

RATIONALISING THE BUSINESS STRUCTURE OF CONTEMPORARY BUDDHIST ORGANISATIONS IN MALAYSIA: A CASE STUDY OF FIVE BUDDHIST CHARITIES

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ABSTRACT

Many contemporary Buddhist organisations have registered in Malaysia since the early 21st century. This article aims to analyse the issues of rationalisation in terms of the structure of organisational and the business concepts of five contemporary Buddhist organisations. In-depth interview, telephone interview, and observation were the methods used to gather qualitative data from the informants and the websites of the selected organisations. Weber's concepts of rationalisation were employed to analyse data collected from the field as well as the secondary data. In terms of the organisational structure, our analysis revealed that two out of five selected Buddhist organisations, namely Kechara and Tzu Chi, are highly structured and formalised. In addition, their bureaucracy is in line with Weber's rationalisation model that emphasised calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism. In terms of business, two out of five selected Buddhist organisations, namely the Buddha's Light International Association and the Nalanda Buddhist Society do not participate in business. In other words, these two organisations showed that the Buddhist's norm and values do not rationalise the believers into accumulating wealth as their goal and then creating the spirit of capitalism. However, the Kechara, Tzu Chi, and Buddhist Business Network do actively participate in business activities to generate their own income. The elements

of calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism are significant in all the three organisations' business involvement too. Overall, this study has indirectly highlighted the similarities and differences of the five selected contemporary Buddhist organisations in Malaysia with respect to their structure of organisation and business involvement based on Weber's concepts of rationalisation.

Keywords: Kechara, Tzu Chi, Buddhist Business Network, contemporary Buddhist organisation, Weber's concepts of rationalisation, business structure, Buddhist's values

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 21st century, there have been many registered Buddhist organisations in Malaysia. According to Ang (2005), there are more than 700 registered Buddhist organisations in Malaysia, and most of them provide religious education and are actively engaged in social and welfare work. Tan (2020) examined the revival and revitalisation of Buddhist organisations in Malaysia since the late 1980s, which suggested strengthening of Buddhism as a more organised religion through exchanges of historical and contemporary Buddhist ideas. Four Chinese Buddhist organisations, namely, the Malaysian Buddhist Association, the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia, Fo Guang Shan Malaysia, and Buddhist Tzu Chi Merits Society Malaysia were chosen by Tan (2020) to represent the Buddhist revitalisation movement in West Coast Peninsular Malaysia. According to Tan (2020), these organisations have affected the Chinese Buddhist communities through their formal organisation – a formalisation that has legitimised them to attract more members.

Tang (2004), on the other hand, found that the Buddhist organisations of Malaysia have maintained their culture of administration and philosophy according to their country of origin. The establishment of this form of “multinational” Buddhist organisations in Malaysia has brought great influences on the local Buddhist culture and issue of identity as compared to the traditional Chinese Buddhist. Nur Suriya (2018) studied the Shah Alam Buddhist Society (established in 1990) and two other Buddhist temple organisations in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. The activities and practices in all these Buddhist organisations were geared towards religious education, welfare, and culture.

Based on the background of the modern Buddhist organisations in Malaysia (established after the 1980s), this study aims to investigate the issues related to the “rationalisation” of the “structure of organisation” and “business involvement” as

well as the relationship between the Buddhist values and business dealings of the five selected Buddhist organisations in Malaysia.

The five selected Buddhist organisations are from different sects of Buddhism (except the Buddhist Business Network), representing the influence of Han Chinese Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and mixed Buddhism organisations, namely, (1) Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA), which was established in 1992 and associates closely with the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order in Taiwan. The association emphasises the practice of Humanistic Buddhism in everyday life; (2) Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation of Malaysia (Tzu Chi), an international humanitarian organisation and the largest non-governmental organisation in the Mandarin-speaking countries. The organisation was officially set up in Penang in 1993. The group's core activities span charity, medication, education, and humanistic culture; (3) Nalanda Buddhist Society (NBS), which was established in 2003. Its focuses on Buddhist education, facilitating personal spiritual development and propagation of Buddha Dharma; (4) Kechara House Buddhist Organisation, which started with the effort of its Spiritual Guide, Tsem Tulku Rinpoche, to open an outlet Kechara Paradise in 2001 and the first permanent Dharma Centre, Kechara House, was opened in 2004; and (5) The Buddhist Business Network (BBN), founded in 2009. BBN's focus is on business referrals, networking, education, and training of Buddhist business communities. Although these five samples of organisations may not be able to represent the whole Buddhist community in Malaysia, but to certain extent, some social realities related to the focus of this study can be discovered through them. With this, the method of purposive sampling was used in selecting informants. The recorded qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and themed. The primary data were gathered through in-depth interview, telephone interview, and asynchronous email interview. At the same time, secondary data were collected through the organisations' websites.

Weber's concept of "rationalisation" was employed to analyse the issues identified in the structure of organisation and the business-related matters of the five selected Malaysian Buddhist organisations. Weber's rationalisation refers to the process of "systematisation of ideas" (Wallace 1990). Wallace (1990) added that one of the orientations that Weber explicitly designates as "rational" involves patent emotional attachment to convictions of duty, honour, a religious "call", and so on. According to Weber, the most fateful force in the modern life is capitalism and this is because it developed along the lines of a "rational conduct of life" (Kolegar 1964). In addition, Kolegar (1964) stated that the rational pursuit of capitalistic acquisition is aided by rational industrial organisation, rational accounting, a rational structure of law and administration, and a rationalistic economic ethic.

Weber further added that the process of rationalisation makes traditional authority structure obsolete and pushes charismatic systems to the margins of society. As stated by Aldridge (2007), rationality means mundane, involving calculation, prediction, measurement, and control. In other words, one may say that efficiency, calculability, prediction, and control are the principles of Weberian bureaucracy in terms of rationalisation.

The term rationalisation also refers to institutional changes involving differentiation, specialisation, and development of hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of social organisation (Peletz 1993). Finally, Koshul (2005) summarised Weber's rationalisation – first, as individual cost-benefit calculation; second, as the wider bureaucratic organisation of the organisations; and finally, as the opposite of understanding the reality through mystery and magic. Based on these concepts of Weber's "rationalisation" as explained by Aldridge (2007), Peletz (1993), and Koshul (2005), the structure of organisation and the business involvement of the five selected Buddhist organisations of Malaysia will be analysed based on Weber's rationalisation model of calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism.

SYNCRETISM AND THE DISCOURSES OF MODERNIST VIS *À* VIS TRADITIONALIST BUDDHISM

According to Lee and Ackerman (1997), the trend of modernist Buddhism started with the emergence of a Chinese middle class in the early decades of the 20th century. There were a few significant changes in the development of Chinese Buddhism since then. Firstly, the lay Buddhists were encouraged to study Buddhist doctrines and texts and to learn more about Buddhist teachings. For this purpose, in 1925, the Penang Buddhist Association (PBA) was formed to offer rational understandings to demystify Buddhist teachings among the believers. With the support of the public, PBA eventually established its own structures that were different from the traditional Buddhist practice but were like the Christian churches. Secondly, from the 1950s to 1980, the Buddhist youth movement emerged that used English language as its medium of religious teaching. For example, the Malaya Buddhist Youth Fellowship (MBYF) was formed in 1958 and the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM) was formed in 1970. These youth organisations functioned to offer serious doctrinal and leadership training.

Thirdly, the practice of meditation became popular along with the development of the youth movement. For instance, the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre (MBMC) was set up in Penang in 1968 and played a very important role to introduce

vipassana meditation primarily to English-speaking Chinese young professionals and university students in the 1970s and 1980s. The Mandarin-speaking Chinese were inspired by the Taiwan trained monk Ven. Chi Chern to practice *anapanasati* meditation. Fourthly, there were attempts made to organise short-term courses to develop knowledgeable lay leaders who were fit for addressing basic Buddhist principles. The courses also aimed at improving the Buddhist youth leaders' professional skills in the application of mass communication and information technology to propagate Buddhism.

In short, the primary features of reformist Buddhism consist of a stress on rationalist fundamentals in Buddhist teachings together with a tacit eradication of traditional cosmology, an intensified appreciation and utilisation of texts, a renewed stress on meditation practice, and an emphasis on universalism and social reform. Irrespective of how, the type of Buddhism that advanced during the time of traditional Buddhism did not end with the rise of revivalist or modern Buddhism. In actuality, the two structures existed simultaneously, with reformist Buddhists firmly reprimanding traditional Buddhist ritualist practices and perspectives (Baumann 2001). Besides the above features, in the process of the development of reformist organisations, there was a re-evaluation of Buddhism to help it fit with modernity and Western ideas, especially when they confronted with British imperialism, Western thoughts, and Christian missionaries before 20th century.

STRUCTURE OF ORGANISATION AND BUSINESS

The influence of modernity along the process of globalisation on Buddhism was observed from many aspects and discussed by many scholars (Baumann 2001; Borchert 2008; Lee and Ackerman 1997; McMahan 2008). From the above discussion on modernist compared with traditionalist Buddhism in Malaysia, the authors have observed some traits of Weber's idea of rationalisation in terms of the development of religion. As mentioned in the Introduction section, the authors will analyse the aspects of the structure of organisation and business in the five selected Buddhist organisations of Malaysia based on Weber's rationalisation model of calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism.

The Structure of Organisation

In the organisational chart of Kechara, the division of labour is based on hierarchy and specialisation. There are 13 departments in the Kechara management structure. As shown in Table 1, each department has its own function and specialisation. In some of the more established departments, we can observe the breakdown

of positions. For example, in Kechara House, positions such as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, committee, and administrator were created according to the modern corporate management style.

Table 1: Departments of the Kechara Buddhist Organisation

Departments	Description
Kechara House	The main Dharma centre
Kechara Animal Sanctuary	A protect for undesirable, helpless and abandoned animals
Kechara Care	A centre for visitors and information
Kechara Discovery	It provides sources for statues at the Kechara Heaven outlets and also organises trips to holy places
Kechara in Motion	A film production house
Kechara Lounge	A lounge and information centre close to the world-famous Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal
Kechara Media and Publications	A publishing house
Kechara Oasis	A vegetarian restaurant
Kechara Paradise	Retail outlets, offering handicrafts and artefacts from the Himalayan region
Kechara Saraswati Arts	A Dharma arts studio
Kechara Soup Kitchen	A community action group that distributes food, and provides medical aid and counselling to the urban poor
Tsem Ladrang	The headquarters of the organisation
Kechara World Peace Centre	The future spiritual sanctuary and alternative learning centre in Malaysia

Source: Kechara (n.d.).

This form of modern scientific management structure is common in most of the modern Buddhist organisations in the contemporary context. The modern structure also shows that there is an alteration in the structure of authority exercise in the modernist Buddhist organisation from traditional authority to modern rational-legal form. For instance, all the departments in the Kechara Buddhist Organisation, except the Tsem Ladrang, are led by professional laities. The leaders in these different departments possess specific qualification, knowledge, experience, and skills to meet the needs or achieve the goals of different divisions in the organisation.

Tzu Chi also shares similar forms of organisational structure, like Kechara, with respect to division of labour. However, in its structure, the aspect of hierarchy has been minimised in order to promote the spirit of equality and dynamism. Tzu Chi practices the concept of an Organisation of Concentric Circles, which emphasise the principle of egalitarianism. There is no rigid administration system in the

organisation. It is based on the rules, regulations, and correspondence for a shared objective. They perform various tasks but there is no hierarchy within the positions. Everybody sees each other as equivalent once they put on their organisation's attire, despite their profession. Since 2005, the spiritual leader, Master Cheng Yen changed the fundamental structure of Tzu Chi into four "circular" clusters, namely Unity, Harmony, Mutual Love, and Joint Effort (O'Neill 2010).

Each of these circular clusters comprises experienced commissioners and senior individuals in each major city. These clusters are liable for spiritual guidance and vital arranging of projects. Harmony clusters are responsible for planning and coordinating projects. Mutual Love clusters comprise volunteers from a similar network and are accountable for distributing tasks and doing them. As for Joint Effort clusters, they are situated in a single neighbourhood and are liable for executing and finishing projects. There is a single centre for the four circular clusters and there are no bosses and no subordinates. Indeed, even the individuals from the Unity cluster will follow the co-ordination of the Joint Effort cluster when they are in their neighbourhoods. This makes Tzu Chi unique in comparison to other associations in terms of organisational hierarchy (O'Neill 2010). According to Cheng Yen, there is a three-dimensional concentric circle in an ideal organisational structure. This structure is deemed accomplished if everybody in the organisation fulfils his or her obligations and considers, communicates, and helps one another, thus accomplishing the tasks productively (Her 2007). Different from Weber's ideal type bureaucracy, which eventually leads to dehumanisation, Tzu Chi lays emphasis to the value of egalitarianism in its organisation. Besides, it also highlights the value of "universal love" or "great love" (da ai 大爱) and this has enabled Tzu Chi's charity work to transcend the boundaries of religion, race, and nation. All these values are crucial in practicing "humanistic Buddhism".

In Weber's idea, the rationalisation in religion is tied to concrete groups of individuals, especially to the professionally trained priesthood. They are the carriers and facilitators of rationalisation. Through a systematic training, the priests have an orderly set of religious concepts that separate them from magicians. Hence, the priests are the products and, at the same time, the facilitators of the process of rationalisation. Weber also highlighted the role of prophets (such as Muhammad, Jesus Christ, and Buddha) and laity in the process of rationalisation, but eventually, the priests will replace the role of prophets and laity will be cultivated and further strengthen the priesthood (Ritzer 2010). This phenomenon is evident in some of the visited Buddhist organisations. For example, in the interview with some laities and priests in Tzu Chi, Buddhist Light, and Kechara, the quotations of the teachings or personal examples in their narratives are more about the founding spiritual leaders, namely Master Hsing Yun, Master Cheng Yan, and H.E. Tsem

Tulku Rinpoche. These priests play the role similar to the chief executive officer (CEO) of modern bureaucratic corporation with multitasking ability. The different training, experience, and background of these priests affect the organisations' culture and, eventually, the organisational identity. In the aspect of professional training, more and more priests, or laities who are the leaders of the organisation, are post-graduate degree, such as master's and doctoral degree holders in different disciplines and mostly in Buddhist studies. In addition, NBS and BBN are managed by a committee elected by its members. The structure of NBS is like any other Buddhist society,¹ whereas the members of BBN are of mixed Buddhist background and are businesspersons. They are involved in various fields of business (Buddhist Business Network Official Website n.d.).

The history of the formation of the visited organisations witnessed the efforts and important roles of the laity. Compared to the past, the laity are currently given the tasks that are more important in the development of their organisation. For instance, there is a system created by Master Hsing Yun of BLIA to acknowledge the status of "Lay Dharma Lecturers". The selection and promotion of these lay dharma lecturers are based on a standard criterion stated in the constitution of the association. Moreover, this step of forming the System of Lay Dharma Lecturer was taken to meet the needs of modernisation. It was considered a revolution in the development of Buddhism because it is forbidden in traditional Buddhism (Man 2005). Therefore, in the modern context, the laities actively study the selective Buddhist scriptures and are strongly influenced by the published texts written by their spiritual leaders. In other words, the laity is enabled by the structure and they actively employ structures such as the Buddhist temple and centre as a resource and regulation in proselytising Buddhist teachings in their community.

In the modern structure, the laities have greater opportunity in making decision and freedom in exercising their knowledge for the advancement of proselytising Buddhist teachings. For example, the leader of NBS had fully utilised this freedom in the design of the dwelling place. As we know, one of the great differences between modern Buddhism and traditional Buddhism is their building. Most of the modern Buddhist organisations run their operations from the shop-lot in the city. NBS is one of them that operates in this kind of setting. In this limited space, the founder of NBS, Dr. Tan Ho Soon, fully utilises the space and design to disseminate Buddhist teachings. According to him, the interior design of the centre is an imitation of the ancient Srivijaya-era temple architecture and is cleverly dabbed with 220 hidden Buddhist symbolisms in the architecture and interior design based on Theravadian doctrine. For instance, at the two pillars in the shrine hall, the words "wisdom" and "virtue" are engraved at the back of each of them, which symbolise the fundamental values in the teaching and practice of

Buddhism. There are doctrinal teachings and clear meaning or message behind each of the symbolisms. This practice highlights rationality in modern Buddhism in demanding true knowledge in belief and discourages the believers to follow the traditions blindly. The design of the Nalanda Buddhist Centre aims at serving the different needs of the urbanites. It functions as a congregation place for Buddhists to perform spiritual practices, take an interest in social and community services, become involved in Dharma lessons and discussions, as well as provide leadership and administrative training. At the same time, it also serves as an important referral centre for Buddhist Studies in Malaysia and has a well-stocked library.

In the context of modernity, modern Buddhist organisation bureaucrats have rationalised its structure. They actively reinterpret and reconstruct the old structure and create new structures for practicality to serve the needs of the modern society based on their rationality. The modern pragmatic needs have demanded the structure to be flexible and dynamic in its form. Bureaucratisation is one of the manifestations of rationalisation in modern world. The five selected Buddhist organisations were found “rationalised” and subjected to the bureaucratising process. Finally, they have developed into bureaucratic organisations with a high degree of differentiation in administrative practice. Such finding is related to Lippmann and Aldrich’s (2003) statement that in Weber’s mind, bureaucracies were the epitome of modern social organisation as they organised along rational lines, highlighted by the abstract, universal, and regular execution of authority and application of standards.

In terms of rationalisation, the five organisations demonstrate different levels of rationalisation. Compared to other four organisations, the Kechara Buddhist Organisation has the most detailed breakdown of the division of labour and organisational hierarchy in its structure. This aspect closely related to the business venture approach used by the organisation to raise fund for spreading the dharma. The detailed division in organisational structure enables the organisation to predict, measure, and evaluate the achievement of the organisation in a more specific manner, especially in examining and calculating the profit or loss of each business-related division. This is in line with Weber’s rationalisation model that emphasises calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism.

Buddhist Business

In economic sociology, Max Weber was concerned about modern rational capitalism. The aspects of rationality, calculation, and systematic pursuit of given ends have found their almost predestined application. Hence, Weber used modern capitalism as his model where his concept of “rationality” is constructed (Kolegar

1964). In Weber's Protestant Ethic essays, he contends that religious beliefs and practices made an important contribution to the breakdown of economic traditionalism and the emergence of modern rational capitalism (McKinnon 2010). His thesis in relating the ethics of ascetic Protestantism and the development of the spirit of modern capitalism in the Western world has provided a good platform for scholars to discuss the relationship between religion and business. In his thesis, Weber argued that the religious thoughts of groups such as the Calvinists played a key role in building the capitalistic spirit. To him, the modern spirit of capitalism deems profit as an end and seeking profit as ethical. His aim was to understand the basis of this spirit and he turned to Protestantism for a possible explanation (Ritzer 2010).

Weber also stated that Protestantism provides a concept of the worldly "calling" and assigns worldly activity a religious character. This conception of the "calling" offers religious rewards to the accomplishment of worldly obligations and supports the discontinuity from traditionalism that had discouraged the quest of material achievements beyond sustaining basic individual needs. Thus, profit and material success were valued as marks of God's favour. Righteousness and profitability were now not seen as contradictory but connected (Cheung and Hou 2006).

In short, Weber's effort on the correlation between religion and capitalism reflected his thought on rationalisation, the notion that the world is becoming gradually dominated by values and norms of rationalisation. His study scrutinised how the West created a distinctively rational religious system (Calvinism) that played a key role in the rise of a rational economic system (capitalism) (Ritzer 2010).

Furthermore, Helble (2006) reported that Buddhism is an exceptionally adaptable and diversified belief. In the context of trade and business, Buddhism does not comprise clear rules or regulations for economic behaviour. However, Buddhist social ethics do provide a few suggestions on economic issues. For instance, in Buddha's teachings, monks and nuns are not allowed to take money as donation. All gifts must be given in kind and the contributors get religious instruction in return. In Buddha's context, he likewise demands for direct economic relations between men, without the intermediation of cash. Only when men can monitor their economic relations is the stability of the entire system ensured.

Among the modern Buddhist organisations, Tzu Chi is considered one of the organisations with a strong financial background. The headquarters of Tzu Chi in Taiwan is the richest charitable organisation in Taiwan, with an endowment of NT\$26.3 billion (US\$800 million) and annual donation of NT\$10 billion (US\$300 million) in 2005. What has enabled Tzu Chi to become the wealthiest charity in

Taiwan is the scale of its donations and its ability to raise large sums in a short time. One of the reasons for the amazing generosity is the personal charisma of Cheng Yen, who, for more than four decades, has convinced people of her compassion and honesty and that their money will be well spent on projects that will bring real benefit to others. The trust and belief in Cheng Yen herself is the single most important factor that contributes to the high level of donations (O'Neill 2010).

The second reason for the high level of donations is the effective use of the money. Almost less than 5% of the donation is spent on administrative costs. The foundation has set up a system of dedicated accounts, for overseas aid, medical work, education, television station, charity, or a particular construction project. Donors can choose into which account their money is paid and are given a receipt. They can monitor how it is spent, through their commissioner's report and the foundation's television station, radio, and print media (O'Neill 2010).

To help maintain probity and effectiveness, Cheng Yen has instituted two long-term policies. First, the expenditure is the same as or less than the income. That means projects drive the flow of money and not the other way round. The second is that the foundation does not invest in real estate, stocks, or other financial instruments, no matter how well the rate of return, and instead puts its money into projects or the bank. This is to ensure that Tzu Chi focuses on its missions and does not become an institution that concentrates on increasing the value of its assets. Besides, it wants to ensure that its one million volunteers are not left idle and that their energy and their talents are fully utilised (O'Neill 2010). Such policies are one of the rationalisations of Tzu Chi to ensure that its business venture is stable for the benefits of its members. It is in line with Weber's rationalisation model that emphasises calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism.

The above strategies employed by Cheng Yen reveal that the philosophy of Tzu Chi in business differs from the capitalism that stresses the extension of desire and self-satisfaction. It also differs from the liberalism that focuses on individual rights and realisation. Tzu Chi accentuates that the credible goal of an individual is a perfect heart, emerging from adoration and order. The expansion of desire will compel individuals to be imprisoned by insatiability from which they will never be liberated. The genuine soul of Buddha is to sanitise an individual's internal heart. Buddha urges the individual not to be constrained by emotion and his condition and not to be imprisoned by desire. He wants a calm that originates from self-restraint and is more profound than opportunity and more significant than anything else. In Tzu Chi, this idea is forged by magnanimous giving and testing an individual's weaknesses in a group. Since not every person in the group is equivalent, every

individual can transform their inadequacies into strength through association with others. Amidst affection, a person can free himself (Her 2007).

Cheng Yen suggested that to be free from the bonds of the capitalist system, one may practice two major Buddhist precepts. One is to adore all living creatures in the world. Cheng Yen requests volunteers to put aside their current work and go to a place of calamity, a hospital, or any place where poor and sick people are living, to protect life and share love (Her 2007). To them, these places are their “Dao Chang” (道场 – the venue of dao), the places where they learn and practice Buddhism. As the monk learns by reading a holy text and debating with his colleagues in the temple, Tzu Chi volunteer learns from bathing a hospital patient, comforting a bereaved relative, and distributing aid to flood victims. Cheng Yen’s mission is to implement Buddhism in the human world, in the society of today, so the volunteers must go where people are in need of help. The other is to protect the Earth. Thousands of Tzu Chi volunteers are working in this mission, recycling the assets of the environment and serving the land. They treasure all things and they love individuals. The worth of an individual’s life cannot be found in the wealth and consumption yet in contentment and the commitment of affection and selflessness.

In short, Master Cheng Yen’s reasoning and the acts of Tzu Chi individuals offer modern soul a spiritual outlet; in other words, adoration, self-discipline, and good behaviour. Cheng Yen’s philosophy and practice strongly oppose the practices of capitalism, such as accumulation of wealth, maximisation, and consumption. This leads to Tzu Chi volunteers calling themselves as “zhi gong 志工” rather than “yi gong 義工” because they serve people with wholeheartedness (as the mandarin character “zhi 志” has a word “heart 心” in it) and with an attitude of selflessness (as the mandarin of “yi 義” has a word “me or self 我” in it). As a comparison, in Weber’s work “The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism”, Weber starts over with the denial of the perspective on capitalism as an aspiration for gaining the profit (Degtiarova 2012).

Among the selected modernist Buddhist organisations, certain business activities are being carried out as one of their ways to generate income besides collecting donation and as a channel to teach Buddhism. The *Jing-si* Books and Cafe situated in Kota Kinabalu, for example, operates with the aim to generate extra income for the Tzu Chi Foundation in Malaysia. According to one of the fulltime staffs there, there are 10 *Jing-si* Books and Cafes in Malaysia. Other than drinks and some light food, clothing, bags, luggage, food containers, and other daily essential goods are displayed for sale in *Jing-si* Books and Cafe of Kota Kinabalu. The goods are made of recycled materials and the food sold there is vegetarian. The operating

costs of such business are different from other types of non-Tzu Chi businesses. The business premise situated on the ground floor of Karamuning Shopping Complex is sponsored by one of the foundation's members. In other words, there is no rental involvement. Besides, other than two fulltime workers, the rest of the workers are voluntary workers. With such support, the *Jing-si* Books and Cafe makes good profit. All the income of *Jing-si* Books and Cafe is channelled back to the foundation for charity works.

Other than Tzu Chi, Kechara Buddhist Organisation also engages in some business ventures. In fact, since its inception, this organisation started a business outlet called Kechara Paradise. Of the 13 departments of Kechara, four of them specifically focus on business and providing services. For instance, Kechara Paradise serves as a learning centre for Himalayan arts and crafts, Kechara Oasis serves as a new age vegetarian restaurant, Kechara in Motion provides services such as audio and visual production, and Kechara Discovery focuses on organising pilgrimage trips to Himalaya.

There are Buddhist values in the business venture of Kechara. For example, in the mission statement of the Kechara Paradise website, it is stated that the reasons for the business is to disseminate Dharma teachings and plant Dharmic seeds to the individuals who are looking for it; to empower individuals in their Dharma practice by giving all the necessities; to support the poor, those less lucky and the destitute from all their returns; to serve both the spiritual and non-spiritual clients by giving a retail treatment of beauty and artistry that is genuine to the identity of the Himalayans; and to help the ancient traditional artistry and mastery of the Himalayan craftspeople by making their products accessible to all. These purposes clearly portray some core values in Buddhism, such as sharing Buddhist teachings, being merciful and fulfilling others' spiritual and physical needs. These purposes may not provide a "calling" or a set of ethics that help create a spirit of capitalism as Weber suggested.

Another aspect that may become a barrier to the possibility of Buddhist ethics creating the modern capitalist is the issue of applying Buddhist values in doing business. An interview with an anonymous Theravada businessperson who is actively involved in a Buddhist centre revealed that the values in Buddhist teachings do not really affect the way the informant runs his business because he has separated business matters from spiritual matters. He said,

Business is business. Business venture is to make money. That is the purpose of doing business. Buddhist teachings don't affect much the way I do my business, almost not at all. Yes, maybe as a Buddhist, at

least I don't do illegal business... To be able to sell my products, most of the time I have to hide the truth or to tell lie as others do. I have to face reality; money is important in life. Don't talk about religion if you don't have money. You can't even donate a single cent if you don't have money. If you don't have money, how could you practice filial piety? You can't even afford to fulfil your parents' need and give them money to join overseas tour and make them happy!

As a social actor, this informant separates his spiritual moment and secular moment in his daily life. When he is in the Buddhist centre and interacting with other Buddhists, he practices Buddhist values. When asked why he is still involved actively in the Buddhist centre since he does not apply Buddhist teachings in his business, he justified that his purpose of joining the Buddhist centre is to seek a peace of mind through the practice of meditation. We relate the personal revelation of this informant to the statement by Kovacs (2014) that people are more sensitive to losses than gains, thus the minimisation of losses could be a rational economic goal. This concept may apply to some religious businesspersons who are sensitive to losses than gains, like the above informant who has separated Buddhist teachings from his business dealings to gain profit. Likewise, Chang (2003) assumed that religious values are necessary to secularise if they involve decision makers who are concerned with both moral choices and organisationally efficient choice. On the contrary, Kovacs (2014) stressed that Buddhist economic activities are based on bounded rationality, non-self, imperfect decision-making, and aims at the reduction of suffering. In addition, Ashtankar (2015) conducted a study that focused on the relevancy of Buddhism for business management and highlighted that profit maximisation should not be the goal of a Buddhist's business. In this respect, we agree with Gould (1995) that while a Buddhist perspective has historically shaped organisations and societies, in terms of Buddhist business ethic, it is based on the individual's sense of self-responsibility.

The above discussions also highlighted a difference between the nature of traditionalist and modernist Buddhism as discussed by some scholars like Baumann (2001), Borchert (2008), Lee and Ackerman (1997), and McMahan (2008). In traditional Buddhism, the focus lies more on gaining merits for the next life and for a pragmatic reason such as fulfilling needs in life. The believers hope to live a better life, either the current life or the next life by doing good deeds such as donation and following the temple monk's instruction in performing certain rituals. For modern Buddhism, the focus lies more on achieving "enlightenment" in this life by learning Buddhism and meditation. In fact, there is no clear boundary in this comparison. The Buddhists who are involved in the modern Buddhist organisation may keep on practicing the culture of traditional Buddhism.

For instance, a successful tycoon in construction and development industry and a strong sponsor to Kechara told his story about his relationship with his Guru, the Protector Lord, and how their relationship met his needs in business venture (Kechara 2012). The tycoon believes that his Guru and the Lord are one and he relies heavily on the Protector's prediction in his business venture. He concluded that to be successful in his business, he must be a good disciple and not let his ignorance overtake the devotion to his Guru and the Protector. If he did so, he would face problems in business. In other words, he has relented and would fulfil his Guru's request at his best. We deem such belief as an individualistic belief that does not represent all the Kechara members.

Of the five selected Buddhist organisations, the BBN is the most business-oriented organisation. The aims of setting up BBN are to generate business with the Buddhist community, to promote business practices in accordance with the Dharma through education, and to pool funds from successful referrals and conduct fund raising to help promote education for children in need (BBN n.d.). All the BBN members are businesspersons in various fields, like wealth consultancy, insurance, innovation and creativity skills training, automation control systems and many more (BBN n.d.). The study found that BBN's business strategies are in accordance with Weber's rationalisation capitalism concepts, especially its strategies of educating and developing skills and expertise in business and developing network through business. These are the modern rationalisation capitalism concepts, but for the BBN members, they do business aligned with the Buddhist values too. Based on the Biz Meet talk series organised by BBN, such as "Successful Property Investment with a Buddhist Heart" and "Business Social Responsibly and Dhamma in Action" and so on (BBN n.d.), it can be concluded that BBN's rationalisation, that is, earning money through business, is important but the believers shall not side-line the Buddhist values too.

On the other hand, some of the Buddhist organisations of Malaysia focus on the traditional teachings of Buddhism and do not focus on business venture to generate income. Two of the selected organisations in this article focus more on the traditional aspect of Buddhism. The BLIA only focuses on the participation in Dharma services and activities that are beneficial to the society at large (BLIA n.d.) and the NBS only focuses on its Buddhist teaching-related educational programmes like Dharma courses, camps, meditation retreats, public forums, conferences, and seminars.² In this case, the Buddhist's norms and values do not rationalise the believers to accumulate wealth as their goal and then create the spirit of capitalism. Moreover, the compartmentalisation of a person's life with separation of spiritual life from secular life has undermined the influence of Buddhist teaching in a person's business activities. At the same time, the traditional Buddhist element,

such as putting faith on the prediction of the spiritual leaders, which does not require Buddhist knowledge, was also observed in this study.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study has filled in the research gap left by Tang (2004), Ang (2005), Nur Suriya (2018), and Tan (2020) in terms of the structure of organisation and the business of the Buddhist organisations of Malaysia. The use of Weber's concept of rationalisation in terms of calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism to analyse the field data as well as the secondary data has helped discover some in-depth social realities related to the structure of organisation and the business concepts among the Buddhist organisations not found in the previous literature.

The analysis of the research found that two out of five selected Buddhist organisations, namely Kechara and Tzu Chi, are highly structured and formalised. These organisations also have a defined hierarchical structure and clear rules, regulations, and lines of authority that govern it. Furthermore, they have been creatively and dynamically modifying and creating the structure in the organisation to fulfil the organisational goal and, at the same time, to achieve their religious destination. In other words, the bureaucracy of both organisations is in line with Weber's rationalisation model that emphasised calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism.

The study also found BLIA and NBS are not involved in business activities but rely on donations from the believers to run their organisations. However, Kechara, Tzu Chi, and BBN do actively participate in business activities to generate their own income. The elements of calculability, predictability, control, and capitalism are significant in their operations. Buddhist ethics were applied in their business dealings focusing on the individual's sense of responsibility and accountability. Overall, this article has highlighted the similarities and differences of the five selected contemporary Buddhist organisations in Malaysia with respect to their structure of organisation and business involvement based on Weber's concepts of rationalisation.

NOTES

1. Telephone interview with one of the administrative staff of NBS, 20 October 2021.
2. Ibid.

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