobur, 2006: 177) describes that the strength of a religion in holding its social values is placed on its symbols.

RESEARCH METHOD

The writer used qualitative research for this study because the primary instrument of this research is the researcher himself. Ary et al (2014: 424) states that "in qualitative studies, the human investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing the data". This study was conducted in area of Vihara Lotus Kadipiro, Banjarsari, Surakarta city of Central

Java Province. The main reason for choosing this *vihara* to be the object of the study is the character of *vihara* itself where it is rarely found elsewhere. It has all characters of a *klenteng* (Javanese term for a Buddhist worship place): red color dominant, dragons, god/goddess statues. However it is not, it is a *vihara*. It was conducted in August to December 2018.

There were several processes in collecting the data for this article: observation, interview, documentation study, transcribing data, and compiling data. The informants of this study were the abbot and the Buddhists of the *vihara*. There are two kinds of data source of this study, primary and secondary. The primary source of data is things found in the *vihara* building and architecture. They can be in form of statues, carvings, constructions, and installations, that can be drawn as meaningful symbols. While the secondary source of data is data from books, journals, articles, and online sources to support and complete the primary data of this study.

Analysis techniques of this study employ the semiotics theory of Ferdinand de Saussure, considering that language is a semiotic system that conveys thoughts in the form of sounds and refers to this system as a combination of the representation and object of which the form and concept of a meaning is defined as the signifier and the signified, respectively (Saussure, 2011).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

History and Activity of Vihara Lotus

Vihara Lotus was built in 2004. Then in 2005, it was used for worship activities. However, several years later Vihara Lotus was vacuum from the activities until 2012 due to lack of attention and guidance from the Buddhist leaders. After that, some people initiated to send a letter of guidance requesting Sangha Mahayana Indonesia (SMI) in Jakarta 2012 to reactivate the worship place. Then SMI entrusted a Monk, named Suhu Cuan Sheng to Vihara Lotus Surakarta. Thenceforth, the worship activities returned.

Vihara Lotus was initially built by a group of

people, who need a place for worship, they are Mrs Rudi, Mrs Dian, Mr Hendra, and others. They were not Buddhist but worshipping in Chinese traditions i.e., Taoism and Confucianism. They conduct their ritual and ceremony in some places, first was in Kandangsapi area, Surakarta. There was not too long because the rented place cannot be extended. Then they moved to Grogol, Solobaru but it was also only in short time because the local community did not support their ritual or ceremony at that time.

In short, they looked for a perfect area to build a worship place, and then found the location of *Vihara Lotus* today. It was not *vihara* building at first planning, and then there were Mr. Wahyudi and his wife as the head of Walubi (a Buddhist organization) Central Java introduce Buddhism and Buddha's teaching. Accordingly, the people decided that the worship place to be built is a *vihara* or Buddhist temple. Thus, it makes *Vihara Lotus* unique, a combined worship place of Chinese tradition and Mahayana Buddhism. It is also not a *Kelenteng*, a worship place for Tridharma believers. The abbot of *vihara* said that the main focus in this *vihara* to be worshipped is The Buddha and Bodhisattvas. This makes it different from *kelenteng*.

Vihara Lotus nowadays has some activities related to the religious matter. The regular activities are *puja bhakti* (Buddhist worship) and meditation practice. Those are done once a week. Besides, some other activities are done in this *vihara* by the Buddhist under the guidance of a monk from Sangha Mahayana Indonesia, named Shi Cuan Sheng. The table 1 shows the schedule of *vihara Lotus* based on the information from Shi Cuan Sheng.

Table 1. Vihara Lotus Schedule

No	Activity	Time
1	Regular Worship in Mandarin	Tuesday at 8 PM
2	Meditation Class	Thursday at 8 PM

3	<i>Ce It</i> Prayer	Every month on 1 st date (Chinese calendar)
4	<i>Cap Go</i> Prayer	Every month on 15 th (Chinese calendar)
5	Brahmasahampati (Sie Mien Fo) Birthday	on November 9 th
6	Chinese New Year Ritual	Once a year
7	Avalokitesvara Day	on 19 th March, June, October (Chinese Calendar)

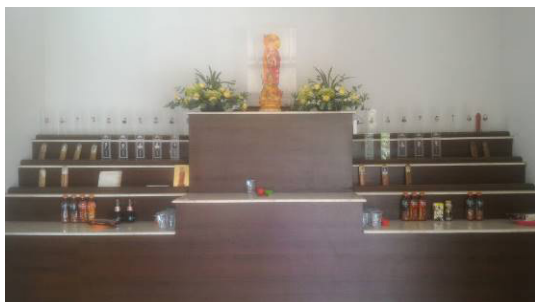
Source : Interview

Meaning and Value of Spiritual Symbols in Vihara Lotus

This section discusses about the symbols in Vihara Lotus which contain spiritual values and meanings. The spiritual value and meaning are based on the Buddha's teaching or Dharma, especially in Mahayana tradition.

a. Ancestors Altar

Figure 2
Ancestors Altar



Source: Author's document

Vihara Lotus Surakarta has a special place for the ancestors. It is a room in the left corner of the *vihara* building. There is a large altar consists of some photos, including names carved on wooden and acrylic boards. It also has a statue and an image of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. This altar is called ancestors altar, the names and photos on boards are the ancestors of the *vihara* founders and the Buddhists.

The altar can convey some symbolic meanings and Buddhism values. It symbolizes

the children devotion to the ancestors especially the late parents as stated in Sigalovada Sutta. The children should provide happiness merits to their late parents by conducting *pattidana* (*Ceng beng*) or do good deeds that are bestowed on their deceased parents. The abbot of Vihara Lotus said that "*nanti ketika cau tu atau ceng beng keluarga datang dan pasang persembahan dan berdoa* (later when *cau tu* or *ceng beng*, the family comes and puts up offerings and also prays for the ancestors).

The Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva statue also delivers a symbolic meaning of the protector god of spirits who are suffering from torment in hell. Shi Cuan Seng in the interview said that "*Ksitigarbha merupakan simbolisasi yang berdiam di alam neraka pelindung supaya tidak terlahir di alam neraka*" (Ksitigarbha symbolizes [the god] who dwells in the hell a protector so they are not born in the hell). Ksitigarbha has a great oath that he will never be a Buddha or reach the perfection, unless the hell is empty. He said "if I don't go to hell myself to help tormented spirits there, who will go?..... if hell is not empty of tormented spirits, I will not become a Buddha. Only when all beings have been saved, then I will reach the Buddhahood".

b. Amitabha Buddha Altar

Figure 3
Amitabha Buddha Altar



Source: Author's document

Amitabha Buddha Altar of Vihara Lotus places in the main hall or *Da Sung Pau Tian* (a large place for religious activities or a place for conducting kindness). In this room there are three altars, one of them is Amitabha Buddha.

The altar consists of three statues, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva on the left, Amitabha Buddha in the middle and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva on the right. It symbolizes the *sukhavati*, the joyful place. It is according to the interview with Shi Cuang Seng “*Itu menyimbolkan alam sukhavati, di alam itu ada Buddha Amitabha dan dua pendampingnya* (it symbolizes the *sukhavati*, in that place the Amitabha Buddha and the two companions live).

Sukhavati is the western paradise, the place that full of joy and happiness. Rebirth in Sukhavati can be achieved by contemplated the name of Amitabha, particularly at the moment of death. Amitabha Buddha, according to Mahayana Buddhist, was a king because for some reason he left the royal throne and became a monk under the name Dharmakarsa. Inspired by the Buddha’s discourse at that time, the Buddha Lokeshvaraja, which taught him the enlightenment path. He got enlightenment and became Amitabha Buddha. Amitabha is also known as the Impersonal Buddha. Williams (2006: 37) stated that Amitabha is an object of popular devotion, and is believed to preside over the Paradise of the West, the Pure Land (*Sukhavati*), into which the souls of the pious may be born, there to rest in bliss for a long age.

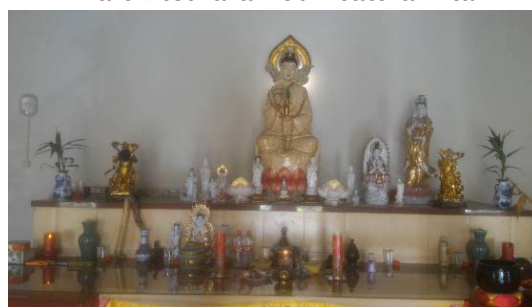
Amitabha Buddha has two companions Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva and Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva is a reflection of the Amitabha Buddha’s nature, Wisdom, while Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva reflects compassion. Hay (2003: 361-362) explained that When Amitabha became a Buddha, Mahasthamaprapta, and Avalokitesvara was his disciples and had the task of guiding the followers to the Pure Land of *Sukhavati* when they died. It is mentioned in the *Shurangama* sutras that “when Amitabha retired in guiding disciples at *Sukhavati*, Avalokitesvara would replace his position. And if the time comes for Avalokitesvara to retire, Mahasthamaprapta instead”.

c. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva Altar

The altar of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is in

the middle of three main altars in *Da Sung Pau Tian* (a large place for religious activities or a place for conducting kindness). The altar consists of the Avalokitesvara statues in many *mudras* and two protectors of Dharma: Wei Tuo Pu Sa dan Qie Lan Pu Sa.

Figure 4
Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva Altar



Source: Author’s document

Avalokitesvara symbolizes and represents the compassion nature of the Buddhas. She is the goddess of mercy. The name ‘Avalokitesvara’ was translated into Chinese as *Kuan Yin* ‘she who listens to the sounds (of the world)’. The mantra is ‘Om Mani Padme Hum, Avalokitesvara vowed never to rest until all beings were free from *samsara*.

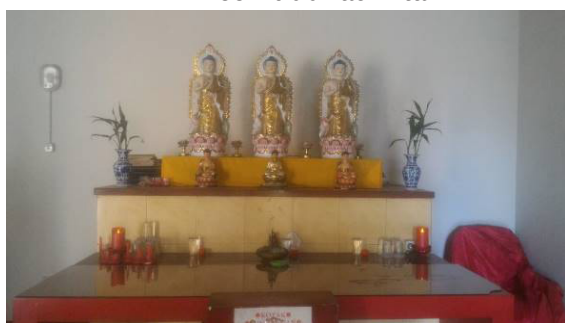
Two protectors Dharma are also Bodhisattva according to the interview “....*kayak pelindung Dharma itu termasuk Bodhisattva..... pokoknya Wei Tuo dan Qie Lan berdampingan menjaga Dharma* . (..... just like the Dharma protector and Bodhisattva ... basically Wei Tuo and Qie Lan side by side protect the Dharma)”. Wei Tuo Pu Sa is a Dharma protector, guardian of the monastery/temple and dharma books, he is a warlord from the the sky generals. Wei Tuo is also said to be the son of a heavenly king who is noble and so appointed by Sakyamuni Buddha to guard Buddha Dharma and has the duty to protect all Buddhists and maintain peace among the Buddhist. He is also responsible to protect members of the Sangha from Mara disorders. If a Sangha (Mahayana) violated the Vinaya (Monk Rules), then he headed to the Wei Tuo Pu Sa to Repentance.

The Wei Tuo figure was often depicted as a handsome young man, dressed in a war

general and his two hands supported a mace/ stick. His usual position is standing with a cloud beside him. Wei Tuo got the title of pho sat/ pus a (Bodhisattva) when he was appointed by Sakyamuni Buddha to be the protector of dharma along with Qie Lan Pho Sat. Qie Lan Pu Sa is honored as a Bodhisattva and protector of the Dharma. He was the guardian of the monastery and the statue is on the left, opposite the Wei Tuo Pu Sa on the right.

d. Three Buddhas Altar

Figure 5
Three Buddhas Altar



Source: Author's document

Three Buddhas Altar is the last altar in main hall or *Da Sung Pau Tian*. It is on the left sides of the Avalokitesvara Altar. The statues are the depiction of Sakyamuni Buddha in the middle of Bhaijaguru Buddha, and Amitabha Buddha. This altar symbolizes the Mahayana doctrine of *Tri-kaya*, teaching on both the nature of reality and the nature of Buddhahood.

Shi Cuan Sen on the interview said "*Mahayana memang kental dengan tiga Buddha yang ada di Barat, Timur dan yang ada di alam kita* (Mahayana is very familiar with the three Buddhas, in the West, East and in our world today)". Those three Buddhas are very essential to the Mahayana Buddhist concept. Sakyamuni Buddha is the Buddha in our life or world now. His chronicle has always been inspiration, not only to all the Buddhists but also many people all around the world. Sakyamuni statue usually hold a globe as a symbol of eternity all the time.

Buddha Bhaijaguru is a past Buddha before Sakyamuni Buddha had attained Enlightenment. He is the Buddha from the East

World, specifically who gives blessings to healing from illness, preventing disasters and longevity. Therefore, he is known as medicine Buddha. The statue is similar to Sakyamuni Buddha but the Bhaijaguru hold a Pagoda or a medicine bowl.

The Amitabha Buddha is also a past Buddha. He resides in the West which is a holy world for Buddhists. His name is always spoken on any occasion because his followers believe in his promise to bring the matched spirits to the Western heaven, Sukhavati.

e. Maitreya Buddha

Figure 6
Maitreya



Source: Author's document

Maitreya Buddha (Mi Le Fo) Statue is placed in front of main hall. Maitreya Buddha means the Buddha who has noble love or Merciful Buddha. Actually, the present position of maitreya is still bodhisattva, so he can be called Mi Le Pu. He is always represented as very stout, with the breast, and upper abdomen exposed to view. His face has a laughing expression, and he is also known as the Laughing Buddha.

The placement of Maitreya in front of main hall has a reason as explained by Shi Cuan Seng on the interview "*kenapa (Maitreya) diletakkan dipaling depan?, simbolisasi bahwa ketika ada tamu yang datang, umat yang datang. Itu khan maitreya selalu diwujudkan dengan Bhikkhu yang tersenyum, jadi disambut dengan kehangatan senyuman. Di tradisi Mahayana biasa di vihara-vihara depan itu pasti Maitreya, Orang datang disambut dengan senyuman.* (why is it [Maitreya] placed at the

front? it symbolizes that when guests arrive or people come, they always warmly welcome as manifested in Maitreya which is presented as a monk who always smiles, so it is greeted with a warm smile. In the Mahayana tradition, in the front temples usually has Maitreya statue, people come and greet with smiles)". Thus it is clear that Maitreya statue in *vihara* lotus conveys the symbolic meaning of warm welcome, happiness, cheerfulness and affection.

f. Si Mien Fo Altar

Figure 7
Si Mien Fo Altar



Source: Author's document

Vihara Lotus has an altar outside the main building, it is the Si Mien Fo Altar. This altar is located in the left corner of the *vihara* yard. The abbot stated that Sie Mien Fo is also known as Maha Brahma Sahampati, the first one who begged the Buddha to spread the Dharma. The four faces are symbols of Brahmasahampati who wanted to see from all sides. Besides, in its later development, in Buddhism, Brahmasahampati is worshiped as Catur Brahma *Vihara*, as a symbol of the four noble qualities that must be possessed by the Buddhists. The four noble qualities are:

- *Metta*. Universal love for all living beings.
- *Karuna*. Mercy. Compassionate nature to other beings who are in suffering condition.
- *Mudita*. Sympathy for the happiness of other beings.
- *Upekkha*. Concept of equanimity. Balanced mind. Immovable.

The Eight Ears symbolize the Compassion, he listens to the cries of suffered living beings from all directions. And the Eight Hands hold Religious Tools which have special meanings:

- *Tasbih* (Beads) is a symbol of the Wheel of Life - The Law of Karma and the rebirth.
- Hands in front of chest are a symbol of his merciful nature and giving blessings.
- Gold Snail House symbolizes wealth and prosperity.
- Flower Vase (Teapot) symbolizes wish-fulfilling blessing water.
- Books (Scriptures) symbolize Science and Wisdom.
- Stick (Spear) symbolizes will of power and success.
- *Cittamani* (Great Flags) symbolizes the spiritual power of a Buddha.
- Flying Wheels (*cakra*) is prevention to disaster hazards and harm, Prevention to the devil and eliminate all gloom and worry.

g. Ching/Gong

Figure 8
Ching/Gong



Source: Author's document

In Mahayana tradition, the worship ritual typically uses some prayer tools, and one of them is *Ching/gong*. It is shaped like a bowl made from metal. The abbot said in the interview "*Kalau Gong sebagai tanda kalo kita akan memulai memutar roda Dharma, kalau dipukul gong itu berarti Dharma itu siap untuk diputar*. (Gong is a sign that we will start turning the Dharma wheel, if the

Gong is hit, it means that the Dharma is ready to be spun.)” The term of spinning dharma wheel here means that the worship begins.

The function of gong in Mahayana prayer can vary, such as: a sign that the worship/prayer has begun, an indicator tools that mantra or sutra reciting is almost/have finished, a sign of standing or kneeling, a sign of exchanging the position of the hand from *anjali* to a meditation posture or vice versa, a tool to command the gods. It also functions to arouse enthusiasm. In the time of the Buddha, Gong was beaten for the purpose of gathering people.

h. Muk Ie

Figure 9
Muk Ie



Source: Author's document

Muk Ie is a prayer tool in Mahayana Buddhism. The material of this tool is a carved wood. It used as a command in reciting mantras and sutras, whether it is slow, fast or medium and in order to make the mantras and sutras reciting done simultaneously. The *Muk Ie* beating at reciting mantras and sutras means to tell us to recite in full concentration as meditation to lead and train the mind.

The shape of *Muk Ie* is like a fish head, it reminds us to understand that the human mind is never silent and stop (always changing) like a fish that never stand still. It is suitable with the explanation of Shi Cuan Seng, He said “*Muk Ie, itu simbol dari bakti, dan pengorbanan serta kewaspadaan. Karena di dalam mui itu ada*

ukiran yang membentuk seperti motif mata ikan, sebenarnya itu wujud dari ikan. Ikan itu khan tidak pernah terpejam tidur. Intinya kewaspadaan, bhaktinya diambil dari Mu Ie yang selalu dipukul ‘tuk tuk tuk’, dengan tubuhnya yang selalu dipukuli wujud dari pengorbanan dan bakti (Muk Ie, is a symbol of devotion, and sacrifice and awareness. Because in Muk Ie there is a carving that forms like fish eye motif, actually it is a form of fish. Fish never closed their eyes while sleeping, the point is awareness or consciousness. The devotion was taken from the Muk Ie condition that is always hit “tuk tuk tuk”, the body is being beaten, it is a form of sacrifice and devotion)”.

The prayer tool, *Muk Ie*, symbolizes a deep meaning of life lesson. The Buddhists are always taught by the Buddha to manage their mind to stay awake and conscious because mind is the starting point of the human deed. It can be evil or good just depend on how a man can manage his mind. It also stated in Dhammapada, Yamaka Vagga (The Twin Verses), verse 1 and 2.

“Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox.

Mind is the forerunner of (all good) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one's shadow that never leaves.”

i. He che

Figure 10
He che



Source: <http://mgmpbuddha.blogspot.com>

He che is the prayer tool of Buddhism Mahayana. It is made from metal, it is like cymbal. *He che* is used as a complement in reciting sutra, mantra or singing praises or chanting. This tool has been widely used in India and China for long time. The Monk said in the interview '*He che kayak simbal, simbol keseimbangan batin, jadi posisinya ketika pegang harus seimbang, kalo gak seimbang pasti gak ada suaranya. Harus bener-bener seimbang agar berbunyi baik. Harus feeling harus seimbang (He che is like cymbals, a symbol of balanced mind. So it should be held in balance, the position also balance, if it is not, there will be no sound. It should be completely balanced in order to have good sounds. There should be get feelings to balance it).*

He che implies the Buddhist concept of Equanimity (Balanced mind) or in Pali called *Upekkha*, is the fourth character of four noble qualities or Catur Paramita. Equanimity is important especially for lay people who live in a world that is in the midst of an ups and downs wave and this uncertainty. *Upekkha* is a calm and balanced mind, not easily shaken by worldly circumstances. In this world, every human being will experience eight worldly conditions (*atthaloka dhamma*), praised-criticized, profit-loss, success-failure, happiness-suffering. For this reason, it is necessary to have a balanced mental attitude that is not easily carried away by the flow of life. Besides, *He che* also contains philosophy of life, human should always get along in order to create a harmonious life.

j. Tan Che

Figure 11
Tan Che



Source: <http://mgmpbuddha.blogspot.com>

Tan Che is made also from metal, it is usually used as a complement tool in mahayana worship. *Tan Che* is held like holding a mirror. Shi Cuan Seng said "*Tan che, itu khan bentuknya seperti cermin. Jadi kita itu sebagai manusia itu harus bercermin kepada diri sendiri, bagaimana tingkah laku kita. Dimainkan harus sejajar dengan wajah supaya kita bisa melihat pantulan dari kita sendiri seperti apa (Tan che looks like a mirror. So, we as human beings should reflect on how we behave. It should be played parallel to the face [like being in the mirror] so that we can see the reflection of ourselves).*

The simple model of *Tan Che* obviously implies a deep philosophy. It has a teaching to human being that they should see themselves and correct any deficiencies or mistakes made intentionally or unintentionally. Human should not be ashamed to admit their mistakes in order to improve for a better human. Besides, people should have *hiri* and *ottapa*, *hiri* is an innate sense of shame over moral transgression; *ottappa* is moral dread, fear of the results of wrong doing.

k. Si Da Tian Wang Statues

Vihara Lotus put four statues in front of the main hall *Da Sung Pau Tian*. These four Statues called *Si Da Tian Wang or Catur Vajra* (sankrit), they are the four heavenly kings. They are four guardians or warrior attendants of Buddha, the warriors who guard the sky. They are rulers of continents located in the four winds of the Holy Mount Semeru which are considered by Buddhists as the center of the world. They are rulers of continents located in the four winds of the Holy Mount Semeru which are considered by Buddhists as the center of the world. They are rulers of continents in the four points of the compass from the Holy Mountain of Semeru which is considered by Buddhists as the center of the world. They are also considered to be able to bestow blessings on anyone who pay respects to the Buddhist *Tri Ratna*, Buddha, Dharma & Sangha. *Si Da Tian Wang* consists of Xi Fang Guang Mu Tian Wang (Left, above), Bei Fang Duo Wen Tian Wang (Right, above), Dong Fang

Che Guo Tian Wang (Left, below), and Fang Zeng Chang Tian Wang (Right, below).

Figure 12

Si Da Tian Wang



Source: author's document

The four of them are Indra's bodyguards, who serve outside the heaven, and have territories in the four corners of the universe. Zeng Chang Tian Wang (Virudhaka) is powerful in the South. Xi Fang Guang Mu Tian Wang (Virupaksa) is in charge in the West. Bei Fang Duo Wen Tian Wang (Dhanada), has power over the North. Dong Fang Che Guo Tian Wang (Dhatarashtra) rules in the East.

This four heavenly kings imply the 31 realms of existence concept. They are in *Catumaharajika* realm. It is the lowest heavenly realm. Life in the *Cātummahārājikā* world lasts, according to human computation, ninety thousand years (DA.ii. 472, 647). The *Cātummahārājikā* world is situated half-way up Mount Sineru. Some of the world gods dwell in the mountain, others in the sky.

Meaning and Value of Cultural Symbols in Vihara Lotus

a. Thian Kong Altar

Vihara Lotus although it is a *vihara* or Buddhist temple, It still provides the Thian Kong Altar as in *kelenteng*. The altar is not same with

other altars, where there are statues, Thian Kong Altar only has a large *Hio Lo* (a place for burning incenses). Shi Cuan Seng, the interviewee, said “*urutan pertama menghadap ke depan ke Thian Kong, tradisi dalam tionghoa atau tradisi kelenteng itu menunjukkan ke depan (ke langit) itu menghormat kepada Tuhan YME* (the first sequence face forward to Thian Kong, in Chinese tradition or *kelenteng* traditions, facing forward [to the sky] is respectful of God Almighty).

In general, Chinese people commonly refer to God the Almighty as Thian Kong (Tian Gong) or Thi Kong, some also refer to it as Shang Di. Actually this understanding is ambiguous, because the meaning of Thian Kong and Shang Di is somewhat different. The term Thian (Tian) actually literally means ‘sky’, which shows the residence of Shang Di, while Shang Di itself means ‘the noblest one who is at the top’. Thus, it implies that The God resides in Sky. Based on the Chinese culture, people believe that there is a God Almighty in the sky, then they pray to sky by burning incenses as the medium of communication with God Almighty.

Figure 13

Hio Lo for Thian Kong



Source: Author's document

b. Chinese Generals

Figure 14
Chinese Generals Altar



Source: Author's document

Vihara Lotus has close relation with the Chinese culture. An example of the relation is the existence of a Chinese Generals altar. The management of *vihara* said that actually the two Generals are not too familiar in Indonesia. It is hard to gain information about the Generals. The only information is from the abbot, he said “*Itu adalah jendral besar pada dinasti cina terdahulu yang didewakan karena jasa-jasa kebaikannya* (they were the great generals of the previous Chinese dynasty who were deified because of their merits)”. This depicts the beauty of Chinese culture in appreciating the one who have done merits to wide community.

c. Earth Gods

Figure 15
Earth Gods and Goddess



Source: Author's document

There are three earth Gods and Goddess statue in Vihara Lotus, they are placed near the altar of Chinese General. One statue is on the table, others are under the table. Almost in all places,

the Earth Gods are usually displayed in more or less the same form, such as an old-haired man and a white beard, with a smiling face with the with nice clothes as a wealthy person. Sometimes the Earth God or *Tu Di Gong* is displayed in pairs with *Tu Di Po* (Tu Di grandma).

Tu Di Gong has a limited tenure. *Tu Di Gong*'s position is usually held by one who has done a lot of good deeds and contributed to the community. After he died the figure of people idol is appointed as *Tu Di Gong*. Therefore every place has its own *Tu Di Gong*. This is what happened to Zhang Fu De. He held the minister of royal tax affairs. In carrying out his duties he always acted wisely so that the people love him very much. He died at the age of 102 years. His position was replaced by a man named Wei Chao. Wei Chao was a greedy person. He made the people suffer greatly. Finally, due to the unbearable suffering, they left their hometown, so that the fields were abandoned. In their hearts they expected a wise person like Zhang Fu De who had died. Then they praised Zhang Fu De, then he was considered an Earth God.

The Earth God is in charge of keeping the lives of the people safe and happy, The farmers consider him as protective god. The merchants see him as a holy spirit that supplies sustenance. The general public regards him as a protector of safety. Based on interviews, it is known that the Earth god is for requesting sustenance. It is because from the earth can generate income, such as agriculture and others.

d. Horse

Figure 16
Horse Statues



Source: Author's document

There are two statues of horse in Vihara Lotus. Horses have many stories in Chinese culture. They are also the rides of the gods. The horse symbolizes enthusiasm, loyalty, courage, energy, the bearer of success or in Chinese *Ma Mao Kung* (Ma = horse, Mao = come, Kung = succeed). In other saying, *Mǎ Dao Cheng Gong*, This is a figurative pronunciation which means “instant success,” which literally means: “with the arrival of the horse, success will be achieved.

In Chinese mythology, the horse symbolizes the yang (male principle) while the female principle (yin) is symbolized by the cow. In the great Ming novel ‘Journey to the West’ (Xi-you ji), we find the expression *yi-ma* = ‘horse of the will’, as a metaphor for willfulness and inconstancy. A galloping steed is probably a reference to the mount of General Guan Yu, which was called ‘Red-hare-horse’. The white horse which often appears in Buddhist texts stands for purity and loyalty (Eberhard, 2006: 178).

e. Soy bean

The soy bean is found in Vihara Lotus as an offering to the horse statues. Its protein content makes the soya bean one of the most important items in Chinese food. From this bean, the bean curd (*dou-fu*) and the liquid extract are made. The last product looks like milk and is a popular breakfast drink. ‘Eating bean-curd’ is a metaphor for sexual intercourse. At weddings in Taiwan, the mother-in-law gives her new daughter-in-law a cake made from dried bean-curd (*dou-gan*) symbolizing the wish that one day her sons will become high officials (*da-guan*) (Eberhard, 2006: 33).

f. Candy and Cookies

Figure 17
Candy and Cookies



Source: Author's document

Almost in every altar of Vihara Lotus is found Candies and Cookies. There are actually some symbolic meanings of the candy and cookies which become one of offering on altar. Shi Cuan Seng said “*Permen itu khan berasal dari manis jadi harapannya kehidupannya lebih manis. Manis itukan melambangkan kebaikan* (The candy comes from sweet, so there is a hope that the life will be sweeter. Sweet symbolizes goodness).”

Based on that explanation, it can be said that candy is the symbol of sweet life, all things go smoothly without obstacles. Besides, there are cookies and candies that have other symbolic meanings, such as: *Tan Kwe* symbolizes long-life or longevity, it comes from dried radish which is durable, *Ang co* symbolizes physical and mental health, *ang co* trees have the ability to cover wounds on its stem, Persimmon is a symbol of harmony among human beings, families, and friends. Persimmon trees are big and tall, fruiting in groups as a symbol of unity.

g. Cigarette

A cigarette is used in a form of offering. In Vihara Lotus it is found as offering to the Earth Gods, *Tu Di Gong*. Some Chinese people still consider that *Tu Di Gong* likes to smoke. So they provide it as a form of worship. Tobacco arrived in China via the Philippines. It was in the province of Zhejiang that it first caught on. The oldest Chinese word for tobacco was an attempt at a phonetic equivalent – *dan-pa-gu*. Then *yan* meaning ‘light yellow’ (because of the colour of the dried leaves) came to be used: *yan* is also the ordinary word for smoke. A metaphor for tobacco is ‘Thinking-of-each-other Weed’. This comes from a story about a man who was so desolated by the death of his wife that he visited her grave every day. One day, a plant grew up out of the grave which turned out to be a tobacco-plant– he smoked the leaves and got over his bereavement.

h. Wine

There are some bottles of wine are used as offering to earth gods in Vihara Lotus. It is obviously not from the management of the

vihara because wine or alcohol is as much as possible avoided by the Buddhists. It violates the Pancasila Buddhist. However, this case is similar to the cigarette offering. Some people still assume that wine is a special way to service or to treat the gods to make them happy.

According to Eberhard (2006: 395), Chinese wine is mostly made from grain (rice). Wine made from grapes is mentioned in ancient texts, but it does not seem to have appealed to the popular palate. Certainly, far more tea is drunk. Wine is drunk in company and at receptions in restaurants, wine-shops and brothels. Drunks are a rare sight. Towards the end of the Later Han Dynasty, when all sorts of stimulants were being tried out, 'hard drugs' were added to hot wine. The classical literature records the names of innumerable kinds of wine; today, Mao-tai and Shao-xing wines are particularly popular. Wine in China never acquired the sacramental significance which it has in the Christian world. When it is poured from a bowl in sacrifice, it is rather as an additive to the food which is being offered to the god.

i. Sri Rejeki Leaves (Chinese evergreen)

Figure 18

Chinese Evergreen



Source: Author's document

Sri Rejeki or Chinese evergreen is always found on the altar of the main hall *Da Sung Pau Tian*. Those three altars have each a couple of Chinese evergreen. This plant is also known as *aglaonema*, derived from Greek 'aglaos' (glow) and 'nema' (thread). *Sri Rejeki* is believed to provide energy and profit. The obvious sign of

bringing sustenance can be seen from scratches, spots, or other strong colors that appear on the leaves. So it conveys a hope of sustenance comes smoothly.

j. Pineapple

Figure 19

Pineapple



Source: Author's document

The offering of pineapple in *Vihara Lotus* can be found on the altar of *Si Mien Fo*. According to the explanation of Shi Cuan Seng, *Si Mien Fo* likes the pineapple fruit but there is another reason why pineapple to be an offering fruit. It is because pineapple is the symbol of sustenance. *Huang Li* or King, so the name pineapple is lapped in Chinese. Because of that, the fruit that originally came from Latin America is usually placed on an offering table. It is symbolic of the king does not lack sustenance to his grandchildren. Like the abundant sustenance received by the kings and distributed from generation to generation to their grandchildren, pineapple can provide abundant sustenance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results toward the symbols of *Vihara Lotus* Surakarta, we can conclude that: 1) The meaning and value of spiritual symbols in *Vihara Lotus* can be found on the symbol category of altar and statue which consist of ancestor altar, Amitabha Buddha Altar, Avalokitesvara Altar, Three Buddhas Alta, *Si Mien Fo* Altar, Maitreya Buddha, *Si Da Tian Wang* Statues, And Earth Gods. Then in category of Prayer tools consist of *Ching/Gong*, *Muk Ie*, *He Che*, and *Tan Che*. Those

spiritual symbols have meaning and value in term of the Buddha teaching such as the *Sigalovada sutta*, *sukhavati realm*, reflection of Buddhas nature, concept of Tri Kaya, affection state, four nobles qualities, dharma wheel turning, awareness, equanimity concept, introspection, and *catumaharajika* realm. 2) Meaning and Value of Cultural Symbols in Vihara Lotus can be found on the symbol category of altar and statue consists of Thian Kong Altar, Chinese Generals, Earth Gods, and Horse statues. Then in plant and food category consist of soy bean, Candy and Cookie, cigarette, wine, Chinese evergreen, and pineapple. Those cultural symbols have meaning and value in term of Chinese tradition and habit, such as Tradition of Sky Praising, merits appreciation, Chinese mythology, traditional food, hope of better life, special service to idol, and hope of sustenance.

Another important thing that can be grasped from this research is that the symbols just as tool only and is not as goal. Using the sum of symbols as the guide to focus the mind and then hoped can reach the goal that is spiritual consciousness. So, it is the logical argumentation that some of tools have significant used in the ceremonial or rituals performing.

Also, the other point can be learnt from this research is that the concepts of Vihara Lotus in Surakarta as the mixed (syncretism) from the originally teaching of Buddha of India and the China culture, and also the Indonesian culture. It is proof that the Buddhism teaching as flexible teaching, because can adaptive to the other teaching or culture as long as relevant to its teaching.

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