

# The Traditions and Rituals of the Muslim People in Sam Poo Kong Temple (*Kelenteng*) in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—Sam Poo Kong Temple is a place where Tridharma adherents (Taoists, Confucians and Buddhists) are believed to have met with Cheng Ho (a Chinese Muslim from China) who arrived on the Indonesian archipelago, especially Semarang, in the fifteenth century. The temple is not only a place of worship for Tridharma adherents, but also frequently visited by Muslims who perform rituals in which they plead for something to Sam Poo Kong manifested in the form of a statue in the temple. This paper explains the practices and traditions carried out by some Muslims in Java, especially in Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang in Central Java, which aim to solve the personal problems they face each day. Some Javanese Muslims strongly believe that the Sam Poo Kong god provide help to anyone who needs it. The aid of Sam Poo Kong is sought through a ceremony. Herein lies the uniqueness of Indonesia as a pluralistic, majority-Muslim country where people respect each other's differences to maintain social harmony.

**Keywords:** *Muslim, ritual, Sam Poo Kong Temple, Islam Nusantara*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sam Poo Kong Temple is a very historically important Chinese temple in the city of Semarang in Central Java. It was founded by Chinese people in Indonesia with the aim of recognizing the services of Cheng Ho (a Chinese Muslim from China) who came to the Nusantara (Indonesian archipelago) in the fifteenth century. The temple is not only visited by Chinese Taoists, Confucians and Buddhists (i.e. Tridharma adherents) who wish to worship there, but also by followers of other faiths, such as Muslims and Christians. People who come to Sam Poo Kong Temple have a variety of purposes. Some would just like to see the temple up close, while others want to petition for something to Sam Poo Kong or Cheng Ho, hoping that what they desire will come about in accordance with their expectations.

Today, Sam Poo Kong Temple functions not only as a place of worship for Chinese people, but also as a tourist destination for visitors to Semarang, including Muslims. For this reason, everyone who visits the temple must buy an entrance ticket, as is the case for visits to other tourist attractions in Indonesia. But the temple is not just an historical site, place of worship,

or tourist destination; it is also a sacred place for those who believe in it. Although against Islamic teachings, such as the prohibition of requesting for something from someone other than God, the Muslim community who already believed in Cheng Ho and the statue of the gods inside the temple ignored the prohibition and continued to perform the rituals in it and entreaty Sam Poo Kong. For the members of the Muslim community who came to Sam Poo Kong Temple, Cheng Ho was not only considered as a Muslim figure in the Chinese emperor's envoy, but also as a god who could grant assistance to people who required it.

This article is based on field research conducted at Sam Poo Kong Temple one year ago. It aims to describe and explain the practices carried out by Muslims who came to this temple. Usually, Muslims petition for something they want when they are performing their daily prayers in the mosque; they typically do not perform rituals and entreaty to gods in other places of worship or temples. But this paper focuses on Muslims who perform rituals in Sam Poo Kong Temple, not the vast majority of Muslims who do not perform such rituals or non-Muslims.

## II. METHOD

The method used to collect data for the composition of this article is a qualitative method, namely, by conducting observations and in-depth interviews with selected informants. Observations were made at Sam Poo Kong Temple during visits to it to witness the practices and rituals performed by Muslims therein. Interviews were conducted with several reliable informants. The results of in-depth interviews with these informants constitute data that can be put in writing in the form of articles read by many people, especially academics. Interviews were conducted with Muslims visiting Sam Poo Kong Temple to worship and request something from Sam Poo Kong (Cheng Ho). Not all Muslims who came to Sam Poo Kong Temple were interviewed, but rather only a few. Interviews were also done with caretakers of the Sam Poo Kong Temple because they know many of the temple's visitors and help them by acting as mediators between the devotees and the Sam Poo Kong god inside the temple. The results of the interviews are written in a research report and an article for publication.

### A. Theoretical Review

The abovementioned practice of certain Muslims in Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang is a form of ritual repeated at different times according to their needs. There are several theories about rituals carried out by a community and religious people, including those of Turner, Van Gennap and Marcel Mauss.[1] Turner[2] states that ritual is an expression of the failure of a secular mechanism in resolving conflicts within and between communities. Through rituals, different village communities can be united and reestablish harmony between one another. Mauss,[3] believes that in every ritual there is a process of exchange between humans and humans, humans and God, or gods and spirits. The abovementioned practice of certain Muslims in Sam Poo Kong Temple can also be seen as a form of exchange between humans and spirits and between humans and humans. Gennap[4] considered that rituals are always present in human life, from the moment one is born until one dies, but that they are more prevalent during certain periods of the human life cycle. For example, birth, marriage and death rituals are routinely carried out by a community. Some of these theories can be used as references in examining the practices and rituals performed by some Muslims from Central Java and other regions of Indonesia in Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang.

### B. Literature Review

Several books and journals can be used as sources in writing articles about the practice of Muslims in Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang. Among them is a book by M. IkhsanTanggok entitled *Nusantara Islamic Practices in Several Temples in Indonesia*, published by Ushul News in Jakarta in 2015.[5] This book explains Nusantara Islam practices in Ancol temple, Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang, and Tuban temple in Surabaya. The shortcoming of this book is that it does not simply focus on one temple to and the presence of the Muslim community therein, but looks at several temples that are different from one another. This book is my main source for this article, though it is supplemented with field research.

The second book is also authored by M. IkhsanTanggok and is entitled, *Ceng Ho Dewa Dagang (Cheng Ho as Deity of Commerce)* and published by Pelita Kebajikan in Jakarta in 2005.[6] The book describes Cheng Ho's visits to several cities in Indonesia in the fifteenth century, including many to Semarang and details the history of the founding of the Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang and its reconstruction in 2002.

The next book was written by Meorthiko[7] and is entitled, *Kelenteng, Vihara, Lithang, Tridharma Temple in Java*, published by the Secretariat Empeh Wong Kam Fu in Semarang in 1980. The book does not restrict itself to Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang but rather looks at temples all over Java island.

The final source is an article by M. IkhsanTanggok,[8] under the title, "The Role of

Chinese Communities to the Spread of Islam in Indonesia". It surveys the history of Cheng Ho's arrival in the Indonesian archipelago in the fifteenth century. It shows that Cheng Ho not only established political relations and conducted trade in the archipelago, but also had a mission to spread Islam there.

### C. Worship of Sam Poo Tay Kam

Let us first acquaint ourselves with Sam Poo Tay Kam. One written story informs us about him. According to it, during the reign of Bing's kingdom in China, Emperor Bing Sing Cou, who was quite famous, used the title Eng Lok Kun. In his kingdom there were many commanders, including the first, second, third and so forth, each in accordance with the position held by the particular commander in the kingdom. Bing Sing Cou had a palace guard named "The Ho." For his loyalty to the king, The Ho was awarded a royal title by him. The knighthood was known as Sam Poo Kong Tay Kam. Sam Poo Kong means the third commander and Tay Kam designates a palace guard; Sam Poo Kong Tay Kam thus refers to the third guard in the kingdom in charge of guarding the king's palace.

Since the awarding of the royal title, the name "The Ho" was hardly used anymore. People now called him Sam Poo Tay Kam; the title, that is, which means "the third commander of the palace guard".[9] Sam Poo Tay Kam is actually another name for Cheng Ho. The latter name is not found in Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang, but the name Sam Poo Tay Jin is. The latter name is written on the nameplate in the Cheng Ho worship hall. The temple administrators and visitors present to ask Zheng Ho for something were not too familiar with the name Che Ho, preferring to call him instead Sam Poo Tay Jin, not Sam Po Tay Kam. Who is Sam Poo Tay Jin? Sam Poo Tay Jin is, in fact, none other than Cheng Ho, and the name written at the entrance gate of Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang reads, "Kelenteng [Temple] Sam Poo Kong," not "Kelenteng Cheng Ho".

### D. The Temple and Worship of Sam Poo Kongor Cheng Ho

Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang does not call itself a "monastery" (vihara) as most temples in Indonesia since the New Order and until now do. It does not also use designate itself as the Cheng Ho Temple after the figure who is primarily worshipped therein.[10] If the temple is termed a monastery, then it is under the auspices and supervision of the Director-General of Buddhism, as many temples in Indonesia are today. Nonetheless, this temple is still under the supervision of the Director-General of Buddhism of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

Who is Sam Poo Kong or Cheng Ho? Sam Poo Kong or Cheng Ho (Chinese Muslim) means the third commander from China who came to Indonesian Archipelago, particularly Semarang, Central Java in the 15th century.[11] To remember the arrival of

Cheng Ho in Semarang, Chinese Community in Semarang built a temple in 1724 (Kong Yuanzhi).[12] It was named the temple (kelenteng) Sam Poo Kong. Now this temple is not only functioned as a place to remember Sam Poo Kong Cheng Ho, but also functioned as a place to worship and ask for something to Sam Poo Kong or Cheng Ho. As mentioned earlier, people who come to Sam Poo Kong Temple have various intentions and objectives. Generally, however, they visit it to ask Sam Poo Kong or Cheng Ho for something. The visitors are typically traders, both men and women. The merchandise they sell and buy varies. Some of them are clothing merchants in Jakarta, Semarang and other areas in Indonesia, while others trade electronics and yet others are food vendors.

Usually, people who come to this temple consider Sam Poo Tay Kam or Cheng Ho as a trader originating from China and who traded in various countries, including Indonesia. Because he was merely considered a merchant and not a messenger of the Chinese emperor, he was at this time called a "trade god" by some people who came to Sam Poo Kong Temple. One of the people's objectives in coming to Sam Poo Kong Temple, as noted earlier, is to request something from Sam Poo Kong. But he was also regarded as the god of salvation for traders because most of the merchants who petitioned him for good fortune subsequently received it in abundance. This is why many of the people who come here are traders who want the sale of their merchandise to render greater profits. Because Sam Poo Kong was a pious Muslim, it is not surprising that, in addition to non-Muslims,[13] Muslims from various regions in Indonesia and some even from Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei also visited the temple. The name Sam Poo Kong or Cheng Ho is thus not only known in Indonesia, but also other countries.

In general, people who come to Sam Poo Kong Temple are small traders, though some are major traders or entrepreneurs. They are either Muslims or non-Muslims from Semarang and other regions in Indonesia. On the night of "Ce It" (1st night based on Chinese calendar) and the night of the 15th (based on Chinese calendar), mostly Chinese non-Muslims come to Sam Poo Kong Temple. On Friday night kliwon (based on Javanese calendar), in contrast, mostly Muslims of various ethnicities and regions in Indonesia visit the temple.

On Friday night kliwon, some of the temple visitors I spoke with were Muslims and were deliberately visiting the temple to request something from Sam Poo Kong. Their Muslim identity can also be discerned from their clothes, such as the hijab. According to the temple clerks, those who come to the temple on the 1st and 15th of the Chinese New Year are Confucians, Buddhists, and a few Christians (including Catholics). Some people say that Sam Poo Kong Temple is not just a place of worship or a place to entreaty the gods, but also a place that unites people of various ethnicities and religions. Indeed, this temple can be considered as a symbol of unity among ethnic groups in Indonesia[14] because people of various

ethnicities gather in it to perform rituals in accordance with their respective beliefs.

Just as the reasons why people come to this temple are sundry, their particular requests to Sam Poo Kong also vary. Some of them asked Sam Poo Kong for progress and success in their trading businesses (e.g. Mrs. Zubaidah from Jakarta), to quickly find a partner, to request medicine, and to get the winning lottery number that will make them rich. With respect to the latter, if they are granted it by Sam Poo Kong, then they will come back for the same purpose; if they do not get the winning number and end up losing in gambling, then they will not return to ask him for numbers and instead search out other places considered sacred in pursuit of the number. There was also a woman who came to the temple to ask for her husband to stop gambling and getting drunk and some who visited it to ensure their children's college studies ran smoothly and experienced no obstacles.

The caretaker of the temple (or biokong) always tells temple visitors that Sam Poo Kong cannot give exact lottery numbers. Nonetheless, there are always visitors seeking just that, but certainly this depends on the beliefs of each person. Their assumption is that Sam Poo Kong is the same as the other gods in being able to grant them the winning number and good luck. There are also people who simply try to ask for the winning number from Sam Poo Kong. If they receive it, whether through a dream or some other means, they believe it is due to Sam Poo Kong's aid. For them, perhaps Sam Poo Kong gave them good numbers through dreams and not through rituals performed in the temple.

Beyond those who visit Sam Poo Kong Temple to procure winning lottery numbers, there are also Muslim traders who come to it asking Sam Poo Kong for their merchandise to sell well in the market. If the merchandise is in demand, then he will benefit a lot. If he earns much profit, he will not forget to thank Sam Poo Kong. One woman wearing a hijab came to Sam Poo Kong Temple on kliwon (according to Javanese calendar) Friday night to ask for help. She explained:

*I have come to this temple three times precisely on kliwon Friday night. I asked the god for my trading business to run smoothly and thank God it has. I also asked the Sam Poo Kong god for everything to go smoothly for my child who was studying at one of the public universities in Bogor. Thanks be to God, now my son's college is over and he works at a reputable company in Jakarta. Even though my child has succeeded, I do not forget to always visit this temple to request whatever I want because I am very indebted to him.*

This woman did not keep the secret of her success to herself; she also told other trader friends of hers. Some of the latter believed in the story and followed her example by asking Sam Poo Kong as well,[15] at

Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang. It is through such mouth-to-mouth story sharing that the number of visitors to Sam Poo Kong Temple each day and its fame amongst the wider community increase.

There are certain rules to be followed by visitors to Sam Poo Kong Temple. Those coming to pray or request something from Sam Poo Kong or other gods in the temple must first buy joss stick from the place it is sold in the temple. The temple administrator provides a place for selling joss stick and other prayer equipment, such as red candles and paper money. The price of a prayer kit (joss/incense stick, candle, and paper money) is estimated to be around 30,000 Rupiah. Once purchased, the prayer items are brought to the area to worship Sam Poo Kong or a special room to worship and ask for something from Sam Poo Kong. For Muslims who come to the temple, the joss stick is first handed over to the temple caretaker for use in prayer. Before one begins one's pray to Sam Poo Kong, the caretaker first asks several things to the person who came, including his/her intention, his/her name, where he/she came from, and what problems he/she has been experiencing. After acquiring the information he is seeking, the caretaker begins burning the incense stick which the supplicant gave him and prays to Thian (God) on the altar where Thian is worshipped. Praying to Thian is equivalent to asking God for His blessing to pray in this place. This stage of the ritual is based on the Chinese belief that one must ask permission from Thian before requesting anything from Sam Poo Kong. Having finished praying to God in the manner that the Chinese pray to Thian, the caretaker petitions for something to Sam Poo Kong. The caretaker's job here is thus to ask Thian and Sam Poo Kong for something on behalf of people who need help, and so functions as a mediator between Thian, Sam Poo Kong, and the people seeking aid.

We must understand how Thian is prayed to in every Chinese temple, including Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang. The prayer is performed by facing the open landscape, the sky, or towards the altar where Thian is prayed to, while the joss stick that has been burned is raised to the head as many as three times and one's head lowered three or four times. There are also certain temples, such as Ancol Temple in Jakarta, that provide a special altar for prayers to Thian. Visitors who wish to pray to Thian there must face the altar.[16] After completing the prayer at Thian, one incense stick stem is inserted into a holder (hiolo) and the remainder of the joss stick that has been burned is used by the caretaker to worship or report to Men Shen, the god of the door (the worship altar is located in the middle before entering Sam Poo Kong's area of worship). After the prayer to the god of the door is completed or the purpose of the prayer reported, the joss stick is inserted into the holder of the doorkeeper god. Every statue worshipped in a temple must have an altar on top of which is a holder. When in front of the god of the door, the devotee must ask the latter for permission to pray to Sam Poo Kong. The devotee need not wait for an answer to this request; it

is only a matter of informing Thian as after doing so he/she will pray to Sam Poo Kong to assist people who need help or simply worship him.

One who asks for help directly observes the temple guard conduct a prayer to Thian. If the prayer to Thian is considered complete, the caretaker enters a room where Sam Poo Kong is worshipped carrying three or four rods of incense stick remaining over from the worship of Thian and the god of the door. In front of the altar of worship at Sam Poo Kong, the caretaker starts to pray to or worship Sam Poo Kong again, and asks that the desires of those visiting the temple be fulfilled. The supplicants themselves are situated behind the caretaker. After worshipping or petitioning to Sam Poo Kong, the caretaker inserts the joss stick in the holder in front of the Sam Poo Kong statue, an action indicating that the prayer to or worship of him is complete[17] and that the next activity can commence.

After completing the worship of or request for something to Sam Poo Kong, the caretaker occupies the place of Ciam Si. The latter is an object in the form of bamboo chopsticks bearing Chinese characters and predictions. The Ciam Si bar is about 20 cm long and 1 cm wide, and on these bamboo stems the numbers 1-99 are written. The number of CiamSi is 99 sticks containing 99 predictions. One uses it to see one's fortune or the fortune one will get in the future. The numbers written on the CiamSi rod have Indonesian translations which can be retrieved from the front room of Sam Poo Kong Temple. The box for CiamSi is made of bamboo or plastic material and is as large as a standard drinking glass. After taking the CiamSi box, the caretaker returns to sit in front of the prayer altar and shake the box until one of the 99 CiamSi sticks falls out of its place. Hiolo is a holder for incense that has been lit with fire and used for prayer. According to information obtained from Google sources, hiolo is a necessary element stored or placed on the altar. Hiolo is made of very high-quality pure brass sold at a reasonable price. One hiolounit is 11.5cm in diameter, 9cm in height, 600gr in weight. The regular price of this type of hiolo is 140,000 Rp in the market but has now become more expensive in accordance with the passage of time.

I also cite here Yulianti's writings concerning fortune-telling as practised by Chinese people from generation to generation. In his article, "Predicting Chinese-style Fate with Bamboo Sticks," he writes[18] that "Chinese people are known to be reliable for making predictions. In addition to predicting with Feng Shui, even traditional ancient fortune-telling is still entrenched in their lives." Because fortune-telling involves the use of bamboo sticks, the prediction it makes is called the CiamSi predication that has been developing in Chinese society since long ago and until today.

The CiamSi forecast is a kind of fortune-telling game based on 100 papers of poetry and may be carried out at any time in the temple. This CiamSi prediction is also a medium for finding out the fortune

of one's fate whereby the participant must first follow the existing rules of the tradition by shaking small bamboo sticks (resembling chopsticks about 10 cm in size in a glass container), each possessing a number adjusted to the number of papers of poetry in the temple. Before the paper of poetry is shaken, someone must make a request through the first offer. After one mentions one's name and age in heart, one submits a request before the statue of the god above the altar, throwing two semicircular wooden pieces whose sides must be different. If the result of throwing two pieces of wood together shows the same side, then the person who would like to have a prediction will not have permission from the god to receive it. But if, on the contrary, the result of throwing two pieces of wood shows a different side, then that person can do the CiamSi forecast by shaking the bamboo stick in the glass container[19] and taking one bamboo stick that has come out of the glass. One bamboo stick already has numbers written on it and is matched with CiamSi prediction paper provided by the temple administrator or taped to the wall.[20] Thus, one discovers what kind of business they must do in the future through the instructions of the CiamSi prediction. One may also use CiamSi's prediction to forecast one's soul mate and other destinies.

Chinese communities wherever they are strongly believe in CiamSi's predictions and enact the practice every time they visit the temple. They also believe that the CiamSi prediction can lead them in the right direction in terms of choosing a type of work or business to pursue as well as grant them good guidance in general. The CiamSi forecast is a tool to show them what they can do now and in the future.

Almost every large temple in Indonesia practices the CiamSi prediction, including Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang. One of the features of Sam Poo Kong Temple that attracts people to it is the temple administrator's provision of a tool for making the CiamSi prediction. The CiamSi prediction tradition has been passed down from generation to generation in Chinese society. Every 1st and 15th, many Chinese people come to Sam Poo Kong Temple to ask Sam Poo Kong for something and carry out the CiamSi forecast. The number of Chinese people coming to the Sam Poo Kong Temple increases during the onset of the Chinese New Year (especially on the 1st and 15th of the first month of the Chinese New Year). Visitors who carry out the CiamSi prediction are not charged to enter, but monetary contributions to the temple clerk and temple administrator are not prohibited. In addition to Chinese visitors, Muslim ones who believe in the CiamSi prediction can also conduct it free of charge, but they must buy prayer equipment before doing so. If a visitor cannot do the Ciam Si prediction alone, he/she can ask for help from the temple clerk. Muslim visitors who believe in this prediction may also request the assistance of the temple clerk. The temple clerk is the mediator between the devotee and the gods worshipped in the temple.

After one of the Ciam Si bars is placed in the holder (hiolo), the caretaker then takes Po Pai, that is,

two semicircular pieces of wood on the prayer altar. Before the Po Pai are made to bounce, the caretaker asks permission from Sam Poo Kong by imagining him. Then after that PoPai is bounced and left to fall to the floor. If the PoPai fall down so that one of the two pieces of wood is facing down and the other facing up, Sam Poo Kong agrees. But if they fall down so that both are facing down or up, then Sam Poo Kong disagrees and CiamSi must be shaken and the tossing of PoPai must be repeated until everything goes as desired.[21] If what they do is in accordance with his wishes, then his heart will feel satisfied.

After everything is finished, the caretaker and supplicant proceed, while carrying a CiamSi obtained from the results of shaking, to a place or closet in the front room for worshipping Sam Poo Kong, located precisely to the left of the entrance to the room where the worship of Sam Poo Kong occurs. The room is a storage place for the ChiamSi translations into Indonesian. If when shaking ChiamSi one got the ChiamSi stem #1, then it is exchanged with the ChiamSi translation for stem #1, and the same process applies to the other numbers as each stem number has its own corresponding translation paper. Everyone wants to get a positive CiamSi that is in accordance with one's wishes. If one receives an answer from CiamSi that is quite good, then one's heart becomes peaceful.

Many people who obtain the Indonesian translations of Ciam Si still have difficulty understanding its content or words because the words or sentence are still quite general. They must thus have the temple clerk explain its meaning to them. The temple clerk is used by a devotee or one who wants to interpret the meaning of the words contained on the Ciam Si paper. To explain the meaning of the CiamSi and know the purpose of the forecast, the temple clerk requires fifteen minutes or half an hour. It is the temple clerk who can explain the meaning of the words contained in CiamSi.

A devotee naturally wants to know the results of CiamSi's predictions. The explanation of ChiamSi is not given in a formal way, but can be provided while standing or walking and may be heard by anyone who wants to listen. Even people who have no connection with people who come for a specific purpose to Sam Poo Kong ask the temple clerk. The latter is open to anyone requiring an explanation from him.[22] The explanation he gives is in accordance with the level of knowledge and education of the one asking for it. Not all Muslims who come to ask Sam Poo Kong for something have a low level of education; there are also some who are highly educated.

One who has received an explanation from the temple clerk may leave the temple. After acquiring an explanation from the temple clerk, a person or group of people who have worshipped and petitioned to Sam Poo Kong bring home the ChiamSi paper. A man keeps the latter in his wallet or other place, though usually in his wallet as there it acts like a "charm" or object that can prevent or protect one from any danger;

a woman keeps it in certain places. Sometimes the Chiam Si paper is kept in a special place a home to ensure the safety of a family. According to one devotee, Ciam Si paper may be stored in a wallet and carried everywhere as a charm, especially to one's work or trading business so that the merchandise sells well and gains much profit.[23] These are some of the beliefs about Chiam Si and its ability to help someone.

A woman named Aminah tells that she benefited significantly from trading after visiting Sam Poo Kong Temple several times and petitioning Sam Poo Kong: "Thanks be to God, [the sale of] my merchandise has greatly improved after petitioning the trade god Sam Poo Kong. Wherever I trade, I always bring the Chiam Si paper to be successful in trading. Therefore, I don't forget to ask for something I want at least once a week or once a month on Friday night when I come to Sam Poo Kong Temple." [24]

Everyone who visits Sam Poo Kong Temple has a different experience. Based on the experience of some Muslim visitors, one should ask for something from Sam Poo Kong repeatedly so that one's wishes will be fulfilled in accordance with what one is seeking. Some of the visitors' wishes were immediately granted, whereas others had to request repeatedly before theirs were answered. One Muslim who often visits Sam Poo Kong Temple recounts his experience:

*Requesting something from the Sam Poo Kong god [does not require one] to come to the temple; it can [also] be [done] from a long distance if we do not have time to go there. But if we have time [to go there, it is] much better to come directly to Sam Poo Kong Temple. Asking for something at the place where the Sam Poo Kong god is located is different from [doing so] at home, even though the request is directed at the Sam Poo Kong god.*

Some of the informants I conducted interviews with at Sam Poo Kong Temple wanted their names to be included in the reports of the interviews while others, for personal reasons, did not. According to one woman who wishes to remain anonymous:

*If we don't have time to visit Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang every kliwon Friday night or every month because we are too busy or it's too far, we can worship and ask Sam Poo Kong for something from a distance, such as from home, by constructing a prayer altar in a private room and placing prayer equipment on it. The altar that is in our house is made to resemble the prayer altar in Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang.*

To worship and request something from Sam Poo Kong, one needs to buy a prayer kit. The latter may include joss stick, candles, siukim paper or paper money or joss paper, and other items. One may purchase these objects at Sam Poo Kong Temple and they will last for seven acts of prayer, especially for Friday night at home. Some Muslims who visited Sam

Poo Kong Temple believe that prayers performed at the temple on the night of kliwon Friday are quickly granted in comparison to when done on other nights. But another visitor said, "If one has the opportunity to come to Sam Poo Kong Temple every month, that is better because asking for something in his place is preferable to doing so remotely." Requesting something remotely need not necessarily be done from the home, but also can be carried out from a business or shop.

During my research at Sam Poo Kong Temple, I had the opportunity to interview a middle-aged woman who was a trader and business owner. She informed me that she once prayed to Sam Poo Kong from home and that it was sufficient. Previously, she visited Sam Poo Kong Temple several times but stopped due to being so busy with work. She prayed to Sam Poo Kong in her private room so not everyone would know. In that room she set up a small table as a prayer altar. She placed on the altar a joss stick holder, two separate red candles or a pair of them, and a few dishes and drinks as offers to Sam Poo Kong. When kliwon Friday night arrived, she asked Sam Poo Kong to be present in her home to listen to her petition and in order to worship him. When she was certain that Sam Poo Kong had come to her home, she immediately requested something from him so that her wishes would be fulfilled. Praying and asking for something from home can be done in the same manner as they are at Sam Poo Kong Temple. The ritual practice carried out in one's home or a business is identical to that enacted in the temple.[25]

This woman prays to Sam Poo Kong at home because she believes that he will only grant her request after praying to or worshipping him seven times. Another reason she does so is that Sam Poo Kong Temple is quite far from her home and thus must spend a considerable sum for transportation and accommodation when visiting it. Therefore, it is enough for her to perform the rituals in her home even without visiting Sam Poo Kong Temple. She also explained to me that, if possible, her neighbours and surrounding community should not know about her worship to Sam Poo Kong at home because she might be thought to be keeping tuyul(ghost) and so her neighbors would be suspicious of her. The feeling of being suspected by and ashamed before her neighbors thus causes this woman to hide well her activity. But even though her neighbors do not know what this woman is doing in her home, family members can easily find out. They must thus keep her activity a secret to prevent news about it spreading elsewhere.

A woman came to the temple from Ambarawa to ask Sam Poo Kong to resolve her problem. She has amassed much debt to other people due to losses in trading. The person who lends the money always comes to collect her debt and sometimes uses thugs to frighten her. She asked Sam Poo Kong for this person's heart to be softened and not always come to collect her debt. If her request is granted, she will come again to the temple to express her gratitude to Sam Poo Kong.

Besides asking Sam Poo Kong for help, a visitor to the temple also usually intends to contribute something to Sam Poo Kong if his/her wish is realized or business succeeds. One type of donation given by contributors whose wishes were granted by Sam Poo Kong is red candles which can last ten months being dying out. Candles are a symbol of illumination and the spirit of a dead individual lives on, watching human beings who are still alive like a candle flame that illuminates its surroundings.[26] Red candles are not just a means for lighting, but are full of the meaning that each person invests in it. Every person and nation has its own interpretation of the burning candle in the temple so that the candle is full of symbolic meaning that can provide one who donates candles to the temple with peace of mind.

One man told me about the time he spent working as a janitor at Sam Poo Kong Temple in 2002. Although the story he shares occurred seventeen years ago, it is interesting to mention here. According to him, a Muslim woman from Jakarta working as a trader or businesswoman by the name of HajahJubaidah visited Sam Poo Kong Temple several times and petitioned for something to Sam Poo Kong. After doing so, her trading business in the Tanah Abang market in Jakarta succeeded and sales increased every day so that she raked in high profits. To return Sam Poo Kong's kindness that caused her to benefit greatly from the proceeds of her sales, she donated thirteen pairs of large Chinese New Year candles to Sam Poo Kong Temple. At that time, the price of one pair of large red candles (one pair of two candles) was around 2,000,000 Rp. Today, the price of one pair of large Chinese New Year candles is around 3,000,000 Rp the wax of which measures at 180cm in height and 50cm in diameter. After lowering the large Chinese candles, the janitor was given a reward of 100,000 Rp by the woman and was very happy to receive it. He told me: "The amount of salary for a sweeper like me is small and I feel very happy when I get a gift from someone of 100,000 Rp." His statement thus reveals that he happily received the monetary reward from Ms. HajahJubaidah.[27] HajahJubaidah is one of the Muslim traders from Jakarta who always visits this temple to ask for something from Sam Poo Kong. There are many other examples of Muslims who have different experiences when visiting Sam Poo Kong Temple and ask something from this god that cannot be mentioned here one by one.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this paper, namely:

- 1) Sam Poo Kong Temple is not only visited by Tridharma adherents, but also by members of other religious communities, including Muslim. The latter can be divided into two groups: the first comprises those who want to be tourists to and know well Sam Poo Kong Temple, which is considered by many to have a close connection to the arrival of Cheng Ho (a Chinese Muslim) from China in the fifteenth

century; the second group includes those who visit Sam Poo Kong Temple when they have a problem so that Sam Poo Kong can provide a solution to it.

- 2) Some Muslims visit Sam Poo Kong Temple and ask Sam Poo Kong for something. They do not consider their actions as idolatry (shirk), which is utterly rejected by Islamic teachings, but as a form of respect for the spirit of Sam Poo Kong who is believed to have contributed greatly to the development of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago.
- 3) Some Muslims not only view Sam Poo Kong as an historical figure in Indonesia, but also consider him to be a god who can help anyone in need of aid. Sam Poo Kong has been cultured as a saint whose assistance can be requested.
- 4) The practices carried out by Muslims in Sam Poo Kong Temple, namely, asking for help from and giving respect and offerings to Sam Poo Kong, can support Marcel Mauss's theory (1967) of "giving". According to Mauss, the exchange of gifts may not only occur between human beings, but also between humans and spirits.
- 5) Although Sam Poo Kong Temple is a place of worship for Tridharma adherents, it is open to other types of religious people who want to perform rituals in it. In this way, a temple may not only function as a place of worship, but also as one that unites people with different beliefs. This is a form of Nusantara Islam in which people respect one another and do not see their differences.
- 6) Muslims who do not visit Sam Poo Kong Temple nor petition him for something hold very negative opinions about and condemn the actions of Muslims who appealed to Sam Poo Kong. In their view, the act of asking something from Sam Poo Kong constitutes an act of idolatry (shirk), which is totally prohibited in Islam. Muslims who visit Sam Poo Kong Temple and ask Sam Poo Kong for something, however, do not consider doing so is idolatry and believe that they still worship God.

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