

BEGINNING AND DEVELOPMENT
OF
BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

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THE DALAI LAMA

FOREWORD

I am pleased to observe that there is a growing interest and enthusiasm among Vietnamese, including in the diaspora, to learn and preserve their traditional Buddhist cultural heritage. Pilgrims from Vietnam as well as other Vietnamese communities living in North America, Europe and Australia come to India regularly, including attending teachings that I give, during which I have also been able to meet many of them.

I am therefore glad that Ven. Thich Vien Ly Tan Ngoc Ho has written this book on the history of Buddhism and its development of education in Vietnam. It will not only shine a light on the importance of studying the profound Buddhist philosophy, but also create greater awareness towards achieving and maintaining peace of mind with its emphasis on nonviolence and compassion.

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ABSTRACT

No systematic examination of how Buddhist education began and developed in Vietnam has been hitherto attempted, to the best of my knowledge. The importance of tracing the history of Buddhism in general and Buddhist education in particular is enhanced by the fact that Vietnam is geographically the meeting point of the eastern expansion of Indian culture and the southern expansion of Chinese culture. These two significant cultures met and flourished in Vietnam.

Its study is an extremely urgent academic task because the few currently available sources could disappear due to the prevailing political and cultural developments, on the one hand, and the dispersal of scholars due to the Vietnamese Diaspora, on the other. In the ensuing chapters, the history of Buddhism and Buddhist education in Vietnam is reconstructed to the extent possible under the present conditions. Some of the conclusions are, therefore, tentative.

The basic hypothesis on which the research has been established:

- (1) Adequate data are gleanable from available resources, textual and oral, to reconstruct this history;
- (2) Such data and the recording of the experience of educated monastics could serve to understand the main features and challenges of Vietnamese Buddhist education; and
- (3) A history of Buddhist education thus reconstructed could be the basis for further examination of issues on which disagreements exist among scholars. The research adopted a combination of four approaches:
 - (a) A desk research on primary sources in Chinese and Vietnamese;
 - (b) A critical examination of secondary sources in Chinese, Vietnamese, English and French;
 - (c) A phenomenological analysis of my personal experience as a Buddhist and student of Buddhism and the experiences of my immediate colleagues, friends and teachers; and
 - (d) Validation of data through a field survey conducted with a questionnaire.

The result of this research is presented in eight substantive chapters. Following the opening Chapter outlining the methodology and the plan of the study, Chapter Two on the contextual background to Buddhist education examines (A) the culture and education of Vietnam before the advent of Buddhism, and (B) how Buddhism came to be introduced to Vietnam. An investigation into the earliest form of Buddhist education in Vietnam is taken up in Chapter Three and continued into Chapter Four with a detailed

analysis of the development of Buddhist education up to 1975. Chapter Five surveys the information available on educational institutions and records the contribution made by pagodas in various parts of the country. Special attention is given in Chapter Six to the content of Buddhist education, which is presented historically under the three domains of educational objectives, namely cognitive, affective and skill-based. This analysis brings out most eloquently the richness of the substantive content which Vietnamese Buddhist education has inherited from its primary sources of inspiration and further developed through its own ingenuity. An equally significant observation results from Chapter Seven in which traditional methods of instruction are examined with reference to the experience of Vietnamese educators. Chapter Eight takes note of the large number of nationally famous educators and teachers, of both Thiền (Zen) and Pure Land traditions, whose literary and instructional contributions could be outlined. In doing so, special notice has been taken of the role which poetry played as a vehicle of spiritual and philosophical communication among them. Chapter Nine summarizes the substantial findings of the research and ends with a brief note on the present and future of Buddhist education in Vietnam.

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First I would like to thank my teachers and advisors at the Department of Religious Studies, University of the West for their sustaining guidance and enthusiasm, as well as their willingness to encourage and support my explorations in the interdisciplinary field of Religious Studies and inspire me to follow my own decision in the pursuit of Buddhist Studies. Here, I would like to express my respectful gratitude to a Great Scholar and dedicated teacher, Dr. Ananda W.P. Guruge, Chair of the Doctoral Committee, who played a large part in the development of my thinking about Buddhism and its educational role in Vietnam and whose insights and direction assisted me in negotiating new theoretical terrains. I am sure that I could never express the depth of my appreciation.

I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Most Venerable Dr. Thích Ân Huệ (Laude T. Ware) who

spend valuable time with me and guided me to which this dissertation takes form. But it is my misfortune that he did not live long enough to see it through. So, I respectfully dedicate this dissertation to him as a tribute to his memory.

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While collecting and using the sources for my dissertation, I benefited directly and indirectly from many research works and I am indebted to the authors. In writing my dissertation, it is simply fair to point out at this outset that I owe a great deal to a great many scholars, even to those whose opinions I strongly agree and disagree with and severely criticize.

My heartfelt thanks go to my community of dharma friends who provided critical feedback and to those who spent their time providing crucial information on the surveys I sent out. Their support and encouragement kept me going through difficult times.

And finally, to my beloved Great Master Thích Ké Châu, who has provided and taught me all the valuable knowledge and skills which I possess now to further develop my thinking in Buddhism and in life.

May the merit and virtue accrued from this work,

repay the four great kindnesses above, relieve the suffering of those on the three paths below, help aim towards world peace and freedom of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam from Communist oppression and contribute towards religious freedom and human rights.

Tan Ngoc Ho

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale for Study

No systematic examination of how Buddhist education began and developed in Vietnam has been hitherto attempted, to the best of my knowledge. The primary reason is the paucity of information resulting from the destruction of early literary sources during times of internal upheavals including the recent Vietnam wars and their aftermath. The importance of tracing the history of Buddhism in general and Buddhist education in particular is enhanced by the fact that Vietnam is geographically the meeting point of the eastern expansion of Indian culture and the southern expansion of Chinese culture. Its location therefore is aptly called Indo-China. These two significant cultures met and flourished in Vietnam, which has a history as long as China's, dating as far back as the 11th century BCE. It is the most ancient civilization in Southeast Asia and its history could reveal the impact of the interaction of the two most important cultural trends of Asia, namely Indian and Chinese. With 50 million Buddhists in an overall population of 83 million people, the Buddhist culture of Vietnam has many specific characteristics,

which shed new light on the manner in which Buddhism transformed itself as a result of Indian and Chinese influences.

The reconstruction of its history is an extremely urgent academic task in view of the fact that the few currently available sources could disappear due to the prevailing political and cultural developments, on the one hand, and the dispersal of scholars due to the Vietnamese Diaspora, on the other. In the ensuing chapters, I have been able to reconstruct the history of Buddhism and Buddhist education in Vietnam to the extent possible under the present conditions. Some of the conclusions, based on the available sources, are, therefore, tentative. And it is expected that such conclusions will lead to more discussions and further research by the world community.

1.2. The Basic Hypothesis

The basic hypothesis on which the research was undertaken has three parts:

In spite of the current situation, adequate data are gleanable from available resources, textual and oral, to reconstruct the history of Buddhism in Vietnam;

Such data and the recording of the experience of educated monastics could serve to understand the main features and challenges of Vietnamese Buddhist education; and

A history of Buddhist education thus reconstructed could be the basis for further examination of issues on which disagreements exist among scholars.

1.3. Methodology of Research

My research adopted a combination of four approaches:

- 1- Desk research based on available primary sources in Chinese and Vietnamese with a critical assessment of their authenticity and reliability as historical sources;
- 2- A critical examination of secondary sources in Chinese, Vietnamese, English and French, including electronic sources from the Internet for theories and opinions offered by scholars with an evaluation of their relevance and acceptability;
- 3- A phenomenological analysis of my personal experience as a Buddhist and student of Buddhism and the experiences of my immediate colleagues, friends and teachers as regards the form of Buddhist education to which we have been exposed, with special reference to: objectives, curricula, books and learning materials, instructional methodology, assessment and certification;
- 4- Validation of data obtained by seeking a consensus of opinion on emerging issues from leading Vietnamese scholars on the basis of a questionnaire to consolidate the unwritten information preserved in the memories of savants and scholars of the Vietnamese Diaspora.

1.4. Plan of Research

One major constraint of this initial study relates to the availability of source material. It is true that original sources for the history of Buddhism and Buddhist education in Vietnam are few and not easily accessible. But information that can be gathered is of the utmost value because it enables us to reconstruct a chronological base to trace the developments. Already competing theories have been developed by scholars on such issues as the earliest phases of the introduction of Buddhism. Was it as far back as 3rd century BCE through one of the nine missions of Asoka from India? Or did Buddhism come with the migrations of Việt from China? Or did the Maritime Silk Route, which passed through Vietnam, bring the Indian influences through sailors and traders? Similar questions arise on specifically Vietnamese characteristics in Buddhist traditions, the curriculum and methods of Buddhist education and its infrastructure.

Much of the relevant information on Buddhism and Buddhist education before recent years is retained in the memory of expatriate and national Vietnamese savants. This information has not been collected and documented. The field research through a questionnaire has been, therefore, the first effort to rescue this information before the senior members of the Vietnamese intelligentsia passed away. This effort was inspired by the dictum of the UNESCO's Oral History Project, which is: "When an old person dies in Africa, a whole library is lost for ever." This applies to Vietnam in its present situation.

The questionnaire, which was sent to over 200 Vietnamese Buddhist monastic scholars worldwide both in English and Vietnamese, sought their responses to the following questions

- 1- What is your view on whether Buddhism came to Vietnam directly from India in the 3rd century BCE rather than from China in the 2nd century CE? On what evidence to you base your conclusion?
- 2- Do you agree that the Golden Age of Vietnamese Buddhism is the period of the Lý Dynasty or do you think that this credit should go to the Trần Dynasty?
- 3- Do you know anything about the founding of the first university by the Lý Dynasty as regards the curriculum and scholars connected with it?
- 4- What is your assessment of the contribution of Master Thạch-Liêm (Thích Đại Sán) to the reformation of the Vietnamese Sangha in the South?
- 5- When did the Chinese Tripitaka become the standard Buddhist scriptures of Vietnam? Do we have evidence of any earlier Buddhist scriptures in Pāli or Sanskrit or native Vietnamese languages?
- 6- Is it your view that Vietnamese Buddhist works were taken to Nanjing during the 1407-1427 Chinese invasion? Are you aware of any such works preserved or translated in China?

7- Please describe your personal experience in Buddhist education in Vietnam, or abroad in a Vietnamese tradition, or both with special emphasis on the following:

- (a) Where?
- (b) For how long: _____ years _____ months?
- (c) From when to when?
- (d) Was it in a school/ college/ university?
- (e) What were the main subjects/courses?
 - 1st year _____
 - 2nd year _____
 - 3rd year _____
 - 4th year _____
 - 5th year _____
- (f) Was there a system of examinations/degrees?
What were they?
- (g) At what level was the graduation or completion?
- (h) What were the books read in the course of your Buddhist education?
- (i). Who were your teachers and what were their qualifications?

8- What do you note as the strengths and the weaknesses of the Buddhist education you received and what is your opinion about the state of Buddhist education today in Vietnam?

The responses were expected to provide a holistic analysis of Vietnamese Buddhist education as an

educational system that is grounded in the Dharma teaching and is performed through meditation practices. The first six questions sought to clarify issues pertaining to the overall context in which Buddhist education developed. Each of the issues raised in them is subject to controversy among scholars. Questions 7 and 8 were designed to verify whether the educational experiences of my cohorts and me were universally applicable to the system that had been, or is currently, in force in the Vietnamese Sangha.

The questionnaire was first sent to over 200 leading monastics/scholars with the request to either respond or refer to some one who could answer. Almost half of them, mostly senior monastics in the Diaspora, who had gone through the same course of training that my cohorts and I had followed in Vietnam, confirmed the information and the conclusions that I was able to present. Apart from communicating their agreement orally or through informal communications, no responses were received from them. Their validation of my conclusions, however, has been particularly useful in bridging gaps in data due to recent upheavals in the country and refuting or reconciling currently held views and theories.

Fifty refused to furnish detailed answers due to their political affiliations or ideological commitments. Twenty expressed their inability to participate in view of the inadequacy of their knowledge and expertise. Sixty-eight did not respond at all.

Finally, 52 responded to the questionnaire and furnished valuable information. These responses

are analyzed under each relevant chapter especially in presenting the experiences of monastics whose education has been disrupted as a result of both the political conditions in the country and the problems encountered by the Diaspora.

1.5. Presentation of results

The result of this research is presented in this dissertation in eight substantive chapters. Chapter Two, in two parts, on the contextual background to Buddhist education examines (A) the culture and education of Vietnam before the advent of Buddhism, and (B) how Buddhism came to be introduced to Vietnam. An investigation into the earliest form of Buddhist education in Vietnam is taken up in Chapter Three. In the next four chapters a detailed analysis of various aspects of Buddhist education is attempted with reference to (1) educational institutions; (2) content of Buddhist education, educational material used; (3) instructional methods used in Buddhist education; and (4) nationally famous and recognized teachers and educators. Chapter Eight examines the place of Buddhist education in present-day Vietnam. Conclusions reached as a result of this study are summarized in the final chapter. The bibliography is presented in three categories: Primary Sources, Secondary Sources in Print, and Secondary Sources on the Internet. An appendix provides information on some respondents in the field research, which was undertaken to validate the conclusions of the desk research phase through a questionnaire.

Chapter Two

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

A. CULTURE AND EDUCATION OF VIETNAM BEFORE THE ADVENT OF BUDDHISM: THE ROOTS OF VIETNAMESE CULTURE.

2.1. Geography and Early Migrations

The territory of Vietnam was settled in ancient times. The oldest culture in the territory was the Đông Sơn culture, which developed during the Bronze Age.¹ The earliest inhabitants were the Austronesian tribes, followed by the Khmer who migrated east from India, then the Laotians who migrated from the highlands of China's Yunnan Province, and the Vietnamese who migrated from the lower Yangtze Valley. The recorded history of the Vietnamese began in 208 BCE with Triệu Đà, a Chinese general who established his own empire, Nam Việt. In the 1st century BCE his kingdom was incorporated by the Hán dynasty into China.²

Vietnam is renowned for its “rich, pleasing

1 Miron, A. Vietnam, www.asianartmall.com/vietnamtoday.htm

2 La Borde, P., 2007, Vietnamese: Cultural profile, http://wthnomed.org/cultures/vietnamese/vietnamese_cp.html

culture,” “heavy in its spiritual life, including among its main ideologies Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Tam Giáo.”³ On the other hand, the presence of images of Shiva, Brahma, and Vishnu, reveals the influence of Hinduism.⁴ Indian maritime merchants had visited and settled down in the eastern coastal area, which was known to Indians as Champa. Vietnamese culture seemed to have absorbed many positive influences. The Buddhist philosophy of tolerance helped to resist invasions, while simultaneously attracting other cultures and enriching the country’s cultural experiences.

Vietnam has a heritage of historic temples, monasteries, and pagodas -- all decorated with carvings, paintings, and other ornamentation. These structures belong to the different periods of Vietnamese cultural development. Vietnam’s cultural past is in myths and legends of dragons and kings, heroes and heroines, gods and deities.

According to legendary traditions from many past generations, the first name for the country was Văn Lang, given to it by the Lạc ethnic group that invented wet rice cultivation. Later, the Âu people who came from the Chinese province of Âu Lạc joined the Lạc people. The next to arrive were the Việts, who emigrated from the Chinese coastal regions as early as the 5th century BCE.

3 Miron, A. *Vietnam History*, www.asianartmall.com/vietnamhistoty.htm

4 Martin, P., *Land of the Ascending Dragon rediscovering Vietnam: The Cradle of Culture*, www.vwam.com/vets/hue/huedanang.html

Together with other ethnic groups, they began their movement towards the Indochinese peninsula, which lasted for 15 centuries.⁵

The Việt people were known long before the Christian era. They were migratory hunting people who used bows, arrows, axes, and javelins. They arrived from southern China beginning 4,000 to 5,000 years ago. They assimilated with the indigenous peoples who settled around the Red River Delta. According to Vietnamese legend, the Dragon King of the south married Âu Cơ, a mountain princess. They lived in the mountains where she gave birth to a hundred sons. But the Dragon King missed the lowlands, so he left the mountains for the lowlands with half of his sons.⁶

The word Việt means “beyond” or “to go through.” The character Nam, meaning “south,” differentiated the Việt people in the north who remained in China and the Việt people who started their migrations to the south of China. The name of the country was sensitive to territorial changes. The name “Việt” referred to the territories in the south of China in the 11th century BCE.

Under the Hán Dynasty (3rd century BCE to 203 CE.) this territory was known as Giao Chỉ Quận (交趾郡). It appeared by the name of Jiaozhi Chine on Ptolemy’s maps, which were used by ancient navigators. It is believed that Europeans might have reached Óc Eo in

5 Early History of Vietnam – *Origin of the name*, www.vnam.com/vets/history/briefhis.htm

6 Dodd, C.J. *Rough Guide to Vietnam*, www.vwam.com/vet/tribes/ethnicminorities.html

the pre-Cambodian Kingdom Phù Nam, which occupied the southern territory of today's Vietnam in the 1st to 6th centuries CE. Óc Eo had trade links with Rome, Persia, India, Myanmar, and China. Archeological findings such as Roman gold coins, Greek objects, Hellenic coins and seals, Indian rings, Burmese jade, Chinese jewelry, and Chinese bronzes of the Han period testify to these contacts. The Óc Eo kingdom was famous for crystal glass.



The basic cultural Óc Eo artifacts were found in the Gò Tháp, Tháp Mười village, Tân Kiềng city, Tháp Mười (Đồng Tháp District). According to Nguyễn Đắc Hiền, around 530 BCE, there were 187 artifacts that have been excavated and recorded at this site. Archaeologists examined the site by C14 in the year 1984:

- GT84-MS
2480±40BP=530BC
- GT84-TS2-01
2350±40BP=400BC
- GT84-TS2-M2-02
2250±40BP=300BC

(According to the reference of Ban KCHVKHXXH tp. HCM, 1995)⁷

2.2. Early Historical Dynasties

It remains unknown how the pre-Khmer Chân Lạp Empire swallowed up Óc Eo during the 7th century CE. In its early history, Vietnam changed its name during different periods. It was:

Văn Lang under the Lạc-Vương Kings (500-257 BCE.),
Âu Lạc under the Thục Dynasty (257-207 BCE.),
Nam Việt under the Triệu Dynasty (207-111 BCE.),
Giao Chỉ (203-544 CE),
Vạn Xuân under the early Lý Dynasty (544-603),
An Nam under the Chinese Tang Dynasty (603-939),

⁷ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, *Phật Giáo Nam Tông Du Nhập Việt Nam*, Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy, Số 11 Tháng 11 năm 2008, p.50

Đại Việt under the Ngô dynasty (939-967),
Đại Cồ Việt under the Đinh Dynasty (968-1054),
 and
Đại Việt under the late Lý and Trần Dynasties
 (1054-1400).⁸

As this list of names indicates, the cultural history of Vietnam had many turns that were influenced by migrations, trade links, and cultural relationships with adjacent territories. For example, the territory of the future Vietnam was under Indian influence during the 1st century BCE and the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries CE. It was a developed civilization that cultivated rice, cotton, beans, and raised pigs, sheep, and elephants. And the people worshipped Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. However, since this territory suffered a great deal from floods, there is a possibility that many of its artifacts remain buried under alluvium. The Sanskrit inscriptions of the king named Bhadravarman (circa 529 CE) found in Quảng-nam and Phú-yên Provinces referring *inter alia* to his founding of a shrine to worship the Hindu God Shiva Bhadrashvara and the Sanskrit inscription quoting the Ràmàyana at Trà kiệ̣n by King Prakàsadharmā (653-679) are among the evidence of Hindu presence in Vietnam.⁹ The statue of Buddha discovered in Đông-dương in 1937 attests to the high level of Funan art¹⁰

8 Early History, op. cit.

9 Coedes, G., *The Making of South East Asia*, London 1962 Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 64-65 and Guruge, Ananda W.P., *The Society of the Ràmàyana*, Colombo 1960, Saman; New Delhi 1991, Abhinav. P.40

10 Early History, op. cit.

in this region. It also confirms that the Buddha was worshipped along with other deities in this territory at that age.

2.3. Intertwined History of Vietnam and China at the Beginning of Vietnamese Cultural Development

Between 200 BCE and 938 CE the Chinese ruled the territory of the conquered Red River Delta. There was a long period of integration of Chinese culture into Vietnamese culture. During this period, Confucianism, Taoism, and the Chinese ideographs were introduced to Vietnam. However, the territory was not culturally homogeneous. For example, the Funan kingdom in the south was influenced more by Indian culture than by Chinese culture. The continuation of Indian influence in the region was further established by the founding of the dynasty of Indravarman II, who was a Buddhist and is credited with the construction of the Mahayana Buddhist monastery at Đông-dương. As already stated, the Champa kingdom in the extreme south was a Hindu kingdom¹¹. Both the Funan and Champa areas were known for the blending of Hinduism and Buddhism with preexisting ancestor-worship cults. The earliest Indian advisors to Southeast Asia were Indian Buddhist missionaries who arrived along with Indian traders.¹²

11 Miron, A. *Vietnam History*, www.asianartmall.com/vietnamhistory.htm

12 Pungtian, Charuwan, 2000, Thai-Cambodian culture relationship through arts, Buddha Dharma Education Association, Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya, p.5.

With Đinh Bộ Lĩnh declaring himself emperor in 968 under nominal vassalage of the Sung Emperor, the Đại Cồ Việt region regained a measure of independence. According to Coedes, the first Đinh emperor is “remembered for having taken the first steps towards organizing religious life of the country. He created an administrative hierarchy of priests, founded some monasteries, and built some temples.”¹³ In 972, Parameshvaravarman, the ruler of the Hindu kingdom of Champa came into conflict with Đại Cồ Việt and intermittent wars between the two kingdoms lasted until the 13th century. Referring to the evolution of Vietnamese literature during this period, Coedes underscores the impact of the Chinese:

A large part of Vietnamese literature is in Chinese; but although this part of the literature, because of the language in which it is written, may legitimately be regarded as forming a chapter in the history of Chinese literature, it is sufficiently Vietnamese in character as to form part of the national culture of Vietnam. No work of literature from the brush of Vietnamese survives from this period of Chinese rule prior to the rise of the first national dynasties; and from the Đinh, former Lê, and Lý dynasties, all that remains are some poems of Lạc Thuan (end of the 10th century), Khuông Việt (same period), and Lý

13 Coedes, G., *The Making of South East Asia*, London 1962 Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp.64-65 and Guruge, Ananda W.P., *The Society of the Ràmàyana*, Colombo 1960, Saman; New Delhi 1991, Abhinav. P.81

Thường Kiệt (last quarter of the 11th century). Those competent to judge consider these works to be quite up to the best standards of Chinese Literature.¹⁴

Thus the territory suffered from conquests and natural disasters. It was colonized and had to absorb other cultures in the process of cultural development. As E. Block notes,

It is remarkable that the Vietnamese hybrid culture is embodied by the Phở, a Chinese dish of rice noodles, beef brought by the Mongols, and French consommé, seasoned with Vietnamese cinnamon, mint, ginger, lime and chilies.¹⁵

The Vietnamese culture developed its pluralistic character through the initial integration with the Chinese culture but then continued interacting with other Asian countries, as well as with other areas of the ancient world.

B. HOW BUDDHISM CAME TO BE INTRODUCED TO VIETNAM

2.4. Sources of Information

Buddhism is not a race or culture-bound religion like Hinduism or Judaism. In the opinion of Peter Santina, in “Early History of Vietnam,”

14 Coedes, G., *The Making of South East Asia*, London 1962 Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp.64-65 and Guruge, Ananda W.P., *The Society of the Ràmàyana*, Colombo 1960, Saman; New Delhi 1991, Abhinav. P.87

15 Block, E., May-June 2004, *A Reversal of Intimacies: Vietnam Savors the Hybrid Flavors of French Rule*, *Ancient Chinese Tradition and Western Kitsch*, American Theatre, Vol. 21, issue 5, p.36.

“It moves very easily from one culture to another because the emphasis in Buddhism is on internal practice rather than on external practice.”¹⁶

Due to this special feature of Buddhist practices, many forms of Buddhism as well as other religions can coexist in the same territory. In Buddhism’s pure form, the links between similar sects are more important than centralization of Buddhist influence over the country as a whole.

It is difficult to trace the beginning of Vietnamese culture because of the lack of historical records. Its intertwined cultural development with China creates a further problem in that even artifacts, which could in reconstructing the history, are often assigned to China rather than to Vietnam. The most reliable sources of information, on the one hand, seem to be Vietnamese legends and fairy tales and, on the other hand, Chinese annals from which some details of the history of Vietnam may be gleaned.

In ancient times, Eastern cosmogony focused on Five elements and Five regions: the center represented by the color yellow, symbolized the earth; the color red symbolized fire and the South; black and water the North; wood and green the East; and metal and white the West.¹⁷

16 Santina, P.D. *Fundamentals of Buddhism*, www.buddhanet.net

17 Early History, op. cit.

According to a famous legend, current in Vietnam,¹⁸ the Hán and Việt populated the Middle Kingdom of Chung Hoa as two major groups. The Hán were homogeneous, while the Việt consisted of multiple tribes. They were known as the Pac Yeuh whose chief was the ruler of the Five Mounts Territory. They lived to the south of the Yellow river. Tài Nhân, the discoverer of fire, Phục Hi, who domesticated wild animals, and Shen Nong, who cultivated wild plants, ruled the Five Mounts territory. But at the end of the Shen Nong's era the Hán invaded the territory. Their chief became the Yellow Emperor of the Center. Đế Minh (帝明), of the Việt origin, fled to the south of the Five Mounts Territory. There he married Vũ Tiên. Their son, Lộc Túc, became King Dương Vương who then married one of the daughters of Động Đình Quang. Their son succeeded his father as Lạc Long Quân. The Vietnamese claim to be descendants of Tiên Rồng, the Dragon and the Immortal. It is known from the annals that, the Việt Thường kingdom sent in 1109 BCE a diplomatic mission to the Zhou (Chu) court with a white peacock as a present of friendship.¹⁹

The several waves of Chinese occupation prevented the Vietnamese people from continuous development of their authentic culture. The first Chinese occupation lasted from 3 BCE until 42 CE. The country became

18 This information which is legendary, is subject to chronological confusion.

19 Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược*, Nhà xuất bản Tổng Hợp Hà Nội, tái bản, 2005, p.19

a Chinese protectorate. Chinese literature, arts, and agricultural techniques were introduced. In 39 CE, injustices of Tô Định caused a revolt against the Chinese authorities by the sisters Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị. Their fall marked the beginning of the second Chinese occupation, which lasted until 543. At that time Vietnam became a Chinese province. It ended when Lý Bôn, by revolt, founded the Lý Dynasty. The following period was marked by conflicts between the Chinese and the Vietnamese. It ended with the third Chinese occupation, which lasted from 603 until 938. During this period the Chinese attempted to establish Chinese culture throughout the conquered territory.²⁰

2.5. Introduction of Buddhism to Vietnam by Asoka from India: Conflicting Theories and Tentative Conclusion

According to Sri Lankan chronicles, the Mauryan Emperor Asoka organized the Third Council – a conference to rehearse the Dharma – at Pataliputra, India and followed it by sending nine Buddhist missions overseas. The monks went from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean in the West and as far as Sri Lanka in the South to teach the Dharma. One of these missions, led by Sona and Uttara is said to have gone to Suvannabhumi. It is currently believed by some Vietnamese scholars that Sona and Uttara went to Myanmar (Burma) and then via Thailand to Indochina, including Vietnam. Most Venerable Thích Đức Nhuận

²⁰ Ealy History, op. cit,

makes the following statement in support of this view:

“In Hải-Phòng – 12 km”²¹ north east of Hà-Nội... there is a memorial tower to commemorate King Asoka that was built by local Vietnamese Buddhists at the time to express their gratitude to King Asoka.”²²

A competing theory is also held by some Vietnamese scholars. Lê Mạnh Thát states:

“Phật Quang (3rd century BCE) becomes the first propagator of Buddhism in Vietnam, as opposed to Khương Tăng Hội (Chin Kang Senghui – 康僧會, 200-280 CE) who was a late comer.”²³

In his “Lịch sử Phật giáo Việt Nam,” he assumes that Phật Quang was one of the missionaries sent by King Asoka to propagate Buddhism in Vietnam.

These are two instances when modern Vietnamese scholars attempt to revise the information given in English books on Vietnamese Buddhism. They are in search of evidence on the way Buddhism was established in Vietnam and the role Buddhism played in Vietnam’s political scene. They aim at proving that Buddhism came to Vietnam as early as 300 years BCE, that is well before Buddhism came to China. But the evidence in hand is very flimsy or, even more precisely, non-existent.

21 Thích Đức Nhuận, *Đạo Phật và Dòng Sứ Việt*, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 1996, p.18

22 Ibid.

23 Lê Mạnh Thát, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, the International Association of Asian Studies, February 21-26, 2000 www.quangduc.com/English/0202buddhisminvietnam.html

There is no evidence to determine whether Suvannabhumi was known to Mauryan as a holy site. India was extensive and included the region from Myanmar to Vietnam. We also have no information from any source as to what Sona and Uttara did as missionaries, where they went or whom they met and converted. Unlike the other missions of Asoka, the mission of these two monks is the least dealt with. While inscriptions on reliquaries in Sonar and Sanchi and the mission to Sri Lanka by ancient inscriptions in the island establish some of the missions, no archaeological evidence is found on a mission to Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.²⁴ The tower in Hải Phòng can in no way be established to be a historically contemporaneous construction of the time of Asoka. It is clear therefore that the statement of Lê Mạnh Thát to the effect that Buddhism in Vietnam was a reality in the 3rd century BCE is untenable.

It is also necessary to examine the claim of the Vietnamese scholars that Phật Quang, who is said to have taught Buddhism to Chủ Đồng Tử at Quỳnh Viên Mountain. This theory proceeds as follows:

From Phật Quang, Chủ Đồng Tử received a straw hat and a wooden staff. After the defeat of Hai Bà Trưng in 43 BCE, Lady Bát Nàn phu nhân who was wounded in the battle returned to her native village

24 Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Buddhism: The Religion And Its Culture*, The World Fellowship Of Buddhists, Dharmaduta Activities Committee, Colombo, 1984, p.66 and Guruge Ananda W.P., *Asoka: A Definitive Biography*, The Central Cultural Fund, The Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Information, Colombo, 1993, p.447

where she became a nun. Her Tiên La Temple has remained to the present day. The place was connected with the fight for independence up to the end of the 2nd century CE. These revolts contributed to the rise of Buddhism in Vietnam as the theology that was to fight against Confucianism coming from the north. The famous books of the period, which proclaimed Buddhist values, are: “Liu du jijing – 六度集經,” “Za shi yu jing,” and “Jiu za shi yu jing” among others.²⁵

According to Ven. Thích Đức Nhuận,

“Vũ Quỳnh, the author of the book *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái* wrote, the legendary story *Truyện Đầm Nhất Dạ: Tiên Dung Mị Nương* and *Chử Đồng Tử* proved that Buddhism was in Vietnam in Hùng Vương III (Dynasty 18 kings Hùng from 2879 – 257 BCE Thục An Dương Vương).”²⁶

The translation of the books is also disputed. Kang Senghui was thought to have translated the *Liu du jijing ching* from Sanskrit into Chinese. Lê Mạnh Thát claimed that the original text was not in Sanskrit but in old-style Vietnamese. It was likely to be translated by the masters connected with Kang Senghui, but not by himself, Lê Mạnh Thát, expressing the opinion that Kang Senghui (*Khương Tăng Hội*) might have participated in the

25 Ibid. (*Lục Độ Tập kinh*, An Ban Thủ Ý, Pháp Kinh kinh tự, Tạp Thí Dụ kinh)

26 Thích Đức Nhuận, *Đạo Phật và Dòng Sứ Việt*, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 1996, p.21.

This information is apparently faulty. Either the dates are wrong or the number of kings should be greater. It is not actuarially possible for an emperor to rule an average of 18 kings

revolt as well as might have propagated Buddhism, pointed out.

“It is unknown why Kang Senghui went to the Wu state in 248, the year of the revolt led by Triệu Thị Trinh, the second woman in the history of Vietnam at the head of the revolt.”²⁴

He further developed this theory, with an interesting survey of the books on Vietnamese Buddhism in Vietnamese, and stated in his “Lịch sử Phật giáo Việt Nam:”

The transmission of Buddhism was assigned to the monk whose name was Phật Quang. This monk transmitted Buddhism to Chủ Đồng Tử and his wife Tiên Dung. These figures were long believed to be legendary. At present, they are considered to be historical figures. Phật Quang is assumed to be one of the missionaries sent by King Asoka to propagate Buddhism in Vietnam. Phật Quang is said to have lived in Nê Lê City at Chùa Tây Thiên, political and military center of the Hùng kingdom where politics and religion were interlinked as early as that time.²⁷

But there is no solid evidence for this assumption.

Lê Mạnh Thát further asserted that the Hùng Vương era lasted longer than it was believed before. It ended in 43 CE. He disputed the Chinese claim that Vietnam was the southernmost province of China to be unlikely unless the Chinese had violated Vietnamese sovereignty. According to him, the Việts had their own oral and written language in the 1st century BCE, and in

27 Ibid.

many ways differed from the Chinese. As an example, he states that Việts at that time grew tulips called Uất Kim Hương, with which they worshipped the Buddha. So he concluded:

“Vietnam during that period was an independent country with nationalistic tendency blended in Buddhist influence.”²⁸

Lê Mạnh Thát, however, agreed with other Vietnamese scholars that

“Buddhism was acculturated into many traditions in Vietnam. The Indian Buddha turned into Cloud-Buddha, Rain-Buddha, Lightning-Buddha, and Thunder-Buddha. The period of acculturation and assimilation began in 544. It was the time that manifested thaumaturgic-tantric Buddhism in Vietnam. The period from the 6th to 13th centuries is called by Vietnamese scholars as the time of consolidation.”²⁹

From this, it can be assumed that Vietnamese culture was dependent in the course of time on many factors, which need clarification and interpretation. First, Vietnamese culture developed its ethnic aspects, which clearly distinguish it from other cultures of the region. Second, it was influenced by other cultures, which came in touch with it in the process of its development. Third, Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhism evolved into a form of Vietnamese Buddhism, which strengthened links with its Indian roots and was enriched by Confucianism and Taoism as philosophies.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

In the absence of reliable archaeological or literary sources to establish the theory that Buddhism was first introduced to Vietnam by the Asokan missionaries, Sona and Uttara, who came to Suvannabhumi, the data we have on Khương Tăng Hội, Mâu Tử, Kalyaruci, and Mahajivika, as recorded in the annals, are more reliable. These four prominent Buddhist figures flourished in the 2nd to 4th centuries CE. According to Lê Mạnh Thát, Kang Senghui (200-280) was born and trained in Giao Châu and became the propagator of Buddhism in southern China.

2.6. The Role of Buddhism in the Liberation of Vietnam

Three great Buddhist monks who came from India, namely Marajivaka (摩訶瞿域 – Ma Ha Kỳ Vức), 康僧會 (Khương Tăng Hội), 支彊梁 – (Chi Khương Lương) and a local scholar, 牟子 (Mâu Tử), figure prominently in the development of Buddhism in Vietnam from approximately the 2nd century CE. Because Mâu Tử (牟子 – the author of Lý Hoặc Luận 理惑論) is a key character in the evolution of Buddhism as a popular religion in Vietnam, we should take a closer look at him.

Considered one of the greatest scholars in history, Mâu Tử used his skill in Chinese education to convert a vast amount of people to Buddhism. He was a senior official who took advantage of his position to teach people about Buddhism. Due to his contribution to the propagation and spread of Buddhism he is considered to be the first ever Buddhist lay person in Vietnam.

The impact of Buddhism on the subsequent period of history was very significant.

For several centuries, the Chinese conquered Vietnam ruled the people with an iron hand. According to *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* (大越史記全書),

“during the Càn-Ngô, 11th (111 BCE) – Hán Nguyên Đinh 6th) winter time, Dương Bộc, ordered the Hán Dynasty to bring 9,000 infantry to encircle Tam-Hiệp and destroyed Thạch-Môn ... At that same time, our country – Việt, ordered three Officers bring 300 buffaloes, 1,000 glasses of wine and registers of three counties: Giao Chỉ, Cửu Chân and Nhật Nam to the enemy to surrender ... From that time, Hán Dynasty took the land and divided nine counties. They are: Nam Hải, Thương Ngô, Uất Lâm, Hợp Phố, Giao Chỉ, Cửu Chân, Nhật Nam, Châu Nhai, Đàm Nhĩ.” (Canh Ngô, năm thứ 11-111 TCN)³⁰

30 Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* dịch theo bản khắc năm Chính Hòa thứ 18 (1697), dịch và chú thích: Ngô Đức Thọ, hiệu đính Gs Hà Văn Tấn, Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1998, pp.153-154 “Hán Nguyên Đinh năm thứ 6. Mùa đông, Dương Bộc nhà Hán đem 9 nghìn bộ binh hãm Tam Hiệp, phá Thạch Môn...” “...Bấy giờ nước Việt ta sai ba quan sứ đem 300 con trâu, 1,000 chung rượu và sổ bộ của 3 quận Giao Chỉ, Cửu Chân và Nhật Nam đến xin hàng” “...Từ đó (nhà Hán) lấy đất chia làm 9 quận là: Nam Hải (quận của nhà Tần, nay là đất Quảng Đông của nhà Minh, Thương Ngô (nhà Đường gọi là Ích Châu – Thương Ngô là tên quận đặt thời Hán, nhà Đường đổi gọi là Ngô Châu nay là huyện Thương Ngô, tỉnh Quảng Tây, chứ không phải Ích Châu nay là Tứ Xuyên như người chú thích nguyên bản đã lầm – xưa là Âu Lạc, đất của nước Việt ta), Uất Lâm (nhà Tần là quận Quế Lâm, Hán Vũ Đế đổi làm tên này), Hợp Phố (nhà Tần là Tượng Quận, nay thuộc Liêm Châu) Giao Chỉ, Cửu Chân, Nhật Nam (đều là Tượng Quận thời Tần), Châu Nhai, Đàm Nhĩ (đều ở trong biển lớn...) Kinh Triệu Vũ Vương (207-137 tr. CN), Kinh Triệu Văn Vương (137-125 tr. CN), Kinh Triệu Minh Vương (125-113 tr. CN),

Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư also mentions that, at the year of Tân Mùi, 110 BCE, (Hán Nguyên Phong first year), the Vietnam belonged to China.³¹

According to Nguyen Quang Le,

“Triệu Đà founded the nation Vietnam from 207-111 BCE, passing through five different kings. In 111 BC, Triệu Dynasty dominated by Tây Hán (西漢) Dynasty (China), changed Vietnam’s name to Bộ Giao Chỉ, Bộ Giao Chỉ belonged to Tây Hán Dynasty (111 BCE-39 CE). There were nine Counties at that time in Bộ Giao Chỉ: 1/ Quận Nam Hải (Kwang-tung), 2/ Quận Thương Ngô (Kwang-si), 3/ Quận Uất Lâm (Wang’s), 4/ Quận Hợp Phố (Kwang-tung), 5/ Quận Giao Chỉ (including plain and central part (Trung du?) Northern part Vietnam now), 6/ Quận Cửu Chân (Thanh Hóa, 7/ Quận Nhật Nam (Nghệ Tĩnh), 8/ Quận Châu Nhai (Đảo Hải Nam) and 9/ Quận Đạm Nhĩ (Đảo Hải Nam).”³²

King Triệu Ai Vương (113-112 tr. CN), King Triệu Dương Vương (112-111 tr. CN)”

31 Ibid. p.155 “Tân Mùi /110 TCN/, (Hán Nguyên Phong năm thứ 1). Nước Việt ta đã thuộc về nhà Hán, Trung quốc.”

32 Nguyễn Quang Lê Ph.D., *Từ Lịch Sử Việt Nam Nhìn Ra Thế Giới (Lịch Sử Đối Chiếu)*, Nhà Văn Hóa – Thông Tin, 2001, pp.48 & 50 “Triệu Đà lập nên nước Việt Nam từ năm 207-111 trước CN, trải qua 5 đời vua: 1/ Triệu Vũ Vương (207-137 tr. CN), 2/ Triệu Văn Vương (137-125 tr. CN), 3/ Triệu Minh Vương (125-113 tr. CN), 4/ Triệu Ai Vương (113-112 tr. CN), 5/ Triệu Dương Vương (112-111 tr. CN) Năm 111 tr. CN nhà Triệu bị nhà Tây Hán (trung quốc) thôn tính, đổi tên nước Việt Nam thành Bộ Giao Chỉ, Bộ Giao Chỉ thuộc nhà Tây Hán (111 tr. CN-39 s.C). Bộ Giao Chỉ khi đó được thành 9 quận: 1/Quận Nam Hải (Quảng Đông), 2/Quận Thương Ngô (Quảng Tây), 3/ Quận Uất Lâm (Quảng Tây), 4/ Quận Hợp Phố (Quảng Đông), 5/ Quận Giao Chỉ (gồm đồng bằng và trung du Bắc Bộ Việt Nam hiện nay), 6/ Quận Cửu Chân (Thanh Hóa), 7/ Quận Nhật Nam (Nghệ Tĩnh), 8/ Quận Châu Nhai (Đảo Hải Nam), 9/ Quận Đạm Nhĩ (Đảo Hải Nam)”

According to *Lời Sớ của Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục*, Volume 2p. 7a: “Luy Lâu was a county belonging to Giao Chỉ.” According to Most Ven. Thích Đức Nhuận, a Vietnamese scholar,

“After 111 BCE, when the Việt country was dominated by the Hán Dynasty, Buddhism was already there,”³³ and “when the North (Chinese) people dominated Vietnam, they put together our county into China’s territory and created a county, which is first called Giao Chỉ, but is later called Giao Châu, which was under the control of Hán (漢) – Ngô (吳) – Tần (秦) – Tống (宋) – Tề (齊) – Lương (梁) – Tùy (隋) – Đường (唐) Dynasties (from 111 BCE-939 CE). Through three periods, which totaled 1031 years, the Vietnamese culture was in danger because of the predominance of Hán people in Vietnam territory.”³⁴

The main objective of the Chinese was to transform Vietnam into another Chinese territory and annex it afterwards to mainland China. In order to achieve their goal, great atrocities were committed both physically and psychologically. The Chinese employed Sinicization or cultural invasion in order to uproot Vietnamese culture and replace it with theirs to ease the annexation. Despite the suffering, there was one thing that kept the Vietnamese people from breaking down and I strongly believe it was their religion. By living according to the teachings of Buddhism, the people believed that the wicked would eventually be punished and that they would survive until that day came.

33 Thích Đức Nhuận, *Đạo Phật và Dòng Sứ Việt*, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 1996, p.12

34 Ibid.

During the Chinese rule, revolutions like that led by two Trưng sisters aimed at liberation but to no avail. In these revolts, Buddhism also played a great role; its temples became the common meeting grounds for freedom fighters and the perfect place to mobilize troops. Finally, in 939 a Vietnamese general named Ngô Quyền, led the Vietnamese people to victory over the Chinese on the decisive battle on Bạch Đằng river thus ending the Chinese rule.³⁵

After the war, Buddhist monks in coordination with the newly established government tried to build the kingdom. To show his gratitude, the emperor Đinh Tiên Hoàng helped to organize the Sangha and named Khuông Việt and Pháp Thuận, both Buddhist monks, as his national security adviser and secretary of state respectively. Another major milestone for Buddhism during this dynasty was that it was declared as the national religion by the emperor, who was himself a Buddhist.³⁶

The establishment of the kingdom was coupled with several hardships. The most crucial of all was the threat of another Chinese invasion. Although it was at first a mere thought among the people, it became clear when a Chinese spy disguised as a delegate for diplomatic relations entered Vietnam to size up its military power. Upon entering Vietnam, the first person the delegate met was a ferryman who was to take him to the capital.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

He was however surprised when the ferryman was able to converse with him at a level worthy of a government officer. When the delegate arrived and conversed with Vietnam's national security adviser, he concluded, based on his meeting with the ferryman and Khuông Việt that Vietnam was well prepared for an invasion and that invading it would be disastrous. Apparently, the ferryman who amazed and confused the delegate with the level of learning of a mere ferryman was Pháp Thuận in disguise. In the end, the two highest-ranking monks were responsible for averting a possible attack through their diplomatic skills and it is noted in history as the first diplomatic war won by Vietnam.³⁷

2.7. Buddhism and Its Two Golden Ages.

After more than 30 years, the Chinese began to strengthen its military force on the borders of Vietnam resulting in the election of a fitting leader to decide on the course of action dealing with the threat. The leader chosen was a talented, kind and highly moral man. He was the commander-in-chief of the army and was known as Lý Công Uẩn, who started the Lý Dynasty. Lý Công Uẩn was a Buddhist monk raised by Zen Master Vạn Hạnh in a Buddhist temple who then became his national adviser. Under his reign, 300 Buddhist temples were built and the Sangha was well organized with over 1000 monks. He incorporated Buddhist teaching in all aspects of governance.³⁸

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

During the two centuries of the Lý dynasty, Vietnam experienced the establishment of its first justice system aimed at educating criminals instead of punishing them. It was also during that time that the first university in Vietnam was established, producing talented and brilliant administrators. Also in that era was the first victory of Vietnam over China in Chinese territory when it crossed its border and struck down two provinces serving as logistic bases against Vietnam.

After the Lý dynasty (1010-1225) was the Trần dynasty (1225-1400). As with the Lý dynasty, all the emperors during this time were Buddhists espousing the teachings of the Buddha. In this dynasty, Buddhism surpassed the Lý dynasty's Golden Age and achieved its highest level of development.

Lý-Thái-Tôn “was an earnest supporter of Buddhism. In A.D. 1031, after putting an end to the Chiêm war in Hoan-Châu (now Nghệ An, North Vietnam), Lý-Thái-Tôn ordered the construction of ninety-five pagodas for the worship of Buddha, honoring their completion with an inaugural ceremony where he announced his decision to waive taxes for the following year. Three years later, in 1034, the emperor of Sung dynasty sent the Đại Tạng Kinh (S. Tripitaka – 大藏經) to Vietnam, where the king gratefully accepted at a special welcome ceremony held to receive the Chinese envoy.”³⁹

39 Thich Thien An, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc, Tokyo, 1975, p.67

The first emperor Trần Thái Tông followed in Gautama Buddha's footsteps and surrendered the throne and refused to govern in order to seek enlightenment. The emperor was persuaded into returning as king after the people of Vietnam threatened to commit suicide if he did not return.⁴⁰ It was during the time of Emperor Trần Nhân Tông (1258-1303) that the first Vietnamese meditation tradition *Trúc Lâm Yên Tử* was founded. During the Lý and Trần Dynasties, "Buddhism achieved its Golden Age in Vietnam."⁴¹

At that time, Mongolia was already a superpower with Central Asia, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Iran and China under its control. It then looked into conquering Vietnam, and sent 30,000 cavalry troops across the Vietnamese border to invade it. But Emperor Trần Nhân Tông withstood the assault with his troops and defeated the well-known Mongolian cavalry. Later, in order to save face from their defeat, the Mongolian army of 200,000 strong led by a prince again invaded Vietnam. As with the first invasion, the Vietnam army under the command of Trần Nhân Tông proved too powerful for the Mongolian army to defeat. The second defeat of the great Mongolian army was a great shock to its emperor Kublai Khan. In just two months of this defeat, Kublai Khan ordered 500,000 troops to go again, under the same prince, to invade Vietnam. The outcome was the same for the third time. The Vietnamese under Emperor Trần Nhân Tông vanquished the invaders in

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p.13

just four months thus frustrating the Mongolian idea of invasion and proving that they were not invincible.⁴² The efforts of the emperor were not in vain. Due to his military prowess and leadership, Vietnam enjoyed two centuries of peace.

Thus Buddhism enjoyed another Golden Age of almost two centuries under the Trần dynasty. Then the educated class was mostly composed of Buddhist monks since during the years of Chinese occupation, the only education one could get was at Buddhist temples. The Chinese policy against the establishment of its own educational system in Vietnam definitely had a great effect on the development of the Buddhist educational system.⁴³

2.8. Buddhism Spreads to the South

After two centuries of prosperity, a struggle for power began that lasted from 1528 to 1802.⁴⁴ The struggle commenced between two brothers Nguyễn Hoàng (1600-1613), who eventually fled to the South and Trịnh Kiểm (1503-1570), who was already acting as prime minister and exercised power. Nguyễn Hoàng fled in order to avoid persecution by his brother. But in doing so, he was instrumental in spreading Buddhism in the south. His loyal followers who fled with him, namely Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, Thuận Hóa (Huế), and Quảng

42 Ibid.

43 GLC. *Overview of Vietnam*, <http://www.viet-imports.com/vietnam.asp>

44 Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Lược Sử*, 1921, Tái bản Nhà xuất bản Tổng Hợp, 2005, p.251

Nam (Đà-Nẵng) together built a new way of life.⁴⁵

In due course Nguyễn Hoàng established his own kingdom called Đại Việt and claimed independence from the North prompting the North to wage war against the South. The war lasted for more than two centuries.

Nguyễn Hoàng, who as a devout Buddhist knew the importance of moral virtue among his people, started to build Buddhist temples and to promote Buddhist monks to oversee the religious affairs and spiritual development of the country. He favored Buddhism greatly and exempted Buddhist monks from military service.

After Hoàng's death, his son Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên was enthroned. Nguyen was also a devout Buddhist and ruled his people with compassion. He was well known for his love and tolerance, which earned him the name "Chúa Sãi" or the Monk King.⁴⁶

Not until Nguyễn Phúc Chu (1691-1725) takes the throne did Buddhism in the Southern kingdom achieve its third Golden Age. Phúc Chu was the most devout Buddhist of all emperors. At the age of 17 he assigned priority to the improvement of Buddhism in his kingdom.

In the words of Ven Thích Mật Thể,

"In 1687-1691 King Anh Tông known also as Nguyễn Phúc Trăn, asked Master Nguyễn Thiệu (元

45 Thích Đức Nhuận, op, cit.

46 Ibid.

韶)⁴⁷ who established Tổ Đình Thập Tháp in Bình Định province, Quốc Ân temple, Hà Trung temple in Thuận Hóa, Kim Cang temple in Đồng Nai (Miền Nam).⁴⁸ “to go back to China to invite a well known Buddhist monk from China.”⁴⁹

According to Thích Thiên Ân,

“At the request of Prince Nguyễn Phúc Trảng who ruled as King Anh-Tôn (1687-1691), Nguyễn Thiều – 元韶 later made a trip to China to gather Buddhist images, sutras, and records of the Zen patriarchs. He landed in Kuang-tung province, there making the acquaintance of Ven. Thạch Liêm Hòa Thượng 石廉和尚, who accompanied him on his return journey along with a number of other Zen monks. In honor of their arrival Prince Nguyễn organized a large reception in Huế followed by a platform of precepts ceremony at Linh Mục temple.”⁵⁰

This special move was due to the fact that the emperor found the prevailing condition of Buddhism in Vietnam to be unsatisfactory.

The Chinese monk known as “Master Thạch Liêm – 石廉 with a hundred well known monks,”⁵¹ started to reform the Vietnamese Sangha “with a grand Bhikkhu

47 Thích Mật Thể, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Lược*, Phú Lâu Na, Los Angeles, tái bản, 1993, pp.159-160

48 Thích Viên Kiên, *Chùa Thập Tháp và Tổ Sư Nguyễn Thiều – Siêu Bạch*, Viện triết Lý Việt Nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 2002, p.110

49 Thích Mật Thể, op. cit., p.160

50 Thích Thiên Ân, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam*, Tuttle, 1975, p.149

51 Ibid

ordination at Thiên Mụ temple,”⁵² and “involving more than 1,400 Vietnamese monks.”⁵³ But, till now, no one knows exactly how many monks participated in the Grand Bhikkhu Ordination.

The emperor together with most of his followers asked Master Thạch Liêm to be their spiritual master. Master Thạch Liêm claimed that he was the 29th patriarch of Chinese Tào Động (曹洞) Thiền (Zen) and was very glad to have a king under his wing. He anointed the king as his successor to be the 30th patriarch of the Tào Động Thiền School. Under the emperor’s direction, thousands of copies of Sutras and Vinayas were brought from China and were placed in libraries. Many Buddhist temples were built including the Bảo Châu in Trà Kiện – Quảng Nam, Kính Thiên Temple in Thuận Trạch – Quảng Bình and Long Hưng temple while some were refurbished such as the Thiên Mụ temple, making his reign the most productive era for Buddhism.⁵⁴ However, according to Thích Mật Thể,

“Master Thạch Liêm (石廉) stayed at Thiên Mụ temple and just created Khánh Vân temple close to Thiên Mụ.”⁵⁵

2.9. Assimilation and differentiation

Apparently, the dispute between Buddhist and

52 Ibid.

53 Le Cong Da, *Introduction to Buddhism in Vietnam & Vietnamese Zen*, Retrieved January 10, 2008, <http://www.quangduc.com>

54 Ibid. Le Cong Da, op. cit.

55 Thích Mật Thể, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Lược*, Phú Lâu Na, Los Angeles, tái bản, 1993, p.166

Confucian doctrines influenced the spiritual and cultural development of Vietnam. Although Vietnamese monarchy was oriented to Mahayana Buddhism, Vietnam during the Trần dynasty was a Confucian state. In the opinion of Nguyễn Thế Anh, “Vietnamese patterns of cultural borrowing from China structured the evolution of Buddhism in ways different from those at work in Theravada countries.”⁵⁶ Vietnamese culture combined “the cosmic umbrella of Hindu-Buddhist thought and a secular culture borrowed from China.”⁵⁷

Chinese Buddhists accepted participation in the life of the world, as well as seclusion from this world. Trần Buddhist texts attempted at synthesizing the two courses of action. On the one hand, Vietnam followed the theory of kingship according to which every leader should be followed by decent followers. On the other hand, Vietnam valued the Buddhist tradition of purifying the heart.⁵⁸ Such a blend differentiated political matters and powers from religious doctrines. It can be assumed that Vietnam was in search of the middle way for political issues. Trần rulers established Thiền (禪) School Trúc Lâm, known in Chinese as C’han and in Sanskrit as Dhyana (= Japanese Zen). The first Vietnamese Thiền (禪) Sect was founded by King Trần Nhân Tông (1258-1308) who resigned from his throne and became a monk.

56 Nguyen The Anh, 2002, *From Indra to Maitreya: Buddhist Influence in Vietnamese Political Thought*, Jour of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 33, issue 2, p.225+, www.quistia.com

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

At the turn of the first millennium, the Chinese Tripitaka influenced Vietnam. The Chinese emphasized the practical value of belief. In early Thiền Buddhist texts the triple world was represented through the turns of the mind: that means all elements came from mind and if we want the triple world to become peaceful and pure we must practice meditation to control and purify our mind. Like Chinese Buddhist practices, Vietnamese Buddhism emphasized syncretism. For example, in Vietnamese Buddhism the distinctions between Thiền (禪) and Tịnh (淨) (the Pure Land) disappear.⁵⁹

According to Thích Thiên Ân,

“Being from the same historical period as the Zen of the Nguyễn-Thiền school, Ōbaku resembles the Zen of modern-day Vietnam in the combined Zen-Pure Land practices, as regards the sect’s monastic organization, the ritual followed during morning and evening sutra chanting, and a number of more minor ways such as the priests’ dress and diet.”⁶⁰

The Chinese were divided into followers of ten sects. The Mahayanists viewed Theravada as preparation for the Mahayana doctrine. The major Chinese schools were the T’ien-t’ai, Hua-yen, Meditation, and Pure Land. The main difference was in the system of worshipping families and ancestors. Vietnamese worshipped ancestors to the ninth generation. In China, a whole

59 Thích Thiên Ân, *Buddhism & Zen In Vietnam*, College of Oriental Studies Graduate School and Charles E. Tuttle Company Publishers, Kyoto, 1975, p.156

60 Ibid, p.156

community could be linked to a single line of heritage, while in Vietnam it was impossible.⁶¹

2.10. Historic Autonomy of the Pagoda

In the cultural development of Vietnam pagodas or monasteries played an important role. First, they were places for the community to worship the Buddha. Second, they were centers of learning. Third, through their architectural forms and sculpture, they developed Buddhist culture. Today, in Vietnam there are about 15,000 pagodas. Some of them were erected in the first millennium of the present era, at the dawn of Vietnamese Buddhism.

The pagoda originates from the Indian stupa. At the beginning of the Christian era pagodas were called either *Tông Miếu* or *Miếu Đường*. Pagodas were classified into three types: state pagodas were built on a hill; middle site pagodas served for Buddhist practices of a whole region; and small site pagodas were used by the inhabitants of one village. The main altar was a shrine with several statues. Some pagodas resembled dwelling houses covered with thatched roofs.⁶²

In early times, monks lived in small huts that were later replaced by pagodas for a community of monks. Through pagodas, many aspects of Vietnamese culture can be observed. One of the earliest pagodas is *Đậu*

61 journals.iranscience.net:800/mcel.pacificu.edu/as/students/vb/China.htm

62 Trần Văn Giáp, *Notes on Vietnam Pagodas*, www.quangduc.com/English/vnbuddism/014notes.html

Pagoda of the 3rd century CE. It has a favorable location at the crossroads of Đông Triều – Phả Lại and Khoái Châu - Hưng Yên. Not only did Thiền (Zen) masters pray at this pagoda but the Dâu pagoda also witnessed the first appearance of Thiền (禪) Buddhism in Vietnam.

The history of some pagodas is reflected in Vietnamese legends. For example, King Lý Thái Tông (1028-1054) had a dream in which Guanyin led him to a lotus shrine. A monk advised the king to establish a pagoda with the Buddha on top of the pillar symbolizing the king from the dream. The Diên Hựu Pagoda was built with Lotus Flower Shrine on top of a stone pillar in the middle of a small lake. The Thiền (禪) master composed a poem to praise the pagoda:

*“The temple bell sounds fading away in autumn
night
Wavering water now quiet down under the moonlight
Reversed birds’ images impressed on cold-water
mirror
Doubled tower’s shape in silver moon looks
clearer.”*⁶³

Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism created the common cultural values of Vietnam, which are joined together in the cultural phenomenon of the Quỳnh Lâm Monastery. Không Lộ was the first monastic credited with the construction of the monastery. The inscription on the stele says that he ordered the molding of the statue of Maitreya. According to the legends, this monk

63 Vo Van Tuong & Huynh Nhu Phuong, op. cit The History of 45 Famous Pagodas is found in this book

was endowed with magic powers. First, he cured the king from hallucinations. Second, he brought from China a sack full of copper from which the monastery's bells were molded. It is believed that in the figure of Không Lộ the practices of Thiền and Tantrism were culturally combined. To Nguyen Hue Chi, the example of Quỳnh Lâm is an illustration of the openness of mind and religious tolerance that existed throughout Vietnam of that time.⁶⁴

The cultural elements of Vietnamese Buddhism are traced in sculptures of gods and goddesses. An important element of Vietnamese Buddhism is Guan-Yin. In Vietnamese statues she is always represented in a female form. She is widely present in Vietnamese temples and iconography. In China and Vietnam she is known as Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit.

The feminization of Guanyin (Quán Âm – 觀音) is attributed to Taoist influences. The figure of Guan-Yin is found in Marble Mountain pagodas, and shrines. She is the patron of barren mothers. Also, she protects people from natural disasters. In the Lotus Sutra (法華經), her image is associated with a male, while in Vietnam her figures are feminine.⁶⁵

2.11. Verification of Contextual Background

Due to the paucity of available data from

64 Nguyen Hue Chi, The Quynh Lam pagoda and the integration of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucius thought under the Lý and Trần (XIth-XIVth c.), Vietnam Studies, 2, 1993, www.quangduc.com

65 Guanyin, <http://journals.iranscience.net:800/vcel.pacicu.edu/mcel.pacicu.edu/as/studies/vb/kauniyin.htm>

archaeological and literary sources and the plethora of competing theories and opinions among modern Vietnamese scholars, the conclusions on the contextual background to Vietnamese education needed verification. The first six questions used for obtaining the opinions of a cross-section of Vietnamese scholars and students were designed for this purpose. The main issues identified for verification were as follows:

- 1- Whether the antiquity of Vietnamese Buddhism could be proved to extend to the time of Asoka and the mission of Sona and Uttara sent by him to Suvannabhumi in the 3rd century BCE rather than from China in 2nd century CE;
- 2- Whether Buddhism in Vietnam achieved its Golden Age in the period of the Lý Dynasty or in that of the Trần Dynasty,
- 3- If the first Vietnamese Buddhist university established in Vietnam was during the Lý Dynasty and what was its curriculum and who were its scholars;
- 4- What was the contribution of Master Thạch-Liêm (Thích Đại Sán) to the reformation of the Vietnamese Sangha in the South;
- 5- When did the Chinese Tripitaka become the standard Buddhist scriptures of Vietnam and whether any scriptures existed in Pali or Sanskrit or native Vietnamese languages;
- 6- Whether Vietnamese Buddhist works were taken to Nanjing in the 1407-1427 Chinese

invasion and were some of them preserved or translated in China.

An analysis of the 52 responses points out poignantly the inadequacy of not only the data on the history of Buddhism but also of critically conducted research. The following responses display the opinions resulting from the current state of knowledge on Vietnamese history. What is attempted in this section is to present the responses without discussion. They will be subjected to a critical evaluation in the section on conclusions.

1- From where Buddhism came to Vietnam:

Question 1:

- From India = 90% respondents
- From China = 5% respondents
- Do not know = 2.5% respondents
- No answer = 2.5% respondents

An overwhelming majority of respondents think that the origins of Vietnamese Buddhism are the result of direct contact with India. The answers supporting Indian-Buddhist origins of Vietnamese Buddhism fall into three groups:

- King Asoka sent missionaries to all regions of his interest. He sent them simultaneously. Chinese territory is beyond and farther than Vietnam. Hence, the missionaries to Vietnam arrived earlier than those who converted China to Buddhism.
- On their way to China, missionaries had to have a rest in the Vietnamese territory. As they traveled by

land, Vietnam was on their way. They built centers to rest during their journey from India to China and back.

- Buddhism was brought to Vietnam from India. Although the Vietnamese territory was often endangered by invasions, the Chinese had to accept the truth that important Buddhist centers were on the territory of present-day Vietnam. So, the rise of Buddhism has a common history.

One respondent expressed his personal opinion that Buddhism came to Vietnamese from India and it was due to Mậu Tử and Khương Tăng Hội who made Buddhism popular in China. Thus, Chinese Buddhism is rooted in Vietnamese Buddhism. The two respondents who thought that Vietnamese Buddhism came from China expressed the view that it took almost 500 years to establish Vietnamese Buddhism but little is known about it for sure, while only under Chinese dominance Vietnamese Buddhism developed. The following sample of responses shows the variety of points of view from which the issue is viewed:

Person 1: I think that Vietnam has earlier roots in Vietnam than China. Of course, it was Asoka who sent missionaries to several countries. I am proud that Vietnam has a longer tradition of Buddhism than China.

Person 2: Vietnamese Buddhism has direct links with India but the Chinese influenced later, being together for such a long time is something that is not denied.

Person 3: The missionaries came first but they were sent to many countries, not only Vietnam.

Person 4: I am of Chinese-Vietnamese origin. It is not important who brought but who developed. So, it was China, we were together at that time, let it be Indo-Chinese.

2- The Golden Age of Vietnamese Buddhism

Question 2:

- Lý Dynasty = 25% respondents
- Trần Dynasty = 37.5% respondents
- Both = 37.5% respondents
- No answer

Twenty-five percent of respondents agreed that the Golden Age of Vietnamese Buddhism was due to the Lý dynasty and substantiated their answers with following comments:

- Lý dynasty was brought to power by the Buddhist monks who gained from it becoming involved in all spheres of life;

- If it were not Lý dynasty with its rewarding attitudes to Buddhism, the Golden Age would not be possible for over two centuries;

- Lý dynasty pioneered a state movement in support of Vietnamese Buddhism. Under Lý dynasty, Vietnam had its first university.

37.5 percent of respondents expressed the view that the period of the Trần dynasty was the Golden Age of Vietnamese Buddhism. Typical explanations given in support of Trần Dynasty were as follows:

- The Trần dynasty is the greatest in Vietnamese history. Thái Tông was a national leader, a heroic emperor, and a Buddhist teacher of great respect.

- The Trần dynasty is important for me because of the Trúc Lâm Yên Tử sect which I admire most of all. I admire Emperor Trần Nhân Tông as the founder of Vietnamese meditation school.

Those who expressed the opinion that both periods should be regarded as the Golden Age of Buddhism gave the following answers:

- I believe that Lý dynasty is a golden dynasty in Vietnam, but Trần dynasty made Buddhism in Vietnam develop more and more. However, without the basic step taken by Lý dynasty it would be impossible.
- I consider them together as both dynasties made many efforts to build Vietnam as a national state through a harmony of social activity and Buddhist education.
- Trần dynasty followed in the footsteps of Lý dynasty and unified the Buddhist heritage.
- Hard to say which of them did more. Both served the country with complete devotion.
- I am against deciding which did more; both did a lot, I am so proud of them both.

3- First University, its curriculum and scholars

All respondents answered this question positively. They gave the state of their knowledge as follows:

Question 3:

- Know something but not much
= 50% of respondents
- Studied with Vietnamese Buddhist teachers
= 50% of respondents

Those who said they knew something pointed to the contribution made by the university to education and academic achievement in Vietnam through the system of national examinations. They were aware that the Temple of Literature was the oldest school of learning in Vietnam and existed for seven centuries as a center of instruction (1076-1779). They also mentioned some of its alumni like Lương Thế Vinh, Ngô Sĩ Liên, and Ngô Thì Nhậm.

Those who said they knew about this school from Vietnamese Buddhist teachers said that it was the embodiment of the best qualities of Vietnamese Buddhist education as regards the teaching of canonical texts, the Mahayana tradition, meditation practices on emptiness, and high morality, in addition to other religions and the training of Vietnamese Buddhist educators.

4- Contribution of Master Thạch-Liêm (Thích Đại Sán) to the Sangha of the South

Question 4:

- Positive = 60% of respondents
- More positive than negative = 25% of respondents
- No opinion = 15% of respondents

5- When Chinese Tripitaka became the Standard Buddhist scriptures of Vietnam

Question 5:

- Not earlier than it was translated by Xuanzang (Hsuan Tsang) in the 7th century from the Sanskrit Vijnanavada = *10 % of respondents*
- With the rise of Thiền Buddhism = *60% of respondents*
- When the Lý dynasty came to power = *30% of respondents*

Most respondents think that the Chinese Tripitaka became standard with the rise of Thiền Buddhism. Some answers were as follows:

Person 1: Chinese Tripitaka was translated from Sanskrit and brought with Thiền Buddhism. I think there were versions in Vietnamese for common people but they are lost. I do not know for sure.

Person 2: Chinese Tripitaka was translated from Sanskrit. The Mahayana tradition needed it. I think Vietnamese texts existed as well. How could they teach without them for so many centuries?

Person 3: The Chinese Tripitaka became standard during Chinese domination.

Person 4: All had their versions. The Chinese translated from Sanskrit, especially going to India.

6- Vietnamese Buddhist works taken to Nanjing during 1407-1427 Chinese invasion

Question 6:

- I have read about it in history books. If so, all books were lost = *60 % of respondents*
- If the Chinese really valued them, they hid them somewhere, but I do not know of Chinese translations = *11% of respondents*
- It is my view that it might have been so; but they took for sure only those in Chinese. The books can be destroyed without been taken so far. = *29% of respondents.*

From the responses, it is clear that most accept the official view from textbooks on history. However, 29 percent of respondents expressed the view that the Chinese wanted to carry the Chinese Buddhist books, which were valuable to them, to Nanjing. They simply confiscated them from pagodas. At the same time, opinion is divided concerning whether the books were destroyed right in Vietnam or later. One respondent wrote: If I were a Thiền Buddhist who lived then, I would have liked to have these valuable Thiền manuscripts in a safe place, namely in China. It is not in the interests of Chinese Buddhists to say what they have in storage, because they hardly want to show the world that Vietnamese Buddhist teachers outdid them in many ways. No respondent thought that the stolen books were translated into Chinese under the names of their Vietnamese Buddhist authors. Following is a sample of answers:

Person 1: I was told that the Chinese had burnt Vietnamese Buddhist books like Hitler did. I do not think they valued those books in Vietnamese. It was so many years ago.

Person 2: The Chinese destroyed the books, maybe without carrying them to China. But I think those in China were not destroyed. It is a very interesting question, understudied. It is a great pity that the books were lost as it happens when a country is at war everywhere.

Person 3: I learned this and I trust this. If such a story exists, how do I know that the Chinese translated something and then destroyed? It is propaganda.

Person 4: I rely on historical facts. There is evidence they were transported to be destroyed. I wonder why they had to transport them to destroy. They wanted to have all Chinese books, which the Buddhist specialists selected as important.

2.12. Conclusions on Contextual Background

On the first issue pertaining to the contextual background, namely from where Buddhism came to Vietnam, the prevailing view that most of the respondents to the questionnaire had expressed is that it came directly from India at the time of the nine missions of Asoka in the 3rd century BCE. It is not surprising because such was the view held in China as far back as the 5th century. As discussed by Ananda W. P. Guruge in his “Asoka the Righteous: A Definitive Biography.” “The Chinese,

with the desire to extend the antiquity of Buddhism, believed that China was a part of the empire of Asoka and out of the 80,000 monasteries ascribed to Asoka, as many as 19,000 were built in China. With this belief as many as archaeological discoveries had been recorded of sites said to be such monasteries.”⁶⁶ Just as there is no evidence as regards the Chinese belief, nothing proves that Sona and Uttara came as far as Vietnam.

Historically, more reliable evidence can be found for the existence of Buddhism in Vietnam in the 2nd century CE. It is, however, significant that three of the four monks who were prominent in the propagating of Buddhism were of Indian origin. This is quite possible because the Maritime Silk Route was by then bringing Indian traders to Indo-China. The Indian kingdom of Champa had come into existence around 192 CE. Funan in the south already had Buddhist kings.

“Paramartha or Gunarata or Zhendi, the Indian Buddhist Scholar, who at the invitation of Empress Wu (502-549) came to China via Fu-nan (Cambodia), brought with him a large shipment of Sanskrit Buddhist Scriptures. He translated as many as a hundred volumes and has distinguished himself as the promoter of Dharmalaksana School in China. Paramartha was a specialist on Abhidharma. Five of his works still extant are on Abhidharma. His most important work, according to Mukherjee, was the translation of Asvaghosa’s

66 Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Asoka A Definitive Biography*, The Central Cultural Fund, The Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Information, Colombo, 1993, pp 382-385

Sraddhotpadasastra (Mukherjee 1928 32). Apart from translating parts of the commentary on Asanga's Mahayanasamparigrahasastra, Paramartha concentrated on rendering into Chinese a remarkable collection of the works of Vasubandhu: Among them are ching pan-yu-chin-wu-chieh lun, Sastra of the Buddha's last teaching (Nanjio 1209), Buddhagotrasastra, Vijnaptimatrasiddhi, Madhyaantavibhangssutra, and Tarksastra. (Mukherjee 1928 33) Paramartha "performed the very important task of introducing the idealistic teachings of the Indian masters Asanga and Vasubandhu to the Chinese Buddhist World" (Ch'ien 1964/73 135). His efforts, among others, set Hsuantsang on his journey to India, which eventually resulted in the founding of the Fa-hsiang or Idealistic School, also known as Yogacara, Dharmaksana, Vijnanvada, Vijnaptimatra, Cittamatra, Mind-only or Consciousness-only School."⁶⁷

The Chinese influence in the development of Vietnamese Buddhism is irrefutable, especially because of the many centuries of political domination. It is equally true that indigenous forces played a major role in achieving a level of popularity and cultural impact. It was this continuous development which enabled the Lý Trần Dynasties to usher in the Golden Age of Buddhism extending from 1225 to 1400. The credit for establishing the first university in Vietnam goes to the Lý Dynasty. Whether it was entirely Buddhist in character is not clear because the responsibility for the system of national

67 Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Buddhist Answer to Current Issues*, Author House, Indiana 2005, pp.292-293

examinations might suggest a Confucian model. This has been noted for further search for data.

The development of Buddhism in the south in the 17th century was significant because inspiration and guidance was sought from China. A Chinese monk of great ability and vision, Master Thạch-Liêm (Thích Đại Sán), revitalized the Vietnamese Sangha and introduced the Chinese Tào Động (曹洞) Thiền School to Vietnam. His contribution appears to have been very important to the evolution and assimilation of the Thiền (Zen) and the Pure Land traditions in Vietnamese Buddhism.

No Indian scriptures (in Sanskrit or Pali) had been found in Vietnam. Nor are there any ancient scriptures in old Vietnamese. There is no proof that the ancient Vietnamese texts were taken to China and destroyed. The Chinese Tripitaka and Chinese translations of Mahayana scriptures have been the primary source of knowledge of Buddhism. The current texts in Vietnamese belong to a later stage.

It is with this contextual background that the exploration of the beginning and development of Buddhist education is attempted in this dissertation.

Chapter Three

BEGINNING OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

3.1. Lack of Information

Vietnam's earliest libraries, the sources of education, were primarily collections of Buddhist texts. However, continuous invasions had negative effects on the way these sources could be preserved. During the Chinese invasion 1407-1427 all original Vietnamese books were transferred to Nanjing where they might have been destroyed. Tensions between the ruling dynasties that supported the neo-Confucian philosophy and the Buddhist church dating from the 14th century resulted in the further destruction of Vietnamese original records.¹ Education in Vietnam in the first millennium CE can be traced only through indirect sources connected with Buddhist practices of that time.

3.2. Impact of Chinese Tradition on Vietnamese Buddhism.

Vietnam is characterized by the Confucian respect for education. Men had higher status than women.

1 Early History, op. cit.

Sons were valued more than daughters. An ideal man developed through four steps: 1) he cultivated himself; 2) he learned how to be the head of the family; 3) he learned how to rule the country; and 4) he learned how to pacify the world. A woman was raised for domesticity. She had to obey her father, her husband and, if widowed, her eldest son.² In Vietnam, the influence of Chinese culture and education was called Sinicization. It is believed that due to Buddhism Vietnam was able to preserve ethnic specificity without being absorbed into the powerful Chinese culture.³

The Thiên (禪, Zen, Dhyana) school of practicing meditation, based on the Buddha's Mind Sealand, was introduced by the Patriarch Bodhidharma who came from India.⁴ The Theravada tradition teaches insight meditation rather than a system of beliefs. Insight meditation develops calm through insight of reflection. Sustaining attention is achieved by focusing the mind on the body. Walking is alternated with sitting or lying down as forms of meditation. The Theravada tradition teaches Buddhists how to be patient, tolerant, caring, kind, and develop compassion as "the natural sensitivity of the heart."⁵ The key to the Buddhist

2 LaBorde, P., 2007, *Vietnamese: Cultural profile*, http://wtnomed.org/cultures/vietnames/vietmese_cp.html

3 Thich Thien An, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam*, Tuttle, Tokyo, 1975

4 Ibid.

5 Knierim, T, *Introduction to Buddhism*, www.thebigview.com

method of knowledge is objective observation of the Four Noble Truths.⁶

Throughout the early history of Vietnam in particular, Buddhist monks belonged to the most learned circle of society. They knew languages, translated Buddhist books into classical Chinese, practiced Buddhism together with laymen, and initiated an anti-Chinese movement. However, they were on friendly terms with the representatives of other philosophies and religions such as Taoism and Confucianism. It is interesting to note that Thiên masters were not only educated in Buddhism but also were renowned scholars in Confucianism. Vietnamese Buddhist monks played an important social, cultural, and educational role under favorable conditions of the 6th-8th centuries. During that period they lead the opposition to Chinese dominance.⁷

3.3. Vietnam as Melting Pot of Indian and Chinese Cultures

Vietnamese culture developed in terms of heterogeneity. The Cham people derived their cultural practices from India. Unlike other parts of Vietnam that were influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, the Cham were predominantly Hindu. They lived in the central highlands of Vietnam. They inherited the caste system from India. Brahmans and Kshatriyas had a privileged status. The Cham people adopted the Hindu

6 Santina, op. cit

7 Thich Minh Chau, *A Brief History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, 1994, www.buddhisttoday.com

practice of not eating beef. They worshipped the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh. Their central figure of worship, however, was Shiva. Together with Hinduism, the Cham people practiced Mahayana Buddhism and Islam.⁸

Hans Kung in suggesting that Vietnam developed some core ethical constants, claimed that

“Cross-cultural relations existed in Asian history and Vietnam was the way along which Buddhism spread from India to China and later to Korea and Japan.”⁹

This theory needs further evidence to be established. Yijing (義淨) in his “Biographies of Eminent Monks” mentions Champa (Vietnam) as the place from where Hui minh Shih started his voyage, where Ch’en-wu died and where Ch’i-chu reached on his way to Sri vijaya.¹⁰ From these observations, it is apparent that Vietnamese culture and education developed conditions in which the rise of Buddhism played a significant role.

First of all, due to Buddhist practices such as meditation, recitation of the Amita Buddha’s name and mantras, Vietnam was able to remain a unified territory that resisted the invaders and preserve cultural values. Second, Buddhism was not alien to the Vietnamese ancient ancestor – worship tradition. Vietnamese

8 *The kingdom of Champa*,:http://journals.iranscience.net:800/mcel.pacificu.edu/mcel.pacificu.edu/as/studies/vb/CHAM.htm

9 Kung, H, December 6, 2007, *The Globalization of ethics*, http://chlim01.blogspot.com/2007/2/globalization-of-ethics.html

10 Yijing: *Ta-t’ang-si-yu-ku-fa-kao-seng-chuan* (Tr. Lahiri), Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1986 pp.71, 102, 106.

Buddhists attempted to develop their own Buddhist practices, which were characterized by Indian-Buddhist syncretism. Third, Buddhism ideas unified Vietnamese against Chinese dominance. Fourth, Buddhism stimulated the development of Vietnamese culture and education even during the Chinese dominance because similar Buddhist practices helped assimilation.

However, Chinese influence prevented Buddhism from becoming a centralized religion. Chinese dominance and attempts at thrusting on Vietnam a particular form of Buddhism were not always positive. In various influences of Confucianism and Taoism on Buddhism, the Vietnamese not only protected their genuine form of Buddhism but also enriched it by new influences. As shown, Vietnamese books written by local monks might have been translated into Chinese with their true origin lost over time – the originals being destroyed and or existing somewhere unknown.

Vietnamese Buddhism consisted of spiritual meditation rather than a system of beliefs, so Buddhists educated themselves as well as others to live with Buddhism in their hearts. This helped the Vietnamese preserve their peaceful attitude and deep spiritual beliefs. With this as the base, Vietnamese culture and education developed under Indian-Buddhist influences intertwined with Taoism, Confucianism, and ancestor worships common to the Vietnamese. The blending of cultural and educational traditions is a remarkable feature of Vietnam before the Golden Age of Buddhism. Achievement/works and casa (clothing) of Vietnamese

Buddhist is under Chinese and Indian cultural influences. Many pages of this history have blank spots due to the invasions of the following eras. However, Vietnamese culture seems to have preserved its specificity, which modern scholars explore and discuss in relation to other cultural traditions of the region. Although Vietnamese culture has been under Chinese influences for a long time, the Chinese impact was not as overwhelming as some scholars used to believe. New research will be able to restore unknown pages relating to the development of early Vietnamese culture and education, as well as likely revisions to known pages.

Chapter Four

DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

4.1. *Buddhism: Origin and Teachings*

Buddhism originated around 538 B.C. as an offshoot of Hinduism. Gautama Buddha, “a prince who bridled at the formalism of Hinduism as it was being interpreted by the priestly caste of Brahmans,”¹ was its founder. He spent years meditating and wandering as an ascetic until he discovered the path of enlightenment to nirvāna. Nirvāna according to him is “the world of endless serenity in which one is freed from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.”² Buddhism espouses that there are four noble truths – man is born to suffer in successive lives, craving for earthly pleasures and possessions is the cause of this suffering, man shall be delivered from suffering upon cessation of this craving, and by following the eight-fold path, man shall achieve deliverance – and through this he shall receive salvation.

The foundation of the Buddhist concept of morality

1 Country Studies. *Religion*, <http://www.country-studies.com/vietnam/religion.html>

2 Ibid

and right behavior, the eight-fold path, consists of right views, or sincerity in leading a religious life; right intention, or honesty in judgment; right speech, or sincerity in speech; right conduct, or sincerity in work; right livelihood, or sincerity in making a living; right effort, or sincerity in aspiration; right mindfulness, or sincerity in memory; and right concentration, or sincerity in meditation.”³ It is the most important religion in Vietnam. Unlike other religions, “Vietnamese Buddhism stays on earth rather than ascends up to heaven, attaches to exorcism and prayers for wealth, happiness and longevity rather than heads toward nirvana.”⁴

Most Vietnamese practice Mahayana Buddhism rather than its Southern counterpart. The doctrinal distinction between the two arises from their differing views of Gautama Buddha: the Mahayana school teaches that Gautama was only one of many “enlightened ones” manifesting the fundamental divine power of the universe; the Southern school teaches that Gautama was a historical enlightened one and a great teacher, but that he was not divine. The Mahayana sect holds further that laypersons can attain nirvana, whereas the Theravada school believes that only ordained monks and nuns could do so.⁵

Since Emperor Asoka, and later Emperor Kanishka,

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- 3 Te Huynh Dinh. *Vietnamese Religions*, <http://www.asiarecipe.com/vietreligion.html>
 - 4 Asiarecipe.com. *Vietnamese Culture*, www.asiarecipe.com/vieculture.html
 - 5 About.com. *Religion in Vietnam: Buddhism*.http://atheism.about.com/library/world/KZ/bl_VietnamBuddhism.htm

took the initiative to spread Buddhism inside and outside their empires, Buddhism has spread to all parts of Asia. It is the predominant religion in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, Laos, and Cambodia. It was also once the predominant religion of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Maldives. Buddhism is present in some form in almost every country in the world. In my estimation, there are approximately 700 million Buddhists in the world. Many millions follow his way to understand and cultivate themselves to later attain Nirvāna through enlightenment.

After the Buddha passed away, the Sangha divided into many groups, and this in turn brought about approximately 100 sects. The Buddha taught different people at different places, and the degree of understanding of each of his students varied widely. Besides, the Buddha encouraged critical examination of his teachings and due to diverse scholarly interpretation of his teachings, many sects have come into existence.

According to Andre Bareau, the Author of *Les Sectes Bouddhiques Du Petit Vehicule*, there are 34 sects:⁶ 1) Mahasanghika; 2) Lokottaravada; 3) Ekavyavaharika; 4) Gokulika or Kukkutika); 5) Bahusrutiya; 6) Prajnaptivada; 7) Caitiya or Caitika; 8) Andhaka; 9) Purvasaila or Uttarasaila; 10) Aparasaila; 11) Rajagiriya; 12) Siddharthika; 13) Sthaviravada;

6 A. Barareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques Du Petit Vehicule*, Paris, France, 2002

14) Himavata; 15) Vatsiputiya; 16) Sammatiya; 17) Dharmottriya; 18) Bhadrayaniya; 19) Sannagarika or Sandagiriya; 20) Sarvastivada – Vaibhasika; 21) Mula-sarvastivada; 22) Sautrantika or sankrantivada; 23) Darstantika; 24) Vibhajyavada; 25) Mahisasaka; 26) Dharmaguptaka; 27) Kasyapiya or Suvarsaka; 28) Tamrasatiya; 29) Theravada–Mahavihara; 30) Abhayagirivasin (Dhammarusika); 31) Jetavaniya (Sagalika); 32) Hetuvada; 33) Uttarapathaka; 34) Vetullaka.

In China and Japan, there are ten sects: 1) Zen Buddhism (Thiền); 2) The esoteric or sect Tantrism (Mật); 3) Vijnanavada sect (Duy thức); 4) The Avatamsaka school (Hoa Nghiêm); 5) Lotus sect (Pháp Hoa); 6) The Vinaya school (Luật); 7) The Middle School (Madhyamika – Trung Quán); 8) Abhidharma School (Câu Xá); 9) Sarvasunyavada (Thành Thật); 10) Sukkavati (Tịnh Độ Tông).

All schools derived from Buddhist canons, and each school of Buddhism employs many methods of instruction and practice.

Although there are many sects, they all are linked to three traditions.

Theravada Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism is the oldest surviving Buddhist tradition and has been the predominant religion in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and most of the continental Southeast Asian

countries. Theravada literally means “the Way of the Elders.” Theravadins believe that liberation from samsara into nirvāna is through the learning, practicing and teachings of the Buddha-dharma. The main purpose in Theravada is reaching Nirvana, which is considered the ultimate goal. It is believed that only humans can achieve enlightenment because all others are too deeply mired either in ignorance, forgetfulness or avarice to be able to even strive toward the goal. The Theravadin way of attaining enlightenment is by intense, dedicated and time-consuming effort and practice. They strive for wisdom first and thus view Buddhism as a philosophy. Pure Theravada with the ideal of Arahant is no longer in existence. Today, what is generally called Theravada is more precisely described as Southern Buddhism and is currently found in South and Southeast Asia where the main scriptures are in Pāli.

Mahāyāna Tradition

Mahāyāna Buddhism is the other major surviving school and has been the predominant religion in China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Mahāyāna literally means “Great Vehicle.” Compared to Theravada, the Mahayana school is quite different. First of all, the Theravada school believes that attaining enlightenment is accomplished through intense and dedicated practice and study of the dharma. However, in the Mahayana school, enlightenment is achieved by living your normal life but with some degree of spiritual involvement. Second, Theravadins believe that their primary goal

in life is to attain enlightenment. Mahayanans vow to be reborn into samsara and help others to attain enlightenment first before they do. Thirdly, Mahayanans strive for compassion and wisdom whereas Theravadins strives for Wisdom. Hence, the Mahāyāna tradition has a reference to a higher being, which makes it look more like a religion than a philosophy. Compassion and concern for humanity and sentient beings as a whole is the central motivation behind the development of the Mahayana tradition.

Both Therāvāda and Mahāyāna, however, have the same goal. They may differ in the paths they follow to reach enlightenment but what is important is that both view enlightenment as the ultimate goal. In Buddhism, understanding one's self and living to attain enlightenment is more important than the "form" or "way" which one follows.

The Mahāyāna tradition has a very rich philosophical literature in the form of Sutras and Sastras, scriptural texts and ancillary works.

The Vajra-prājñā-paramita sūtra teaches:

"The Buddha asked: What do you think Subhuti, does it occur to the Tathagata? Has Dharma been demonstrated? Whoever, Subhuti would say, the Tathagata has demonstrated Dharma, he would speak falsely, and he would misrepresent me by seizing on what is not there. Why? Demonstration of Dharma, demonstration of Dharma, Subhuti, there is no Dharma that can be understood as a demonstration of Dharma:"

The Buddha also taught:

“The Dharma should, nevertheless, be abandoned. How much more so what is not the Dharma?”⁷

In Thiên school, we are told:

“Use mind; impart mind, do not use language, outside the sect; also do not undergo normal instruction; do not rely on texts but on personal communication of its tenets,”

Some master said:

“To end of the way of language, and all the activities of the mind, places must exterminate.”

These statements urge one to avoid ego and (chấp thủ) impressions, because impressions are a screen and obstruction (chướng ngại), to the attainment of enlightenment. Therefore, the Buddha taught that impression in language is a big screen and obstruction to enlightenment.

Hence, an individual must not rely on things such as Sùtras alone because the Sùtra itself is not the Truth. The Sùtra is only a “form” or “means” to attain truth. This is why Buddha said, “Form is empty.” It does not really matter how one arrives at the truth.

In the Lotus Sutra, the Parable of the Herbs showed the value of equality in Tathàgata’s teachings. Buddha emphasized that the Dharma he taught is for everyone, offering an equal and unprejudiced learning for everyone. There is no discrimination and everyone who

7 Vajra Prajaparamita sùtra, trans by Ven. Yifa, Buddha’s Light Publishing, 2006, p.15 (法尚應捨何況非法)

wants to be saved can learn from his teachings.

In the Mahaparinirvana Sùtra, the Buddha taught: “The Dharma which the Buddha taught has only pure one taste, it is the taste of deliverance.” The Mahayana teachings are diverse and give importance to philosophical analysis.

Vajrayana Tradition

Vajrayana Buddhism is an extension of the Mahayana tradition and is widely known in Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, northern India, Nepal, southwestern and northern China, Mongolia and various constituent republics of Russia. Known as the “Diamond Vehicle,” Vajrayana adopted additional techniques like upaya (skillful means) rather than philosophy. In the Vajrayana tradition, practitioners claim that they have an accelerated path to enlightenment and that Buddhahood can be achieved in a single lifetime. They view enlightenment as liberation from limited ego-driven individuality. Their techniques are also very different from the two other branches in the sense that they use tantric techniques, which are practical aids to spiritual development. Vajrayana Buddhism views enlightenment as a valid interpretation of the Buddha-dharma, though it may seem that some of the practices used in this school are more radical than the other schools. In the Vajrayana, the concept of Guru is more important than the Buddha himself.

In each tradition, there are different schools and sects such as Thièn, Tantra, Mantra Sect, Pureland Sect, Lotus Sect, Avatamsaka School, etc. Although each

tradition understands the Buddha, each tradition has their own ways of explaining him.

According to Theravada, the Buddha was the visible physical body (*rupa-kaya*), but according to Mahayana the Buddha has three bodies: 1). The reward body of a Buddha, in which he enjoys the rewards of his labors (*sambhoga-kaya* – 報身); 2). Buddha’s metamorphosis body (*Nirmanakaya* – 化身); 3.) *Dharma-kaya* (法身), body of teachings.

In *Majjhimanikaya* (Vol I, p 140, P.T.S. ed):

“Tathagatam ananuvejoti vadami etc., – I declare that Tathāgata is ananuvejja etc. Whose track is untraceable, who is above all the dichotomies of thought.”

In *Vajracchedika – Nāng Đoạn Kim Cang Kinh* (verse 43):

“Dharmato Buddha drastavya

Dharmakayahinayakah.

Dharmata capyavijneyanasasakya vijjanitum.”⁸

(The Buddhas are to be seen in their real dharma-nature, for these supreme guides (of humanity) have the dharma-nature in their core. But the essence of dharma is transcendent to thought and cannot be grasped by ideation).

In *Karika XXII, 15*, *Nāgārjuna* says: “Those who describe the Buddha who is transcendent to thought and word and is not subject to birth and death in term of

8 Jaidev Singh, (*An Introduction to Madhyamaka Philosophy (Đại Cương Triết Học Trung Quán)*), Trans: Thích Viên Lý, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 1998, p 175

conceptual categories are all victims of the verbalizing mind (prapanca) and are thus unable to see the Tathagata in his real nature.”⁹

In the Vajra Prajnaparamita Sutra, it is taught:¹⁰

“Subhuti, what does your mind say? The Buddha can be seen by his perfectly formed body, can he not?”

“No, World-Honored One. The Tathagata should not be seen by his perfect formed body. Why is this? The Tathagata says a perfectly formed body is not a perfectly formed body, so it is called a perfectly formed body”

“Subhuti, what does your mind say? The Tathagata can be seen by all of the perfect characteristics, can he not?”

“No, World-Honored One. The Tathagata should not be seen by all of the perfect characteristics.

Why is this? The Tathagata says the perfection of all characteristics is not perfect, so it is called the perfection of all characteristics.”

Further in the Vajra Prajnaparamita Sutra:

“Subhuti, what does your mind say? The Tathagata can be seen by bodily appearances, can he not?”

“No, World-Honored One. The Tathagata cannot be seen by bodily appearances. Why is this? The Tathagata has said bodily appearances are not bodily appearances.”

9 Jaidev Singh, *An Introduction to Madhyamaka Philosophy*, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 1988, p.194

10 *Vajra Prajnaparamita Sutra*, translated by Ven. Yifa, M.C. Owens, P.M. Romaskiewicz, Buddha's Light Publishing, Hacienda Heights, 2006, pp.57-59

The Buddha told Subhuti, “Every appearance whatsoever is a deception. If you can see all appearances not as appearances, then you see the Tathagata.”¹¹

Vĩnh Gia Đại Sư (永嘉 – 玄覺大師) reflects this philosophical outlook when he remarks:

君不見，
絕學無為閑道人
不除妄想不求真
無明實性即佛性
幻化空身即法身

“Have you not seen!

*People whose study has ended, who do nothing, who
abide in the Way at ease?*

*They do not banish false thoughts; they do not seek
the truth.*

The true nature of ignorance is the Buddha-nature;

*This empty body, an illusory transformation, is the
Dharma-body.”¹²*

This concept is the basis of many strong statements in various Buddhist schools and sects: “Sentient beings are Buddhas, afflictions are Bodhi.” This statement, widely known in many monasteries in Vietnam, lays emphasis on the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of the

11 *Vajra Prajnaparamita Sutra*, translated by Ven. Yifa, M.C. Owens, P.M. Romaskiewicz, Buddha’s Light Publishing, Hacienda Heights, 2006, p.11

12 Vĩnh Gia Đại Sư, (永嘉 – 玄覺大師), (證道歌) *Chứng Đạo Ca*, HT Tuyên Hóa Lược Giảng, Buddhist Text Translation Society 2004, Pg.16

Absolute No-Self and No-Ego in relation to the Buddha-nature.

In approaching the vast body of knowledge from all traditions, schools and sects of Buddhism, as found in different regions, Vietnamese educators had been less parochial and more open to the universal applicability of the Buddha's message. They saw Buddhism as Herbert George Wells, a historian and philosopher, portrayed in his "Outline of History:"

"You see clearly a man, simple, devout, lonely, battling for light, a vivid human personality, not myth. Beneath a mass of miraculous fable I feel that there also was a man. He too, gave a message to mankind universal in its character. Many of our best modern ideas are in closest harmony with it. All the miseries and discontents of life are due, he taught, to selfishness. Selfishness takes three forms – one, the craving for immortality and worldliness. Before a man can become serene he must cease to live for his senses or himself. Then he merges into a great being. Buddha in a different language called men to self-forgetfulness five hundred years before Christ. In some ways he was near to our needs and us. Buddha was more lucid upon our individual importance in service than Christ, and less ambiguous upon the question of personal immortality."¹³

In many Sūtras such as the Maha Parinibbana, the Lotus flower sūtra and others, it is said: "Buddha Gautama is the successor of the past Buddhas." In the Brahma Net Sūtra, Buddha said:

13 H.G. Wells, *Outline of History*, Classic Books, USA, 1920

“I have come to this world 8,000 times.” As the president of The United States of America described in his annual Vesak message, the Buddha was “a wise and holy man who, in his search for spiritual truth, inspired the world with a powerful message of compassion and tolerance, which millions of believers in countries across the globe continue to find inspiration, comfort, and purpose in his teachings. Today, 2,543 years after Buddha’s birth, our world grows increasingly complex; yet Buddha’s enduring message still offers us strength and serenity in a demanding era.”¹⁴

In 2005, the United Nations declared that Buddhism is a major religion and recognized the anniversary of the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and death as a special United Nations holiday. Mindful of the continuing relevance of the teachings of the Buddha in modern times, Vietnamese educators pay equal attention to all traditions, schools and sects in spite of the differences among them.

4.2. Early Trends in Vietnamese Education

In Vietnam, Buddhist education is closely related to the developments of Buddhism. Unlike the educational system, with its overcrowded schools and lack of basic supplies due to wars,¹⁵ Buddhist education has a rich history. The early Vietnamese people under Chinese rule gained education not from the government but from

14 Bill Clinton, President of United States of America, May, 3 1999

15 QCA.org. *Children from Vietnam*, www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/qca-05-1746-11315_vietnam.pdf

the Buddhist temples. During the Chinese occupation, the policy that all cultural links to national traditions be extinguished was strictly implemented. The Chinese aimed to strip the Vietnamese of their cultural identity and replace it with their own. And there were no Vietnamese schools. The only education that people received was from word of mouth, common experience and from the temples of monks.

After the Chinese invasion, when Vietnam gained its independence with the help of Buddhist leaders, Buddhism gained new ground. As already discussed, it achieved its Golden Age and temples were built to honor and revere Buddhism. The emperors of the new dynasties who were devout Buddhists encouraged Buddhist education. The temples were educating more and more Vietnamese and welcoming them into Buddhism. Even after the Golden Age and when Vietnam fell into a civil war, Buddhism still was a prominent force. South Vietnam was at this time educating the population about the teachings of Buddhism.

Before the French organized a system of education patterned after the Western model, monks were the teachers of the people exactly as in Cambodia:

Before the French organized a Western-style educational system, the Buddhist wat, with monks as teachers, provided the only formal education in Cambodia. The monks traditionally regarded their main educational function as the teaching of Buddhist doctrine and history and the importance of gaining

merit. Other subjects were regarded as secondary. At the wat schools, young boys – girls were not allowed to study in these institutions – were taught to read and to write Khmer, and they were instructed in the rudiments of Buddhism.¹⁶

Even today in Vietnam the pagoda school system exists in parallel with the state education system.¹⁷ The education offered by pagoda schools is still important since children in rural and remote areas can still acquire an education in places without state schools. They arguably are still private schools that contribute to training the population to become the country's human resources the future.¹⁸

After graduating from high school in pagodas, the students are able to apply to Vientiane Buddhist Higher School.¹⁹ The Higher School Head Office was in the largest pagoda in Vientiane known as Thập-Tháp monastery. During the early years of rehabilitation, the Buddhists supported pagoda schools in hiring more

16 *Country Studies Education*. Retrieved January 10, 2008, from <http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/52.htm>

17 Thi, Thi Nguyen. Buddhism Education in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos After renovation period (from 1986 till now). Retrieved January 10, 2008, <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/LaoStudies/nthit.htm>

18 R. Topmiller, *Vietnamese Buddhism in the 1990s*, Cross Currents, 2000, p.232.

19 Viangchan or Wiangchan/ Vientiane is a distorted French spelling. Viangchan is derived from the liturgical language of Theravada Buddhism. Hence, the name of the school system may be found in Theravada Buddhism sources. I may simply say, a system of education in Viangchan, without inventing a term

teachers and sending syllabi for science subjects and foreign languages.

4.3. Buddhist Education during the 1920's to the 1950s

In the 1920s and 1930s, Vietnam was involved in several movements all aimed at the revival and modernization of Buddhism. In the words of Topmiller,

“Understanding that the degeneration of Vietnamese Buddhism would deeply hurt the nation and at the same time, motivated by Hải Triều Âm magazine for revolution of Chinese Buddhism, the Vietnamese Sangha and laymen in 1920 tried their best to revamp Buddhism in Vietnam, using temples to open Buddhist schools to produce monks, nuns and talented men, and also giving Dharma talks to Buddhists.”²⁰

During this time most Buddhist temples in Vietnam were reorganized. It is also at that time that some Buddhist associations were created to open Buddhist schools and develop public opinion.

During 1927-1931, Giác Hoa temple opened Buddhist schools to teach over 100 nuns in Bạc-Liêu Linh Tuyên temple in Bến Tre by Master Khánh Hòa and in Kim Huê, Vạn Phước temple in Sa-Đéc, and Long An temple in Trà-Ôn by Master Khánh Anh.

In 1930, the Buddhist Sangha and laymen made the first move to organize a Buddhist revolution and

20 Thích Thiện Hoa, *50 năm Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế tái bản, Los Angeles, 1987, p.32

the Buddhist youth association was born. In 1931, the Southern Part created Hội Nghiên Cứu Phật Học và Hội Lương Xuyên Phật Học (Lương Xuyên Buddhist Research and Studies Society).

In 1932, the Central Part created Hội Việt Nam Phật Học (The Vietnam Buddhist Studies Society). In 1934, the Northern Part created Hội Việt Nam Phật Giáo (Vietnam Buddhism).

All Vietnamese Buddhist Societies opened elementary and high schools and universities for monks and nuns from all locations. They also created libraries and published books and magazines to spread Buddhism.

According to Thích Đức Nhuận,
 “During that time, Tổ Đình Thập Tháp in Bình Định, Thiên Ân temple in Quảng Ngãi, Từ Quang temple in Phú-Yên, Phật Học Đường Báo Quốc in Huế, Chùa Quán Sứ in Hà-Nội, Chùa Sơ, Bút Tháp temple, Bồ Đề temple in North of Vietnam. Phật Học Đường Ân Quang in Saigon, Phật Học Đường Lương Xuyên in Trà Ôn were the well-known Buddhist Studies Institutes in Vietnam. “In the Southern area, there was Từ Bi Âm, Duy Tâm, Magazine; in Central there was Viên Âm Magazine, and in Northern there was Đuốc Tuệ Magazine; in addition, there were Tiếng Chuông Sớm, Phật Âm, Tam Bảo, Giác Ngộ, Giải Thoát, Diệu Âm, Phương Tiện, Liên Hoa, Từ Quang, Bồ Đề Tân Thanh, Việt Nam Phật Giáo, Vạn Hạnh, Hải Triều Âm, Giữ Thơm Quê Mẹ, Tư Tưởng, Hoàng Pháp, Hoá Đạo, Bát Nhã, Hóa Giải, etc.”²¹

21 Thích Đức Nhuận, *Đạo Phật và Dòng Sư Việt*, Viện Triết Lý Việt nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 1996, p.447

In 1951, six communities of Giáo Hội Tăng Già (Sangha Congregation) and the Northern, Central, and Southern Buddhists had a conference at Từ Đàm Temple in Huế to create the Tổng Hội Phật Giáo (Unified Vietnamese Buddhists of Vietnam). In 1952, the three Southern, Central, and Northern Sangha Congresses called another national conference at Quán Sứ temple in Hà-Nội to create the Giáo Hội Tăng Già Việt Nam (National Buddhist Sangha Congress of Vietnam).

4.4. Developments in Buddhist Education- Introduction of Theravada Tradition

Over the twenty years from 1930 to 1951, the prospects of the Buddhist unity of the country was bright. Its basis was the Tổng Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam, which included six Buddhist and Sangha communities. There was a great interest in Theravadin meditation growing together with the reorganization of the Mahayana establishments.²²

According to Anson, Binh,

“A young doctor named Lê Văn Giảng was one of the people who introduced Theravada Buddhism to the ethnic people. He was a well-educated man who received higher education from Hanoi and was working for the French government. At first, he studied and practiced the Pure Land and Tantric ways but was not satisfied. By some chance he came to read a book on the Eightfold Path and decided to

22 Anson, Binh, *Therevada Buddhism in Vietnam*, <http://www.quangduc.com/English/vnbuddhism/02vnnt.html>

try out Theravada Buddhism. He learnt meditation from a Cambodian monk at the “Unalom Temple in Phnom Penh and achieved deep samadhi states. He continued the practice and after a few years, he decided to ordain and took the Dharma name of Ho-Tong (Vansarakkhita).”²³

In 1940, Lê Văn Giảng went back to Vietnam upon an invitation of a group of Buddhists led by Nguyễn Văn Hiếu and established there with Bửu-Quang temple, the first Theravada temple for Vietnamese Buddhists at Gò Dưa, Thủ Đức. This temple was destroyed in 1947 but was rebuilt in 1951.

Venerables Thiện-Luật, Bửu-Chơn, Kim-Quang, Giới-Nghiêm, Tinh-Su, Tối-Thắng, Giác-Quang, An-Lam, and Hộ-Tông were at this temple and began the teaching of Buddha Dharma in the Vietnamese language. In 1949-1950, “Venerable Hộ-Tông together with Nguyễn Văn Hiếu and supporters built a new temple in Saigon, named Kỳ-Viên Tự,”²⁴ which became the center for Theravada activities in Vietnam. In 1957, the Theravada practitioners formally established the Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist Sangha Congregation and elected Venerable Hộ-Tông as its first President, or Sangharaja.²⁵

During that time, the presence of Venerable Narada from Sri Lanka strengthened the Buddhist movement

23 Ibid.

24 Anson, Binh, *Theravada Buddhism in Vietnam*, <http://www.quangduc.com/English/vnbuddhism/02vnnt.html>

25 Ibid.

and soon the Theravada movement spread from Saigon to other provinces and with it a number of Theravada temples for ethnic Viet Buddhists were established in many areas in the South and Central parts of Vietnam. Theravada temples continued to be centers of Buddhist learning.

4.5. Buddhist Education during 1954 to 1975.

From 1954 to 1963, Buddhists faced a major problem because of Ngô Đình Diệm government; at least 21 monks, nuns and laymen sacrificed themselves to protect the Dharma. Among them was the Most Venerable Thích Quảng Đức, whose self-immolation attracted world attention to the plight of the Buddhists of Vietnam.

On Dec. 31, 1963, Tổng Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam and 10 Giáo Phái (groups and communities) joined in the Conference at Xá Lợi temple in Saigon. After five days of deliberation, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam was created on Jan. 01, 1964. It built a thousand Bồ Đề schools and Buddhist Studies Institutes and opened a thousand offices. The revival of Buddhism ushered in by these actions, produced almost 40,000 Buddhist monks and nuns and millions of Buddhists. The number of Buddhists, 85 percent of the 25 million people in South Vietnam, ensured that this was to be a great period for Buddhism.

For the first time in history, the Theravada and Mahayana traditions worked in the same Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

“Most Venerable Thích Tịnh Khiết (Mahayana) was Supreme Patriarch, and Most Venerable Tôí Thắng (Theravada) was Vice Supreme Patriarch ... Venerable Thích Tâm Châu (Mahayana), was President, while Venerable Thích Pháp Tri (Thervada), Venerable Thích Thiện Hoa (Mahayana) and Layman Mai Thọ Truyền were Vice Presidents, ...Venerable Thích Huyền Quang was Secretary General and Commissioner of Laymen.”²⁶

Many other senior Venerables who came from 11 different sects and communities, both Sangha and laymen, joined the same Church. A 1994 document states:

“In the 1964-1975, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam created a thousand Monasteries, and opened a thousand Buddhist schools, consulting-rooms and gave alms to poor people, built charitable institutions etc..... A number of Vietnamese Bhikkhus were sent overseas for further training in Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Taiwan, Japan, Germany, France, America, and some other places with the aim of enriching the monks and further strengthening Buddhist teachings in Vietnam.”²⁷

In the words of Thích Thiện Hoa,

“From zero or nothing, with top endeavor, the Sangha and Buddhists built, reformed and, made progress through many periods, till now and Buddhism has

26 Liên Hoa Nguyệt San, Số đặc biệt “Đại Hội Thống Nhất” số đôi 11 và 12, Pl. 2507 – Rằm tháng 12 năm Quý-Mão (29-1-1964), pp.121-122

27 Bản Báo Cáo của Viện Hóa Đạo, Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất, 1994, p.6

accomplished good and useful work as today.”²⁸

Hence, the periods 1920 to 1930 and 1964 to 1975 are times of development for Buddhism in Vietnam.

4.6. Case Study on the Buddhist Education of a typical cohort of Buddhist Monks in the 20th century

To illustrate how the historical development of Buddhist education affected the training of a cohort of Buddhist monks in the 20th century, this section attempts to outline in the form of a case study how the process of education in Buddhism began in the family and progressed through a variety of available resources. This case study is expected to provide information on the principal actors, the objectives which motivated them, and the results achieved.

It has to be noted at the very outset that in the early centuries, the present Vietnam was completely divided into parts and represented several small states. The Buddhism from China influenced the northern part of the territory because the Chinese Empire dominated it. As a result, the first monks ever in the territory of Vietnam appeared at the end of the 2nd century C.E. and came from China. Later monks from Central Asia and India came to these lands. People who lived on these territories practiced the Buddhist Pure Land School. An equally popular school was the Chan School, which was practiced in monasteries and among scholars

28 Thích Thiện Hoa, *50 năm Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, Los Angeles tái bản, 1987, p.130

of Buddhism. Some of the Buddhists of those times became well-known writers, scholars, and poets.

But the southern part of the present Vietnam was exposed to the influence of India at the beginning of the current era. Both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism flourished then. Starting from the 15th century, the states in the South Vietnamese territory gradually merged with the northern state. This is how the south was also introduced the Chinese form of Buddhism.²⁹

At the beginning of the 20th century, Buddhism in Vietnam experienced certain changes, and even some kind of modernization: national organizations of Buddhists were established and monks concentrated on education. Nevertheless, the process of gradual modernization was hampered by the long period of wars and the process stopped when the country was under Communist rule. Nowadays, this process seems to be recovering again, despite the political situation.

Influenced by this historical background, a typical cohort of Buddhist monks in the 20th century would have the general experience of the monk whose educational career is described in the first person below:

My parents were born and raised in the Eastern culture, and as a result their religion was predetermined to some extent by the environment. My father was Vietnamese and my mother was Chinese; both of them were true Buddhists. They became Buddhists when

29 Nguyễn Văn Sáu, *Phật Giáo Nam Tông Du Nhập Việt Nam*, Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy số 11, NXBHN, 2008, p.p.46-63

they were young and my father, being a famous Oriental Doctor, was Chair of the Buddhist Committee in my city which had a population of 1.5 million. He used most of his leisure time to teach people how to become true Buddhists and did his best to make them develop according to Buddhist doctrines.

The province where I was born and brought up was relatively modern in the sense that it was only about 500 years old and developed on account of the seaport. It is therefore considered to be rather new in the context of over 5,000 years of Vietnamese culture.

My parents had nine children and four of them became Buddhist monks. Three of my brothers and I studied in a major monastery, while another brother studied in a temple. The monastery was prodigious and well-known one, so that we had many great opportunities to have contact with a variety of members of the Maha Sangha, both Theravada and Mahayana.

The preparation of our careers as Buddhist monks, though it was not so intended, began with the Buddhist upbringing to which we were subjected in our home from our tender years. I will always remember the admonitions of my parents who taught us that Buddhism was a religion of peace, and that all teachings of Buddha expressed compassion to other people and wisdom in relations between the believer and the world both inner and outer. We were convinced that if Buddhism had spread all over the world, it would be for the great benefit of the whole humankind. The memory of these

sentiments makes me happy, because my family has given me this valuable understanding very early in my life. It also provides me with the power to live and propagate Buddhist doctrines to other people so that they see all the beauty of the peaceful world, where all elements are in divine harmony. It further enables me to be concerned with today's world, where greed for money and power, wars and conflicts are prevalent, usual things. Our parents influenced us to recognize that true believers of Buddhism have to provide people with the information on religion and the benefits it gives, so as to help those who become true adherents of the religion and strive for the enlightenment.

Our parents always reminded us to avoid evil, only do good deeds and purify our minds. They taught us the rule of compensation and equilibrium which exists in this world: if we do good, this good will return to us and if we hurt people in some way, the same evil will come back to us. This is how the Buddhist principle of karma was introduced to us through didactic stories. We had to admit that just as we respect and love our parents, we have to remember all teachings of the Buddha and doctrines of Buddhism and do our best to practice them. These teachings stimulated our minds and imagination and have been very useful in my life and those of my brothers and sisters. They asked us to have vegetarian food on two days a month, and they practiced vegetarian diet ten days a month. In order to cultivate our interest in and love for Buddhism, parents took us from time to time to the beautiful temples like Bảo Sơn temple,

which is situated in the picturesque and quiet mountain, so that we could learn the Dharma in an environment of peace and beauty.

My childhood memories allow me to remember the time when I was three years old, and my grandmother died. I see this point in time as the beginning of my informal or nonformal Buddhist education. My parents invited our Master, Most Venerable Thích Kế Châu, the abbot or chief monk of the temple, to come to our home in order to pray for my grandmother. By that time, my Master had already asked me to repeat after him a short sutra, which was greatly loved by all my family. So, he asked me to remember that sutra and also he taught me how to chant and pray to the Buddha. Besides, the Master explained the simple meaning of impermanence to me. This was one of the most impressive moments of my childhood, because I considered this charismatic person to be bigger and more powerful than my parents, despite the fact that he was not a big man physically. Nevertheless, he radiated the happiness and calmness, which I felt with all my childhood senses. He explained to me that “Every thing in this world was impermanent and changed every second and all people must die some day; but death is not the end, it is just the beginning for the next life and our next life depends on our karma.” He expressed his benevolence and compassion to me: he wanted me to accept this, although very often it is hard even for adults. I should confess, that due to my small age I could hardly understand everything that was happening around me that resulted from my

grandmother's death; but the words of the Master I accepted without any reservation, and 'decoded' in a few years. These words really helped me and provided all necessary support on my way to a career as a Buddhist monk later.

The day he came to my house to conduct religious services for 49 days after the death of my grandmother, I took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with one of my younger brothers. My Master gave us Buddhist names and said that we have become Buddhists now, so that we must study and practice the Buddha's teachings. I remember almost everything he told me that day. Thus, he asked me to chant the Amita Buddha's name every second, and meditate twice a day – in the morning and in the evening before I go to sleep. Another remark made by the Master concerned my appearance. He told me that I would become a Buddha someday, because I was very handsome. He told me: 'If you do not want to have suffering like your grandmother, you must chant the name of the Amita Buddha. When you breathe in, you chant Nam Mô A, when you breathe out, you chant Di Đà Phật. It is very helpful for you and will help your family as well.' The teaching of the cause and effect had great influence on my life. My Master also taught me how to practice meditation by following and counting the breaths. Thus the educational process of a Buddhist child has begun very early even before his formal school education could begin. The two agencies undertaking this important task were home, where parents who

the Buddha called the First Teachers commenced the process, and the temple where the monk reinforced what the home began.

At the age of six I became the Buddhist monk or, more precisely, a novice (Sramanera). It was on a beautiful day, that my Master asked me, ‘Oh my dear boy, come to me, do you want to become a Buddhist monk?’ I answered that I wanted to obtain the consent of my parents for this. I came to my parents and told them that I wanted to become a Buddhist monk, and that my Master suggested it to me. My wise parents asked me of the seriousness of my intentions, because they knew that this way is for those who really wanted to dedicate one’s life to the Buddha. I was such a person. It was my greatest desire at that time. Today, when I look back to my past and to those happy days, I always admit the power of that desire and it is a real happiness and contentment to me today to remember all my feelings and actions that day. I believe that it was the power of the Buddha that guided me in the right direction. It was also the power of my Master, who used to tell me that I would become a Buddha in the future. I felt a deep sense of peace with the world and myself in my heart. I really wanted to become a monk and told my parents about it, because I loved the world and liked the way the monks lived. Moreover, it was my greatest desire that not only I, but all my family, brothers and sisters, also became Buddhist monks and nuns. Of course, such answer of a six-year old child made my parents smile, and they discussed

this issue for some time. But then they made me completely happy by giving their consent for me to become a Buddhist monk.

In a week after this memorable day my parents took me to the monastery, knelt down in front of my Master and asked him to accept me to the monastery because I wanted to become a monk. My Master was very pleased with my decision and the decision of my parents and kept me as his senior bonze's attendant.

With this began the next phase of my Buddhist education and it was in the temple. My Master was an outstanding teacher; he had committed to memory all the sutras of the Tripitaka – Three Collections of the Buddhist Canon. Whenever someone asked him something about the Tripitaka, he could explain it well. His answers opened the mind of that person and brought him happiness. He had learnt by heart not only the Tripitaka, but also, among others, the Four books: Great Learning, Confucian Analects, Doctrine of Mean, Mencius (四書), the Five classics (五經), and Tang Poems (唐詩). He studied and comprehended the philosophies of Taoism and Confucianism very well and learned to write and understand Chinese. In this he succeeded to such an extent that he became a better student of Chinese than the Chinese and Vietnamese themselves. Correctness and beauty, emanating from the inner harmony of the person, characterized his work. He wrote books, poems and helped many temples. He was well known all over the country as a great writer. He spent all his life for

education: he studied throughout all his life. He had more than a hundred male and female monastic students and many thousands of the laity around the country. He also had many Korean students. He was a compassionate and wise teacher, a great master who gained the respect of many people.

The first two years of my education as a monk were spent on studying the Rules of Discipline, and practice of meditation and memorizing all sutras, which were regularly chanted daily very early in the morning at 4:00AM. For monastic students the day started even earlier: as they had to wake up by 3:30AM. The sutras that were thus committed to memory, besides the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism and all forms of ceremonial worship, were:

- Daily Essential Rules (Tỳ Ni Nhật Dụng Thiết Yếu),
- Ten Precepts of Novice monk (Luật Sa Di)
- Twenty four Dignities (Hai Mươi Bốn Oai Nghi)
- Shurangama Sutra (Kinh Lăng Nghiêm),
- Sukhàativyùha Sutra (Kinh A Di Đà),
- Eighty-eight Buddhas confession ceremony (Hồng Danh Bửu Sám),
- Bestow food to solitary ceremony (Mông sơn Thí Thực),
- Great Compassion Mantra (Chú Đại Bi),
- Heart Sutra (Bát Nhã Tâm Kinh),

- Awakening Teaching of Master Quy Sơn (Qui Sơn Cảnh Sách),
- Eight Awakenings of Great people (Bát Đại Nhân Giác),
- Vijnànavàda trimsika (Vijnaptimatratra-trimsika (Duy Thức Tam Thập tụng),
- The Last Teaching of the Buddha (Kinh Di Giáo) and etc.

Besides these texts, which were studied in Vietnamese, we had to study Chinese words in preparation for eventual study of Sutras in Chinese. Our education was not limited to what was imparted at the temple, because we also attended the secular elementary school, where we studied subjects, which were taught to children of the relevant age.

Under the order of the Master, some of the elder dharma brothers who were already ordained, had higher education and gained experience in the practice of dharma helped the younger students to finish their home work each day. It was the rule that if one failed to finish the set home task, he was punished. Each time he had to kneel down for one or two hours, and sometimes he had to confess.

From the third year in the monastery, students learn the sutras in the Chinese language.

When students finished elementary school education, they were sent to high school to acquire secondary education. The pursuit of two parallel systems of

education called for determination, stamina and hard work. This fostered a deep sense of responsibility. Adding to the burden was the need to travel between two places as well as to pursue monastic duties. The Master would insist that no student should miss any aspect of the Practice of Dharma, because practice was the most important for progress and the future as a monk depended on the perfection of practice, which included adherence to monastic discipline, regular meditation and participation in ritual and worship.

The daily routine during weekends and summer school vacation included three sessions of Dharma Practice as follows:

- 3:30AM – Wake up and meditation in bed,
- 3:45AM – Get ready for Dharma practice in the Buddha hall,
- 4:00AM – Dharma Practice in the Buddha Hall (i. e. worship and meditation),
- 5:45AM – Breakfast,
- 6:15AM – Clear up yard, Buddha hall, and guest room; water the flowers, trees etc.
- 7:15AM – Go to school,
- 8:00AM – Study,
- 11:30AM – Have lunch etc.
- 12:15 PM – Continue study;
- 4:00 PM – Go back to temple, do home work, study Dharma (*Students not going to elementary school*)

had Dharma Practice in the Buddha Hall from 4:00PM to 5:30PM);

- 6:00PM – Dinner;
- 7:00PM – Dharma Practice in The Buddha Hall;
- 8:30PM – Study Dharma;
- 11:00PM – Meditation in the Buddha Hall or in the room;
- 11:30PM – go to sleep.

On school days, students had to skip the Dharma Practice session of 4:00 PM. They had absolutely no time for leisure time. The daily program was extremely strenuous. In addition, the students were made to forego sleep and also experience hunger in the belief that these constraints were necessary conditions to bring enlightenment closer.

Every year, monasteries had three months of retreat in summer time, called “An Cư Kiết Hạ.” Some had a three-month retreat in the wintertime too, called “Kiết Đông.” It was provided to students because in the central region of Vietnam, it rained heavily in the wintertime. During the retreat times, students had Dharma practice everyday and studied hard; one of the practices was confession; they had to bow down over one hundred bows everyday.

By the time the cohorts reached the age of 13, they had completed four years of monastic education during which they acquired knowledge and skills pertaining to chanting, meditation, harmonious living, respect

for elders, limiting desires and ego, contentment and training in monastic duties of cleaning and maintaining order. In my experience in Vietnam, the young monks under seven years old do not study with any personal objective, because of the lack of wisdom and knowledge to fully understand the Buddha's teachings. They only studied because of the fear of being punished. The elder monks, however, did not punish their students for not understanding, nor did they praise and bribe the students for being correct. This was because the elder monks wanted their students mind to grow, but never their ego, which made this a difficult task. This first level of Buddhist education is very similar to elementary school education. The monks and nuns must memorize all the Rules and Sùtras, which are chanted everyday, understand all the fundamental principles and practice the tasks requested by the teacher. When they finish their first level of Buddhist education, the monks and nuns have numerous experiences that can help their monastic lives and gain the respect of devotees.

The five years of elementary school education equipped them with a basic knowledge of mathematics, literature, science, art, and civic education.

At the age of 13, I was tested thoroughly by my Master who asked many questions about my vows and my fundamental knowledge. He wanted to make sure that I would not give up my career as a monastic. After getting the evidence that I was well prepared and adequately motivated, he granted me the status of "Thế ĐỘ" (crossing over) by a special ceremony. In

Vietnam young monks do not shave all their hair as the old monks do. It is the privilege of experienced and well-trained elderly monks. When shaving the heads of young monks, a lock of hair, called “chóp mao” is retained to be stuck around their heads when it becomes long. With this ceremony, my “chóp mao” was cut and I was given a Buddhist name, which is called “pháp tự.” This is equivalent to a form of formal graduation from the first level of Buddhist education.

When I was 14 years old, my Master made me a Sramanera after I passed a special written and oral examination conducted by ten masters who were the examiners. Sramanera, meaning a small Sramana or monk, refers to a novice, prior to being ordained a Bhikkhu which is allowed only after one is 20 years old. “Due to the background of Rahula’s ordination, the Buddha required that prior to full Bhikkhu ordination, male candidates must first take the sramanera ordination.”³⁰ According to the Vinaya, all sramanera and sramaneri have the same ordination tradition: “(1) to shave, (2) to endow the ten precepts, and (3) to perform the ordination.”³¹

“Monastic education continues in preparation for ordination as a bhikkhu. Committing to memory the four books of the Disciplinary Code (giới bản), with a detailed review of all doctrines and teachings and three months of confession constituted the main

30 Huiman Bhiksu, *An Inquiry Concerning the Lineage of Bhiksuni Ordination*, Studienstiftung für Buddhismus (Foundation for Buddhist Studies), Published 2007, p1

31 Ibid. p6

elements of this training. Vinaya Pitaka constitute ‘part of the sacred literature of the Buddhist which contains the regulation for the outward life of the members of the Buddhist Sangha—nearly the oldest, and probable the most influential, of all Fraternities of monks.’³²

The Vinaya Pitaka is the Buddhist ecclesiastical law, “derived from experience” and “prescribed only after an offence has been committed.”³³ The ecclesiastical Vinaya laws play a significant role in the Buddhist Sangha because “without Vinaya there is no order (Sangha), and without the community of monks there is no Buddhism.”³⁴

The Vietnamese Buddhist tradition provides that before letting a monk to be ordained, the Head Sangha of the province should make sure again that a monk has reached a satisfactory level of education by completing the Buddhist College program, has studied all the basic sutras and Buddhist doctrines, possesses desirable qualities and has a great desire and capacity function as a Bhikkhu.

On satisfying all these conditions, including the permission of the Head monk of the province, I went to the pulpit at Hung Long temple for ordination. I had

32 F. Max Müller, David Rhys T.W. & Hermann Oldenberg (Translated from Pali: Vinaya Texts), *Sacred Books of the East*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, First Published 1885, Reprint Delhi 1963, 1969, 1974, 1982, 1990, 1996, 2003, p. ix

33 Paul Williams, *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, Routledge Publishing, Published 2005 New York, p.149

34 Ibid.

to stay for one week there for confession together with more than a thousand monks. By itself, it was an intense period of further training as well as examination. The candidates for ordination had to participate in religious practice six times a day, leaving them only three hours to sleep. Whenever the sound of the bell was heard, one had to wake up right away. All the monks had to chant the four books of the Disciplinary Code from memory. If a monk missed even a few words, he was not allowed to be ordained as a Bhikkhu. In addition, a candidate had to answer 40 questions in writing in front of proctors in four hours. On passing the written examination, one had also to pass an oral examination by answering ten questions. During these seven days, the candidates were further subjected to close observation to ensure that their behavior was in keeping with requisite standards of pure living, noble action and dignity. Thus if a monk fails to observe all rules of discipline including his conduct as regards standing, walking, sitting, lying, talking, eating etc, he could be declared ineligible for ordination.

After doing all examinations, one received ordination as a Bhikkhu in the presence of Ten Masters, including the Master of Ordination, and the Vinaya Master. The administration of the Bodhisattva vows and admonition on the ten directions of the Buddha by burning three points in the head marked the conclusion of ordination.

After completing the necessary high school curriculum, one proceeded with further studies leading to a university degree. Before the invasion of April 30, 1975, monks and nuns went to the Vạn Hạnh

University or Văn Khoa University, etc. However, after the invasion, all the Buddhist universities and institutes in the Republic of South Vietnam were closed by the communist regime. Hence, whoever wants to continue their education now must go to a communist public university. The curriculum at the communist university is entirely secular as seen in the courses students took for their Bachelor's degree over a four-year period:

KH1: Learning Skills at Academic level, 70 periods.

KH2: Basic and General Mathematics, 70 periods.

KH3: Higher Integral, 80 periods.

KH4: Chemistry, 60 periods.

KH5: Biology, 60 periods.

KH6: Physics, 70 periods.

KH7.1: History of the World, Centuries: 15-16, 90 periods.

KH7.2: History of Economic and Scientific, Technical Development, 90 periods.

KH7.3: History of Vietnam Development, From Century 16 to Century 19, 90 periods.

Human Sciences:

NV1: Notions of Social Sciences and Humanities, 90 periods.

NV2: Linguistics of the World and Vietnam, 90 periods.

NV3: Poetry and Literature of the World, 90 periods.

NV4.1: Poetry and Literature of Vietnam 16th Century, 90 periods.

NV4.2: Poetry and Literature of Vietnam 19th Century, 90 periods.

NV4.3: Poetry and Literature of Vietnam during the revolution against the French and the American, 90 periods.

NV5: Philosophy, 90 periods.

NV6: Practical Vietnamese, 90 periods.

NV7: Bases of Vietnam Culture Development, 90 periods.

Social Sciences and Reasoning:

XH1: Political Sciences, 80 periods.

XH2: Political Economy, 80 periods.

XH3: Sociology, 80 periods.

LL1: Reasoning, 90 periods.

LL2: Oriental Philosophy, 90 periods.

LL3: Occidental Philosophy, 90 periods.

LL4: Theories of Occidental – Oriental Literary Works, 90 periods

LL5: Analysis of Literary Works, 80 periods.

Public Relations Science and Foreign Languages:

GT1: Art of Public Relations with Students, 80 periods.

GT2: Public Relations in the Pedagogy Branch, 80 periods.

GT3: Intuition and Teaching Aids, 80 periods.

NN1: Basic English, 85 periods.

NN2: Advanced Communicative English, 85 periods.

NN3: Advanced Written English 1, 85 periods.

NN4: Advanced Spoken English 2, 85 periods.

Extracurricular Activities:

NK1: National Defense Education, 60 periods.

NK2: Physical Education, 60 periods.

End of Course Exam:

Work on Practice Process, 90 periods.

Exam: Reasoning on Teaching Method, 60 periods.

Exam: End of Course Professional Operations, 60 periods

There were no degree programs in Buddhist education.

It was, however, not the end of the education, because the Sangha was engaged in life-long education. During the Vietnam wars, a monk had to be diligent and study very hard, because if he failed during any year or he was lacking proper studies, the Head monk would not provide him with a Sangha card. If this happened, he had to leave the Sangha and was obliged to serve in the army as a soldier.

As a result of this intensive program of study, most Buddhist monks knew Chinese and French languages along with Vietnamese, understood all the doctrines, traditions, religion history, world history, social and cultural, psychology, and administration. Monks were also skilled in conducting religious services and ceremonies, giving Dharma talks, managing monasteries and educational institutions, and counseling people about their needs and problems. They had to live a simple life, content with few desires (thiểu dục tri túc), and follow the rules. They had to be patient, compassionate and tolerant. Monks had to set a good example to all people so that they were to develop the community, the temple, and the Sangha. “The Buddhist monk, despite variations, is considered a spiritual model and guide. His role is basically twofold: the first, which is quite evident, is that of a teacher, adviser or counsels as well as an active community leader; the second, which is very

significant in popular Buddhism, is that of a source or originator of merit.”³⁵

The ideal which the Masters upheld for the Sangha was stated as follows: “The Buddhist monk is a great teacher of gods and human beings, a great leader, a great educator; one must recognize this mission and never stop.”

It has become extremely difficult for my cohorts to pursue these goals, ideals and commitment to Buddhist education since the political changes of 1975. As many as 85 percent of Vietnamese Buddhist monks left their monasteries or temples and returned to lay life.

4.7. Validation of Data and Conclusions

As already stated, the senior monastics residing abroad as a part of the Vietnamese Diaspora, who contacted me informally either in writing or orally without responding to the questionnaire confirmed that their experience with Buddhist education was very much the same that my cohorts and I had undergone before the change of the political system caused by the invasion of the Communist regime in 1975. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam is banned by the State; all its religious, cultural and Social institutions have been seized by Government; many Buddhist monks and follower.³⁶ In fact, such a confirmation was to be

35 Ananda W.P. Guruge, *Buddhism: The Religion and Its Culture*, Published by The World Fellowship of Buddhists, Published 1984 Sri Lanka, pg.176

36 Que Me, Action for Democracy in Vietnam & Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, Paris

expected as the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, even under trying conditions, had systematically and diligently pursued the education of monastics. The responses to the questionnaire proved to be significant because they came from younger persons whose experiences, due to a variety of factors, have been different.

All 52 participants were males, young adults, Buddhists and were born in Asia. Their participation was justified by their readiness to help. Two of the more detailed sample answers, including their comments on the contextual background, are as follows:

Person 1: I am a Buddhist but I study economics at Hanoi University. I am a male of 20, Vietnamese. I think that Vietnam has earlier roots of Buddhism than China. Of course, it was Asoka who sent missionaries to several countries. I am proud that Vietnam has a longer tradition of Buddhism than China. The Golden Age was during the reign of Lý kings, this is written in books and I accept it. The first university was a great school of learning, as it existed for seven centuries. It was a paragon of learning, all canonical texts studied and discussed. Thạch Liêm wanted to extend Vietnamese Buddhist influences, so that was positive. Chinese Tripitaka was translated from Sanskrit. I think it was brought with Thiền Buddhism. I think there were versions in Vietnamese for common people but they are lost. I do not know for sure. I was told that the Chinese had burnt Vietnamese Buddhist books like Hitler did. I do not think they valued those books in Vietnamese, maybe only those in Chinese. It was so many years ago. I studied Buddhism in our local pagoda

for one year. We learned the Lotus Sùtra, that is my favorite. I think Vietnamese Buddhism is humane, and it protects from grief and shows the way to the future. It gives me personally noble patience. I do not want to compare Vietnamese Buddhism with others. I think that it is the best way to value positively all attempts to be enlightened. I have tried to answer your questions; that is my personal opinion.

Person 2: I am 21 years old, male, I belong to TrúC Lâm, I am not an ordained monk, I have not decided yet. I am too young to decide but I do not want you to mention my name in any questionnaire. Vietnamese Buddhism has direct links with India but the Chinese influenced later, being together for such a long time is something that is not denied. The Trần dynasty is our Golden Age. Our first university was a great higher school institution but it was for administration and warrior class. It was not for all who wanted to study. It was limited to one caste of Vietnamese population. I know little about Thạch Liêm. The Chinese destroyed the books, maybe without carrying them to China. But I think those in Chinese were not destroyed. It is a very interesting question, understudied. It is a great pity that the books were lost but it happens when the country is at war everywhere. Chinese Tripitaka was translated from Sanskrit. The Mahayana tradition needed it. I think Vietnamese texts existed as well how could they have taught without them for so many centuries. I study with Vietnamese Buddhist teachers, it is a system, and we know for sure what corresponds to each level. I

enjoyed studying Heart Sutra, Daily Essential rules, and Shurangama Sutra. Vietnamese Buddhist education has a long tradition. It is pure Buddhist education – canonical texts, meditation, and study of eminent monks. It is true to the Dharma teaching. Speaking about weaknesses, too many sects but nothing divides us.

Apart from such general answers, respondents living in Vietnam provided no details. The common reason given by them was that little information on the studied subject prevented them from giving full answers. A typical note was: “Because of the lack of information, I am sorry that I cannot answer your questions in full.” These answers, however, reveal that Buddhist temples continue to provide some exposure to basic teachings of Buddhism as references to Sutras in the above sample answers show. But evidence of the diligent pursuit of the traditional system had not been forthcoming. But their responses to the penultimate question throw light on the present condition of Vietnamese Buddhist education. These responses also show why respondents did not answer the last question on the state of Buddhist education today in Vietnam.

Strengths and the weaknesses of Vietnamese Buddhist education you received:

- **Strengths:**
 - The Dharma teaching
 - Self-knowledge
 - Power of meditation
 - Life-long learning

- Traditional character, right behavior and right conduct
- Teaching to be a wholesome, moral person
- **Weaknesses**
 - Lack of Vietnamese Buddhist Doctrine
 - Too much concentration on meditation
 - Teaching in isolated pagodas

It is clear from the answers that the purity of Vietnamese Buddhism focuses on the traditional Dharma teaching, attention to meditation, and life-long learning techniques. And emphasis on morality, right behavior and right conduct are admired as specific features of Vietnamese Buddhist education. The only weaknesses mentioned are lack of Vietnamese Buddhist doctrines, too much concentration on meditation, and teaching in isolated pagodas. The respondents seemed to be reluctant to talk about substantive weaknesses of Vietnamese Buddhist education.

Some typical answers to the question of strengths and weaknesses are:

Person 1: I think Vietnamese Buddhism is humane, and it protects one from grief and shows the way to the future. It gives me personally noble patience. I do not want to compare Vietnamese Buddhism with others. I think that it is the best way to value positively all attempts to be enlightened.

Person 2: Vietnamese Buddhist education has a long tradition. It is pure Buddhist education – canonical texts, meditation, and study of eminent monks. It is true

to the Dharma teaching. Speaking about weaknesses, too many sects but nothing divides us.

Person 3: Strengths: It is part of Vietnamese culture, pure Mahayana, deeply rooted in Buddhist ancient traditions, moral, and ethical, leading to self-knowledge. Weaknesses: none

Person 4: Strengths: practical value of meditation, a lifestyle rather than dogmas. Weaknesses: can't exist separated anymore, not good for the Vietnamese who live in Vietnam.

From the data analysis the following conclusions may be drawn:

First, only a few respondents were able or willing to answer all questions.

Second, the respondents were more interested in the way Vietnamese Buddhist education had influenced the culture of Vietnam rather than in discussing their exposure to it.

Third, the respondents were limited in their special knowledge of canonical texts if they were not actively involved in Vietnamese Buddhist education.

Fourth, all respondents show great respect to Vietnamese Buddhist teachers and want to know more about them.

Fifth, the respondents are reluctant to discuss strengths and weaknesses of Vietnamese Buddhist education of today. They see only strengths in Vietnamese Buddhist education of the past and wished that these traditions were not lost in the 21st century. They think

that Vietnamese Buddhism has always been too tolerant to other religions and only during the Golden Age was it able to consolidate as a national ideology. They also believe that Vietnamese Buddhist education has a great potential due to its meditation practices.

Sixth, there is a need for more research on Vietnamese Buddhism, in general, and Buddhist education, in particular. The respondents mainly rely on currently available books, which are published by official sources in Vietnam. They depend on officially recommended books and their knowledge of the development of Vietnamese Buddhist education is seriously limited.

To sum up, the respondents have demonstrated that they have no systematic knowledge of Vietnamese Buddhist education, although they value its morality and righteousness, self-knowledge and powerful meditation practices.

Chapter Five

BUDDHIST EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS OF VIETNAM

***5.1. Absence of Specific Records in India,
China and Elsewhere***

As already discussed, the history of Buddhism in Vietnam is long and impressive. It started in approximately the 3rd century BCE:¹ and by the 2nd century CE the main center of Buddhism religion had been established in the area, widely known as the Luy Lâu 贏樓.² This was the capital of the then Vietnam that

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- 1 De Caroli R., *Haunting the Buddha: Indian popular religions and the formation of Buddhism*, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2004: this source studies in detail the passage of Buddhism from India to other Asian countries; In Corless, R.J., *The Vision of Buddhism: the Space under the Tree*, St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1989 the life of Buddha is narrated in light of the fruits of his teachings. King Asoka's Buddhism is studied in Akira, H. & Groner, P., *A History of Indian Buddhism from Sakyamuni to early Mahayana*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, p.9.
 - 2 Taylor, K.W., *The Birth of Vietnam*, p.32, 1991, pp.42-43. Retrieved: 6.01.09, from <http://books.google.com>. According to this source, Luy-Lau became the administrative centre of Giao-Chi Prefecture in the 1st c. BCE. Primarily, it was a trading centre. Chinese historians refer to ancient Vietnam as the Lac Yüeh, which is the name of all the peoples living in the south, in fact, Austroasiatic speakers. The ancient Vietnamese belonged to "a broad linguistic-cultural world

lay on trade routes from China from India.³

Quảng Ninh province is believed to be the cradle of Vietnamese Buddhism. During the reign of Chinese Han dynasty, besides Luy Lâu (forty kilometers from Hà-Nội), there existed at least two other important centers, one in East China known as Pengcheng 彭城 and the other by the Yellow River known as Luoyang 洛陽. As Buddhism came to Vietnam from India,⁴ and in the second wave, from China,⁵ the institutions developed for the dissemination of Buddhist education were influenced by both these cradles of Buddhism:⁶ although later developments in Vietnam

that included Yüeh peoples in southeastern China” (p.43). Taylor claimed that Vietnamese culture “has preserved very little that is not directly related to national survival.”

- 3 Prebish, C.S. (Ed.), *Buddhism: a modern perspective*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994: this book is a valuable source of the history of Buddhism in India and in China.
- 4 Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch sử Phật giáo Việt Nam, Tập I*, Huế: NXB Thuận Hóa, 1999, pp.19-22. According to this source, the first Vietnamese Buddhists were Chử-Đông-Tử and his wife Tiên-Dung; they studied Buddha’s teachings (thaumaturgics) from an Indian monk Phật-Quan around mid-3rd or 2nd century BCE at the mountain in Hà-tĩnh. Three phases of Buddhist thought in India that can favor modern understanding of Indian Buddhist roots are studied in Conze, E., *Buddhist thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy*, L.: Routledge, 2008.
- 5 Mिंग, Kuan, *Popular Deities in Chinese Buddhism*, 1985, p.13, pp.50-51, Retrieved: 7/01/09, from http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/ancientsgrfx.pdf. Kuan Mिंग gives a list of Asian countries to which Buddhism spread from India but he excludes from this list Vietnam (p.13), reinforcing further Chinese influences.
- 6 The rise of Buddhism and its fundamental principles are discussed in many books. Mention should be made of the following: Suvanno Mahathera, *The 31 planes of existence*, Buddha Dharma Education

are connected with the close geographical location to China and, therefore, associated with Chinese Mahayana Buddhism,⁷ Zen, Tantra,⁸ and Pure Land.⁹ It is not accidental that the favorite Vietnamese legend *Tám Cám* 糝敢 tells the story of *But* 倅 (Buddha) who helped good people.¹⁰ To Patriarch Yin Guang, “Traditionally, most Buddhist schools and methods take the self-power approach; progress along the path of Enlightenment is achieved only through intense and sustained personal effort.”¹¹

Association Inc., Penang, Malaysia, 2001; Narada Maha Thera (Ed.), *A Manual of Abhidhamma being Abhidhammattha Sangana of Bhadanta Anuruddhacariya*, The Buddhist Missionary Society, Malaysia, 1987; Pategama Gnanarama, *Essentials of Buddhism*, Principal Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore, 2000; Sayadaw, Mahasi, *The Great Discourse of the Wheel of Dhamma*, Translated by U Ko Lay, Sukhi Hotu Dhamma Publication, 1998.

- 7 In Williamson, P. & Tribe, A., *Buddhist thought: a complete introduction to the Indian tradition*, L.: Routledge, 2000, the nature and of origins of Mahayana Buddhism and philosophy are studied in detail. Another valuable source that studies pre-Mahayana Buddhism and the initial teaching of skilful means in the Lotus Sutra that includes both mythology and insight literature is Pye, M., *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism*, N.Y.: Routledge, 2003.
- 8 In Wallace, V.A., *The Inner Kalacakra Tantra: a Buddhist Tantric View of the Individual*, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2001, special reference is given to religious traditions in India.
- 9 Yin Guang, *Pure-Land Zen*, Translated by Master Thich Thien Tam et al., N.Y., San Francisco, Toronto: Sutra Translation Committee, 2005, pp.9-15.
- 10 In line with K. Sri Dhammananda (Sri Dhammananda, K., Two main schools of Buddhism, from <http://www.buddhanet.net/budsas/ebud/ebdha120.htm>), “the Samdhi Nirmorcana Sutra (a Mahayana Sutra) clearly says that the Sravakayana-Theravada and the Mahayana constitute one Yana (ekayana) and that they are not two different and distinct vehicles.”
- 11 Yin Guang, op. cit., p.8.

India is known to have had very ancient seats of learning like Vedic Caranas, centers of higher learning which included Kashi and Taxila. For example, Taxila was an important Vedic/Hindu and Buddhist center of learning for about nine centuries, from the 6th century BCE to the 5th CE. To Gul and Khan, “Taxila was one of the famous educational centres where students came from different parts of the country.”¹² However, from 460 BCE to 370 BCE, the Ephthalites swept over that territory so that only the remains of ruined stupas and monasteries can be traced today, including the stupa at Dharmarajika and the monasteries at Jaulian and Mohra Muradu.¹³

Similarly, China had Confucian centers of learning that prepared students for the Chinese public examination system.¹⁴ Confucius taught in his school for many years. His philosophy of teaching was the core of Chinese educational system for two millennia.¹⁵ The main idea of Confucianism is ren, or benevolence; Confucius taught not to do to others what one does not want to do to oneself.¹⁶ In both countries Buddhist

12 Gul, S. & Khan, S., *Growth and development of oriental libraries in India*, Library Philosophy and Practice, 2008, p.1, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from [http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:6r\)1H2BdE](http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:6r)1H2BdE).

13 Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Buddhist Answers to Current Issues*, Authorhouse, Indiana, 2005, p.52.

14 Elman, Benjamin, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, London: Univ. of California Pr, 2002, p.67.

15 Confucius, 2002, Retrieved: 06/01/09, from http://www.2002china.net/china_columns/ancient_china/confucius.shtml

16 Chinese religions, Retrieved: 07/01/09, from <http://www.chinatourguide.net/12-13.htm>

educational institutions have been in operation for many centuries. Chinese pilgrims Faxian,¹⁷ Xuanzang and Yijing (義淨),¹⁸ and Pali texts¹⁹ provide a great deal of information on the Buddhist educational institutions of South and Southeast Asia. Each Buddhist monastery established in India or Sri Lanka, either called Arama or Vihara, was a center of learning with necessary facilities such as departments of study, classrooms and libraries. Viharas, as monastic libraries, were institutions of higher learning.²⁰ People in those centers were taught religious traditions and doctrines of Buddhism. The nature and quality of these institutions were extensively

17 Fa-Hsien, *A Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms*, Trans. J. Legge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886, Reprinted in Kishlansky, M.A. (Ed.), *Sources of World History*, Volume I, N. Y.: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995, pp.154-158. Faxian Fa-Hsien traveled in Sumara, Ceylon and India in search of authentic Buddhist writings. He collected Sanskrit Buddhist writings and on his coming back home he concentrated on their translation into Chinese; about Buddhist writings in Sanskrit found by Faxian in Ceylon: Faxian, from *Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms: A Chinese Pilgrim in Ceylon*, Trans. Herbert Giles, Retrieved: 7/01/09, from <http://academic.hus.edu/chinese/huang/asn209/Faxian.htm>; in his Indian pilgrimage, according to *The Journey of Faxian to India*, Retrieved: 7/01/09, from <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/faxian.html>, he came across both Mahaynists and Hinayanists, the latter located by him in North India.

18 *Chinese Monks in India*, Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the Western World in Search of the Law During the Great Tang Dynasty, by Yijing, Translated by Latika Lahiri, Delhi, etc.: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.

19 Hua-Ching Ni, I Ching: *The Book of Changes and the Unchanging Truth*, Los Angeles: Seven Star Communications, 1999, p.58; Ming, K., op. cit., p.12.

20 Gul & Khan, op. cit, p.1.

demonstrated by the graphic descriptions of the Sri Lankan institutions at Anuradhapura by Faxian, of the Nalanda University by Xuanzang and of Valabhi by Yiing.²¹ Vikramasila, (founded in the 8th century, became the intellectual center of Tantric Buddhism, and as early as the 11th century had 160 teachers and 1000 students),²² and Odantapuri, with a rich library of Buddhist texts,²³ are two later Buddhist universities of which we have information.

Nalanda University was situated in the ancient Magadha country that Indian scholars consider to be the cradle of Buddhism. The first monastery in Nalanda was a seminary for Buddhist monks. It is interesting to note that in the 10th century Nalanda University had about 10, 000 students and more than 1,500 teachers. At that time, students came from many other Asian countries to acquire high quality education provided by this university, recognizable for its merits. Vikramasila University was famous along with Nalanda University. It was founded at the end of the 8th century – the beginning of the 9th century in response to the decline at Nalanda. It had a thousand students and more than a hundred teachers. One of its alumni was Atisa Dipankara, the founder of the Sarma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.²⁴

21 Hua-Ching Ni, I Ching, 1999, op. cit., p.61

22 Vikramasila, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.buddhanet/e-learning/pilgrim/pg-28.htm>

23 Gul & Khan, op. cit, p.2.

24 Amarasiri Weeraratne, D., *The six Buddhist universities of ancient India*, Retrieved 8/01/09, from <http://mail.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebdha240.htm>

China had similar institutions connected with the development of such schools as Chan, Pure Land, Tiantai. The extensive archaeological evidence coming from such locations as Leshan, Dunhuang,²⁵ and Luoyang demonstrate the multipurpose educational enterprises of large monasteries. For example, Tiantai (天台宗) is the Lotus Sūtra School that was one of Buddhist schools in China and Japan. Dunhuang had a substantial library and had been a center for the production of educational materials as shown by the treasure-house of Chinese documents discovered in Cave XVII.

In addition, China was known to have sophisticated translation bureaus which served great translators like Kumarajiva. He established the Chinese branch of the Madhyamika, or “Three Treatises” school. Kumarajiva influenced all Buddhist schools in China, having learned the doctrines of the Madhyamika schools and assimilated Mahayana teachings.²⁶

While it can be presumed that a similar institutional infrastructure was developed in Vietnam, no information is currently available either because the ancient literary records were lost due to internal political and military upheavals or they were taken to other countries.

25 Baumer, C., *Southern Silk Road: In the footsteps of Sir Aurel Stein and Sven Hedin*, Bangkok: White Orchid Books, 2000.

26 Kumarajiva, Retrieved 8/01/09, from <http://www.angelfire.com/electronic/bodhidharma/kumarajiva.html>; Kumarajiva, Newsfinder, January 08, 2009, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.newsfinder.org/site/more/kumarajiva>

5.2. Principal Educational Institutions with Reliable information

The following are the principal institutions about which some reliable information is available. They were very famous and influential educational institutions in the past and today they either continue as important institutions, or constitute an essential part of the Vietnamese history.

1. Mĩ Sơn: Mĩ Sơn Sanctuary was the area of the great historical events which happened between the 4th and 13th centuries. It was the location of an exclusive culture owing its origin in Hinduism, which came from India. Mĩ Sơn was the capital of the Champa Kingdom.²⁷ Luy Lâu, on the way from India to China, was the main center of the Buddhist religion in Vietnam established in the end of the 2nd century. The sanctuary was a center for spirituality. It was culturally and spiritually influenced directly from India. This Buddhist center was inhabited from the 4th to the 15th centuries.²⁸ Mĩ Sơn became a Buddhist center during the reign of Bhadravarman in the 4th century. It was the main intellectual and Buddhist center of the Cham civilization.²⁹ The Chinese pilgrim of the 7th century Yijing left evidence that in the port

27 NESCO, Mĩ Sơn Sanctuary, 1999, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/949>

28 Mĩ Sơn Sanctuary, Vietnam, Asia Pacific, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from http://www.globalheritagefund.org/where/my_son.html

29 The World Heritage Site of Mĩ Sơn Sanctuary, UNESCO Bangkok, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://cms.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=3189>

cities of Champa Hinayana was practiced.³⁰

2. Quốc Tử Giám (國子監): The first university in Vietnam under Lý's Dynasty (1010-1225) was Quốc Tử Giám.³¹ It was part of the Văn Miếu (文廟) Confucian Temple. Quốc Tử Giám was established in 1070³² as part of an effort to educate the Buddhist elite. The university existed until 1779.³³ The reason for the destruction of this university still remains unknown; however, the ruins of this site are famous and have become a tourist site.

3. Quán Sứ Pagoda: Quán Sứ Pagoda was constructed in the 15th century in Hà Nội city. This area had no pagodas until Quán Sứ Pagoda was established. Initially this pagoda was not an educational institution but an official building for welcoming messengers and deputies from neighboring countries. However, the building soon became a Buddhist monastery due to the fact that all messengers from Laos, Champa and other countries were Buddhists. Therefore, it was used to make their stay in Vietnam more comfortably, and so that they could practice their traditional worship services. Although other construction sites and the ruins of those

30 Tran Ky Phuong, *The geography of the ancient kingdom of Champa in Central Vietnam*, 2003, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.pnclink.org/annual/annual2003/programme/presenpdf/10931.pdf>

31 Temple of Literature, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/hanoi/A20935.html>

32 Đỗ Văn Ninh, *Văn Bia Quốc Tử Giám Hà Nội*, Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa – Thông tin, Hà Nội, 2000, p.09

33 *Văn Miếu, Quốc Tử Giám*, Thế Giới Publishers, Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1994, p.42

early times have disappeared from the face of the earth, Quán Sứ Pagoda is still there. Just like many other old pagodas, Quán Sứ Pagoda became an important center for Buddhist education,³⁴ and even a place for the official organization. In 1934 it became the main headquarters of the Buddhist Association of Northern Vietnam.³⁵ Today it is ranked as the national pagoda with a long history and fine architecture, and it remains essential to all Buddhists around the country. In the middle of the 20th century the pagoda was rebuilt. Võ Văn Tường underlines the exceptional role of Quán Sứ Pagoda in the history of Vietnam: “For half a century, Quán Sứ Pagoda has witnessed many important landmarks of Vietnamese Buddhism, including the unification of Buddhist organizations throughout the country and the affiliation of the Vietnamese Buddhism to International Buddhism.”³⁶

4. Thập Tháp pagoda: Thập Tháp pagoda in Bình Định province was established by the merchant Nguyễn Thiều in 1665.³⁷ As Võ Văn Tường puts it, “The name of this Patriarchal House is a compound of the words Thập

34 Quán Sứ Pagoda, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/hanoi/A20937.htm>: Quán Sứ Pagoda contained a school of Buddhist doctrine; Quan Su pagoda – The headquarter for Vietnam Northern Buddhist Congregation [Chùa Quán Sứ – Hội quán Trung ương của Hội Phật giáo Bắc Kỳ] / Lê Tâm Đắc // Kiến trúc Việt Nam – 2006. – No 8. – pp.71-76.

35 Võ Văn Tường, *Vietnamese's Famous Pagodas*, Art Publisher, 1995, p.66

36 Ibid, p.67

37 Thích Viên Kiên, *Chùa Thập Tháp Di Đà và Tổ Sư Nguyễn Thiều – Siêu Bạch*, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam & Triết Học Thế Giới, 2002, p.40

Tháp (the Ten Stupas) and Di-Đà (meaning Amitabha) Pagoda in the Ten – Stupas Area.”³⁸ Recognized as an important center of the educational life of Vietnam, it has a colorful history. Many honored Buddhists started on the path to Buddhism here and these marks of honor and recognition are present in Thập Tháp pagoda even today. In 1691, the Pagoda was granted by Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu, a board of royal charter and a pair of parallel sentences,³⁹ and it also had an inscription “with the Thập Tháp Pagoda’s Record made by the Royal Commentator Võ Khắc Triễn in 1928.”⁴⁰ The most famous patriarch of the Thập Tháp monastery was Abbot Quốc sư Phước Huệ who became a National Teacher. He spent his days in good deeds and propagated the teachings of Buddha to the monks at Trúc Lâm and Tây Thiên Buddhist Schools starting from 1935. His dedicated life was immortalized on a stupa in his honor, which is among the stupas of other patriarchs within Thập Tháp pagoda.⁴¹

5. Báo Quốc pagoda: Báo Quốc pagoda, initially given the name of Hàm Long Thiên Thọ Tự,⁴² is located in the ancient capital of Vietnam (Huế province).⁴³ However, compared to other pagodas, its history is not

38 Võ Văn Tường, op. cit., p.17

39 Ibid, 21

40 Ibid, p.42

41 Ibid, p.63

42 Báo Quốc Pagoda, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Bao-Quoc-Pagoda>

43 Ray, N. & Yanagihara, W., *Pagodas and churches*, 2005, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://books.google.com>

very long: the pagoda was established in the 17th century by Thiền Master Thich Giác Phong.⁴⁴ The monastery was renamed several times depending on who was the country's king. This pagoda was respected and it obtained the required investments for reconstruction from kings and queens. The pagoda's statue of the Buddha has two sets of Mahayana sūtras. Also, the altar features the copy of the Lotus sutra.⁴⁵ The reconstruction ended in the 19th century. Then, in the 20th century it played a significant part in the training and teaching of "a new generation of well-qualified monks and nuns for the restoration of Vietnamese Buddhist in the 1930's."⁴⁶ Báo Quốc pagoda took on an exceptional role when it became a "monastic training centre in Hue" together with the Buddhist Studies Basic School (1936) and the School of Higher Buddhist Studies (1940).⁴⁷ In 1957, the new reconstruction of the pagoda started. It followed the Buddhist Restoration. The newly created pagoda contained many statues of the Buddha. In 1939, the style of the pagoda was changed. This happened mainly due to the Abbot of Báo Quốc Pagoda, Venerable Phước Hậu, who combined the traditional decorations of triple religions (Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism), as founded in the Central and Northern Vietnam. The Hàm Long Primary School was founded on the basis of the Báo Quốc Pagoda in 1959. Hàm Long Primary-

44 Vo Van Tuong, *op. cit.*, p.43

45 Báo Quốc Pagoda, *op. cit.*

46 Vo Van Tuong, *op. cit.*, p.41

47 *Ibid*, p.45

Secondary Private School was established here in 1961, and it became the memorable institution for all Buddhists in Huế province, who also respect the great contribution of Báo Quốc Pagoda and its schools to the education of monks in Central Vietnam. However, with Communist rule, the Hàm Long Primary school, also known as Trường Bồ Đề Hàm Long (Hàm Long Bodhi School), was closed.⁴⁸

6. Ân Quang pagoda (Sài Gòn): Despite its comparatively young age, Ân Quang pagoda has played an essential role in Vietnamese history. It was the headquarters of the South Vietnam School of Buddhist Studies, the South Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, the office of the Dharma Propagation Institute and the Sangha Presidency in the middle of the 20th century. Today it is the headquarters of the Municipal Executive Committee (Saigon City).⁴⁹ It consists of several Buddhist schools (such as Mai Sơn, Ứng Quang). The pagoda has survived several reconstructions and was updated with the necessary facilities to ensure quality Buddhist education for the monks who distributed their knowledge all over the country.

7. Lưỡng Xuyên: Located in the city of Lưỡng Xuyên, the capital of An Giang province, this institution is not very famous because of the religious diversity in this area. However, it also contributed to the dissemination of Buddhism in this part of Vietnam.

48 Vo Van Tuong, op. cit., p.47

49 Ibid, p.71

5.3. Monastery or Pagoda as the Main Institutional Base of Buddhist Education.

The absence of any information of a similar nature with regard to Vietnam is a major drawback in reconstructing the institutional infrastructure of Buddhist education. The Buddhist monastery, which in Vietnam is referred to as a pagoda, has been the main center of community life throughout history. It evolved as a center of learning as it had done in all other Buddhist countries in Asia.

There are a great number of archaeologically researched pagodas in Vietnam which continue to be used only as Buddhist temples for the purpose of worship. But they have been learning centers of varying sizes and consisted of libraries and facilities for meditation and education. The following nationally famous monasteries or pagodas have had a long existence and have served as centers of Buddhist learning, even if they did not have the facilities as one often expects in a modern college or school:

1. **Dâu Pagoda** (also called Chùa Dâu, Thiền Định, Duyên Ứng, or Pháp Vân pagoda),⁵⁰ dating back to the 3rd century CE, is a wooden construction⁵¹ located in center of the ancient capital Luy Lâu, now part of Thanh Khương village, Thuận Thành district, Hà Bắc province,

50 Vo Van Tuong, op. cit., p.5

51 Thien-an-design construction, Retrieved: 9/01/09, from <http://www.thienan-construct.com.vn/news.asp?news=NEW0801181255268&Cat=SCA0801181252598>

30 km from Hà Nội.⁵² The Dâu Pagoda was founded by Indian monks who had come as Buddhist missionaries to that area about 1,800 years ago.⁵³ It earned fame as a center of activity for various Thiền (Zen) masters. It was renovated many times: in the 12th century, at the end of the 13th century, and in the 14th, 18th and 19th centuries with facilities to help it function as a center of education. The location of the Dâu Pagoda in the capital of Giao Chỉ district favored its outstanding role as the first Vietnamese Buddhist center. It proves that popular educational centers emerged in cultural areas. Pagodas were built near citadels, palaces, markets, and along streets.

2. **Chùa Đền Pagoda** (sometimes called Phương Quang Tự), in Thuận Thành County, Hà Bắc, was built at the beginning of the current era, with a library near the pagoda and stone buildings used as lecture rooms behind the pagoda and, according to Võ Văn Tường, used by the king to hold the examination “Thái học sinh” to select bright scholars for the service of the country.”⁵⁴

3. **Bút Tháp Pagoda** (Ninh Phúc Tự) is famous for its complex architectural style with a five-storey building more than 100 meters in height. It is situated in Đình Tô city of Thuận thành County (Hà Bắc province). The pagoda’s history is connected with Queen Trịnh

52 Vo Van Tuong, op. cit., p.7

53 Dâu Pagoda – *Cradle of Vietnamese Buddhism*, 2009, Retrieved: 7/01/09, from http://www.footprintsvietnam.com/vietnam_news/daupagoda.htm

54 Vo Van Tuong, op. cit., p.14

Thị Ngọc Trúc, the compiler of the first Chinese-Vietnamese dictionary Hán-Nôm.”⁵⁵ The pagoda is renowned for the sculptural masterpiece, which is the statue of Avalokitesvara, 3.70 meters high, and made of excellent wood covered with paint. It was carved by an artist named Trương in 1656 and has 11 faces, 994 arms with 994 eyes – each eye resting on the palm of a hand.”⁵⁶

4. **Côn Sơn Pagoda** (Chí Linh, Hải Hưng) was one of the three centers of the Buddhist Trúc Lâm Trinity under the Trần Dynasty.⁵⁷ It was renovated, according to Võ Văn Tường, “In the time of the Lê dynasty, while Thiền Master Mai Tri Bản, alias Pháp Nhàn was Head, and enlarged to comprise 83 compartments including the three entrance gates, the Upper Hall, the Lower Hall, the bell-tower and the drum tower,”⁵⁸ connected with several famous people and national heroes, such as Nguyễn Trãi.⁵⁹

55 Bút Tháp Pagoda, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.waytovietnam.com/But-Thap-Pagoda-Bac-Ninh.asp>

56 Võ Văn Tường, op. cit., p.17

57 Côn Sơn Pagoda, Retrieved 8/01/09, from <http://www.vietnamtravels.vn/Vietnam-travel-information/services.asp?ista=1342>; Côn Sơn Cultural and Historical Site, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from http://www.biology.homuns.edu.vn/store/elib/pub/IBA/Cddata/source-book/sb_pdf/Con_Son.pdf

58 Võ Văn Tường, op. cit., p.18

59 Ngô Sĩ Liên. *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* [The Complete Work of the Historical Records of Great Viet]. 4 v. Hà Nội: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1993. Reprint. Originally published in 1479; Trần Văn Giáp. *Tìm Hiểu Kho Sách Hán Nôm: Nguồn Tư Liệu Văn Học, Sử Học Việt Nam* [The Hán Nôm Books Treasury: An Annotated Bibliography of Books on Vietnamese Literature and History]. 2 v. Reprint. Hà Nội:

5. **Hòa Yên Pagoda**, situated on the Yên Tử mountain in the Quảng Ninh province in a somewhat inaccessible location more suitable for meditation and self-cultivation, was considered by Võ Văn Tường to be proof of “the Vietnamese people’s combination of religion and worldly life.”⁶⁰ Maybe because of its location 543 meters above sea level, the pagoda’s first name was Pagoda of Clouds and Smokes (Vân Yên Tự).⁶¹

6. **Keo Pagoda** or Thần Quang pagoda, built in 1608 in the Thái Bình province, was the place of the Spring and Autumn Festivals and venue for competitions in different kinds of sports such as boat racing and canoe rowing, plus musical contests and a literary competitions. According to legend, a fisherman was enlightened on the site of the future pagoda in the 11th century. Keo pagoda is associated with Master Không Lộ (1016-1094) who cured King Lê Thánh Tông (1066-1127).⁶²

7. **Trần Quốc Pagoda** or Khai Quốc, An Quốc (Chùa Trần Quốc – Ba Đình, Hà Nội) pagoda (544-548), is one of the oldest pagodas in Vietnam that was

Văn Hóa; Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1984-1990; Ủy Ban Khoa Học Xã Hội Việt Nam. *Kỷ Niệm 600 Năm Sinh Nguyễn Trãi*. [Commemorating the 600th Birthday of Nguyen Trai]. Hà Nội: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1982.

60 Vo Van Tuong, op. cit., p.19

61 Pilgrims reach new heights at Yên Tử, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://english.vientamnet.vn/vniden/2008/12/820880>

62 Buddhist legend in Keo Pagoda, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.vietnam-beauty.com/vietnamese-culture/festivals-and-ceremonies/118-buddhist-legend-in-keo-pagoda.html>

built during the Lý Nam Đế Dynasty,⁶³ from the very beginning it was a center of religious propaganda. It was renamed several times, the last being Trần Quốc and noted since the 11th century as the center of Thảo Đường Chan school, which opened because of the need for the propagation of Buddhism doctrines.

9. **Tây Phương** (also known as Sùng Phúc Tự), was built in 1632 in Hà Tây province. It consists of “the Upper Hall with three compartments, the Vack Hall with twenty compartments and corridors,”⁶⁴ and is famous as a center of inspiration for many famous artists, writers, and musicians. The whole structure of the pagoda symbolizes Thái Cực. The double tier of the roof is the symbol of *Luỡng Nghi*, namely yin and yang. The slopes of the pagoda symbolize the four elements of *Tứ Tượng* (heaven).⁶⁵

10. **Linh Mụ Pagoda** (also known as Thiên Mụ), was initially built in the beginning of the 17th century in the ancient Vietnamese capital in Thừa Thiên-Huế province,⁶⁶ but was later re-built for general cultural

63 Trần Quốc Pagoda, Retrieved 8/01/09, from <http://www.thingsasian.com/travel-tips/10216>; Tran Quoc Pagoda, September 2008, Retrieved 8/01/09, from <http://www.vietnam-beauty.com/cities/ha-noi/4-ha-noi/72-tran-quoc-pagoda.html>

64 Vo Van Tuong, *Vietnamese's Famous Pagodas*, Art Publisher, 1995, p.28

65 Tây Phương Pagoda, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.vietnamsunrisetravel.com/ha-tay/543-tay/543-tay-phuong-pagoda>

66 Vo Van Tuong, *Vietnamese's Famous Pagodas*, Art Publisher, 1995, p.29

sightseeing and specifically its architectural perfection.⁶⁷ Nguyễn Phúc Chu (1691-1725) described the merits of this pagoda's monk Thạch Liêm as well as the monks' rooms and a house for Buddhist meditation.⁶⁸ He devoted the following poetic lines to the pagoda:

*“How beautiful is the landscape in South Vietnam today,
How magnificent is the pagoda on the gate of which
reflects the sunlight,
As nature is calm and pure, water is murmuring out
of spring.
Now that the country is peaceful, life is easy and
carefree everywhere.”*⁶⁹

11. **Quốc Ân Pagoda** (initially Vĩnh Ân Pagoda also called Royal-Chartered Pagoda), located in Thừa Thiên—Huế province, was the venue of some important historical events, as indicated by its second name. It was established by Thiên Master Nguyễn Thiệu somewhere between 1682 and 1685,⁷⁰ and re-constructed in 1825.⁷¹ It is noted for a great number of the inscriptions on the parallel boards with masterpieces of Chinese calligraphy using a unique carving technique.

67 Quốc Sử Quán, *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí Tập I*, [trans. Phạm Trọng Diem] Nha Xuất Ban Thuan Hoa, 2006 p.96-97

68 Thiên Mụ Pagoda, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.hueworldheritage.org/vn/DTHue/DiTichDetail.asp?Varl=2&ln=en>

69 Vo Van Tuong, *Vietnamese's Famous Pagodas*, Art Publisher, 1995, p.29

70 Ibid, p.30

71 Ibid, p.30

12. **Từ Đàm Pagoda** of Huế, Thừa Thiên province, was established by Thiền Master Minh Hoàng-Tử Dung at the end of the 17th century and was initially called Ân Tôn, the forbidden name of the King Thiệu Trị (1841). The founder of the pagoda emphasized in his teachings the struggle that was necessary for the freedom of Buddhism as a religion.⁷² In 1951, the Unified National Buddhist Conference was held at the Từ Đàm Pagoda with 51 Buddhist delegates from different regions of Vietnam.⁷³ The World Buddhist Plaque was first installed in front of the Pagoda during this conference.⁷⁴

13. **Chúc Thánh Pagoda** was founded in 1454 by the Chinese monk Minh Hải. Here, the Thien Chuc chapter of the Thiền **Lâm Tế** religion came into existence.⁷⁵ Built in the 17th century in Đà Nẵng province, the pagoda has preserved its primary architectural features through the centuries even though it has been renovated many times. As Võ Văn Tường observes, “one of the invaluable objects preserved until nowadays is a set of 18 Arahants’ terracotta statues placed on 0.165-meter-high lotus pedestals. Each statue is 0.45meters high, the knees’ width being 0.28meters.”⁷⁶

72 Từ Đàm pagoda, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.vietnamtravels.vn/Vietnam-travel-information/Tu-Dam-Pagoda.htm>

73 Thích Thiện Hoa, *50 năm Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế tái bản, 1987, p.82

74 Vo Van Tuong, *Việt Nam Danh Lam Cổ Tự*, Khoa Học Hà Nội, 1992, p.402

75 Quảng Nam, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from <http://www.worldheritageroad.com/quangnam/quangnam-sightseeing.htm>

76 Vo Van Tuong, op. cit., p.51

14. **Thiên Ân Pagoda**, is situated on Mount Thiên Ân in the Sơn Tịnh district of Quảng Ngãi province. This is considered to be one of the ten most beautiful locations in the province. The pagoda was established by the Chinese monk Thiên Master Pháp Hóa, who took care of it for 60 years, until his death in 1754.⁷⁷ A memorial to the famous Vietnamese scholar Huỳnh Thúc Kháng was raised there in 1947 in front of the pagoda. Many famous poets and writers have dedicated their works to Thiên Ân pagoda.

16. **Giác Lâm Pagoda**, was founded by the devoted Chinese Buddhist Lý Thụy Long in the area of Saigon City in the 18th century. It is recognized officially as of exceptional cultural and historical value, and houses columns covered with inscriptions made in Chinese calligraphy.⁷⁸ It received its fame for the Buddha oil lamp.⁷⁹

18. **Xá Lợi Pagoda**, located in Saigon, is closely associated with activities of the South Vietnam Buddhist Association established in Saigon in 1951. It was designed to be an educational center consisting of a main hall, a preaching hall, a library, an office, a council-chamber, a meeting room, a reception room, a monastery and a funeral parlor.⁸⁰ According to Võ Văn Tường, “Xá Lợi Pagoda, with its important position

77 Ibid., p.53

78 Ibid, p.61

79 Giác-Lâm pagoda HCM city, Retrieved: 9/01/09, from <http://www.asiarooms.com/travel-guide/vietnam/ho-chi-minh-city/sightseeing>

80 Võ Văn Tường, op. cit., p.72

in the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and its considerable contribution to the Dharma propagation since its early days, receives a large number of Buddhist delegations and visitors, home and foreign alike, all round.”⁸¹ The Xá Lợi pagoda, built in 1956, was opened in 1958 by Master Thích Khánh Anh. It became the center of opposition to the government in 1963. At that time about 400 monks and nuns were arrested. This place houses a memorial to Master Thích Quảng Đức.⁸²

19. **Kleang Pagoda**, built in the middle of the 16th century in Sóc Trăng, was greatly influenced by the Khmer culture, and recognized as an “historical and cultural relic of Sóc Trăng” in 1990.⁸³

20. **Vĩnh Tràng Pagoda**, located in Tiền Giang province, was built in the beginning of the 19th century and is noted for its combination of occidental and oriental elements such as Renaissance features, Japanese tiles and the classic patterns of Gothic, Vietnamese and Chinese calligraphy. It was constructed in 1849 by Venerable Abbot Thích Huệ Đăng. Almost half a century later, it was reconstructed by the Most Venerable Thích Chánh Hậu.⁸⁴

Besides the above mentioned pagodas, the following

81 Vo Van Tuong, op. cit., p.73

82 Xá Lợi pagoda: Historic Buddhist temple, Retrieved: 9/01/09, from <http://www.wcities.com/en/record/296067/269/record.html>

83 Vo Van Tuong, op. cit., p.75

84 Vĩnh Tràng Pagoda, Retrieved: 10/01/09, from <http://www.vietnam-beauty.com/top-destinations/destination-in-the-south/207-vinh-trang-pagoda.html>

are also among the most well-known and the oldest Buddhist pagodas in Vietnam: Phúc Lâm Pagoda,⁸⁵ (Hải phòng province, end of the 13th century); Chùa Một Cột (10th century); Đậu Pagoda; Thiên Phúc Pagoda (also called Chùa Thầy);⁸⁶ Chùa Hương Pagoda (Cổ Lễ pagoda in the North of Vietnam);⁸⁷ Long Khánh Pagoda, Linh Phong Pagoda, Thiên Đức Pagoda, Thiên Bình Pagoda (Bình Định province); Bảo Tịnh Pagoda (Phú Yên); Thanh Minh Thiên Viện Pagoda (Saigon); Giác Hoa Pagoda (Saigon); Đại Tòng Lâm Pagoda (Bà Rịa); Tôn Thạnh Pagoda (Long An); Giác Thiên Pagoda (vĩnh Long); Vĩnh Hoà (Bạc Liêu, Minh Hải); Linh Thử Pagoda (Tiền Giang); Hội Tôn Pagoda (Bến Tre); Huệ Quang Pagoda (Bến Tre); Tiên Châu (Vĩnh Long); Hoa Lâm (Đồng Tháp); Thập Phương Pagoda; Quán Âm (Minh Hải); Tây An Pagoda (An Giang); Khánh Quang (Cần Thơ); Samrong ek (Trà Vinh) etc. These most outstanding pagodas, out of more than 15,000 existing in Vietnam, have functioned in the past and continue to do so as educational centers for both monastic and

85 Ray, N. & Yanagihara, W., 2005, op. cit., p.238: Phuc Lam pagoda, according to this source, was founded in the mid-17th century. Its head monk An Thiem became a monk in his childhood, at the age of eight.

86 Chùa Mia and Chùa Thầy, Retrieved: 10/01/09, from <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/1056>. Thien Phuc means “Heavenly Blessing.” The outer building is the First Offering House; the central building is devoted to Sakyamuni; the third building is dedicated to Từ Đạo Hạnh, with whom the name of the pagoda is associated.

87 Cổ Lễ Pagoda, Retrieved: 10/01/09, from <http://www.vietnamtravels.vn/vietnamtravelinformation/Co-le-Pagoda.htm>. This pagoda was built by Buddhist Monk Nguyen Minh Khong during the Ly dynasty.

the Buddhist public. It is thus evident that Vietnam is endowed with a widespread and well-tested system of Buddhist educational institutions.

No evidence, either archaeological or literary, is available to establish that any of these pagodas could have equaled the university or college level educational institutions with hundreds of students, nationally recognized teachers, and nationally and internationally fame. Some of the pagodas have been used for religious ceremonies and meditation only, and were not designed to accommodate students. Of all the pagodas, so far mentioned, Dâu Pagoda, Đản, Quán Sứ, Bảo Quốc, Thập Tháp, Ân Quang and Xá Lợi possessed facilities to function as effective educational centers. Thus, the buildings of Xá Lợi Pagoda are rather progressive, and include adequate educational facilities such as halls, library, reception and meeting rooms, monastery and an office. Ân Quang Pagoda has already been the educational institution for the South Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, the South Vietnamese School of Buddhist Studies, and headquarters of the Sangha Presidency and of Dharma Propagation Institute. Quán Sứ Pagoda includes halls, amphitheater and library, and is the headquarters of the Vietnam's Institute of Buddhist Studies and the office of the Buddhist Asian Organization for Peace in Vietnam. Đản Pagoda with lecture rooms in the stone buildings nearby has already been used as an educational institution.

As already mentioned, many pagodas included libraries where people could find important and

necessary information. This was exactly the case with Đản Pagoda, Quán Sứ Pagoda and Xá Lợi Pagoda. These have been repositories of books and manuscripts.

Institutional development of Buddhist education was significantly hindered during the French colonial rule. During approximately 80 years, Buddhism and its doctrines were oppressed by Roman Catholics. The Buddhists underwent repressions, such as control over monks. The law required the approval of French authorities before building temples, and there were limitations imposed on the Vietnamese community regarding grants and legacies.⁸⁸ Buddhism, under such conditions, degenerated into what Truyen considered a sorry sight of a religious hodgepodge, composed of mysticism, Tantrism, animism and polytheism.”⁸⁹ During this period, the pagoda remained the only place where some form of Buddhist education could be imparted to monastics and laity by diligent and determined monastic scholars.

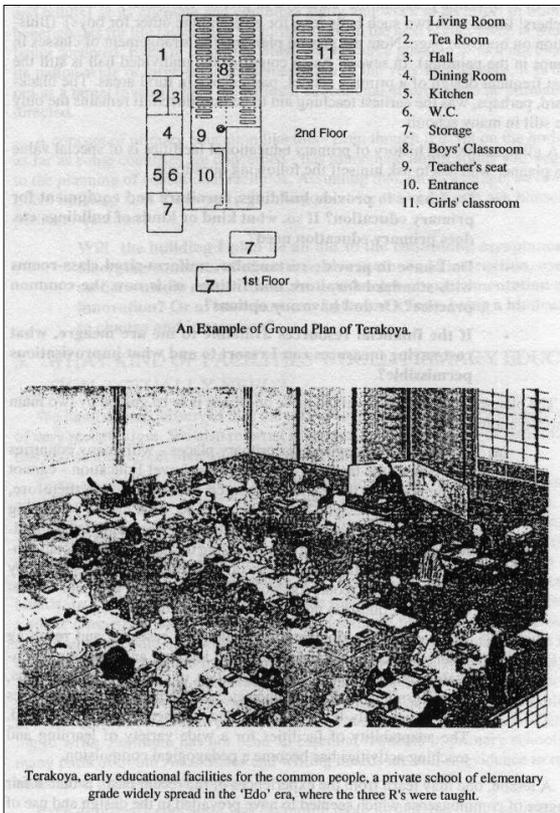
5.4. Institutional Facilities at the Disposal of my Cohorts

The Thập Tháp Pagoda was similar to other monasteries where novices were trained by a highly motivated master. The pagoda had adequate facilities necessary for a quality education such as classrooms,

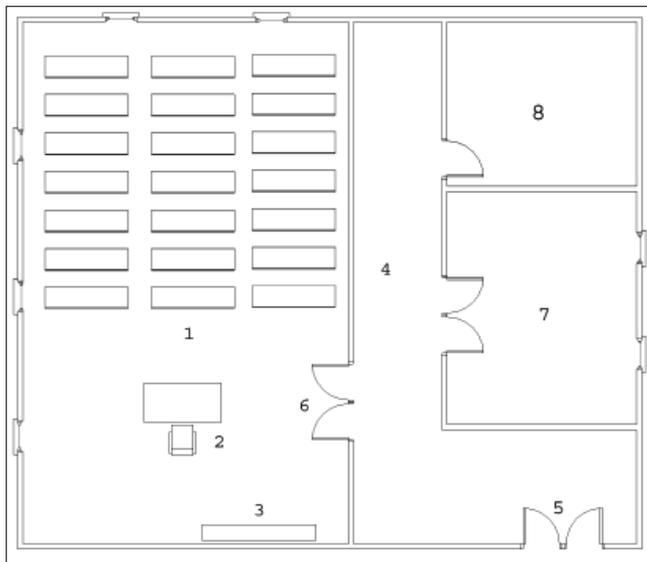
88 Truyen, Ch. 2005, “Buddhism in Viet Nam” Online <http://www.phatviet.com/pgvn/Buddhisminvietnam.htm>

89 Truyen, Ch. 2005, “Buddhism in Viet Nam” [Online] Available at <http://www.phatviet.com/pgvn/Buddhisminvietnam.htm>

the Buddha Hall for the practice of meditation and Pure Land Buddhism and a library. It was not a large library but it had eight huge bookcases that contained an abundance of important information. Our master had a great personal library, which provided us with all the books and manuscripts we needed, including sutras and Buddhist books both in Chinese and Vietnamese languages. At that time, there were no such facilities as a photo-copy machine; therefore, all sutras and books were written by hand.



The educational facilities provided at Thập Tháp Monastery appeared to be similar to what was usually provided in Eastern Asia as seen when comparing the floor-plan of a typical Vietnamese Buddhist educational institution with that of the popular educational institution called the terakoya, in Japan:⁹⁰



The terakoya originated in the medieval period at Buddhist temples. Its teachers were known as shisho or tenarai shisho. The terakoya education focused on writing and reading. Buddhist monks taught in these schools.⁹¹ In Vietnam, Buddhist monks and nuns operate

90 Guruge, Ananda W. P., *Educationally Speaking*, Karunaratne and Sons Ltd., Sri Lanka, 1994, p.74

91 Chapter 1. *Education during the late Edo and early Meiji periods*, Retrieved: 8/01/09, from http://www.next.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/hpbz198103/hpbz198103_2_005.html

pagoda schools for street children.⁹²

A traditional Buddhist educational school has entrances to classrooms with a blackboard, a hallway, a restroom, and an office. Below is shown the traditional Vietnamese Buddhist school before 1975, and after 1975 when all the Buddhist traditional schools were closed by the communist government.

- 1- Class Room
- 2- Teacher
- 3- Black Board
- 4- Hallway
- 5- Entrance
- 6- Class Room Entrance
- 7- Office
- 8- Restroom

In contrast, the Teachers' Training University, where some monks did their degree studies, is one of the biggest in Saigon city; with eleven floors, a big hall and a somewhat limited library. However, this was not a Buddhist educational institution.

⁹² Pham Ngoc Luan, *Teaching from the heart of a pagoda school*, Vietnam Cultural Window, 2003, 59, 18-19.

Chapter Six

CONTENT OF
BUDDHIST EDUCATION
AND LEARNING MATERIALS

6.1. *The Buddha as an Educator*

As repeatedly stated in Samyuttanikaya, the doctrines of Buddhism originate from the Buddha (bhagavanmulika no dhamma – Our Dhamma originated with the Blessed One, II 24, 80, 198); the content of Buddhist education is similarly determined by his teachings. The Buddha used the “experience gained in the hermitages of Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta to create a body of educational contents that were similar to *Ñānavāda* (theory in the form of precepts, philosophical discussions and doctrinal principles) and *Theravāda* (traditions and practice as developed by the senior practitioners).¹

The Buddha was primarily a teacher. He was referred to as an instructor (*satthā*) and his system of teachings was called *sāsana*. Both words originated from the root *sās* to instruct, teach, educate. He was also called

1 Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Buddhist Answers to Current Issues*, Authorhouse Indiana, 2005, p.149

Sakyamuni – the sage of the Sakya clan in which he was born in Lumbini, Nepal.

He grew up with an inclination to reflection and meditation. His father originally wanted him to be a warrior and a leader. During the early parts of his life, he complied with his father's advice and married early. According to early accounts of his life, he encountered four signs: an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a holy man around 533 B.C. Dissatisfied with the fate of humans and seeking a way to end human suffering, he, at the age of 29, abandoned his family, wealth, and power to search for enlightenment. Living as an ascetic, he discovered the Middle Way and around 528 B.C.E., experienced enlightenment (nirvana) at the age of 35 under a Bodhi tree near Gaya (currently known as Buddh Gaya in Bihar); hence he was called the Buddha (The Enlightened or Awakened One).

He delivered his first discourse in the Deer Park near Benares (now Vārānasi) to five of his one-time fellow ascetics. This discourse, as remembered and recorded by his disciples, summarizes the basic teachings of Buddhism on the Middle Path, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Within months, the Sangha (the community of monks, to which nuns were later added) was formed. The Sangha observed the path preached by the Buddha and followed a series of strict rules established by him in response to violations of discipline among its members. He accepted everyone regardless of caste or gender into the Sangha.

Over a period of 45 years, he traveled widely around the region of Magadha and spread his teachings. Only during the three months of the rainy season (*vassana*) did he stay indoors. The Buddha spent the rainy seasons of the last twenty-four years of his life at Jetavana Monastery, Savatthi, where most of the recorded discourses were delivered. All monks and nuns were also required to spend the rainy seasons indoors and these periods were used for enhanced educational and literary activities. The memorization of the details of discourses which the Buddha had delivered, arranging them in order to facilitate retrieval and preparing ancillary tools for the understanding and the interpretation of the doctrines were the principal elements of such activity.

By the time he was about to pass away, the Buddha's path had developed into a well-established way of spiritual life with a fourfold community dedicated to it: namely *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhuni*, *upāsaka*, *upāsikā* (monks, nuns, male devotees, female devotees). The Buddha had accepted donations of well organized monasteries and thus set the standard for similar institutions as centers of Buddhist activity. A vast literature consisting of his sermons, exegetical commentaries and aids to learning such as abstracts, key words and definitions had also come into existence. In addition, the Sangha had organized itself as a learning society and was engaged in continuing study and producing additions to the canonical teachings of the Buddha. In sum, the members of the Sangha became the educational agents

and the preservers of the content of Buddhist education for Buddhist communities.

In Kusinagara, between twin sala trees, the Buddha entered perfect tranquility after he had completed his multifaceted mission as one of the world's greatest teachers and outstanding educators. Instead of appointing a successor to carry on his mission, he said, "*After my death, my teachings shall be your teacher, follow the Dharma and you will be true to me.*"²

As a Western student of Buddhism appraised the Buddha's role:

"The Buddha was so great that he has no need of legends to make him appear greater; he was the wisest teacher the world has ever seen, and his teachings given to men about 2,500 years ago are still helpful for us today. He did not claim to be a God, nor was he any divine messenger. He clearly tells us that what he did, we can do also if we will listen carefully to his teaching and walk in the pathway he found for us."³

The entirety of the Buddha's life was dedicated to education. His pedagogical skills and principles have received the attention and approval of many scholars.⁴ How the Dharma was "taught appears to have been subjected to in-depth analysis by the Buddha as well as

2 Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, *The Teaching of Buddha*, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2002, p.14

3 Ernest K. S. Hunt, *The Buddha and His Teaching*, 2005, NXTG, p.10

4 Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Buddhist Answers to Current Issues*, Authorhouse Indiana, 2005, p.150

his senior disciples, [for such] analysis has developed a series of observations, which form a basis for theoretical constructs of a Buddhist system of education.”⁵ As Narada Maha Thera, a pioneering Buddhist missionary of the 20th century, says,

“The Buddha was a unique being. He was the profoundest of thinkers, the most persuasive of speakers, the most energetic of workers, the most successful of reformers, the most compassionate and tolerant of teachers, the most efficient of administrators. The most notable characteristic of the Buddha was his absolute purity and perfect holiness. He was so pure and so holy that he should be called “**The Holiest of Holies.**” He was the perfect model of all the virtues he preached. On no occasion did the Buddha manifest any moral weakness. Everybody that came in contact with him acknowledged his indisputable greatness and was deeply influenced by his magnetic personality. His will, wisdom, compassion, service, renunciation, exemplary personal life, the blameless methods that were employed to propagate the Dhamma, and his final success – all these factors have contributed to hail the Buddha as the greatest religious Teacher.”⁶

Appraising the Buddha’s role in today’s world, the Indian national leader Jawaharlal Nehru said: “The Buddha has been something greater than all doctrine and dogma, and his eternal message has thrilled humanity

5 Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Buddhist Answers to Current Issues*; AuthorHouse, Indiana 2005 pg. 149

6 Ven. Narada Mahathera, *The Buddha, Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2002, p.112

though the ages. Perhaps at no time in past history was his message of peace more needed for a suffering and distracted humanity than it is today.”⁷

The Buddha is said to have been known by his contemporaries by ten titles, which refer to qualities and virtues, and these have been repeated in all Buddhist literature irrespective of the later division into schools, sects and traditions. The titles in bold font indicate his educational role:

- 1- Thus come one (**tathāgata**, meaning that he attained his goal of enlightenment and liberation)
- 2- Worthy (arhat)
- 3- Perfectly enlightened (**samyak-sambuddha**)
- 4- Perfect in understanding and conduct (**vidyācarana**)
- 5- Well gone (sugata, again with reference to his attainment of the happy state of liberation);
- 6- Knowing the world (Lokavidū)
- 7- Unsurpassed taming hero of tamable humans (**anuttaro purusa-damya-sārathi**)
- 8- Teacher of gods and people (**sastā-deva-manusyānām**)
- 9- The Awakened or Enlightened One (Buddha)
- 10-World honored one (**lokanātha, bhagavān**).

7 Dhammananda Sri K., *Buddhism in the Eyes of the Intellectuals*, Thích Tâm Quang, Fresno, California 1994, p34

The Buddhist literature current among the Vietnamese has preserved the following attributes and accomplishments of the Buddha. In *Brahmajāla-sūtra* (translated into Vietnamese from Chinese), the Buddha is said to have taught that “all Buddhas must have ten characteristics of the diamond heart as developed by a Bodhisattva:”⁸ namely,

- 1- Complete insight into all truth (覺了法性),
- 2- Saving of all creatures (化度眾生),
- 3- Glorifying all Buddha-worlds (莊嚴世界),
- 4- Supererogation of his good deeds (善根迴向),
- 5- Service of all Buddhas (奉事大導師),
- 6- Realization of the truth of all Buddha-laws (實證諸法),
- 7- Manifestation of all patience and endurance (廣行忍辱),
- 8- Unflagging devotion (長時修行),
- 9- Perfection of his work (自行滿足),
- 10- Aiding all to fulfill their vows and accomplish their spiritual ends (令他願滿)

In *Avatamsaka-sutra*, it is said that each Buddha must also have fulfilled Ten Perfections or paramitas: Charity (*danapāramitā* – 布施), Purity (*śīlapāramitā* – 持戒), Patience (*ksāntiparamitā* – 忍辱), Zealous progress (*virya-pāramitā* – 精進), Meditation (*dhyāna-pāramitā*

8 *Brahmajāla-sūtra* (*Kinh Phạm Võng*), Diệu Pháp, Monterey Park, California, 1988, p.11,

– 禪定), Wisdom (*prajñāparamitā* – 智慧), Teaching as suited to the occasion and hearer – Adaptability (*upāyapāramitā* – 方便), Vows (*pranidanapāramitā* – 願), Force of purpose (*balapāramitā* – 力), Knowledge (*jñānapāramitā* – 智), [in bold font are the two perfections relating to the Buddha's educational role]

In the Lotus-sūtra, a Buddha is said to possess Ten Wonders (incomprehensible). These are in two groups:

a) Traceable (跡門):

- a. The embracing mind (Buddha and all things as a unity (境妙)
- b. A Buddha's all embracing knowledge arising from such universe (智妙)
- c. His deeds, expressive of his wisdom (行妙)
- d. His attainment of all the various Buddha stages, etc., (位妙)
- e. His three laws (三法妙)
- f. His response to appeal (感應妙)
- g. His supernatural power (神通妙)
- h. His preaching (說法妙)
- i. His supernatural retinue (眷屬妙)
- j. The blessings derived through universal elevation into Buddhahood (利益妙)

b) Fundamentals (本門)

- a. The initial impulse or causative stage of Buddhahood (本因妙)

- b. Result (本果妙)
- c. His (Buddha) realm (本國土妙)
- d. His response (to all living being needs) (本感應妙)
- e. His supernatural power (本神通妙)
- f. His preaching (本說法妙)
- g. His supernatural retinue (本眷屬妙)
- h. His nirvana (本涅槃妙)
- i. His (eternal) life (本壽命妙)
- j. His blessings (本利益妙)

His preaching (說法妙) occurs in both lists. There are many such lists of the Buddha virtues (merit punya – 功德), actions, vows and motives of attainment (大本行) and all emphasize that the Buddha was a supreme personality and had a significant personality. According to each one’s knowledge, view, concept or idea, the Buddha has been seen as a Teacher, Educator, Social Reformer, Leader, Scientist, Mathematician, Author, Physicist, Politician, Poet, or Philosopher.

The following are samples of assessments by modern scholars, writers and leaders:

“The Buddha teaches all his followers to make the best use of life, and gives us the promise that his pathway leads to true happiness in this world and hereafter.”⁹

9 Ernest K.S. Hunt, *The Buddha and His Teaching*, NXBTG, 2005, p 4.

The Lord Buddha was the great pioneer. He cut the road through the dark forest of ignorance and is willing to show us the way if we are wise enough to listen to what he tell us.”¹⁰

“Buddha was the embodiment of all the virtues he preached. During his successful and eventful ministry of 45 years he translated all his words into action; and in no place did he give vent to any human frailty, or any base passion. The Buddha’s moral code is the most perfect which the world has never known.”¹¹

“The most striking thing about the Buddha is almost a unique combination of a cool scientific head and profound sympathy of a warm and loving heart. The world today turns more and more towards the Buddha, for he alone represents the conscience of humanity.” “The Buddha was a pioneer as a lover of men, and a philosophic genius rolled into a single vigorous and radiant personality. He had things to say that no man or woman, after 2500 years of bustling and hustling and chattering round the fountain of knowledge, can afford to ignore. Greater perhaps than his wisdom was the example he set.”¹²

“Throughout history, the Buddha’s far-reaching influence has touched the lives of millions of individuals. The Buddha’s philosophies of peace,

10 Ernest K.S. Hunt, *The Buddha and His Teaching*, NXBTG, 2005, p.196

11 Ven. Sri. Dhammananda, *Buddhism in the Eyes of Intellectuals*, Max Muller, AT, 1994, p.27

12 Ven. Ski. Dhammananda, *Buddhism in the Eyes of Intellectuals*, Moni Bagge, Our Buddha, AT, 1994, p36

tolerance, and compassion have guided and inspired people to serve a cause greater than self. This even is an opportunity to pay tribute to a great religious educator. I appreciate all those celebrating this important day for your efforts to preserve the legacy of the Buddha for future generations ...”¹³

6.2. The Buddha’s Teachings constituting the Contents of Buddhist Education

The Buddha’s teachings, which are relevant to the content of Buddhist education in Vietnam, are described below in three categories: namely,

- A. Cognitive or Knowledge-based Content
- B. Affective or Attitude-based Content
- C. Skill-based Content

Sanskrit, Chinese and Vietnamese terms referring to such doctrines and detailed explanations thereof are included to show how Vietnamese Buddhist education has remained true to the authentic teachings of the Buddha.

A. Cognitive or Knowledge-based Content of Buddhist Education

“The Tathagatas are only teachers.”¹⁴ This same idea had been conveyed in the Dhammapada where the Tathagatas are described as pointers of the way,

13 The message from Mr. George W. Bush, the President of USA, May 18, 2007

14 Bunno Kato, Yoshiro Tammura, Kojiro Miyasaka (trans), *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Revelation of the (eternal) *Life of the Tathagata*, Kosei Publishing Co., 1975, p.250-251

meaning that the learning and the attainment of the goal of Enlightenment are to be pursued by each individual:¹⁵

The Buddha placed before humanity a path of deliverance from suffering. He emphasized practice rather than knowledge; he is presented in the Dhammapada as saying that knowing a little of the doctrines and practicing was more beneficial than knowing all the books because the book-learner was like a herdsman who looked after other people's cows and did not enjoy the milk or the milk products. (Dhammapada verses 102, 19-20).¹⁶ But to practice his path, a minimum of a knowledge base was required. The following thus became the cognitive aspects that one had to include in the courses of Buddhist education:

**(a) Integration of the Teacher,
the Teaching and the Taught:**

(1) **Triratna (Three Treasures/Jewels)** is a central concept of Buddhism whereby the Buddha (Enlightened One), who was the teacher, the Dharma (the doctrines embodied in the Buddha's teachings), and the Sangha (the Buddhist community that accepted and lived according to such teachings) were integrated as constituting the whole of the Buddhist dispensation. This enables the life of the Buddha as well as the history of the Buddhist Sangha to be an important part of the knowledge base in addition to doctrines.

15 F. Max Miller (Translated from Pali: The Dhammapada), *Sacred Books of the East*, Motilal Banersidass Publishers, First Published 1881, Reprint Delhi 1968 (verse 276)

16 Ibid. (verse 102)

(2) Pañcaskandha (Theory of Five Aggregates):

Buddhism uniquely defines a person as an integration of certain aggregates that undergo change continuously. The five aggregates or skandhas are: form, sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. The doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent causation or co-arising) is based on the ideology of a 12-linked chain: ignorance during an individual's past life brings about the creation of new aggregates, resulting in sensations and cravings, and eventually, yearning for existence. Rebirth consequently results. This cycle reflects a chain of renewed existences as opposed to a permanent being that migrates from one life to another. Basically, the Buddhist concept of *samsāra* is rebirth or more precisely re-becoming of the individual, having new combinations of aggregates for each birth, and without the transmigration of a permanent soul or self. The concept of *karma* in Hinduism is more or less similar in Buddhism where one's actions have corresponding consequences.¹⁷ But with a difference: the Buddha taught that there was no such thing as fixed karma or determined period of life or fate and that action to generate karma must be intentional. One modifies one's karma through good or bad action.

(3) The Three Marks (Trilaksana or Tilakkhana)

in early Buddhism which consists of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and selflessness (*anatta*), which in later schools of Buddhism appears as the Law

17 McDermott, J.P. *Buddhism*, Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2005, p.3

of the Three Seals: All things are impermanent; nothing has an ego; Nirvāna is quiescence.

(4) **Nirvāna** or **the state of enlightenment** is the eventual goal of Buddhism. It is a state where the individual is free from greed, hatred, and ignorance. Anyone can obtain nirvana although practically, Buddhist monastics are the ones who can realistically attain the state. An enlightened individual is called an arhat in Theravada Buddhism and is considered as a saint. Second to attaining nirvana, the most important goal for Buddhists is to acquire good karma for their rebirth.¹⁸

(5) **Holy Path:** The Buddha's teachings consist of sacred principles about the holy way (*ārya-mārga*), which fall into two categories as follows:

I. The Doctrine of Four Noble Truths

(*catvāri-ārya-satyāni* – 四妙諦):

The Four Noble Truths constitute the primary and fundamental doctrines of Sakyamuni Buddha. The Noble Truth of Suffering (*dukkha-ārya-satya* – 苦諦), deals with three kinds of suffering, caused by (i) direct causes, (ii) loss or deprivation and (iii) impermanence of all things, and eight distresses: namely, a) Birth; b) Old age; c) Sickness; d) Death; e) Parting with what we love; f) Meeting with what we hate; g) Unattained aims; and h) All the ills of five skandhas. The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering: (*dukkha-samudaya-*

¹⁸ *ibid*

ārya-satya – 集諦) specifies the three poisons: a) wrong desire; b). anger; and c). ignorance, or desire for and love of the things of this life (kamaraga). The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (duhkha-nirodha-ārya-satya -滅諦) pertains to liberation from existence by attaining Nirvāna, which has the characteristics of a) Permanence; b) Peace; c) Not growing old; d) No death; e) Purity; f) Transcendence; g) Unperturbedness; and h) Joy. The Buddha taught:

“There is an Unborn, Unbecome, Unmade, Uncompounded; for if there were not this Unborn, Unbecome, Unmade, Uncompounded, there would be apparently no escape from this here is that born, become, and compounded.”¹⁹

He also said: “Nirvāna is the highest happiness.”²⁰ The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering (duhkha-nirodha-mārga-ārya-satya – 道諦) refers to the Noble Eightfold Path (Aryastāngikamarga) consisting of a) Right understanding (samyak-drsti); b) Right thought (samyak-samkalpa); c) Right speech (samyak-vācā); d) Right Action (samyak-karmanta); e) Right livelihood (samyak-ājīva); f) Right effort (samyak-vyāyāma); g) Right mindfulness (samyak-smṛti); and h) Right concentration (samyak-samādhi).

According to the Mahaparanibbana Sutta, the Buddha taught at the village of Koti: “It is through not understanding the four Noble Truths, O Bhikkhus, that we have had to wander so long in this weary path of rebirth, both you and I.”

19 From Udāna, VI VIII.3, Dieu-phap, Los Angeles, 2000

20 From Dp 204, 法句經

II. The Law of Cause and Effect or the Doctrine of Conditionality of all Physical and Psychological Phenomena (理緣起):

The doctrine of the 12 nidānas (*dvādasāṅga-pratīyasamutpāda*) deals with the 12 links in the chain of existence: namely,

1. Ignorance (*avidyā*),
2. Karma formation (*samskāra*),
3. Consciousness (*viññāna*),
4. Name and form (*nāmarūpa*),
5. The six sense organs (*sadāyatana*),
6. Contact, touch (*sparśa*),
7. Sensation, feeling (*vedanā*),
8. Desire (*trsnā*),
9. Laying hold of (*upādāna*),
10. Being (*bhava*),
11. Birth (*jāti*),
12. Old age and death (*jarāmarana*).

Conditioned by ignorance, karma formation will be produced and conditioned; by karma formations consciousness will be produced. So will each factor in the chain condition each succeeding one. Conversely, if ignorance is destroyed, then the rest of the chain, starting from karma formation will be destroyed also. Similarly, if old age and death are destroyed, then birth is destroyed. If birth is obliterated, then being will cease to exist, so on and so forth. Buddha taught that when this is, that arises, or due to having this condition, that arises.

(6) **Other Fundamental Teachings:** In addition, the following are also included in the body of knowledge,

communicated to students in the Buddhist system of education:

- ***The power of karma***, with due emphasis on impermanence and the cycle of birth, existence and destruction, produced by causal conditions.
- ***The Four Sublime State***
 - a. Lovingkindness or universal love (metta)
 - b. Compassion (Karuna)
 - c. Sympathetic joy or Altruistic joy (mudita)
 - d. Equanimity (upekkha)
- ***Six Points of Reverent Harmony***
 - a. Doctrinal Unity in Views
 - b. Economic Unity through Sharing
 - c. Moral Unity through Upholding the Same Precepts
 - d. Mental Unity through a Shared Joy
 - e. Verbal Unity by Not Criticizing others
 - f. Bodily Unity by Living Together
- ***The Five Precepts:***
 - a. Killing
 - b. Stealing
 - c. Sexual Misconduct
 - d. Lying
 - e. Use of intoxicants,
- ***The Six Pāramitās***
 - a. *Dāna paramita*: generosity, giving of oneself (in Chinese, 布施波羅蜜)

- b. *Śīla paramita*: virtue, morality, discipline, proper conduct (持戒波羅蜜)
- c. *Kṣānti (kshanti) paramita*: patience, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance (忍辱波羅蜜)
- d. *Vīrya paramita*: energy, diligence, vigour, effort (精進波羅蜜)
- e. *Dhyāna paramita*: one-pointed concentration, contemplation (禪定波羅蜜)
- f. *Prajñā paramita*: wisdom, insight (智慧波羅蜜)

• ***The Eight Precepts (atthanga-sīla)***

- a. Avoid killing, directly or indirectly.
- b. Avoid stealing and taking things without the permission of their owner.
- c. Avoid sexual contact.
- d. Avoid lying and deceiving others.
- e. Avoid toxicants: alcohol, tobacco and drugs (except for medicinal purposes).
- f. Avoid eating more than one meal that day. The meal is taken before noon, and once one has stopped eating for thirty minutes, the meal is considered finished.
- g. Avoid sitting on a high, expensive bed or seat with pride. Also avoid sitting on animal skins.
- h. Avoid wearing jewellery, perfume, and make-up. Avoid singing, dancing or playing music with attachment.

• ***Ten Pāramitās***

- a. *Dāna parami*: generosity, giving of oneself
- b. *Sīla parami*: virtue, morality, proper conduct
- c. *Nekkhamma parami*: renunciation
- d. *Paññā parami*: transcendental wisdom, insight
- e. *Viriya* (also spelt *vīriya*) *parami*: energy, diligence, vigour, effort
- f. *Khanti parami*: patience, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance
- g. *Sacca parami*: truthfulness, honesty
- h. *Adhiṭṭhāna* (*adhitthana*) *parami*: determination, resolution
- i. *Mettā parami*: loving-kindness
- j. *Upekkhā* (also spelled *upekhā*) *parami*: equanimity, serenity

• ***Ten Good Deeds, in order to open the bodhi-mind***

- a. Do not kill
- b. Do not steal
- c. Do not indulge in sexual misconduct
- d. No lying
- e. No double-tongued speech
- f. No abusive speech
- g. No irresponsible speech
- h. No greed
- i. No hatred
- j. No delusion

• ***37 Factors Leading to Enlightenment:***

- a. *The Four Dwellings of Mindfulness*

- i. Contemplating the Body as Impure
- ii. Contemplating the Sensation as Suffering
- iii. Contemplating the Mind as Impermanent
- iv. Contemplating the Dharma as Not-Self

b. The Four Right Zeals (Samvakprahana)

- i. To put an end to existing evil
- ii. To prevent evil arising
- iii. To bring good into existence
- iv. To develop existing good.

c. The Four Wishful Contentment (rddhipada)

- i. Wishful Contentment of Desire
- ii. Wishful Contentment of Mindfulness
- iii. Wishful Contentment of Progress
- iv. Wishful Contentment of Wisdom

d. The Five Roots (Panca Indriyani)

- i. Root of Faith
- ii. Root of Zeal
- iii. Root of Mindfulness
- iv. Root of Meditation
- v. Root of Wisdom

e. The Five Powers (Pana Balani)

- i. Power of Faith
- ii. Power of Zeal
- iii. Power of Mindfulness
- iv. Power of Meditation
- v. Power of Wisdom

f. Seven Characterisitics of Bodhi (Septa Bodhyanga)

- i. Discrimination of the true and the false
- ii. Zeal
- iii. Joy
- iv. Riddance
- v. Renunciation
- vi. Mediation
- vii. Mindfulness

g. The Noble Eightfold Path

- i. Right Understanding
- ii. Right Thought
- iii. Right Speech
- iv. Right Action
- v. Right Livelihood
- vi. Right Effort
- vii. Right Mindfulness
- viii. Right Concentration

This summary is the basic cognitive content of Buddhism, of which the Buddha said,

“Whatever truths have been expounded to you by me, study them well, practice, cultivate and develop them so that this holy life may last long and be perpetuated out of compassion for the world, for the good and happiness of many, for the good and happiness of gods and men. What are those truths? They are: The Four Foundations of Mindfulness; the Four Kinds of Right Efforts; the Four Means of Accomplishment; the Five Faculties; the Five Powers; the Seven Factors of Enlightenment and the Noble Eightfold Path.”²¹

21 The Māhāparinervāna Sūtra (*kinh Trường A Hàm*), p.120, Chùa Diệu Pháp, ấn tống, 2006

The main source of the content of Buddhist education is the canon of early Buddhism, namely the Tipitaka (Tripitaka in Sanskrit) preserved in the Theravada or Southern Tradition in Pāli. Tipitaka means “three baskets” and corresponds to the three parts of the canon. These three are:

- The Sutta Pitaka (Sūtra Pitaka in Sanskrit), a collection of discourses;
- The Vinaya Pitaka, the code of monastic discipline;
- And the Abhidharma Pitaka, with philosophical, psychological, and doctrinal discussions and classifications.

The identical contents with minor variations are found in the Sarvastivādi Tripitaka, which is found in Sanskrit only in fragments and in Chinese in its entirety in the form of Āgama Sūtras, forming the first part of the Taisho version of the Chinese Tripitaka.

The other branch of Buddhism, Mahāyāna, was established sometime around the beginning of the current era. A new concept of an eternal Buddha was created, giving him a threefold nature (trikāya), along with the creation of the concept of the Bodhisattva. The Mahayana version of Bodhisattva is an enlightened man, who is similar to the arhat in the Theravāda tradition, but dedicated to the saving of all sentient beings. Mahayana developed its own literature, Mahayana sūtras, which discuss the fundamental teachings of the Buddha with emphasis on new concepts. This vast literature, again, includes very important aspects of

the contents of Buddhist education in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The Mahayana sūtras are further enhanced by an extensive literature produced by Buddhist philosophers of India itself such as Asvaghosa, Vasubandhu, Nagarjuna, and Asanga.

Another tradition of Buddhism came into existence some time in 700 CE: Tantrism. It was basically the combination of Mahāyāna concepts and folk beliefs in India. It placed greater emphasis on sacramental action. Hindu Tantrism emerged around this period also.²² These doctrines have formed the basis of Tantrayana or Vajrayana Buddhism as practiced in Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Buryat and by the Shingon School in Japan.

Besides the translations of these works, there are also national Buddhist literatures, which arose in all Buddhist countries. The increasing tendency today is to expand the content of Buddhist education to include as much as possible of this vast and ever-increasing body of knowledge shared by the three traditions.

There is also a rich philosophical literature that has commanded attention. The importance of its study is illustrated in the following discussion of the Buddhist theory of causation or conditionality:

“The Theravāda has interpreted Pratītyasammutpāda (conditioned co-production, or interdependent origination) as temporal sequence of real entities

22 McDermott, J.P., 2005, *Buddhism*, p.5, Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2006 (CD). Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation

between which there was a causal relation. According to the Madhyamika School, *pratītyasammutpada* does not mean the principle of temporal sequence, but the principle of essential dependence of things on each other. In one word, it is the principle of relativity, to which the Buddha made reference two thousand five hundred years before.”²³

To Candrakīrī (月稱), *pratītyasamutpāda* means the manifestation of entities as relative to causes and condition.²⁴ According to Dr. E. Conze: “All the concrete content belongs to the interplay of the countless. There is no real, independent existence of entities in the *pratyayas* conditions.”²⁵

According to Nāgārjuna: “*Apratītya samutpanno dharmahkaścin navidyate. Yasmāt tasmāt śūnyo hi dharmah kaścin navidyate*”²⁶ (Since there is no element of existence which comes into manifestation without conditions, therefore there is no dharma (existence) which is not devoid of real independent existence (*s’ūnya*). And Nagarjuna says: “What is *pratītyasamutpāda* that we call *s’ūnyatā* – *Yah pratītyasamutpādah śūnyatām tām pracaksmamhe*.”²⁷

23 Jaidev Singh, *An Introduction to Mahhyamaka Philosophy*, translated by Thích Viên Lý, supplement of book, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam Và Triết Học Thế Giới, 1998, p.76

24 月稱, *Hetupratyayapekso bhavanam utpadah pratītyasammutpadarthah*, 明句論, p.2

25 Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, Munshiramp Manoharlal, New Delhi, 2002, p.240

26 M.K.(中論), 24, 19; Nagarjuna, *Trung Luận*, Thích Viên Lý trans, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, Califormation, 1994

27 Ibid, M.K.(中論 24), 18

Jaidev Singh comments, “The doctrine of Pratītyasamutpāda is exceedingly important in Buddhism. It is the causal law both of the universe and the lives of individuals. It is important from two points of view. Firstly, it gives a very clear idea of the impermanent and conditioned nature of all phenomena. Secondly, it shows how birth, old age, death and all the miseries of phenomenal existence arise in dependence upon conditions, and how all the miseries cease in the absence of these conditions.”²⁸

According to the Avatamsaka school, “There are four principal uses of the term:

- 1- 業感緣起, that of the Hīnayāna etc., under the influence of karma the conditions of reincarnation arise;
- 2- 阿賴耶緣起 that of the primitive Māhāyana school etc., that all things arise from Ālaya;
- 3- 如來藏緣起, that of the advancing Māhāyana, that all things arise from Tathāgatagarbha;
- 4- 法界緣起, that of complete Māhāyana, in which one is all and all are one, each being a universal cause.”²⁹

Jaidev Singh concludes: “The importance of pratītyasamutpāda lies in its teaching that all phenomenal existence, all entities in the world, are conditioned,

28 Jaidev Singh, *An Introduction to Madhyamaka Philosophy*, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam và Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 1998, p.72, p.74

29 Trần Nguyên Trung, *Từ Điển Phật Học Việt Anh*, p.88, NXBTG, 2004

are devoid of (sunya) real, independent existence (svabhava).”³⁰

Detailed discussions of such themes have become an essential element of current Buddhist studies especially at the college and university levels and are especially pursued at graduate level.

B. Affective or Attitude-based Content of Buddhist Education

Even as he entered into Māhāparinirvāna, without nominating a successor, the Buddha emphasized the importance of practice rather than knowledge because what he taught was a path of purification and liberation that each individual had to pursue through diligence and hard work. He said, “By sustained effort, earnestness, temperance and self-control, the wise man may make for himself an island which no flood can overwhelm.”³¹

Among other statements attributed to the Buddha to stress the affective domain objectives are the following:

“Oneself is indeed one’s own savior, who else could be the savior? With self-control and cultivation, one can obtain a wonderful savior.”³²

“You are your own protector. You are your own refuge. Try to control yourself as a merchant controls a noble steed.”³³

30 *ibid*, p.78

31 F. Max Miller (Translated from Pali: The Dhammapada), *Sacred Books of the East*, Motilal Banersidass Publishers, First Published 1881, Reprint Delhi 1968 verse 25

32 *Ibid*. verse 160

33 *Ibid*. verse 380

“After the Tathāgata has passed away, all bhikkhus have to take the Dharma and sīlas as the teacher.”³⁴

“Make of yourself a light, rely upon yourself, do not depend upon anyone else. Make my teachings your light. Rely upon them, do not depend upon any other teaching.”³⁵

The ideal Buddhist focuses on the five qualities of faith, generosity, learning, wisdom, and virtue. The first two concern the heart, the next two concern the intellect, and the last concerns both the heart and the intellect. The major part of the affective aspect of Buddhist education deals with the concept of *Sila*, which is definable as virtue developed through the observance of precepts. Buddhist precepts are somewhat parallel to the Ten Commandments in Judeo-Christian tradition with the main difference being that each precept is formulated in the form of a resolution or self-discipline that one takes upon oneself voluntarily. Precepts observed to affect character; conduct and virtue in a monastic are in three levels:

1. Ten Precepts of Buddhism:³⁶ The training of a novice whether śrāmanera or śrāmaneri begins with the observance of the Ten precepts:

34 Dirghāgama – Māhāparinirvāna Sūtra, (*Kinh Du Hành*) p.120, Chùa Diệu Pháp, 2007

35 Dirghāgama – Māhāparinirvāna Sūtra, (*Kinh Du Hành*) p.120, Chùa Diệu Pháp, 2007

36 Nyanatiloka, *The Word of the Buddha*, The Buddhist Publication Society, 1971, p. xii

- i. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from harming living beings.
- ii. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from taking things not given
- iii. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from sexual intercourse.
- iv. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from false speech.
- v. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.
- vi. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from taking untimely meals.
- vii. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from dancing, singing, music and watching grotesque mime.
- viii. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from use of garlands, perfumes and personal adornment.
- ix. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from use of high seats.
- x. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from accepting gold or silver.

The ten precepts go beyond the five precepts that the Buddhist laity is enjoined to observe. In the five precepts there is one difference: the third precept, which in the case of a monastic pertains to total celibacy, is modified for lay people to abstinence from sexual misconduct.

2. *Pātimokkha* or *Prātimoksa*: Once ordained, a monastic has to observe an entire code of discipline as laid down in the Vinaya. These rules of discipline are called *Pātimokkha* in Pali and *Prātimoksa* in Sanskrit and go up to 227 for bhikkhus and 248 for bhikkhunis in early Buddhism as currently held by Theravada or Southern Buddhist tradition and 250 for bhikkhus and 348 for bhikkhunis in the Mahayana tradition. The rules are arranged according to the gravity of the violation and the punishment or expiation prescribed for each violation. A very rich Vinaya literature is current in Vietnam as a result of the Chinese translations of such works as Dharmagupta Vinaya, Sarvastivada Vinaya, Dasadhayaya Vinaya, Mahisasaka Vinaya and Mahasanghika Vinaya, which were brought by Fa Xian from Sri Lanka to China in 410 CE.

The in-depth study of these rules, which is an extremely important aspect of Buddhist education, involves a command of definitions and exceptions, the rationale of the Buddhist jurisprudence, and procedures of administering justice. Directly related to the study is the practice of confession which is an essential part of the fortnightly ceremony of the Buddhist Sangha. Here the theoretical study of the rules is further reinforced through practical participation in the confessional ceremony.

3. *Bodhisattva Vows*: An addition to the above, a monastic in the Mahayana tradition takes upon oneself the Bodhisattva vows. According to the *Avatamsaka*

Sùtra (Kinh Hoa Nghiêm – 華嚴經), there are Four Great Vows, which Bodhisattvas must undertake:

**1. SENTIENT BEINGS WITHOUT NUMBER
WE VOW TO ENLIGHTEN**

For a Bodhisattva, the eradication of one's own suffering is combined with the desire to aid in the eradication of all others' suffering as well. The real Bodhisattva identifies the immeasurable distress of all sentient beings as his own.

**2. VEXATIONS WITHOUT NUMBER WE
VOW TO ERADICATE**

The desire to be a Bodhisattva to convert and liberate sentient beings, and aid in the eradication of their distress, etc., should not be an impulse based on idle sentimentality or romantic notions of spiritual life. This noble aspiration can only come to completion provided that there is a strong foundation of wisdom. With wisdom only, and not otherwise, can one spread the Dharma and assist living beings. This wisdom arises from a keen desire to learn and practice the Buddha-dharma.

**3. LIMITLESS APPROACHES TO THE
DHARMA WE VOW TO MASTER**

When one perceives the suffering of sentient beings, one vows to enlighten sentient beings without number. When perceiving the distress in one's life and that of others, one vows to eradicate vexations without end. Perceiving the myriad Dharma doors to Enlightenment, one vows to master them all. Perceiving the truth of Nirvana, one vows to attain the Bodhisattvahood.

4. THE SUPREME ENLIGHTENMENT WE VOW TO ACHIEVE

The Buddhist Path conditions what gives rise not only to peace but to Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi. It means perfect, big, and full Enlightenment: the Enlightenment that not only knows how to let go and be peaceful but the Enlightenment that also knows how to perfectly respond to conditions in a way which is a true blessing for all beings.³⁷

These Bodhisattva vows, as further expanded and explained in the course of monastic training in the form of Mahayana Buddhism as practiced in Vietnam, imply a pledge of a monastic who acknowledges his or her devotion to Buddha's precepts and to the essence of his doctrine. It is a commitment to themselves and those around them. Bodhisattva vows are intended to guide one on a spiritual path leading to Enlightenment. Besides reaching the ultimate goal, the observance and practice serve to shape the practitioner's character. The many restrictions, although difficult to comply with, enhance the life of a person sticking to them. The elements of character developed by these vows include the peaceful co-habitation of all sentient beings. According to Berzin, the Bodhisattva vows are "a subtle invisible form on a mental continuum, which shapes behavior."³⁸

These vows constitute the code of conduct. For instance, one of the vows states that a Bodhisattva should

37 *The Buddhist Liturgy*, Sutra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, New York, 1993, p.137

38 Berzin, Alexander, *Taking the Kalachakra Initiation*. Snow Lion, Ithaca, 1997, p.54

always be positive and treats other living beings with the same positive attitude: no aggression, prejudices or intolerance can be accepted. Moreover, these vows teach us to live for the sake of others, and not to make Enlightenment the only aim in life. Helping others on their way to the goal is also encouraged. As mentioned below, it is prohibited to discourage other people from becoming a Bodhisattva, or persuading them to leave everything because it is very difficult and complicated to attain. Praising oneself is also prohibited: the violation of this vow is considered to imply the violation of all vows. Destruction of places of habitation is also a major violation because it worsens the lives of other people. Therefore, all vows are aimed both internally and externally for the spiritual development of all segments of the society.

The Mahayana tradition current in Vietnam includes as an extension of the vows of a Bodhisattva precepts. The main point here is that people who strive to become Bodhisattvas have to overcome many obstacles on their way including temptations and undue behavior. The failure to comply with the requirements and commitment of some of the undue actions result in the “decline in spiritual development and hinders the growth of positive qualities.”³⁹

According to the Brahmajala Sùtra (Kinh Phạm Võng Bồ Tát Giới – 梵網經) of the Mahayana tradition,

39 Berzin, Alexander, *Taking the Kalachakra Initiation*. Snow Lion, Ithaca, 1997, p.54

there are ten root vows and 48 secondary vows. These vows are a little different from the ones discussed earlier. The ten root vows are abstinence from (i). killing, (ii) stealing, (iii) sexual relationships, (iv) falsehood, (v) selling alcohol and narcotic substances, (vi) spreading wrongful misdeeds of others, (vii) praising oneself and denigrating others, (viii) parsimonious action, (ix) thoughts of resentment and failure to repent sins, and (x) denigration of the Three Jewels. The 48 secondary vows relate to minor offences and will not affect the ordination of a Bodhisattva and the damaged vows can be restored.⁴⁰ Four basic vows predetermine and lay the foundation for all the other Bodhisattva vows. They are abstinence from killing, stealing, falsehood and sexual intercourse.

These complex Bodhisattva vows form an integral part of the affective domain content of Buddhist education in Vietnam because they are not merely to be studied but are to be practiced with diligence. It is interesting to note that one is expected to practice them not only in this life, but also in future lives because the way to Enlightenment often takes much more than one human life: “Thus, as subtle forms, these vows continue on our mental continuums into future lives.”⁴¹

How the Bodhisattva vows enable the affective objectives of Buddhist education to be achieved may

40 Kinh *Phạm Võng Bồ Tát Giới*, Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, Los Angeles, 1991, p.p.16-50

41 Berzin, Alexander, *Taking the Kalachakra Initiation*. Snow Lion, Ithaca, 1997, p.54

be illustrated with how endurance and patience are instilled. To resist hatred and revenge despite being scorned and insulted is to practice endurance and patience. Tolerance is a key attribute which many find hard to practice. However, to achieve Enlightenment, control of emotions and thoughts is important. Upon being insulted, a Bodhisattva will be patient and will try to teach the offenders. Undergoing bad circumstances, a Bodhisattva will shift focus to the bright side of things. Five endurances are hence taught and practiced:

- (i) Endurance in subduedness,
- (ii) Endurance in belief,
- (iii) Endurance in smooth conditions,
- (iv) Endurance of no-birth,
- (v) Endurance of still extinction.

The vows are taught by experienced teachers in monasteries, where the practice of Lục Độ (Six Paramita) and Thập Độ (Ten Paramita) are stressed.

C. Skill-based Content of Buddhist Education

To the above cognitive and affective areas of content, the Buddhist education adds the following skill-oriented content. Three kinds of skills are aimed at in the course of training a Buddhist monastic:

Meditation: With the Buddha's emphasis on deliverance and the cultivation of the mind for that purpose, the first skill is in the field of meditation. Meditation for which training and skill development are required consists of a great deal of personal

concentration and focus to obtain mental cultivation and spiritual purification. It is a way to reflect deeply on one's experiences, as a means to avoid ignorance and be exposed to knowledge. Self-realization is obtained through meditation. The technical guidance for this is provided in many discourses of the Buddha such as the Mahasatipatthanasutta. But practice under the supervision of a master is essential. Accordingly, a fair amount of time in the life of a monastic in training is devoted to meditation.

Practice and Performance of Rites and Ritual:

Buddhist worship especially in the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions involves congregational worship based on centuries-old rites and rituals. Bowing is a very important part of the Vietnamese Buddhist worship and this requires enormous practice, particularly since a person must develop a tremendous stamina to do hundreds of bows in one session. In addition, there are various rites for honoring Bodhisattvas, for benedictions and for granting protection. And for each form of worship and ritual, there are Buddhist texts to be chanted and dharanis to be uttered appropriately. Apart from the knowledge of such texts, it is necessary to be a skillful chanter. Chanting with or without the wooden fish and bells is a practical skill that is achieved through directed participation. Mantras are another practice widely used by Buddhists all over the world. Mantras are sounds which are considered sacred and

supernatural.⁴² Mantras are also considered as powerful protection from evil. Mahayana tradition also implies the usage of mantras for exorcistic aims.

Instructional skills: A Buddhist monastic has many duties to perform which demand well-developed instructional skills. He is constantly required to teach the Dharma to laity and younger colleagues. Delivering a sermon calls for skills which the Buddhist educational system provides through guided practice. The teaching skills are further expanded to include public speaking as most monastics are required to address large crowds of devotees. Thus the skill-training aspect of Buddhist education places significant stress on teaching and public speaking. An additionally skill being contemplated in certain Buddhist circles is the introduction of a counseling skill.

Ancillary skills – Five Sciences (Pancavidya – 五明): In the Avatamsaka Sūtra, when Sudhana questioned, “What do Bodhisattvas need to do to represent compassion completely?” Mañjuśrī Bodhisattvas had taught the Five Sciences, such as the best skillful means. They are:

(a) *Language* to express one’s thoughts, orally and through writing to express one’s self effectively, with mastery in communication through language, art and music;

(b) *Craftsmanship* including areas of mathematics,

42 Meher McArthur, *Reading Buddhist Art: An Illustrated Guide to Buddhist Signs and Symbols*, Thames & Hudson, 2004, 62.

engineering, and technology;

(c) *Medicine* to treat the sick; and

(d) *Logic* including critical thinking to analyze and understand different events, and theories ;

(e) *Knowledge* of philosophies, and other religions.

Overarching these three domains of educational objectives is the overall Buddhist goal of *Prajñā*, which is the ultimate level of self-cultivation leading to Enlightenment and the end of suffering. Prājñā is attained through knowledge and skill. It is the highest form of wisdom that humans can achieve. There are three levels of Prajna: (i) Literary Prājñā – mastery of Buddhist texts, (ii) Contemplative Prājñā – deep understanding of Buddhist texts, and (iii) Real mark Prājñā – complete knowledge on nature and the ultimate goal of Buddhists. “There are three prajnas or perfect enlightenments:

1) The first part of the prajnaparamita: The wisdom achieved once the shore is crossed.

2) The second part of the prajnaparamita: The necessary wisdom for actual crossing of the shore of births and deaths.

3) The wisdom of knowing things in their temporary and changing condition. The necessary wisdom for vowing to cross the shore of births and deaths.”⁴³

43 Thiệu Phúc, *Buddhist Dictionary Vietnamese and English, Vol. One*, TĐ Minh Đăng Quang, Santa Ana, 2005, p.195

The educational materials we used included the Buddhist canonical texts in Chinese and Vietnamese, biographies of well-known and popular Vietnamese Buddhist masters, and textbooks and manuals by outstanding Vietnamese Buddhist scholars.

The Anapanasati Sutra (An Ban Thủ Ý), which was one of the first Buddhist texts to be translated into Vietnamese,⁴⁴ plays an exceptional role in the monastic training. It is due to the fact that Vietnamese Buddhists are interested in Buddhism not only as a system of values and beliefs, but more so as a system of meditation providing a practical way to self-realization and further Enlightenment. In order to reach self-realization, we were required to acquire the skills of creative thinking and physical expressions of happiness.

The biographies of the famous Buddhist monks served to inspire beginner monastics to reach self-realization and comply with all requirements. The texts we used in our monastic education were exclusive Buddhist sources, which are yet to be translated into European languages. The following is an annotated list of the sutras used in daily practice, which required memorization and in-depth understanding, and hence included in the curriculum of the two levels of Buddhist education in Vietnam:

44 Đạo Lý – Tự Trọng, *Người Tìm Chữ Cổ, Chữ Việt Cổ*. (the old Vietnamese written language – Hùng Vương era). Chữ “A Đầu,” Saigontime, 4, 6, 2009, p.C5

ELEMENTARY LEVEL (*Some of many sutras used in daily practice and required memorization*):

1. **Tỳ Ni Nhật Dụng** (*Vinaya Pitaka*). This scripture guides the monks' daily meditation practice. It is the quintessential book for beginning monks as well as age-old masters. The Buddha created Vinaya rules for monks and nuns to know and observe in order to attain honor, respect, and modesty. It describes the seven classes of rules that must be observed and practiced by monks with complete dedication. Monks must practice the fourfold purification or "visudshimagga" – (1) Right Speech and Right Action, a disciplinary code of 250 rules for monks; (2) Restraint of the Senses by control of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind; (3) Right Livelihood in accordance to the precepts; and (4) Moderation of food, clothing, housing and medicine. These rules help to assure the purity of the monastic lineage and the continuation of Buddhism throughout the ages.⁴⁵

2. **Luật Sa Di** (*The Ten Precepts*). Before one is able to purify the mind and change his karma, one must understand and internalize the fundamental precepts. Those precepts are known as Sa Di Luật Giải (*Srāmanera's Vinaya*). These scriptures are important in keeping the monastic mind well grounded and disciplined. The Ten Precepts are guidelines, which all monks must abide by as taught by The Buddha. These precepts include avoidance of: taking any life, taking

45 Bhikku Moneyya. *Teaching and Training Pa-Auk Forest Monastery*. Buddha Dharma Education, Inc. Wave Publications, 2006

what is not given, sexual activity, lies or fabrication, alcohol or drugs, eating after the noon hour, any form of entertainment, luxurious sleep or living quarters, wearing perfume or decorative adornments, and accepting any money.⁴⁶

3. Hai Mươi Bốn Oai Nghi (*Twenty Four Dignities*).

This book is considered essential in teaching the mindfulness of action and thought that must be practiced in order to become a respectable monk. The Buddha teaches that there are 24 dignities that, if learned, will earn the respect of all individuals. Monks strive daily to practice these ideal behaviors and to become honorable.

4. Hồng Danh Bửu Sát (*Eighty-Eight Buddhas Repentance Ceremony*). This book is practiced to formally offer repentance for the sins of this life and that of the past lives. We recite the names of the 88 Buddhas to purify the mind and attain true repentance. The ceremony must be performed seriously and the reformation effected to ensure no further sins are committed. This is done in front of the Buddhas for recognition and certification.

5. Kinh Di Đà (*Amitabha Sùtra*). Amitabha means “Infinite Life” in Sanskrit and this sùtra describes the Land of Ultimate Bliss. The Buddha describes the Pure Land of no pain or rebirth during a conversation with his disciple. The essential concept of this sutra is to develop faith and vows to recite the Buddha-name. This

⁴⁶ Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007

powerful sutra is believed to enable one to be reborn into the Pure Land without falling back. By reciting the Buddha-name to single-mindedness and without delusion, one can attain a life of pure bliss in the Pure Land.

In addition, my cohorts and I have memorized many other sutras which we chant for various ceremonies.

ACADEMIC LEVEL:

6. Kinh Lăng Nghiêm (Śūrangama Sūtra). The English translation for these main texts is “Heroic Progress Samadhi (meditative concentration scripture).” It focuses on the importance of meditation on the progress of the Dharma. Disciplined moral precepts are essential to staying true to the Path. The general idea of the Śūrangama is that living beings must acquire the true mind or Buddha nature. Because of ignorance about nature, and true mind, living beings are subject to the cycle of rebirth whereas the Buddha is aware of the truth. Therefore, the mind must be free from delusion.⁴⁷

7. Duy Thức Tam Thập Tụng (*Vijñaptimātratā-trimsikā*). “I pay homage to the Beings that are either completely or partially purified by *Vijñaptimātratā*,” wrote Vasubandhu, a 5th century Yogacara Buddhist philosopher. He claimed that all beings are nothing but the subjective manifestation of consciousness. His

47 Epstein, Ronald. Foreword – The Fifty Skandha-Demon States: A Simple Explanation by the Venerable Master Hsüan Hua. The Śurangama Sutra, Volume VIII, pp.vii-ix. Burlingame, CA: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1996.

philosophy, known by the label “mind-only” (*citta-mātra*) or “consciousness-only” (*viññānamātra*), discloses the indiscernible process of transforming the consciousness. He states that transformation results when the object of perception is perception itself. He adds: “The transformation of consciousness is constitution (*vikalpa*). What is constituted (*yad vikalpyate*) does not exist. Therefore, everything is perception-only (*viññaptimātraka*).”⁴⁸

8. Trung Luận (*Mādhyamika Śāstra*), Thập Nhị Môn Luận (*Dvādaśānikāya Śāstra*), Đại Trí Độ Luận (*Prajñāpāramitā Śāstra*). These were written by the famous Buddhist scholar, Nagarjuna, and are known collectively as the *Sūtrasamuccaya* or “Compendium of Sūtras.” This scholar is famous for the “perfection of wisdom.” He explained that Enlightenment can only be attained by a Bodhisattva when the perfect wisdom of emptiness is acknowledged. His texts further explain the Buddha’s teaching of the “middle way” between existence and non-existence and permanence and non-permanence.⁴⁹

9. Thành Duy Thức Luận (*Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi Śāstra*), Du Già Sư Địa Luận (*Yogācāryabhūmi-śāstra*), Câu Xá Luận (*Abhidharmakosa śāstra*) etc.

These works make up the foundation for the

48 Chatterjee, K.N. Vasubandhu’s Vijnapti-matrata-siddhi (with Sthiramati’s Commentary). Varanasi: Kishor Vidya Niketan, 1980.

49 Venkata Ramanan K. (ed.), Nagarjuna’s Philosophy as Presented in the Maha-Prajñāparamita-Sastra, 1966, reprinted 1987

Dharmalaksana (Faxiang) school of philosophy, which focuses on the experience of nature in relation to its cosmic existence. The scholars behind this movement include Maitreya, Asanga, and Vasubandhu. They believed that through the denial of objects and the non-denial of objects there reveals the existence of ideas. The conscious and sub-conscious mind projects the manifestation of all existence.⁵⁰

10. Bát Đại Nhân Giác (八大人覺經 *Eight Awakenings of Great People Sùtra*). A sùtra that the Buddha taught is said that if anyone were to practice these words of the Buddha, one will escape of the realms of suffering and rebirth. Each awakening contains all eight for a total of 64 awakenings. When practiced in its entirety, the awakenings are countless in numbers. This sutra is very short and practical in the sense of developing one's mind to enlightenment.⁵¹

11. Kinh Tứ Thập Nhị Chương (四十二章經 *Sùtra of Forty Two Sections*). This is considered to be the First Sùtra, recorded in 67 CE by two Honorable Elders, Kashyapa-matanga and Gobharana, after they revealed the Eighteen Transformations of an Arhat and convinced the Chinese emperor of the legitimacy of Buddhist sutras. The sutra reveals the “path” preached by the Buddha on dharma. Most importantly, the Buddha

50 Kaiten Nukariya. *The Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan*. www.enotalone.com/article/17382.html.

51 會性法師, 大藏會閱八大人覺經, 第二冊七四八頁再版。— 臺北市: 天華. 民 84; 冊: 公分。— (天華佛學叢書;)

teaches: “In religious exercises, in conduct, in language, even in philosophizing, I never forget (the necessity of founding all on the basis of) supreme reason!”⁵²

12. Kinh Tứ Niệm Xứ (四念處經 *Four Kinds of Mindfulness Sūtra*). The Four Kinds of Mindfulness are: the body, feelings, mind, and the dharmas. These four foundations are the nature of the five skandhas. In the Mahayana tradition, mindfulness is regarded as wisdom, or transcendental knowledge, or *prajñā* in Sanskrit. The practice of mindfulness is the object of meditation. It is also achieved through the two supports of mindfulness and awareness. Without developing these two disciplines, there is no way a person can be truly mindful.⁵³

13. Kinh Kim Cang (*Vajracchedika- Prajñā-Paramitā – the Diamond Sūtra*). The Diamond Sutra is one of the monumental scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism. The great 6th Patriarch of Zen, Huineng, is said to have achieved enlightenment after hearing a single line of this sutra. The Diamond Sutra is intended as an antidote to suffering. The antidote is achieved through wisdom. The realization of the emptiness of all things is the key step on this path and manifestation comes with the Bodhisattva act of saving all sentient beings. It relates the story of the Buddha preaching to

52 Rev. S. Beal. *The Sutra of the Forty-two Sections*, from the Chinese, 1862, edited by Christopher Weimer, 2002

53 Rinpoche, Dzogchen Ponlop. *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. Bodhi Magazine, Issue III. Copyright in 1996 & 2007. <http://www.dpr.info>

Subhuti, one of his ten major disciples. He was able to understand the lesson of emptiness – that all is empty when examined under relationship with subjectivity and objectivity.⁵⁴

14. Đại Bát Niết Bàn (*Mahā-Parinirvāna Sūtra*). This sūtra was delivered by the Buddha on the last day and night before he reached nirvāna. This scripture encompasses all of the gathered truths taught by the tathāgatas. He imparts to his disciples all the enlightenments attained during his spiritual path. The sūtra is said to be so powerful that hearing its name brings happiness and awakening. The Buddha preaches on emptiness, internal Buddha elements in all sentient beings, and explains that Nirvāna that can be attained when mental afflictions are overcome. It is at that point that one becomes free from attachment, suffering, and desire and the diamond Tathāgata permanently endures.

15. Kinh Pháp Hoa (*Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra*). In Sanskrit, “*sad*” means wonderful and “*pundarika*” means white lotus flower. The Lotus Sūtra is one of the most important Mahayana scriptures. It is made of 28 fascicles, of which 18 recommend the practice of sūtra recitation. This sūtra emphasizes purifying the six senses through scriptural recitation. The Lotus Sūtra teaches that the ultimate vision to be attained is that of a Bodhisattva, one who practices true compassion. It talks about the many pathways one can take to achieve

54 Hsüan Hua. *The Vajra Prajna Paramita Sutra*: a general explanation / by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua. English translation by the Buddhist Text Translation Society.-- 2nd ed., 2002

Buddhahood and lays out a four-part scheme to aid the Bodhisattva: (1) in establishing the healthiest and most effective relationships within and outside the Sangha, (2) in meditation, (3) in keeping tolerant attitudes toward other Buddhist faiths, and (4) *in using one's powers of Buddhahood to literally draw beings towards Enlightenment.*⁵⁵

16. Kinh Đại Bảo Tích (*Maha Ratnakuta Sūtra*). Also known as the Great Umbrella Jewel Sūtra, these scrolls emphasize that to attain pristine awareness a person must first meditate on wisdom and moral ethics. All phenomena should be understood as lacking an end and a middle, just as the mind does not have an end nor a middle. With the knowledge that the mind is without an end or middle, no identity of the mind is perceived. Like the identity of physical form, the mind is also ultimately not perceived. In this way, when one does not see the identity of any phenomena through wisdom, one cannot analyze whether physical form is permanent or impermanent, existent or non-existent.⁵⁶

17. Kinh Vô Lượng Thọ (無量壽經 *The Great Infinite Life Sūtra*). Also known as the Larger Pure Land Sūtra, this text begins with a conversation between the Buddha and his popular disciple, Ānanda. The Buddha describes to Ānanda his knowledge of other Buddhas

55 Hurvitz, Leon (translated). *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1976

56 Chang, Garma C.C. *A Treasury of Mahayana Sūtras: Selections from the Maharatnakuta Sutra*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983. xv + 496 pp.

and the lineage of Buddhas that preceded him. He also tells the story of a king named Dharmakara who renounced his worldly and privileged status to become a Buddha in the Pure Land. The text further describes, in detail, the Land of Bliss and all its inhabitants and their benefits. The Buddha explains clearly the steps one can take to enter into the Pure Land. One of the most definitive steps mentioned is the ten recitations – by reciting the Amitabha Buddha’s name a person will attain rebirth into the Pure Land.⁵⁷

18. Kinh Đại Bát Nhã (*Maha Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*). This extensive 8,000-line sūtra is known as the “Perfection of Wisdom Sutra” and is the cornerstone of Mahayana literature. It teaches the fundamental philosophy of the great wisdom of emptiness and void. To attain the level of Bodhisattva, a person must recognize that true knowledge is attained through the perfection of wisdom, but true wisdom is attained by knowing that there is no perfect knowledge. The texts also describe the six paramitas – giving, morality, patience, vigor, contemplation, and wisdom. Of these, wisdom is the most important since it can weaken delusion and reveal things as they are.⁵⁸

Of the many Sutras and Sastras I have studied, there

57 Kung, Chin. Preface: Passages from the Commentary on the Infinite Life Sutra. Buddha Dharma Education Association, Inc. http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/passages.pdf

58 Keown, Damien (ed.) with Hodge, Stephen; Jones, Charles; Tinti, Paola. *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Great Britain, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p..270

are four that have strongly influenced and impacted me. They are:

a. **Kinh Kim Cương** (金剛經 – *The Diamond Sūtra*) in which the Buddha expresses the Highest Perfect Wisdom: “Every appearance whatsoever is a deception. If you can see all appearances not as appearances, then you see the Tathagata.”⁵⁹

b. **Kinh Hoa Nghiêm** (*The Avatamsaka Sūtra*) in which the Buddha teaches the Theory of Universal Causation of Dharmadhātu.

c. **Kinh Pháp Hoa** (*The Lotus Sūtra Saddharma-pundarika Sūtra*) in which the Buddha emphasizes the Buddha vehicle (Buddhayana – Phật thừa)

d. **Trung Luận** (*The Mādhyamika Śāstra*) in which the Bodhisattva Nagarjuna explains the Middle Way, especially the Philosophy of Emptiness.

By the time these works are studied with their commentaries and diverse interpretations, the student has completely mastered the traditional curriculum of Vietnamese Buddhist education. One’s knowledge of Mahayana Buddhism, as practiced in the country, has developed to a point that one becomes adequately capable of explaining the fundamentals of Buddhism to students and the laity as a teacher or preacher.

In addition to the above, there are two major collections to which a senior student is introduced. Here

59 Vajra Pranaparamita Sutra 金剛般若波羅蜜經 (*Kinh Kim Cang Bát Nhã Ba La Mật*) Ven. Yifa, M.C Owens P.M. Romakieuc (translated), Buddha’s Light Publishing, Hacienda Heights California, 2006, p.11

one has the option of studying any sutras of his choice. These texts are generally used by teachers to enable students to understand specific differences in various traditions of Buddhism:

19. Tứ A Hàm – Four Agama Sùtras: 1. *Dīrghāgama* (Trường A Hàm); 2. *Madhyamāgama* (Trung A Hàm); 3. *Samyuktāgama* (Tập A Hàm); and, 4. *Ekottarāgama*. The Agama Sùtras are the recollection of the Buddha’s teachings by 500 disciples of the Buddha, who rehearsed them in the First Council after he passed away. It is considered to contain the crux of the Buddha’s teaching – suffering, pain, impermanence, emptiness, the Four Noble Truths and Enlightenment. The Agama Sùtras, which were translated from the Sarvastivada Canon in Sanskrit, are closely related to the Pàli Canon of the Southern Buddhism.

20. Tam Tạng Kinh (*Tripitaka*): *Tripitaka* means “Three baskets” and, as the main canon in Pàli of Southern Buddhism, is known as one of the earliest collections of Buddhist teachings. The three baskets are: (1) *Vinaya Pitaka*, which gives the rules and disciplines for the Sangha; (2) *Sùtra Pitaka*, which contains the Buddha’s teaching on doctrine, behavior and meditation techniques; and (3) *Abhidharma Pitaka*, which teaches of Buddhist philosophy and psychology. The Pàli Text Society of London and several other publishers have brought out translations of the entire canon in English, making it accessible to those who do not know Pali. The Tripitaka is also translated into Chinese and published in

Taiwan. The Vietnamese Theravada sect uses discourses of this canon in its educational system.

We also studied Buddhist texts associated with famous Vietnamese Buddhist pagodas. These works enabled us to appreciate the beauty of nature and creativity as will be seen from the following quotation from Thiên Master Chuyet Cong's poem in one of such accounts:

*“This bamboos and high pines are dropping,
fragrant dew
While fresh breezes and young moon cool the night
Who are the West High Land dwellers anyone knew?
Every sunset the bell resounds, chasing off twilight.”⁶⁰*

6.4. Result of Field Research and Conclusion

The question No. 7 of the field research questionnaire required the respondents to comment on their personal experience in Buddhist education in Vietnam or abroad in a Vietnamese tradition or both with special emphasis on the following:

- (a) Where?
- (b) For how long: _____ years _____ months?
- (c) From when to when?
- (d) Was it in a school/ college/ university?
- (e) What were the main subjects/courses?
 - 1st year _____
 - 2nd year _____
 - 3rd year _____

60 *Vietnam Buddhism*, 2008, [Online] at www.buddhismtoday.com/english/dialogue/06_VietnamBuddhism.htm

4th year _____

5th year _____

- (f) Was there a system of examinations/degrees?
What were they?
- (g) At what level was the graduation or completion?
- (h) What were the books read in the course of your Buddhist education?
- (i). Who were your teachers and what were their qualifications?

Apart from the senior monastics who had gone through more-or-less the same system of Vietnamese Buddhist Education as my cohorts and I had in Vietnam, most responded had little experience in Vietnamese Buddhist education. Only 20 responded, therefore, answered this question. Those who studied the Dharma and Sutras answered the question as follows:

Person 1: I studied Buddhism in our local pagoda for one year. We learned the Lotus Sutra. That is my favorite.

Person 2: I study with Vietnamese Buddhist teachers, it is a system. We know for sure what corresponds to each level. I enjoyed studying Heart Sutra, Daily Essential rules, and Shurangama Sutra.

Person 3: (a) The Trúc Lâm center; (b) half a year; (c) January-May 2007; (d) School; (e) The Dharma teaching basic canonical texts; (f) No system of examinations; (g) Graduation when the education is complete; (h) All listed in the curricula; (i) They were Buddhist masters.

Person 4: I went to the Buddhist center in France for one summer month. Studied canonical and modern texts. I wanted to study meditation and that was my purpose. I learned what to do to get transformed. Wonderful experience and very good people, modest, sincere, and friendly.

Only Person 3 seemed to have access to a formal system of Buddhist education and even then, the information he could furnish was scanty. The responses to this question clearly show that Vietnamese Buddhist education is in disarray both in Vietnam and among the Vietnamese diaspora. To sum up, the respondents have demonstrated that they have no systematic knowledge of Vietnamese Buddhist teaching, although they value its moral and righteous guidance, along with its understanding of self-knowledge and powerful meditation practices.

The most intensive part of the Buddhist education, which was imparted in Vietnam to my cohorts and me, was in the affective domain. We were always taught to avoid evil, live in peace with ourselves and the whole world. Accordingly, Buddhist practices of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, the four Sublime States (*Brahmavihara*-梵住) or Imponderables (四無量心 – Tứ Vô Lượng Tâm), was encouraged. We studied and strictly complied with the precepts and Vinaya rules. We observed the confessional ceremony regularly. We practiced the 18 root vows which were considered to be central to our spiritual development. These vows were intended

to build our character. It can be unambiguously stated that this aim was reached, because we became stronger and stable in our devotion. In order to reach the state of mind liberation and spiritual freedom, we practiced various rites and rituals such as mantras, “walking mindfulness,” bowing and many others. Thus, during our education at the monastery we had to bow 100 times a day, and during each free moment we had to meditate.

The stress laid on practice had the advantage of developing the skill-related objectives of Buddhist education. Skills associated with chanting, meditation, performance of rites and ritual, conduct of worship and such services as funeral and administrative work, and expounding the tenets of religion to laity were considered essential and indispensable to a monastic career. In addition, we acquired through practical involvement such mundane skills as managing the affairs of a monastery, maintenance of buildings and equipment, raising, managing and accounting for funds, and conducting wholesome interpersonal relations within the Sangha and with the community. Thus the training we received through the system of Buddhist education in Vietnam prepared us to be efficient and effective spiritual leaders in the community.

Chapter Seven

APPROACHES AND METHODS
OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION

***7.1. The Buddha's Stress on Approaches
to Instruction***

The Buddha is recorded to have told his disciple Ānanda:

“Verily, Ānanda, not easy is it to teach Dhamma to others. In teaching others Dhamma

Ānanda, make five things stand up within you, then teach others Dhamma. What five?

- (i) Teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will talk a talk on the gradual;
- (ii) Teach others Dhamma. Thinking: I will talk a talk with the way in view;
- (iii) Teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will talk a talk out of kindness;
- (iv) Teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will talk a talk not as a means for gain;
- (v) Teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will talk a talk not to my own hurt nor to others.

Verily, Ānanda, not easy is it to teach Dhamma to

others. In teaching others Dhamma,
Ānanda, make these five things stand up within you,
then teach others Dhamma.”¹

How the Buddha himself used these principles in his teachings has to be gleaned from what has come to present times as records of his discourses, debates and discussions. As discussed earlier, the early Buddhist canon, the Tripitaka in Pali and the Agama Sutras of the Chinese Tripitaka represent the Buddha as a teacher in real world situations, whereas, in the Mahayana Sutras in Sanskrit and translated into Chinese and Tibetan, he generally figures as a teacher to Bodhisattvas, mahasattvas and such supernatural audiences. Both sets, however, seek to preserve what the Buddha had taught in the form and style in which he is believed to have taught. An analysis of this literature enables us to identify what approaches and methods the Buddha used or, at least, what his followers accepted and believed to be his approaches and methods.

As far as language is concerned, the doctrines of the Buddha are accessible in four forms:

A. Direct Language:

Direct language was used by the Buddha when he was still alive. Everything that he taught was directly to his students and was passed down by word of mouth. These statements occur in direct speech in the literature

1 Ananda W.P. Guruge, *How the Buddha Taught*, Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism, Volume 4, International Academy of Buddhism Hsi Lai University, 2003, p.51,

under review. The early poetry found in canonical literature is regarded as the Buddha's own words.

B. Remembered Language:

Ānanda and Upali are regarded as two of the disciples who committed to memory the Buddha's teachings on doctrine and discipline respectively. They were considered to have remembered everything, verbatim, that the Buddha taught in the two areas. After the Buddha passed away, the first assembly was presided over by Kasyapa, and sage Ānanda recited the Dharma, or doctrine, and Upali the Vinaya, or rules of discipline. What they presented was in remembered language. At this stage, the arrangement and identification of discourses would have been attempted and the development of the canon with at least the Dharma and Vinaya as two main divisions could have been accomplished.

C. Written Language:

What the Sangha orally transmitted after the collective rehearsals of the First (Rajagaha), the Second (Vesali) and the Third (Pataliputra) Councils and compiled into three baskets as Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma continued to be unwritten until the 1st century BCE. At that time, the Tripitaka, the canon in Pāli along with commentaries, was written down in books in Sri Lanka. Since then the writing of canonical texts had taken place and the entire Buddhist literature has been preserved in books on palm-leaf, tree barks and paper.

D. Translated Language:

The Buddha encouraged the study of his teachings in the language of the learner. In India itself the canonical texts have been available in several Prakrits besides Pāli and Sanskrit. With the spread of Buddhism, texts were translated into the languages of Central Asia and East Asia. Translations continue to be made in many modern languages and, as such, the Buddha's teachings are accessible in many areas of the world.

The Buddha's teachings in all these four forms are analyzed to identify his instructional approaches and methods.

Experts on the teachings of the Buddha posit that he used five general approaches to teaching and preaching:

1. Gradual Approach:

This method requires that the most simple or elementary doctrines and teachings are the first to be taught. Once the student accepts the most basic precept or tenet, then that is the time when the next tenet is to be taught. The process is from simple to, from the easier to the more difficult doctrines. For instance, the more tangible concepts may be taught prior to the teaching of the abstract concepts. The Buddha compared this approach to one's experience in getting down to the sea – one goes deeper gradually.

2. Adaptive Approach:

This makes use of any current situation and circumstances and draws the attention of the learner to

what the Buddha taught related to it. The Buddha adapted the content to make his instruction fit the situation at hand. This was a special talent of the Buddha, who knew immediately the disposition of the student and right away directed his mind to new ideas.

3. Illustrative Approach:

This method makes use of analogy, simile, parables (喻言) and fables, which aid in sending the messages to the learners. For instance, there is a famous tale about the Buddha teaching the Middle Path to the lute player, Venerable Sona Kolivisa. The Buddha told him that only when the wires of the lute were neither too loose nor too tight would the lute play beautifully.

4. Analytical Approach:

This is used for the more analytical and intelligent learners. The initial step would be to analyze the nature of the subject, and then to engage the learner in lively discussion and debate. In this way, he or she is able to develop the four analytic powers, namely: the capacity to analyze meanings (attha), reason (dhamma), educational media (nirutti) and intellectual skill (patibhaana).

5. Experimental Approach:

In this method, the natural abilities and skills of the learners are developed. This approach makes use of a cycle of teaching and practice, in order to find out which combination suits the student best. It is said that the Buddha wished all those who listened to him to first

test out his teachings before signifying acceptance of the teachings. Thus, by slowly following and practicing the Buddha's doctrines a person may obtain truth and Enlightenment. The Buddha was not disappointed if a student wanted to experiment with his teachings first.

The Buddha was a strict promoter of the principle of continuing education. After a certain period of time under his tutelage, his prized students went to different places to teach the very same principles. After about nine months, these same students would go back to the Buddha to receive further advanced instruction, engage in discussions, and to share feedback and insights on teaching with the Buddha and their fellow monks. This was a special activity used during the rainy season.

7.2. Twelve Practical Methods in Buddhist Education.

Using the Buddha's actions as an example, the system of Buddhist education has developed numerous methods of instruction. These have been described below on the basis of speeches, statements, and discussions as recorded in the currently available scriptures. It has been possible to identify as many as 16 methods as follows:

A. Repetition Method (Sangāyanā):

Over 26 centuries ago, there were no technologies such as videos, cassettes, papers, pens, etc., to help us remember the Dharma that the Buddha taught. Thus, the Buddha "repeated the important concepts over and over again, returning to them [his disciples]

whenever it appeared permissible.”² By reiterating the concepts repeatedly, students are able to commit them to memory and pass down the concepts from generation to generation. Memory training through repetitive drill and group recitation is an age-old function of the Buddhist Education systems. Group recitation (Sanskrit Svadhyāya and Pali Sajjhāyanā) has been a basic method of learning and is traceable to Vedic times. These recitations continue in the Buddhist tradition to present times.

B. Experimental Method:

The Buddha used this method to explain any doubtful points raised by his disciples. According to the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha used skillful means (upaya) to teach his disciples to break old traditions of learning. If anyone was too traditional and stern to follow the faith, the Buddha would ask them to question and experiment.

“They are oppressed by all the distresses;
 They have entered the thickets of heretical views,
 Such as ‘existence’ or ‘nonexistence’;
 Relying on these [false] views,
 Although sixty-two,
 They are deeply attached to these false laws,
 Firmly holding, unable to give them up,
 Self-sufficient and self-inflated,
 Suspicious, crooked, and faithless in mind;
 During thousands and millions of kalpas
 They have not heard the name of a Buddha,

2 Ananda W.P. Guruge, *How the Buddha Taught*, Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism, Volume 4, 2003, p.29

Nor have they heard the True Law;
Men such as these can hardly be saved.
For this reason, Sariputra,
I set up a tactful way for them,
Proclaiming the way to end sufferings,
Revealing it through nirvana.”³

This method has been found to give students a hands-on opportunity to discover the knowledge on their own in a practical and applicable way. This form of applied science results in students finding the knowledge that they are seeking. This method is widely used in all systems of Buddhist education.

C. Narrative Explicative Method:

The Buddha displays mastery of the spoken word. He explained each point with extreme clarity and used a very rich vocabulary of synonyms. He also was a consummate story-teller. He used both: symbolic and metaphorical language. As Guruge states, “A further element discernible in the discourses delivered by the Buddha is the tendency toward exegesis attempted primarily by using a string of synonyms and, where appropriate, elaborating further with a simile or a parable.”⁴ The Buddha told stories and parables to illustrate his lessons. The Buddhist education system employs the Buddha’s linguistic style and narratives in many languages as media of teaching.

3 Kato Tamura Miyasaka, *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Kosei Publishing Co, Tokyo, 2003, p.66

4 Guruge, Ananda W.P., *Buddhist Answers to Current Issues*, Authorhouse Indiana, 2005, p.162

D. Active Mindfulness Method:

“Whether he stands, walks, sits, or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should develop his mindfulness. This, they say, is the highest conduct here.”⁵ By way of setting the example, the Buddha used every physical activity to teach his disciples. From the way he walked to the way he sat; from the way he ate to the way he smiled; from the way he stood to the way he slept, the Buddha used body language to emphasize his teaching of mindfulness. Even when the Buddha did not use words, his actions conveyed the lesson he wished to teach. This also meant that the Buddha practiced what he preached and preached what he practiced. This again, is a method, which is adopted with significant advantage in Buddhist education.

E. Indirect or Subtle Method:

When there was an event such as death, the Buddha might use that event to teach about the Laws of Impermanence. There are times when he taught directly and there are times when he adopted an indirect or subtle approach. When King Ajātasatru, son of the King Bimbisāra, ordered his minister to ask the Buddha about waging war with a neighboring nation, the Buddha did not answer directly but rather asked his own disciples a series of questions. The minister, by listening to the answers that the disciples said, understood what the Buddha was trying to explain. Another instance

5 Saddhatissa H., *The Sutta-Nipata*, Routledge Curzon, 1995, p.p.143-152

is in the Kutadantasutta of Dighanikaya, when the Brahman inquires about new ways of performing sacrifices and, the Buddha narrates a story by which the Buddha's attitude to sacrifice is clearly but indirectly communicated. While this approach is not applied as a teaching method, examples of the Buddha's approach are utilized to discuss how information can be effectively communicated indirectly.

F. Meiotic or Question Method:

The Buddha enables the disciple to discover the truth by asking a series of questions. "These were always searching, incisive questions, carefully arranged to convince the discussant of the fallacies of his arguments. The discussant was gradually led to make concessions and give up his original stand."⁶ With these questions, the questioner realizes the answers that he seeks. In the Suramgama-sūtra (Kinh Lang Nghiêm), seven times the Buddha asked Ananda, where is the mind? From question to question, the Buddha made Ananda understand what he wants to know.⁷ In the Vajra Pramita Sūtra, the Buddha asked Subhuti about Tathagata and many other questions that made Subhuti realize the truth which Buddha wanted to teach.⁸

6 Guruge Ananda W.P., *How the Buddha Taught*, Hsi Lai journal of Humanistic Buddhism, Volume 4, 2003, International Academy of Buddhism, Hsi Lai University, Rosemead, CA, P.29

7 Shramana Meghashika, *Suramgama Sutra*, 2008, [online] <http://www.mandala.hr/3/surangama.html>, Chapter 1

8 Wayne H. Huang, *The Diamond Sutra*, CUBT Publishing, 1993, pg. 89-96

Teaching through sequential questions is a method, which Buddhist education systems have perfected, as illustrated by many Thièn narratives.

G. Investigative Method:

The Buddha respected all individuals whether they were his disciples or not. Recognizing that everyone has the capacity to critically examine everything, he, as a teacher, encouraged everyone to exercise the right to ask questions. He never forced anyone to follow him or believe his teachings without question. There was a man who came to the Buddha, claiming that the other religions have a higher being, whom should I trust? The Buddha taught that he should not trust anyone, even in the Buddha himself. “Believe nothing. No matter where you read it, or who said it, even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.”⁹

H. Inductive and Deductive Methods:

There are two ways to delineate a person and their relation to the world around them: deductively and inductively. According to Dr. Peter Della Santina, “the rational or deductive method begins with an abstract idea and applies that idea to one’s experience.”¹⁰ Usually after explaining a subject in detail, the Buddha used to

9 F. Max Müller (Translated from Pali: The Dhammapada), *Sacred Books of the East*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, First Published 1881, Reprint Delhi 1968V. 380.

10 Santina, P.D. *The Tree of Enlightenment*, Chico Dharma Study Foundation, Taiwan, 1997, pg. 284

give the gist in a verse to help students to remember and retrieve. Most importantly, every discourse (Dharma-desana – Thuyet giang) of the Buddha concludes with a dharmaparyaya¹¹ meant to bend one’s mind to study and practice. This method is called the empirical inductive method which “begins with the facts we encounter in experience; through observing and analyzing, interpreting and understanding these facts, we build up a picture of ourselves and the world around us.”¹² The Buddha always used life experiences as a concrete base to show the way to practice meditation, because “the inductive method, which is the one used in the Abhidharmic system, [resembles] quite close the method of science, except that in science the focus of the inductive process is outward and in the Abhidharmic method it is sometimes called introspection or, to use a traditional term, meditation.”¹³

I. Advance Progressively Method:

The languages, which Buddha used to teach, were practical, clear, connected, and lively. He analyzed profoundly, deeply, meticulously, beyond description (thẳng nghĩa) and defined by images, examples, numbers, etc., to help students easily understand, remember and to help their practice. The Buddha also used numbers

11 Lotus Sutra – *Chapter 27, Dharmaparyaya*, The Period of the Law, 2008, http://www.zenguide.com/principles/sutras/content.cfm?t=lotus_sutra&chapter=27

12 Jerry Wellington, *Secondary Science: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*, Routledge, 1994, p.41

13 Ibid.

as a method to help his disciples understand and organize the dharmas. He organized the content of his presentations logically to take the disciples from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the complex and from easy to difficult concepts. The subject matter was thus presented in a cumulative manner and hence this method is called “Advance progressively.”

J. Regulation Method:

By using this method, the Buddha devised many rules of discipline for the Vinaya Pitaka, purposely persuading his disciples to live a peaceful, pure, ascetic life (Brahmacarya). The importance of Sīla and Vinaya is not based on punishment but on regulating all aspects of life to avoid evil and bad kamma and to adopt noble and pure living for the achievement of merit and further spiritual cultivation.¹⁴

K. Prevention or Prohibition Method:

When the Buddha saw or heard any of his disciples doing any misdeeds or committing any misconduct, he would devise a new precept by which such acts were prohibited. The discourses pertaining to the four major offences or Parajika thus go beyond the usual didactic or advisory function of other teachings.¹⁵

14 K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera, *What Buddhists Believe*, 2008, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taiwan, 1993, p.148

15 Guide to Tipitaka, Vinaya Pitaka, Buddha Dharma Education Association, 2008, at <http://www.buddhanet.net/parajika.htm>

L. Silent Method:

The Buddha stated that a question can be answered in four ways: positively, negatively, with a counter question and with silence. When someone asked him a question, he kept silent. Thus, deliberate silence also became a method of instruction. When one asked Buddha if the world is limited or unlimited, Buddha kept silent, because Buddha wanted to teach him that his question is unhelpful in the quest for Realization. There is a parable about a man who was shot down by a poison arrow. A physician came by to help pull out the arrow and to heal the wound. However, the man refused the help and demanded answers concerning who shot him, what was the arrow made of, what kind of poison, etc. By the time all the answers to his questions were found, the man would have died. This parable was used by the Buddha to illustrate that one has to be pragmatic even when searching for knowledge, and one has to avoid wasting time trying to know the unknowable. There are ten questions on metaphysical problems that Buddha did not answer:

- 1- The world is eternal, or
- 2- It not eternal
- 3- The universe in finite, or
- 4- It is infinite
- 5- Life is the same as body, or
- 6- Life is one thing and body another
- 7- The Tathagata exists after death, or
- 8- The Tathagata does not exist after death
- 9- The Tathagata both exists and not exist after death, or

10- The Tathagata neither exists nor not exists after death.

According to T. R. V. Murti, the “Silence” of the Buddha was the beginning of the dialectic.” This is a method used especially in the Zen tradition.¹⁶

These 12 methods can be illustrated from various discourses recorded in the Pali Tripitaka and their counterparts in the Agama sutras. They continue to influence instructional procedures of Buddhist education in Vietnam; just as they have been in other parts of the Buddhist world. In addition, there are several methods, which are recorded, in later literature as used by the Buddha. Among them the most important is what is elaborated in the Lotus Sutra as the Expedient Method.

7.3. Concept and Explanation of Expedient or Skillful Methods (Upayakausalya)

A variety of methods are attributed to the Buddha especially in the Lotus Sūtra. In Chapter 16, the Buddha taught:

“The Tathàgata knows and sees the character of the triple world as it really is: [to him] there is neither birth nor death, or going away or coming forth; neither living nor dead; neither reality nor unreality; neither thus nor otherwise. Unlike [the way] the

16 T. R. V. Murti, *Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of Madhyamika System*, Munshirm Manoharlal Pub Pvt Ltd, 2003, p.372

triple world beholds the triple world, the Tathàgata clearly sees such things as these without mistake.”¹⁷

The parable of the burning house, one of seven parables in the Lotus Sùtra, explains the unity in the diversity of teachings attributed to the Buddha and attempts to reconcile the different schools of Buddhism. It presents the role of compassion (*karunā*) and wisdom (*bodhi*) of the Buddha, which enables the Buddha to adopt different teachings to save (liberate) all the living beings (*sattva*) from the dangerous realm of miserable existence (*durgati*) or the burning house of the triple world (*trailokya* three realm):

“Know ye! All these three vehicles are praised by sages; [in them you will be] free and independent, without wanting to rely on anything else. Riding in these three vehicles, be means of perfect faculties, powers, perceptions, ways, concentrations, emancipations, and contemplations, you will as a matter of course be happy and gain infinite peace and joy!”¹⁸

Another aspect of this method refers to the need to be conscious that an analogy could be confused with the fact. When Buddha teaches any subject he always gives an example that is very concrete. We understand that example of body is not the absolute truth but through examples we can understand the truth. Like pointing your finger at the moon is only an expedient way of

17 Kato Tamura Miyasaka, *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Kosei Publishing Co, Tokyo, 2003, p.251

18 Ibid. pg. 89

showing us the moon. But one may look at the finger and not the moon, thus getting a wrong impression. The main idea was taught in chapter two of the Lotus Sūtra:

“In reality they are [but] the One-vehicle.
The Buddhas, the honored ones,
Know that nothing has an independent existence
And that buddha-seeds spring from a cause,
So they reveal the One-vehicle.
All things abide in their fixed order,
[Hence] the world abides forever.”¹⁹

Further, the Buddha is reported as saying:

“Sariputra! If there are living beings who have a spirit of wisdom within and, following the Buddha, the World-honored One, hear the Law, receive it in faith, and zealously make progress, desiring speedily to escape from the triple world and seeking nirvana for themselves, these will [have the vehicle] named the sravaka-vehicle, just as some of those children come out of the burning house for the sake of a goat cart. If there are living beings who, following the Buddha, the World-honored One, hear the Law, receive it in faith, and zealously make progress, seeking self-gained wisdom, delighting in the tranquility of [their] individual goodness, and deeply versed in the causes and reasons of the laws, these will [have the vehicle] named the pratyekabuddha-vehicle, just as some of those children come out of the burning house for the sake of a deer cart. If there are living beings who, following the Buddha, the World-honored One, hear the Law, receive it in faith, diligently practice, and zealously advance, seeking the complete wisdom,

19 Ibid. pg. 70

the wisdom of Buddha, the natural wisdom, the wisdom without a teacher, and the knowledge, powers, and fearlessness of the Tathagata, who take pity on and comfort innumerable creatures, benefit gods and men, and save all [beings], these will [have the vehicle] named the Great Vehicle. Because the Bodhisattvas seek this vehicle, they are named mahasattvas.”²⁰

After hearing what the Buddha taught, Sage Sariputra said:

“Hearing the gentle voice of the Buddha,
Profound and very refined,
Expounding the pure Law,
My heart is filled with joy,
My doubts and regrets are forever ended,
[I am] at rest in real wisdom.”²¹

After revelation of the meaning of One Yāna (the vehicle of oneness or the one Buddha-yana) (Ekayanā), sage Sariputra one of the ten great disciples of the Buddha said:

“The World-honored One, knowing my heart,
Uprooted my heresy and taught me nirvana.
[Thus] having completely freed myself from
heretical views
And obtained proof of the Law of the Void.”²²

This method also refers the use of symbolic or metaphorical language by the Buddha to convey a

20 Ibid. pg.89

21 Ibid. pg.80

22 Ibid. pg.79

message to his disciples. It is said that whoever does not study the Dharma cannot understand it:

“Those who will not learn
 Are not able to discern it.
 [But] you already know
 The expedient tactful ways of
 The buddhas, the leaders of the world.
 Have no further doubts;
 Rejoice greatly in your hearts,
 Knowing that you will become Buddhas.”²³

One more explanation of the application of this method deals with how a teaching of the Buddha could be misunderstood. In the Four Noble Truths, the word “*Dukkha*” contains many different meanings: the five aggregates of attachment constitute one of eight *Dukkhas*, and whatever is impermanent (*anicca*) is *Dukkha*. In the words of the Buddha:

“By all means, *Dukkha* includes physical and mental suffering: birth, decay, disease, death, to be united with the unpleasant, to be separated from the pleasant, not to get what one desires. However, many people do not realize that even during the moments of joy and happiness, there is *Dukkha* because these moments are all impermanent states and will pass away when conditions change. Therefore, the truth of *Dukkha* encompasses the whole of existence, in our happiness and sorrow, in every aspect of our lives.”²⁴

23 Ibid. pg.76

24 K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera, *What Buddhists Believe*, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2008, 1993, p.75

Because of skillful means (upāyakusala) this method of Buddhist education enables different views to be reconciled. Thus it is possible to cover within Buddhist education all the different schools and traditions such as Vietnamese Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, Sri Lankan Buddhism, Korean Buddhism. Each country has its own special tradition as regards clothing, architectural designs of monasteries, implements used in worships, etc. There are different cultures that had different Buddhist traditions. Each school of Buddhism also has its own special tradition such as Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayana. With the method of expedient teaching the diversity is accepted as a positive factor.

7.4. Esoteric Methods

There are two more methods that are discussed in later literature as utilized by the Buddha. Both have an element of miraculous communication very similar to what is associated with Mahavira in Jainism. According to the Jain tradition, Mahavira preached by not speaking and his teachings were conveyed to audiences through a divine sound.

- *Mind-to-Mind Method:*

The Buddha is said to have communicated from mind to mind without words. He would flash his halo or a Samadhi in which all kinds and colors of sight are emitted to teach. Among other skillful means, the Buddha at the Linh Son assembly raised a Lotus flower, and sage Maha Kasyapa smiled.

• *Listening to Oneself Method:*

It is said that the Buddha taught that all human beings must listen to themselves, and because of this method, one can rediscover oneself and rediscover all things. In the Suramgama Sutra, the Buddha said that “the organ of hearing is universally penetrating.”²⁵

7.5. *The Methods in Buddhist Education of my Cohorts and Me*

The method of “gradual development” and therefore, “gradual instruction,” which the Buddha and his disciples used, was the method that was primarily employed by the educators who taught my cohorts and me. It resembles the modern educational method of going from the known to the unknown. It was effective in enabling us to understand the complexity of Buddhist philosophical concepts and the ethical principles embodied in vows. The reason for adopting this method was that an unprepared and untrained person could not understand properly the intricate statements such as the following: “The only reality is Emptiness,” or “Nothing exists,” or “Everything the Bodhisattva does is pure.” Unless the philosophical significance of such statements was properly grasped, students like us would have asked, “Then why strive to develop?” What appears controversial at first sight could be understood appropriately only if the student was trained regularly, persistently and gradually. This method allowed the

25 Thích Thiện Hoa, *Triết Lý Đạo Phật*, Hương Đạo Xuất Bản, Vietnam 1955, p.223

structuring of information on the basis that each of us perceives different information at different stages of our spiritual development.

Our teachers would explain to us their preference of this method by referring to the poetic simile in the *Uposatha Sutta*: “Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch, in the same way this Doctrine and Discipline (dhamma-vinaya) has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual progression, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch.”²⁶

Vietnamese educators, in general, emphasized the gradual method especially in relation to training us in Buddhist practice. Although meditation played an essential role in Buddhism, it was not the only primary focus of Buddhist education. Meditation was first put in a continuous training program that lasted as long as the Buddhist education program when the foundation was laid through the observance of precepts and adoption of a life of moral rectitude through *Sila*. In Buddhist meditation, each stage implied the discovering of the next following stages. The gradual development began with the progressive process of diluting a person’s attachment to the environment with notions of “This is mine; this is me; and this is my self,” because only an unattached person could proceed to higher levels of mental cultivation and eventually become liberated.

26 Bhikkhu, Thanissaro, *Uposatha Sutta*, 2007, at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.5.05.than.html>

The next method adopted by our Vietnamese educators was the Body-Mindfulness Method. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness of early Buddhism which were upheld in the Mahayana tradition were divided into five major stages of the way. The first stage in the process related to the objects of meditation which included the body, the feelings, the thoughts and the dharmas, or phenomena:²⁷ “The body serves as the basis of that clinging, to which we add feeling, which is seen as something to be experienced, something to be enjoyed by this self in the most basic sense.”²⁸ Thus, mind and body were tightly interconnected and could not exist without each other. *Prajñā* dealt with these objects and explained their interdependence. Consequently, the first stage of this method of Buddhist teaching was to realize the four objects of body, mind, feeling and phenomena. The second stage applied to understanding and realizing mindfulness or awareness. *Prajñā* at this stage was associated with comprehending and experiencing the actual nature of body, feeling, mind and phenomena. The third stage involved assistance from awareness and mindfulness to support the awakened mind with the help of discipline. The focus of the method used in the fifth or final stage was concentration on the external nature of the body without taking into account the nature of the mind. “We are approaching the level of absolute reality, rather than remaining on the relative level, where we are seeing the relative nature of mind, the relative nature

27 *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, 2008, <http://www.nalandabodhi.org/resultofmindfulness.html>

28 *Ibid.*

of our body, the relative nature of our mindfulness.”²⁹ Thus, according to our masters, the deep insight and inner development, which were required for our spiritual growth could be realized through this method. The Mahayana tradition in Vietnam claimed that there was no real living beyond the physical body and in this light the mindfulness of body was very important.

Analytical meditation, on which this method is based, had to precede the body mindfulness, and that was why the development of three stages of prajna acquired considerable importance. To practice the body mindfulness, one should first realize the fact that one’s body could move, and then feel that. Every movement of the body implied experience. In general, walking or sitting meditation was considered significant because these types of meditation lead to the successful practice of body mindfulness.

Our educational institutions, as a rule, did not use the “adaptive method” as it did not require any special knowledge other than the understanding of the essence of the Buddhist principles and their acceptance. It did not contribute to our development of critical thinking. But the method of “illustrative approach,” which implied that the information was provided to students in the most applicable and amusing form through various associations, was frequently utilized.

The “analytical method,” which involved debates and discussion on controversial issues, was usually utilized

29 Ibid

in instructing senior or mature students with a flare for analysis. Not all of us were exposed to this method. But, on the contrary, the “experimental approach” was popular as it developed skills, knowledge and abilities. Among the methods used in the process of Buddhist education by our educators were also the old practical methods, which had proved their reliability. They included “repetition method,” “narrative explicative method,” “subtle method (indirect method),” “question method,” “investigative method,” “inductive and deductive method.”

While recognizing that the methods of the Buddha’s teaching had not lost their currency in modern times and were still effective when used appropriately in instructing certain types of students in certain disciplines, our masters were mindful of what was applicable to today’s reality. Thus, the methods of “gradual approach,” “adaptive approach,” “illustrative approach,” “analytical” and “experimental” approaches were widely used for instruction. These were also emphasized as methods that we could effectively use when we had to instruct students or the laity, while other methods were applied when necessary. Whatever the method that our educators adopted in instructing us, the triple objectives in cognitive, affective and skill domains, discussed in the earlier chapter, demanded deep insight, true faith, hard work, discipline, and commitment. Not every one of us met these requirements. But all were invited to benefit from Buddhist education provided we complied with the precepts, vows and other rules of discipline.

Vietnamese language, rather than Canonical Chinese, was our principal medium of education because it enabled easier comprehension of subject-matter and allowed us to have access to monastic training without protracted language studies. Books and learning materials had been developed in adequate quantity and acceptable quality. Access to literature in other languages was also encouraged and our libraries were well provided. Our Buddhist masters began to utilize modern educational technology for better communication of Buddhist ideas and principles. Audio-visual and, Internet facilities were available and widely used. The modernization of methods of instruction and learning on the basis of educational research were a major concern of our educators and these issues were often discussed.

7.6. Conclusion

The experience of my cohorts and I is that we were exposed to a variety of educational methods, which date back to the times of the Buddha. In adopting those methods that were immediately effective, the main goal was to encourage us to acquire such knowledge, attitudes and skills as would guide us in the way to Enlightenment. During the time of monastic training, my fellow monks and I achieved a very high degree of competence not only to practice the Buddhist path but to direct and inspire others to do the same. The substantial Buddhist educational content conveyed to us through the methods discussed above prepared us for our dual roles as seekers of our own Enlightenment and teachers to the community.

Chapter Eight

FAMOUS TEACHERS
IN THE HISTORY OF VIETNAMESE
BUDDHIST EDUCATION

8.1. Introduction

The history of Vietnamese Buddhist education is rich in names of educators who are famous for their exceptional abilities as teachers or authors of quality books. They range from the first known Buddhist Master Khương Tăng Hội to the most recent, the late Supreme Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang and The Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ. Their history is darkened by periods of suppression, violation of religious rights, and exile. They are presented chronologically with emphasis on the Golden Age teachers and Thiền Uyển, the patriarchs of the Trúc Lâm sect, and educators in the period of decline, and contemporary Buddhism represented in Vietnam by the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. But, the absence of documentation restricts our search. A further problem is the difficulty in distinguishing between Chinese and Vietnamese Thiền masters. Only reliable sources are utilized and reference is made to only clearly identifiable Vietnamese masters.

8.2. Founders of Lineages and Early Teachers

The first Vietnamese lineage was formed by Mou Po (Mâu Bác or Mâu Tử in Vietnamese) and Khương Tăng Hội at the end of the 2nd century CE and the beginning of the 3rd century CE. First Vietnamese Buddhist teachers set simple goals: to worship Buddha, to recite the Buddhist scriptures, and to lecture the Dharma.

The scholar Mâu Tử was a scholar of wide-range of knowledge of Confucianism and Daoism whose journey to Vietnam was prepared by Marajivaka (who visited Vietnam in the late 2nd century or early 3rd century), Kalyanaruci (Chi Khương Lương), and Khương Tăng Hội. Mâu Tử was an outstanding Buddhist teacher and the first Buddhist in Vietnam. Despite being a layperson, he contributed greatly to Vietnamese Buddhism. A native of Wuzhou, he accepted Buddhism in preference to Daoism in approximately 190 CE. He was an educated person who understood Confucius. Having no difficulty in debating when promoting Buddhism, Mâu Tử was a senior official who used his position of administrative authority to teach Buddhism. Known as the author of “Lý Hoặc Luận” (198 CE) in which he encouraged the development of Vietnamese Buddhist identity, he helped establish Buddhism in Luy Lâu, Southeast Asia. He wrote “Lục Độ Tập Kinh,” which was translated by Khương Tăng Hội from Vietnamese into Chinese.

Mâu-Tử played a significant role in the rise of Buddhism in the late 2nd century and early 3rd century CE. He contributed to early Vietnamese Buddhism by

exploring differences and similarities between Chinese philosophy and Buddhist philosophy. He became the founder of the Vietnamese lineage of Buddhism in Luy Lau, the capital of Vietnam in his time, and succeeded in attracting believers.¹

“Khương Tăng Hội, a famous figure in both Vietnamese and Chinese Buddhism, was the son of a Sogdian merchant who settled in Jiaozhi, or modern Tonkin (North Vietnam), an important commercial city linking India and China.”² The boy’s parents died almost simultaneously when he was only 12 years old. From an early age, the boy decided to leave home and work to spread the Buddhadharma. He upheld the Vinaya, studied Sutras and was said to be reading 30,000 gathas daily. Khương Tăng Hội arrived in Chung Kio, built a hut and began cultivating Shramans, a rare practice in that place at that time. Shraman practitioners would get down on the ground and back up again in a rhythmic and repeated action.

The emperor sent for Khương Tăng Hội and questioned him about his worship. Khương Tăng Hội said that he was studying the Buddhadharma and promised the emperor that he would obtain a sharira. Together with his disciples he prayed for almost three

1 Tam Ha Le Cong Da. *Introduction to Buddhism in Vietnam and Vietnamese Zen*. <http://www.buddhismtoday.com/english/vietnam/country/005-VietnameseBuddhism.htm>

2 Thich Thien An, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc., Japan, 1975, p.30

weeks. Khương Tăng Hội and his disciples even vowed that they would commit suicide if they were not able to obtain a sharira. On the seventh day of the third week at five o'clock, they heard a bang from the brass urn in which they found a five-colored sharira. They were full of joy. Khương Tăng Hội declared that it was “a manifestation of the Buddha’s might.”³

To commemorate this important event, the emperor built the first Buddhist monastery and stupa where Khương Tăng Hội settled. Since then, Khương Tăng Hội devoted his life to spreading Buddhism in Vietnam. The following words are assigned to him: “Thunder may rend the mountains but the deaf do not hear it. The Buddha is efficacious, but these senseless ones pay no attention.”⁴ Thus, he converted people to Buddhism, teaching them by his own example. He died at the age of 80. He became the master of a lineage due to his brave, consistent pursuing Buddhist teachings. “He translated many sutras from Pali Sankrit to Chinese.”⁵ He translated “Liu du ji jing” from Sanskrit into Chinese. He was the advocate of the form of Thiền Buddhism that was in harmony with the Confucian ethical system of East Asia.⁶ He was the first Buddhist master at Luy

3 Tripitaka Master Hui. *Record of High Sanghens*. <http://books.google.de>, p.20.

4 Tripitaka Master Hua, *op. cit.*, p.21.

5 Thích Mật Thể, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, Phú Lâu Na, Denver 1993, p.56

6 Leighton, T.D. Introduction to Zen social ethics: historical constrains and present prospects. *Buddhist and Ethnics*, 13, 2006. [http://www.buddhistethics.org/13/zse\)-leighton.html](http://www.buddhistethics.org/13/zse)-leighton.html)

Lâu center and one of the eminent monks in the Chinese Kingdom of Wu.⁷

Though little is known about him, he built the first pagoda in Nanking. It is also known that he preached the Dhamma. Below is the earliest Vietnamese Thiền (Zen) text “Sitting” assigned to Khương Tăng Hội:

There are three ways of sitting in meditation.
First, sit and keep your mind on breathing;
Second, sit and chant the sutras;
And third, sit and happily listen to the chanting of sutras.
Sitting has three levels.
First, sit in union;
Second, sit in peacefulness;
And third, sit without fetters.
What does it mean to sit in union?
That means your mind becomes one with your body.
What does it mean to sit in peacefulness?
That means your mind has no thought. What does it mean to sit without fetters?
When all fetters are destroyed – that means to sit without fetters.⁸

Thiền Buddhism in Vietnam has a long history. Vietnamese Thiền sects are of the following lineages: Vietnamese Thảo-Đường Line originated with Thảo-Đường. It is important to understand this Thiền sect for the following reasons: first of all, there is an interesting

7 Cuong Tu Nguyen, 1997, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam: a study and translation of the Thien Uyen Tap Anh*, Retrieved: 24/08/08 from <http://books.google.com.ua/books>, p.9.

8 From ancient Vietnamese Zen masters, Retrieved: 28/08/08, from <http://www.thuvienhoasen.org/ZenAncientMasters-03.htm>

commentary for those who want to understand the way of thinking among Vietnamese Buddhist teachers better; second, it is a reliable source of Vietnamese Buddhist writings that compile this anthology.

Vietnamese Lâm-Tê Line (臨濟) originated with Nguyễn-Thiền (元韶);

Vietnamese Liễu-Quán Line originated with Liễu-Quán;

Vietnamese Trúc-Lâm Line originated with Trần-Nhân-Tông;

Vietnamese Tỳ-Ni-Đa-Lưu-Chi Line originated with Vinitaruci;

Vô-Ngôn-Thông Line originated with Vô-Ngôn-Thông (無言通).

Hence, the history of Vietnamese Buddhism is mainly that of Thiền sects. On the whole, Vietnamese Thiền Buddhism is an eclectic blend of traditions with the three schools of Vinitaruci, Vô Ngôn Thông, and Thảo Đường (草堂). Thus, Lâm Tế, Liễu Quán, Tào Động, Thảo Đường, Trúc Lâm, Vinitaruci, and Vô Ngôn Thông are Vietnamese Thiền lineages.

Vietnamese Thiền Sects, similar to other schools of Thiền Buddhism, emphasized meditation and transmitted “the special realization attained by Shakyamuni Buddha in the meditation posture under the Bodhi Tree at Gaya.”⁹ Thiền instructors directed their pupils to Enlightenment through mediation practices as personal experiences.

9 T. Leggett. *A First Zen Reader*. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1960, p.13.

Hence, Thiền (Zen) is “the art of seeing into the nature of one’s own being, and it points the way from bondage to freedom.”¹⁰ Early Thiền teachers followed Mậu Tử and Khương Tăng Hội’s teaching styles that focused on the ordinary mind and the Buddha-nature activity. They “posed unsolvable conundrums for their students to contemplate, a practice inescapably similar to the K’an-hua style of meditation.”¹¹

The first lineage was founded by Vinitaruci. The school’s lineage records preserve the name of Vạn Hạnh (d. 1018) who practiced dharani Samadhi (concentration based on the repetition of a mantra) as the greatest Buddhist teacher in this lineage. The school survived until the death of Y Son in 1216. It listed 19 patriarchs.

Vinitaruci (?-594 CE) (Vietnamese Tì-ni-Đa-luu-chi) was born in Southern India. He left India for China in 574 CE in search of the Dharma. He met the third patriarch Sengcan of the Chinese Zen School and since then had connected his life with Thiền (Zen) Buddhism. First, Vinitaruci went to Guangdong Province to become the abbot of the Zhizhi Temple (制旨寺) in Guangzhou. There, he engaged himself in translations of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit, among them the Mahayana Vaipulya Sūtra of Total Retention and the Buddha Pronounces the Sutra of the Elephant Head Ashram. However, six years later he went to northern Vietnam to become the abbot

10 D.T. Suzuki. *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1961, p.13.

11 S. Heine. *The Koan: texts and contexts in Zen Buddhism*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.53.

of the Fayun Temple. There he started the school that spread the Dharma in Vietnam. The outstanding role of Vinitaruci is in his foundation of Vietnamese Thiền lineage that prospered for six centuries. His disciple Faxian was the first patriarch who passed the lineage to Yishan.¹²

The Lý dynasty came to power due to the Buddhist monks who were became highly esteemed as monk-teachers, advisors, and counselors. Under their influence, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh changed the name of the country, moved the capital to Hoa Lu, introduced hierarchichal ranks for Buddhist monks, and integrated Buddhism into the composition structure of the state.

When Đinh Bộ Lĩnh united the country in 968, Vietnamese Buddhism, mainly due to the efforts of Ngô Chân Lư, started influencing the political life of the country. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh came from a peasant background. He was born in Hoa Lư where he lived with his mother beside the temple of a mountain spirit. He proclaimed himself king of Northern Vietnam in 968, ascending to the throne as Tiên Hoàng Đế. He ruled for 11 years until he was assassinated. At his court, he promoted the idea of incorporating Buddhist and Diaoist rituals, thus fusing Buddhism with the animist teaching of Daoism.

Đinh Bộ Lĩnh established a Vietnamese Sangha. He initiated the practice of appointing eminent Buddhist monks as royal advisors on political, religious, and

12 *10 Buddha Sutras*. Mantras Sanskrit. Last updated 9/08/2008. <http://www.sutrasmantras.inf/glossary.html>

domestic issues. Master Ngô Chân Lưu, First Supreme Patriarch of Buddhism in Vietnam under Đinh Bộ Lĩnh reign, lived at Phật-Đà monastery. The emperor invited him to the court and placed him at the head of the Sangha. The king honored him the title of Khuông Việt Quốc Sư, which basically means National Teacher. Master Ngô Chân Lưu was appointed national advisor. He played an outstanding role for integrating Buddhism into politics. Ngô Chân Lưu contributed to the building of the nation with Buddhism as a state policy. He gave advice to both political and religious matters.

The Vô Ngôn Thông School was founded by Wu Yantong (?-826) as the lineage of Mậu-Tử. This school was the first to include a king in the list of patriarchs, King Lý-Thái-Tông (1028-1054). Vô Ngôn Thông came from south China, where he had studied with the great Chinese teacher Baizhang before arriving in Vietnam in 820 and becoming the founder of the Vô Ngôn Thông sect.¹³ The sect was prosperous during the Lý dynasty (1010-1225). Its founder was known for the development of meditation monasticism. All emperors of the Lý dynasty were Buddhists. King Trần Nhân Tông was ordained to become the First Patriarch of Trúc Lâm sect. He worked effortlessly to elevate Vietnamese culture and introduced examinations to exclude ignorant people from serving the country. The best results in the 1097 examination were obtained by Thiền master Viên Thông who later became National

13 Thích Thiện Hoa, *Phật Học Phổ Thông Khóa Thứ V*, Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, Los Angeles, 1981, pp.37-38

Advisor. Nhân Tông and other Lý emperors held in high esteem such Buddhist monks as Mãn Giác, Không Lộ, Giác Hải, and Thông Biện – all of them listed in the Vô Ngôn Thông Sect lineage.

Master Mãn Giác of Giác Nguyên Temple in Cửu Liên was a native of An Cách Village, Lũng Mạc. His father was a lay person who held the office of Gentleman of the Chancellery. Mãn Giác was a bright child. He was among the children of notable families who attended to the needs of the emperor (Lý Thánh Tông). When Lý Nhân Tông inherited his father's throne he bestowed on Mãn Giác the sobriquet "Filled with Faith." Mãn Giác received the mind-seal from Quảng Trí of Quán Đảnh Temple. Mãn Giác is considered to be one of the Buddhist leaders of his time. Even the emperor and the empress revered him calling him "Elder." The emperor brought Mãn Giác into the palace with the rank of "Inner Palace Teacher of Enlightenment" as "Purple Robed Great Monk."¹⁴

Master Không Lộ was born to a lay family Dương. At the age of 26, Không Lộ and his two spiritual friends, Giác Hải and Từ Đạo Hạnh, set off to India to attain the six supernatural powers. On his return home he devoted himself to the chanting of the Great Compassion Mantra. Once he paid a visit to the court of the Song emperor. When the emperor talked to him he said that his wish was to build four vessels in Vietnam. The emperor

14 Buddha Sutras. *Mantras Sanskrit*. Last updated 9/08/2008. <http://www.sutrasmantras.inf/glossary.html>

allowed Không Lộ to carry as much copper as he could put in his bag. But to the surprise of all, Không Lộ, the master of supernatural powers, took all the copper from the emperor's store, his bag still having room for more copper and without any difficulty carried all this copper to his land. He cast a huge statue of Amitabha Buddha, built the Báo Thiên Stupa, cast a big bell for a temple in his native village, and cast a bell for Diên Phúc Temple.¹⁵

Master Giác Hải became a monk at the age of 25. He was known to be Không Lộ's Dharma heir and companion.¹⁶ He taught the mind's concentration power which he described in the Eight Change Mantra.¹⁷

Master Thông Biện (?-1134) taught that the representatives of the Vinitaruci line in his time were Lâm Huệ Sinh and Vương Chân Không. Thông Biện attempted at systemizing the history of Vietnamese Buddhism. He narrated a story of Sui Wendi, who wanted to send Buddhist monks to Jiaozhou to spread the Buddha Dharma. There, a Buddhist monk at the court reminded the emperor that Jiaozhou had already built Buddhist temples, had ordained monks, and translated scriptures. By saying that, Thông Biện implied that Jiaozhou was the center of Buddhist studies and had an established Buddhist community. Thông Biện was honored with the title "Monk Scribe" who wore a purple

15 Nguyen T. Cuong, 1997, op. cit, p.234.

16 Thích Minh Cảnh, *Từ Điển Phật Học Huệ Quang*, Tu Viện Huệ Quang, Sai Gon, 2000, Tập 3, p.2604

17 Nguyen T. Cuong, 1997, op. cit, p.237.

robe. He was given the sobriquet “National Preceptor with Consummate Eloquence.” He contributed to Vietnamese Buddhism, opening a teaching center where he taught people to practice the Lotus Sūtra.¹⁸

Thông Biện expressed his understanding of mind teachings: “Understanding the mind teachings of Buddha, attaining enlightenment along with interpreting scriptures – these are called Patriarchs.”¹⁹ To him, Buddha and Patriarchs were one. In the view of Cuong Tu Nguyen, Thông Biện “cast Vietnamese Buddhist history in the Thiền framework of the mind-to-mind transmission of enlightenment down through generations to successors.”²⁰

“The first real propagation of Buddhist sect occurred under the third king of Lý, Lý Thánh Tông (ruled 1054-1072), Dharma-successor to Master Thảo Đường.”²¹ The “specialty of Vietnamese Buddhism is the Thảo Đường’s meditation study.”²² The Thảo Đường School was founded by Caotang (草堂), the prisoner of war, later honored with the title of National Teacher responsible for Thiền practices and Buddhist philosophy in the royal palace, whose first Vietnamese pupil was his own captor King Lý Thánh Tông. This

18 Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, Nha Xuất Ban Thanh Pho Sai Gon, Viet Nam, 1999, p.133

19 Ibid, No 21.

20 Cuong, T Nguyen op. cit, p.35.

21 Thích Thiên An, *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam*, Charles E. Tuttle Company publishers, Tokyo, Japan, 1975, p.73

22 Nguyễn Đăng Thực, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, An Tiêm, Paris-San Jose, 2002, p.76

school was a late development in Thiền Buddhism known for Lý Thánh Tông's actions and spiritual development. He became the epicenter and the meeting point of the elite society for the study of Buddhism and literature. He emphasized the doctrine of Confucianism, the doctrine of the Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva and also the influences of the Champa's view on society and human life.²³ Thảo Đường used the nian-fo (repetition of the Buddha's name) as a combination of Pure Land and Thiền practices. Thảo Đường sect is the mixture of Thiền and Pure Land Buddhism. It emphasized the merging of loving-kindness (S. karuna) and insight (S. prajñā). Its first patriarch was Lý Thánh Tông. The first patriarch of the Thảo-Đường sect was Lý-Thánh-Tông.

Two of the Lý monarchs received the seal-of-mind in the tradition of this sect. The sect focused on loving-kindness and insight (S. karuna and prajñā). It provided the material for the philosophy of humanism developed by the Trúc-Lâm sect.

A new Thiền school of Trúc-Lâm was founded by the kings of Trần-Nhân-Tông dynasty (1258-1308). This school cultivated the mind in a mind-oriented training. The Trần clan absorbed a Chinese form of Buddhism brought by Chinese monks into local Vietnamese Buddhist practice.²⁴

In the 18th century, the Lâm-Tế school was

23 Nguyễn Đăng Thực, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, An Tiêm, Paris-San Jose, 2002, p.90

24 J.K. Whitmore, *The rise of the coast: trade, state, and culture in early Dai Viet*, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37 (1), 2006, p.103.

established. It combined study with practice and advocated combined practices of koans and nianfo.

Thiền Buddhist practices were characterized by the following. First, Thiền Buddhists are aware of false thoughts but they do not follow them. Second, they deal with forms without involvement of mind. Third, they consider differentiation unreal. Fourth, they call for living with true nature, avoiding false phenomena. Pure Land was a major branch of Buddhism in East Asia. Since the 10th century, Pure Land practice and Thiền practice have been combined. The followers of Pure Land put their faith in Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Life and Infinite Light. He promised his followers a paradise without any suffering, any disease, or death. Even sinners could reach Pure Land if they had faith in Amitabha. Pure Land believers are engaged in the recitation of praise to Amitabha.

Kings of the Lý Dynasty (1010-1225) were Lý Thái Tổ (1010-1028), Lý Thái Tông (1028-1054), Lý Thánh Tông (1054-1072), Lý Nhân Tông (1072-1127), Lý Thần Tông (1128-1138), Lý Anh Tông (1138-1175), Lý Cao Tông (1176-1210), Lý Huệ Tông (1211-1224), and Lý Chiêu Hoàng (1224) – all of them contributed to the support of Buddhism in Vietnam. During their rule, Buddhist clergy received many privileges. In 1018 king Thái Tổ sent a mission to China to gather texts of the Tam Tông. In 1068, King Lý Thái Tông oversaw the creation of the Thảo Đường sect. The Lý kings founded about 150 monasteries.

Among Thiền masters were Lý Thái Tổ, Lý Thánh Tông, Lý Anh Tông, Lý Cao Tông, Trần Thái Tông, and Trần Nhân Tông, the kings who resigned to become Thiền masters. Lý Thái Tổ, the founder of the Lý dynasty, was born at Cổ Pháp Pagoda in 974. His mother died soon after his birth. When he was three years old, the superior monk of the pagoda adopted him as Lý Công Uẩn. Lý Thái Tổ was protected and supported by Master Vạn Hạnh. When the last king of the Anterior Lê Dynasty died, Lý Thái Tổ ascended to the throne. Formerly a Buddhist monk, in his royal status he not only supported Buddhism but also gave it a status of a national religion. He personally contributed to creating fruitful conditions for Buddhism as the religion of his nation. In his court, Buddhist masters became supreme advisors, among them Anh Tông and Cao Tông who were leaders of the Thảo Đường sects. About 150 monasteries were erected during that time that favored Buddhism at the state level.

It is worth noting that Vietnamese Buddhist teachers had links with esoteric tantric practice, which is based on rituals and visualizations that enhance the encounter with cosmic energies. Tantric esoteric mandalas were integrated into Buddhist practice. For example, the Thiền master Không Lộ concentrated on the Great Compassion mantra. Nguyễn Học recited the dharani. Master Vạn Hạnh practiced dharami-samadhi. Vạn Hạnh recited the Mind of Great Compassion mantra.

8.3. *Vạn Hạnh and other Buddhist teachers of Golden Age in Vietnam*

Master Vạn Hạnh is the 12th patriarch in the lineage of the Vinitaruci sect, descended from the Nguyễn Family.²⁵ In his twenties he was instructed in the clear-sighted direction in Lục Tổ pagoda. He also practiced the Dharani-Samadhi method developed in Mahayana-Vapalyadharani Sutra. Vạn Hạnh was one of the Buddhist monks who helped overthrow Lê Long Đĩnh and establish the Lý dynasty. Thiền Master Vạn Hạnh “served as advisor” to the future king Lý Thái Tổ (1010-1028) from his early age.²⁶ Many ideas of integrating Buddhism into the country’s policies were borrowed from him. Later, Vạn Hạnh became the king’s adviser and helped Vietnam to grow into a strong state. During the Lý Dynasty, Vietnam history entered the golden period. It became a country of great wealth and power and had constant peace among the land; all due to the knowledge of the great Thiền Master Vạn Hạnh because Master Vạn Hạnh developed and advise the King Lý Thái Tổ.²⁷ Lý Nhân Tôn (1072-1127) referred to Vạn Hạnh’s idea of moving the capital from Hoa Lu to Thăng Long. The Thiền master knew that without influencing the government it was next to impossible to

25 Nguyễn Bá Lăng, *Kiến Trúc Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, Hoa Cau, California, 1989, p.49

26 Thích Thiên An, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc., Japan, 1975, p.39

27 Đức Nhuận, *Phật Học Tinh Hoa*, Viện Triết Lý Việt Nam & Triết Học Thế Giới, California, 1995, pp.413

help people. He was active in attending to the welfare of the people. He devoted himself to the teaching of the Dhamma.

Thiền Master Vạn Hạnh became involved in politics with the goal of propagating Buddhism. He organized the Sangha that had a thousand monks. It is worth noting that Lý dynasty's civilization had further than most countries. First of all, it pursued a new ideology that incorporated Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and traditional Tantric practice in an eclectic form. Second, mainly due to Thiền Master Vạn Hạnh, a universal harmony of mind, energy and material welfare was developed and maintained. To symbolize the source of inspiration for this spiritual emphasis of Buddhism, Vạn Hạnh built a wooden pagoda on a stone pillar in a lotus pond for the king to see at any time of the day. Like other Thiền (Zen) masters, Vạn Hạnh did a lot to promote Buddhism by teaching the potential individual awakening whose transmission is outside the doctrine. His personal achievement as a Buddhist teacher was putting the Buddhist community at the center of the country's life that linked the local spirit cults with the Buddhist temples and kings as protectors of religion.²⁸ In his verse "The Rise and Decline" ("Thanh Sy") Vạn Hạnh taught his students to watch their minds regularly, for the body declines while the Dhamma does not:

Human body is like a lightning flash, appearing then disappearing.

28 J.K. Whitmore, 2006, op. cit., p.103.

All trees bloom in the spring, then decay in the autumn.

Live accordingly with the rise and decline, and have no fear.

The rise and decline – just like a drop of dew on a blade of grass.²⁹

Another translation of the same poem which belongs to Kewin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung:

The body, like lightning, here and gone,

Like a spring foliage that withers in fall.

Don't worry about the show of rise and decline;

Like dewdrops on grass, so our lives float on.³⁰

Thiền Master Ngô Ân (1020-1088) was born “in the Đàm Family in the Kim Bài Village.”³¹ He is said to have been abandoned by his mother in the forest. A champa monk found, saved, and raised him. The child got the name Khí, which means abandoned. When Ngô Ân was fully ordained, he received the mind-seal from Master Quảng Trí. His sobriquet was Ngô Ân (“Seal of Enlightenment”). “He was the abbot of Long Ân temple in Hà Đông.”³² Ngô Ân viewed the great path as the great road. He thought that Thiền schools had much in common, like water in different rivers. Ngô Ân left his vision of the empty mind (“Diệu tánh rỗng không chẳng thể vin”) through the symbols of the suffering world [the

29 Translated by Nguyen Giac. In: Nguyen Duy (Ed.), *Zen poems from early Vietnam (900CE-1400CE)*, <http://www.quangduc.com/English/Zen/28zenpoem.html>

30 Nguyen T. Cuong, op. cit., p.133.

31 HT Thích Mật Thể, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Lược*, Phú Lâm Na, Denver, 1993, p.115

32 Ibid.

mountain, the kiln and the Buddha nature (the jewel and the lotus)]:

The true nature is empty, nowhere to grasp.
 With an empty mind, you will see the self-nature
 easily.
 In the mountain burning, the jewel's color is shining
 bright.
 In the kiln firing, the lotus blossoms beautifully.³³
 Another translation of the same poem leaves out
 the image of a mountain substituting it by “volcanic
 heat”
 Only a clear mind will capture it.
 Bright as a jewel fired in volcanic heat;
 A lotus plucked from a kiln, its hue, lush and fresh.³⁴

“Thiền Master Viên Chiếu (999-1090) was born in the Mai Family (in the Phúc Đường Village), Long Đàm district. He followed Thiền master Định Hương.”³⁵ on Ba Tiêu Mountain and three years later he gained Enlightenment. “When he was a child, he was a gifted and intelligent person.”³⁶ However, only an excerpt from one of his books, *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* (*Collection of outstanding Thiền masters*) is preserved. Viên Chiếu was powerful in elucidating the Dharma. In his poetry he expounded the Buddhist practices, like below in the poem entitled “No mind”

33 Nguyen Duy, op. cit, translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung.

34 Ibid.

35 Thích Thiện Hoa, *Phật Học Phổ Thông Khóa V*, Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, Los Angeles, 1981, P.48

36 Thích Minh Cảnh, *Từ Điển Phật Học Huệ Quang*, Tu Viện Huệ Quang, Sài Gòn, 2000, Tập 10, p.9010

*The body like a breakwall in time will crumble.
Worries and cares erode all worlds.
The Mind empty, ignores the tumble of forms.
Quietly settled, remains oblivious to what the waves
hurl.*³⁷

Vietnamese teachers of the Golden Age wrote remarkable poetry in which they expressed their world outlook. Their names are preserved to history by poetry that serves as an illustration of the following words: “Buddhism in Asia developed an immensely rich philosophical, cosmological, and mythological tradition that flourished up to and into the modern period.”³⁸ To illustrate this point, it is necessary to refer to some Vietnamese Buddhist teachers whose poetry presents meditation practice and the teachings of that time. Định Hương (?-1051) wrote in his poem that the Buddha is awake, while true Dharma is illusory (幻 – huyền):

Originally there is no place for the six senses
dwelling any place is true dharma.

True dharma is thus illusory.
Illusory existence is not nothing.³⁹

It is interesting to note that in his addresses to Buddhist monks, Thông Thiên who has already been mentioned above repeatedly advised them:

37 Nguyen Duy, op. cit., translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung.

38 R.H. Seager, *Buddhism in America*, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1999, p.16.

39 Nguyen Duy, op. cit., translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung.

“Oh monks! The ancient masters said, ‘Keep seeing that the five aggregates are emptiness, the four elements are non-self. Keep seeing that the true mind has no form, neither going nor coming. Keep seeing that the self-nature did not come when you were born, will not go when you die. Keep seeing that the true mind is always serene and all-embracing, and that your mind and all scenes are one. Seeing that constantly, you will soon attain enlightenment, gain freedom from the three periods, and become those who leave this world. It is important to you not to cling to anything.’”⁴⁰

Here, the teaching of Thông Thiên is in line with other Vietnamese Buddhist practitioners. To all of them, as can be observed from their verses, learning the world was similar to getting a new insight to enjoy its true nature in a different way. The Buddha explained this by holding a flower. All the monks were looking at the flower waiting for the Buddha’s words. Only one monk smiled. The Buddha said that through that smile the monk got the true meaning of Dharma. Vietnamese teachers educated people how to keep seeing constantly, for this is the only way to the enlightened state of mind. In their poetry Vietnamese Buddhist teachers described the feelings that were born in them on the path of Enlightenment. For instance, Nguyễn Học (?-1174) wrote in his “Not a word” (Không một lời):

“Understanding the mind and body completely,
you will open the eye of wisdom, transform
marvelously, and reveal the auspicious appearances.

40 From ancient masters, op. cit, 43

While walking, standing, sitting and lying, you stay peaceful effortlessly, transform correspondingly, manifest countless bodies – appearing all over in space but having no form to be identified. With nothing is the world comparable to, the sacred light illuminates endlessly. The unthinkable meaning is professed constantly; however, there is not a word deserving.”⁴¹

Master Nguyễn Học implied in this poem that the Way is formless and that on reflecting on oneself, a human being can find this way. He taught that the eye of wisdom opens with complete understanding of the mind and body. The same view was expressed by Thiền sư Y Sơn (?-1213) in his poem “Dharma of equality” (bình đẳng) when elucidating the equality of things:

“You should know that Buddha attains the omniscient wisdom, examines all the meanings, has no doubts about the dharma of equality, bears no mind and no appearance, doesn’t leave and doesn’t stop, passes beyond all measures and boundaries, stays away from the two sides, dwells in the middle way, and surpasses all the words.”⁴²

Similar ideas developed Đạo Hạnh (?-1115) in whose poem “Existence and emptiness” the basic teachings of the Four Noble Truths acquired humanistic outlook that is a renowned feature of Vietnamese Buddhism education: Existence – there you see all things existing. Emptiness – there you see all things empty. Existence

41 From Ancient masters, op. cit., p.70.

42 Ibid, p.74.

and emptiness are just like the moon underwater.⁴³ In this small poem Đạo Hạnh made it clear that Buddhist listening is always listening with a vacant mind. Sounds are heard but they are nothing else than echoes, dreams, or illusions. A Buddhist clings to neither existence nor emptiness, hence a poetic image of impossibility of the moon in the water.

Master Khánh Hỷ (1067-1142) was “born in the Nguyễn Family at the Cỗ Giao village, Long Biên district.”⁴⁴ He studied at Chúc Thánh pagoda and became the head of the 14th generation of the Vô Ngôn Thông School. He often consulted King Lý Thánh Tông (1128-1137). The king valued his advice and appointed him the Supreme Patriarch. None of Khánh Hỷ’s works are preserved except for a poem. The lines given below are assigned to Khánh Hỷ. From these lines an idea of his teachings about the way of patriarchs may be shaped:

Don’t ask of the Formed and the Formless,
 Follow the path, study the ancients.
 The sky is never home to the Buddha’s face.
 The cinnamon tree knows nothing of cinnamon
 forests.
 This whole universe spins on a feather.
 The small mustard seed contains the sun and moon.
 The Great Power lies in the palms of our hands.
 Who can tell the sham from the true, the West from
 the East?⁴⁵

43 From Ancient Masters, No. 17.

44 Thích Minh Cảnh, *Từ Điển Phật Học Huệ Quang*, Tu Viện Huệ Quang, Sai Gon, 2000, Tập 4, p.3472

45 Translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung

Thus, Thiền masters of the Golden Age were unanimous in referring to the Thiền ideal of unwavering meditation. Vietnamese Buddhist teachers developed a devotional form of Buddhism which was marked by the union of self-power and other power.⁴⁶ Chân Không (1046-1100) was born in Phù Đổng village, Tiên Du district. At the age of ten, he went on a long pilgrimage with the purpose of visiting all major temples. That pilgrimage proved to be fruitful, for Chân Không devoted his life to Buddhist practice as a monk. He was so dedicated to the practice that he spent twenty years on Từ Sơn Mountain.⁴⁷ He was respected by King Lý Nhân Tông (1072-1128) who invited him to give dharma talks in the royal palace. Chân Không is particularly renowned for his clarification of the Lotus Sutra. However, he left no works. The only lines belonging to him are quoted below:

The subtle, miraculous emptiness is present every
day
It's behind the harmonizing whirlwind in the world
Everyone knows the blessings of unconditioned
wisdom
But unless one realizes it (makes it one's home), it's
useless.

Poem

*Each day the miracle of emptiness,
The whirlwind that sings up the world.*

46 Thích Thien-An, 1975, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, Dharma Publishing Society, Chapter 12.

47 Thích Minh Cảnh, *Từ Điển Phật Học Huệ Quang*, Tu Viện Huệ Quang, Sài Gòn, 2000, Tập 2, p.353

*You say you know the blessing of its presence,
But with what do you build your home?⁴⁸*

Minh Trí (?-1196) was born in the To Family at the Phù Cầm village. He was the abbot of Phúc Thánh pagoda. He represented the tenth generation of the Vô Ngôn Thông School. “He was renowned for his powerful understanding of sutras. So much did he excel in that art that the king changed his name to Minh Trí, which means Shining Wisdom.”⁴⁹ In one of his two survived poems he wrote:

*Searching For the Echo
Winds through pines, moons on waters,
Leave neither trace nor shadow.
Our mind-body void like them.
Grasp for it-grasp the wind’s echo.⁵⁰*

Portraying the mind as symbolized by the moon, he wrote, “Like wind whistling in the Cyprus trees, the underwater moon shines bright. It has neither shadow nor shape. Existence is just like that; emptiness, an echo in the sky.”⁵¹ He taught that “the profound Way of Buddha and Patriarchs should be transmitted specially outside the scripture,”⁵² because Thiền is to be transmitted beyond scriptures.

Master Quảng Nghiêm (1121-1190) was born in the Nguyễn Family in the Đan Phụng village. He studied

48 Translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung

49 Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, Nhà Xuất Bản Thành Phố Sài Gòn, Việt Nam, 1999, p.209

50 Translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung

51 From ancient masters, op. cit, 38.

52 Ibid, 71.

with Minh Trí at Phúc Thánh pagoda. He gained Enlightenment and became abbot of Thánh Ân pagoda, in Siêu Loại village.⁵³ He taught in his poem not to follow the Buddha's footprints because he was the one who attained perfect wisdom, which is different for a human being. He said that human beings should have firm resolve to be in search for internal freedom:

Do Not Follow the Tathagata's Path
 Free from death, one's free to talk of death's nature.
 Born into birthlessness, one's free to talk of
 birthlessness.
 Man's aim is to shatter the heaven,
 Not, to the Buddha's past, toe the line.⁵⁴

Thường Chiếu (?-1203), "a famous master of the late 12th century, was born in the village of Phù Ninh, north Vietnam, with the family name Phạm."⁵⁵ He studied with Quảng Nghiêm (1121-1190) at Tịnh Quả pagoda. He represented the 12th generation of the Vô Ngôn Thông School. His only works survived are two poems.

*Born into the human body,
 Mind holds the Buddha nature.
 Its light- a beacon shines within,
 Look outside- never find it.*⁵⁶

53 Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, Nhà Xuất Bản Thành Phố Sài Gòn, Việt Nam, 1999, p.216

54 Translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung

55 Thích Thiên An, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc., Japan, 1975, p.69

56 Translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung

Master Tịnh Giới (?-1207) was born in Giang Mãn. He was of a peasant background. He initially studied Confucianism. At 26 he became a novice at Quốc Thanh pagoda. He was renowned for performing rituals. His famous farewell poem is:

*The autumn light cool, soft, expansive.
Great poets gaze on the moon and write.
Laughable dunces drunk in the Zen land,
What's sealed in Mind to stamp with words.*⁵⁷

Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ (1230-1291), the most important master of this period, was not only a general but also a Thiền master that influenced the Trúc Lâm Thiền School.

“Tuệ Trung played so important a part in the Thiền of Trúc Lâm that he has sometimes been considered as the founder of the sect.”⁵⁸ His religious name was Tuệ Trung (“The Wisdom within”). The title given to him by the king was Thượng Sĩ, or the Superior person. Tuệ Trung got interested in Buddhism at an early age. He had many talks with Thiền master Phước Đường Tiêu Diêu. During his life, Tuệ Trung was a widely sought teacher by the people.

“At the time of the Mongolian threat to the Vietnamese autonomy, Tuệ Trung fought alongside his father, a famous national hero, exhibiting great courage and leadership in the final confrontation with

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Thích Thiên An, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc., Japan, 1975, p.247

the enemy.”⁵⁹ Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ participated in the battles against three Mongolian invasions. However, he retired to Dưỡng Chân Trang to practice Buddhism. He was the teacher of King Trần Nhân Tông (1258-1308) who founded the Bamboo Grove School of Thiền (Thiền phái Trúc Lâm) which was the first genuine school of Buddhism. His writings were collected in “Recorded Saying of the Eminent Tuệ Trung” which was compiled by Thượng Sĩ Ngũ Lục. The glorious Golden Age of Vietnamese Buddhism excels in his “Song of the Buddha mind:” (Phật Tâm Ca)

Buddha! Buddha! Buddha! Impossible to be seen!
Mind! Mind! Mind! Impossible to be told!
When the mind arises, Buddha is born.
When Buddha is gone, the mind vanishes.

There is never a place where the mind is gone while
Buddha remains.

There is never a time when Buddha is gone while the
mind remains.

If you want to understand the mind of Buddha, and
the mind of birth and death, just wait for Maitreya
and ask him.

There was no mind anciently; there is no Buddha
now.

All unenlightened beings, holy beings, human beings,
heavenly beings are just like flashes of lightning.

59 Thich Thien An, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc., Japan, 1975, pp.14-15

The mind nature is neither right nor wrong.
The Buddha nature is neither real nor unreal.

Suddenly arising, suddenly ceasing,
anciently leaving, now coming,
you all waste your time with thinking and discussing.
In that way, you would bury the Vehicle of the
Patriarchs,
and cause the devils to hound in the house.

If you want to find the mind, stop searching outward.
The nature of the mind is naturally still and void.
Nirvana and the birth-death cycles are illusionary
shackles.
The fetters and Enlightenment are hollow
oppositions.

The mind is Buddha; Buddha is the mind.
That profound meaning shines bright since endless
time.
When spring comes, the spring flowers blossom
naturally.
When autumn comes, the autumn waters reflect the
sorrow clearly.

Removing the false mind, and keeping the true nature
is similar to a person who searches for the reflections
and misses the mirror.
He doesn't know that reflections come from the
mirror,
and that the false appear from the truth.

That the false come is neither real nor unreal.
That the mirror reflects is neither wrong nor right.
There is neither sinfulness nor blessedness.
Don't mistake wish-fulfilling gem for white jewel.

Gems could have scratches; Jewels, defects.
The mind nature is neither rosy nor green, neither
gained nor lost.
Seven times seven is forty-nine.

The six perfections and the ten thousand conducts
are waves on the ocean;
The three poisons and the nine kinds of sentient
beings, suns in the sky.
Be still, be still, be still; Go down, go down, go down.
The essence of all phenomena is the Buddha mind.

The Buddha mind and your mind are one.
Such is, naturally, the profound meaning since
endless time.
Walk in Zen, sit in Zen, then you will see the lotus
blooming in fire.

When your will becomes weak, just strengthen it.
When your place is peaceful and suitable, just stay
there.
Ah ah ah! Oh oh oh!
Sunken or floating, bubbles on the ocean are all
empty.

All deeds are impermanent; All phenomena are void.
Where can you find the sacred bones of your late
master?

Be mindful, be mindful, be awake; Be awake, be
mindful, be mindful.

Keep four corners in contact with the ground; don't
let things tilt.

If someone here trusts like that,

He can start walking from the crown of Vairocana
Buddha.

Shout!⁶⁰

8.4. Thái Tông of the Trần dynasty, the precedent of a king becoming a monk

As it was shown, Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist teachers taught a new understanding of the Vietnamese Buddhist culture, reflecting on their meditation practices through poetry. They taught self-reflection looking for true human nature. Those teachers were Dharma masters who explained the Dharma and the sutras. The Trần dynasty opened a new page in the development of Vietnamese Buddhism.

The Great King Trần Thái Tông (1218-1277) was born Trần Cảnh. Trần Thái Tông was a devout Buddhist and was also one of the greatest Buddhist scholars during his time. He is famous for his books like “Khóa Hư Lục” and a few others. It explains the experiences that he went through from a young age to the time of Enlightenment. It also contained many theories and philosophies that are deeply focused and analyzed.⁶¹ His uncle prepared his marriage to Queen Lý Chiêu

60 Translated by Nguyen Giac, from Ancient Masters, op. cit., 45.

61 Nguyễn Đăng Thục, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, An Tiêm, Paris-San Jose, 2002, p.241

Hoàng. She abdicated so he could take the throne. He was an outstanding person, a wise and learned ruler, the author of a Thiền manual “Instructions on Emptiness.”

After attaining the status of supreme emperor, Thái Tông became a monk. That was the precedent for other kings to follow. His interest in Buddhist Thiền was his life-long practice. Spiritually, he wanted to devote all his time to Buddhist practice, which had to be postponed because of his duties as king. When he fulfilled his duty he realized his dream and became a monk. His example was followed by such supreme emperors as Thánh Tông, Nhân Tông, Anh Tông, and Minh Tông. All of them, abdicated from the rank of supreme emperor, traveled as monks among people and promoted Buddhist teachings. At that time “Secret powers of Việt” (“The Việt Điện U Linh Tập”) was written Lý Tế Xuyên.⁶²

Thái Tông wrote several books on Buddhism. He stated that the principles of Buddhism needed the wisdom of Confucianism for the purpose of being injected into human societies. He emphasized the transcendental viewpoint denying existence. “Many books from the Trần Dynasty were seized by the Chinese Minh Dynasty and brought to Kim Lăng. According to the book ‘Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Văn Tịch Chí’” by Phan Huy Chú claimed that the books from Vietnam that were seized by China were:

62 J.K. Whitmore, 2006, p.103.

- Hình Thư by King Thái Tông; Lý Dynasty: three books
- Quốc Triều Thông Lễ by King Thái Tông; Trần Dynasty: ten books
- Hình Luật by King Thái Tông; Trần Dynasty: one book
- Thường Lễ Niên Hiệu Kiến Trung: ten books
- Khóa Hư Tập: one book
- Ngự Thi: one book
- Di Hậu Lục by King Thái Tông; Trần Dynasty: two books
- Cơ Cừ Lục: one book
- Thi Tập: one book
- Trung Hưng Thực Lục by Trần Nhân Tông; two books
- Thi tập: one book
- Thủy Vân Tùy Bút by Trần Anh Tông: two books
- Thi Tập by Trần Minh Tông: one book
- Trần Triều Đại Điển by Trần Dụ Tông: two books
- Bảo Hòa Điện Dư Bút by Trần Nghệ Tông: eight books
- Thi Tập: one book
- Bình Gia Yếu Lược by Trần Hưng Đạo: one collection
- Vạn Kiếp Bí Truyền by Trần Hưng Đạo: one collection
- Tứ Thư Thuyết Ước by Chu Văn Trinh: one collection
- Tiêu Ẩn Thi; one book
- Sầm Lâu Tập by Uy văn Vương Trần Quốc Vượng: one book

- Lạc Đạo Tập by Chiêu Minh Vương Trần Quang Khải: one book
- Bǎng Hồ Ngọc Hác tập by Trần Nguyên Đán: one book
- Giới Hiên Thi Tập by Nguyễn trung Ngạn: one book
- Giáp Thạch Tập by Phạm Sư Mạnh: one book
- Cúc Đường Di thảo by Trần Nguyên Đào: two books
- Thảo Nhân Hiệu Tản by Hồ Tôn Vự: one book
- Việt Nam Thế Chí: one collection
- Việt Sử Cương Mục: one collection
- Đại Việt Sử Ký by Lê Văn Hưu 30 books
- Nhị Khê Thi Tập, by Nguyễn Phi Khanh: one book
- Phi Sa Tập by Hàn Thuyên: one book
- Việt Điện U Linh Tập by Lý Tế Xuyên: one book.”⁶³

And, according to Lê mạnh Thát, “when the Minh army took over Vietnam in 1407, Thiền Uyển Tập Anh (禪苑集英) was seized by the Chinese and was rewritten under a different name: ‘An Nam Chí Nguyên’ ”⁶⁴ and also Đại Việt Sử Lược.⁶⁵

Two of his books, “Commentary on the Diamond Sùtra” and “A Guide to Zen Buddhism” are lost. But his “Lessons,” or “Khóa Hư Lục,” contains prefaces to these books. From these prefaces it is apparent

63 Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược*, Nha Xuất Ban TPHCM, 2005, pp.193-194

64 Lê Mạnh Thát, *Nghiên Cứu Về Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*, Nhà Xuất Bản TPCHM, TPHCM, 1999, p.24

65 Ibid. p.63

that he considered Buddha to be of universal and transcendental nature. He told the story of his life. He became an orphan when he was quite young. In 1245 he left the palace. He climbed up Yên Tử Mountain where he presented himself to the monk who was in charge of the pagoda. The monk explained to him that Buddha is in the heart of man. The king was found and taken back home to dutifully serve his country, but he never stopped studying Buddhism and consulting on mediation. He became enlightened, linking the words “It is better to have a non-clinging heart” with his Enlightenment.⁶⁶

In the preface to “A Guide to Zen Buddhism” he wrote:

“There are intelligent and ignorant people, but, thanks to the quality of Buddha, they may all be enlightened. Therefore, the forthright principles of Buddhism are to use practical methods to teach ignorant people and to use single ways to point out to them the truth about life and death. On the other hand, it was Confucius who set up particular patterns and techniques of government for the generations to come. Therefore, the sixth patriarch of Zen said: ‘Sages are no different from bonzes [monks].’ So, the principles of Buddhism need the wisdom of Confucianism for their penetration into human societies. Thus, can I not take the responsibility of

66 Nguyễn Đăng Thục, ‘Vietnamese Humanism’, In *Philosophy East and West*, V. 9, University of Hawaii Press, 1959, p.134. This article on Vietnamese Buddhism contains valuable translations of the prefaces to the two lost works. It explains the nature of Vietnamese Buddhism and its rooted tradition of humanism. The book “*Khoa hu luc*” is analyzed from the perspective of Vietnamese humanism.

the Sage and the principles of Buddha to my own?"
(Translated by Nguyễn Đăng Thục)⁶⁷

In his "Lessons about the 'Sùnyata'" (*The Khóa Hư Lục*) Thái Tông discussed the concept of voidness:

"In the beginning, there were not four elements (tanmatra), not even five aggregates (skandhas). From non-existence comes the misleading mind; from this misleading mind comes the external manifestation; and this external manifestation comes from the absolute void, which is ultimate reality. Thus the false comes from the 'void' the 'void' produces the false; and the false produces the many external manifestations. That which is contradictory to the non-creating and non-transforming principle will always create and transform, for that which is non-creating and non-transforming will always remain so, and only that which is creating and transforming can continue to create and transform." (Translated by Nguyễn Đăng Thục)⁶⁸

He recognized the eternal character of the transformist nature. To him, birth, age, sickness, and death constituted the permanent law of existence. He knew that "when one gets free from one chain, one will get caught in another." Thus, in illusion human beings pray for Buddha and in doubt they pray for Dhyana. Yet, "Buddha and Dhyana are not to be involved. They are silent and above words."⁶⁹

In his analysis of this text, Nguyễn Đăng Thục held

67 Ibid, p.132.

68 Nguyễn Đăng Thục, op. cit., p.138.

69 Ibid, p.137.

that Thái Tông changed the four Doors, or the four sufferings of primitive Buddhism, into four Mountains that represented four seasons. Thái Tông called spring the season of birth, summer – the season of maturity, autumn – the season of harvest, and winter – the season of storage. To him, existence could be denied as spiritual freedom:

“Existing in the illusory world is considered existing in the real world. In the despicable human body, it is considered to be in the ultimate reality of Buddha. Let us destroy the six robbers (six pleasures of the six sense organs) and transform them into six supernatural powers; let us stroll around in eight places of misery and transform them into eight transcendent places.”⁷⁰

In his text on encouraging, Thái Tông explained why it is necessary to practice the Way constantly. He made his reader realize that living without cultivating the original mind is merely a waste of life. Without regard to gender or status, he encouraged people, monks/nuns and lay Buddhists, to cultivate Buddhist teachings and practices:

“Some people bury their heads in the joy of eating and drinking, and waste their life away. Some people practice the Way incorrectly, and cannot get Enlightenment. They don’t know that in everyone the Bodhi Mind is already perfect, and the virtuous Prajna is already complete. Despite being a hermit, completely or partly, despite being a monk or a layperson, you will get Enlightenment if you realize

70 Ibid, p.138

the original mind. That is originally not male or female, so you don't have to cling to the appearance. Those who don't understand turn into three teachings tentatively; those who already understand know that they have realized the same one mind. Those who constantly reflect inwardly will all see the self-nature and become Buddhas."⁷¹

However, Trần Thái Tông taught monks and nuns that they have to depart from home to seek the Way and revere Buddha as the holy teacher because on this Way no human attachment is needed. He taught them the fundamentals of Buddhism: discipline, meditation and wisdom: Apart from his royal stature, his depth of commitment to Buddhism has earned him fame and recognition as one of the greatest, if not the greatest Buddhist educator in Vietnamese history.

8.5. The Trinity of Trúc Lâm Patriarchs of Golden Age

The trinity of Trúc Lâm Patriarchs of the Golden Age consist of King Trần Nhân Tông (1258-1308), Thiền master Pháp Loa (1284-1330), and Thiền master Huyền Quang (1254-1334). All of them participated in developing Buddhist culture and building Buddhist centers.

Trần Nhân Tông ascended to the throne when his father abdicated in 1279. During his reign he organized the Diên Hồng Conference of the country's elders and the Bình Than Conference of military commanders.

71 From Ancient Masters, op. cit, No.76.

Like his father, he abdicated in 1293 in favor of his son. He devoted himself to Buddhist practice. Five years later he became a monk. He liked going barefoot around the country teaching the Buddhist dharma.

The first patriarch of Trúc Lâm sect, Trần Nhân Tông, followed in the footsteps of Thái Tông. Most Trần rulers abdicated before their death and held the title of Thái Thượng Hoàng (“Senior Emperor.”)⁷² In time of war, he spent all his energy and time fighting against Mongol invaders. But when the wars ended in victory, he abdicated the throne and “for twenty years until his death in 1277 at the age of sixty, Trần Thái Tông devoted his time to mediation and to enlightening others to their own spiritual heritage.”⁷³ He deserved his Buddhist name of the Great Ascetic Monk, Hương Vân Đại Đầu Đà. He established temples and meditation centers. In the end, he was ordained a monk and became the founder and the First Patriarch of the Trúc Lâm School of Thiền Buddhism, which was influenced by Confucian and Daoist philosophy. The school emphasized mental cultivation, which is expressed in the hymn “Cư Trần Lạc Đạo Phú,” assigned to King Trần Nhân Tông. Its last verse is:

*Nothing was created
Nothing was terminated*

72 Tana, L., A view from the sea: perspectives on the Northern and central Vietnamese coast, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 31 (1), 2006, p.83.

73 Thích Thiên An, *Buddhism & Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, Charles E. Tuttle Company Inc., Japan, 1975, p.126

*If that is understood
The Buddha will always be present
Where should there be the coming and returning?*⁷⁴

He also wrote:

“Living in the world, practice quietly with joy.
When hungry, eat. When tired, sleep. Don’t look for
it elsewhere, the jewel lies within. An empty mind
facing the world, what use is Zen?”⁷⁵

Trần Nhân Tông, ordained Hương Vân Đại Đầu Đà, combined the principles of all three Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist sects in the new sect Trúc Lâm Yên Tử. The patriarch called for enjoying the Way and living with what comes in life, dealing with all without false mind. From Trần Nhân Tông’s verses it can be observed how deeply he understood the workings of the mind. To him, meditation was a natural process, so that when he watched his mind meditating, all his thoughts would disappear:

*Thought, rightful and wrongful, are falling off just
like
Flowers in the morning
Fame and wealth are chilled in my mind just like
cold, rainy nights.
The flowers are dying; the rains, gone; and the
mountains, serene.
A bird chirps a sound, and the spring is leaving
again.”*⁷⁶

74 Patron Kings: King Tran Nhan Tong of Vietnam, Retrieved: 24/08/08,
from <http://www.khyentslfoundation.org/patronkingsIV.html>

75 Translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung

76 From ancient masters, op. cit., 71.

His other works are “Thiền Lâm Thiết Chủ Ngữ Lục,” “Đại Hương Hải Ấn Thi Tập,” “Tăng Già Toái Sự,” and “Thạch Thất Mị Ngữ.” These works emphasized syncretism of the prajna practice of Thiền and the karma aspect of the Pure Land. They concentrated on mantra meditation and sought the union of karuna and prajna, which has always been valued by Vietnamese Buddhism.

The second Patriarch Pháp Loa (1284-1330), “a famous master of the early 13th thirteenth century, was born in the village of Cửu La, the Hải Dương province, Nam Sách country, with the secular name of Đồng Kiên Cương.”⁷⁷ In 1304 (or 1305) he met by chance the founder of the Thiền phái Trúc Lâm (Bamboo Forest School of Thiền), Trần Nhân Tông and became his disciple. The First Patriarch took him to Kỳ Lân to be ordained bhikkhu and Bodhisattva. At the age of 24, Pháp Loa assisted the First Patriarch. Then he followed the patriarch to expound dharma at Siêu Loại temple. The king gave him the dharma name “Thiện Lai” (“Auspicious arrival.”)

Master Pháp Loa was famous for his comments on the dharma. The First Patriarch officially announced him the abbot of Siêu Loại temple and the leader of Trúc Lâm Yên Tử sect. After the death of the First Patriarch, Patriarch Pháp Loa returned to Yên Tử. He revised the verses written by the First Patriarch compiling “Thạch

77 Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, Nhà Xuất Bản Thành Phố Sài Gòn, Việt Nam, 1999, p.333

Thất Mị Ngũ.” Pháp Loa was trained by Trúc Lâm Điều Ngự to be the principal preacher of the Trúc Lâm Congregation.⁷⁸ His language was simple and precise. For example, his poem “Enter the World Longing for Green Mountain:”⁷⁹

*A slender range mirrored in autumn waters.
A single peak rising straight to Heaven.
Look up, a vast and boundless horizon.
Look down, a road veering into numberless paths.*

In 1307, Pháp Loa was called to the Ngoại Vân Temple on Mount Bảo Đài to receive the robe, begging bowl, and a gatha. In 1308, Nhân Tông had his transmission of robe-and-bowl formalized in the presence of Anh Tông. Nhân Tông handed to Pháp Loa 20 cases of Buddhist texts. In 1311, Pháp Loa wrote “Đại Tạng Kinh” at the request of the king in which he listed about a thousand monks. The list was checked every three years. In 1317, Pháp Loa came to Quỳnh Lâm Pagoda to practice asceticism. He created a study room for training monks, which at that time contained about 5,000 volumes of Tripitaka.

When he was seriously ill, he distributed his possessions among his disciples. He gave his verses and the First Patriarch’s bowl to Master Huyền Quang; the Buddhist props and rod to Cảnh Ngung (Quê Đường); a feather wand to Cảnh Huy; a bamboo rod to Huệ Quán;

78 Thích Thiên An, *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, Cha rle E. Tuttle Company, Tohyo, Japan, 1975, P.132

79 Translated by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung.

his dharma poems to Huệ Nhiên; a golden bell to Hải Ân; and a golden history book to Huệ Chúc. He died at the age of 47. He built 1,300 Buddhist statues, two temples, five pagodas, and 200 Sangha houses. His six students became Great Masters.

His works are lost, except for three poems and some excerpts. The names of his books are: *Tham Thiên Kỹ Yếu*, *Kim Cương Trạng Đà La Ni Kinh Khoa Chú*, *Niết Bàn Đại Kinh Khoa Sớ*, *Pháp Hoa Kinh Khoa Sớ*, *Lăng Già Tứ Quyển Khoa Sớ*, *Bát Nhã Tâm Kinh Khoa Sớ*, *Hưng Vương Hộ Quốc Nghi Quỹ*, *Pháp Sư Khoa Văn* and *Độ Môn Trợ Thành Tập*. In these writings he explained the nature of Buddhist practices. He taught how to keep the precepts pure, explained the meanings of the Mahayana precepts, and pointed out the key Thiền practices. He also occupied himself with preaching the Buddhist teaching, especially the Avatamsaka-sūtra.

His views of Thiền practice are summed up in the following text:

“After seeing the mind essence, you have to keep the precepts purely. How is ‘keeping the precepts purely’? That means in 12 hours, stop all involvement outwardly, and still your mind inwardly. Because the mind is still, you are peaceful while seeing a scene. Your eyes don’t slip outward when consciousness arises by the seen, and your consciousness doesn’t slip inward by the scene you see. The outward and the inward don’t interfere with each other, so we call blockade. We say blockade, but it doesn’t mean “to block.” The senses of ears, nose, tongue, body and mind are just like that. That is called the

Mahayana precepts, the unsurpassed precepts, also the unequalled precepts. All the monks, young or old, must keep the precepts purely like that. Keeping the precepts firmly, then you practice Zen. The key of Zen is that you must drop all body and mind. First, while practicing the samatha meditation, you should often ask yourself some questions. Where did this body come from? Where did this mind come from? While the mind doesn't really exist, where did the body come from? While body and mind are emptiness, where did all things come from? All things don't really exist, because while there was no existence [at the beginning], where did existence come from? That existence was nonexistence, so there is no existence. A thing is not really a thing, then where does each thing depend on? If there is no where to depend on, then a thing is not a thing. This thing is not real, but also not unreal."⁸⁰

Pháp Loa developed the concept of education advanced by the First Patriarch. "Master Pháp Loa was the first person to create the curriculum vitae of the Sangha of monks and nuns in Vietnam and also helped the Sangha community in Vietnam to be established and organized."⁸¹ The school valued both Buddhist and non-Buddhist knowledge and treated both of them as inclusive. In this, the Trúc Lâm School followed in the footsteps of Mậu Tử and Khương Tăng Hội. The same trend was reaffirmed later by Hương Chân Pháp

80 From ancient masters, op. cit., 30.

81 Thích Trí Quang, *Tăng Già Việt Nam*, Phú Lâm Na, Los Angeles, 1986, p.125

Tính (1470-1550), Minh Châu Hương Hải (1628-1715), and Hải Lượng Ngô Thời Nhiệm (1746-1805). Then the school supported all-round education that has become Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. Finally, following Trần Thái Tông who in the preface to “Thiền Tông Chỉ Nam” (“A manual of Dhyana teaching”) stated that the Buddha’s teachings might be transmitted by Confucianist intellectuals, the Trúc Lâm School emphasized syncretism of Vietnamese Buddhist teachings and their search of unity between Thiền (Zen) and Pure Land, on the one hand, and Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, on the other hand.

Of Pháp Loa’s poetic compositions, the best known is the one on the *Great Way (Đại Đạo)*:

The Great Way is immense and boundless, restraining nothing.

The self nature is serene, neither virtuous nor evil.
Yet a thought of choice arises, instantly creating a number of faults, and separating sky from earth.

Holiness and unholiness are from same root;
Right and wrong have no two ways.
Thus sinfulness and blessedness are originally void;
The cause and effect relationship is ultimately unreal.

All human beings already complete the Great Way;
All that we have is already perfect.

The Buddha nature, and the true body of all phenomena are just like images and shadows, apparently appearing and disappearing, neither one nor many.

The nose points straight down; the eyebrows lay across your face, above your eyes. Yet it's very hard for you to see them.

You have to examine why the ancient masters said, "The 3,000 dharma-gates point to one heart; countless profound activities come from the original mind." Thus you already complete the gates of precepts, meditation and wisdom; just observe yourself.

Having a cough, uttering a hymn, raising eyebrows, winking an eye, grabbing something, walking around – what is the essence of those actions?

Yet what is the mind you are using to know about that essence?

The mind essence is empty and bright; so what is right, and what is not?

Reality is the essence; Buddha is the mind.

What essence is not reality?

What mind is not Buddha?

Mind is Buddha; Mind is reality.

Originally, reality is not reality; reality is just mind.

Originally, mind is not mind; mind is just Buddha.

Learners! Days and months are flying by.

Life is not waiting for you.

Why you are eating rice and soup,

and don't realize the use of bowl and spoon?

Observe!⁸²

The Third Patriarch of Trúc Lâm Yên Tử sect was Thiền Master Huyền Quang; his secular name was Lý

82 From Ancient Masters, op.cit., 47.

Đạo Tái. He was ordained his monastic name in 1305. “Master Huyền Quang was considered one of the greatest masters of his time and respected and venerated for many generations.”⁸³

He became the Third Patriarch at the age of 77 and died four years later. He wrote “Ngọc Tiên Tập,” “Chư Phẩm Kinh,” “Công Văn Tập,” and “Phổ Tuệ Ngũ lục.” His disciples were Cảnh Huy, Cảnh Ngung, Huệ Chúc, and Kim Sơn. The “Recorded Sayings as the Lamp of the Saints” gave an account of Kim Sơn. In his analysis of these lines, Lê Mạnh Thát claimed that Huyền Quang succeeded the dharma-lineage of Pháp Loa, whereas the Dhyana Patriarch of the Third generation was Kim Sơn. In the 18th century, Tính and Ngô Thời Nhiệm compiled “True Record of the Three Patriarchs” based on the earlier source the Tổ Gia Trúc Lục (“True Record of the Patriarchal House”) that was brought to China in 1426-1435 and contained the biography of Huyền Quang. From these sources, Huyền Quang cultivated the Buddha’s path at the Hòa Yên Temple on Mount Yên Tử. However, no information is available concerning Huyền Quang’s practicing sila and Samadhi.⁸⁴

To sum up, the Trúc Lâm School is rooted in Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. It is a Dhyana school that maintained the transmission of Buddhism via sutras. The founder of the school selected Avatamsaka-

83 Trần Thị Băng Thanh, *Huyền Quang: Cuộc Đời, Thơ và Đạo*, Nhà Xuất Bản TPHCM, 2001 p.27

84 Lê Mạnh Thát, *The Emperor Nhân Tông and the Trúc Lâm School*, URL: http://www.todinglinhson.com/ts_Imtemperor2.htm

sutra as the guiding text. On the whole, the study of sutras was given a priority.

8.6. *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*

The main Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist text *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* (“The Brilliant Stars of the Thiền Garden”) was compiled in the third decade of the 14th century, according to Cuong Tu Nguyen. This book, above all, recorded a meeting between Vinitaruci and Pháp Hiền at the Dâu pagoda. The Buddhist text was discovered in 1927 by Trần Văn Giáp. He concluded that there were three schools of Thiền Buddhism in Vietnam.

However, the Harvard scholar Nguyễn Tụ Cường claimed that Trần Văn Giáp’s view needed to be revised:

“Zen in medieval Vietnam was not an institutionalized entity, but a more diffuse set of attitudes and styles spreading out among its adherents – a blend of life attitude and aesthetic taste and intellectual vocabulary that held considerable appeal for some among the Vietnamese elite, offering a lifestyle for today and a more abstract visualization of the past of their religion and their country.”⁸⁵

Thiền Uyển Tập Anh is a collection of biographies of eminent Thiền monks in Vietnam. It is mainly written in the style of “transmission of the lamp” literature whose tradition may be traced from the Đinh Dynasty (968-

85 Nguyen Tu Cuong, op. cit, p.8

980) through the Lê (980-1009) and Lý (1010-1225) up to the Trần (1225-1240) Dynasty.⁸⁶

This collection records genealogies of three schools of Thiền Buddhism. However, for the Thảo Đường School, only a list of five generations of successors is given. Sixty-six biographies are of eminent monks that belonged to Vinitaruci and Vô Ngôn Thông schools. The translation of the book by Cuong Tu Nguyen was highly appreciated by the critics: “Nguyen’s translation of the Thiền Uyển is clearly a labor of love. His words are well-chosen, at times even inspired.”⁸⁷

Thiền Buddhist literature exists in three types of texts. The first group of texts recorded Thiền Buddhist lineages of masters and their disciples. The second group of texts recorded teachings of Thiền masters. The third group of texts was written in a dialogic form between masters and disciples. Nguyễn Tự Cường claimed that texts of the first group served three main purposes. First of all, they recorded an abstract outline of a moment in the process of Enlightenment of the past Thiền masters. Then, they legitimized these adepts. Finally, they rationalized Thiền Buddhist existence. To Vietnamese Thiền Buddhists, in the view of Nguyễn Tự Cường, *Chiếu Đồi Lục* was a source of reference, as well as a model for their own writings. Among other

86 Ibid. p.9

87 Stevenson, D.B., 2000, ‘Reviewed works: *Zen in Medieval Vietnam: A study and translation of the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* by Cuong T. Nguyen’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp.212-213. URL: <http://www.istor.org/stable/3632499>

writers that drew heavily on *Chiếu Đồi Lục* were Liệt Tổ Yếu Ngữ and Kế Đăng Lục. It is thought that Thông Biện, Thường Chiếu, Huệ Nhật, Như Sơn, and Phước Điền, among others, followed *Chiếu Đồi Lục* in their understanding of Buddhist history.⁸⁸

Nguyễn Tự Cường held that *Thiền Uyển* modeled Vietnamese Buddhist history on *Chiếu Đồi Lục* by Thông Biện. Most biographies in *Thiền Uyển* belong to the transmission of the lamp tradition. At the same time the style of the biographies of Đạo Hạnh, Giác Hải, and Không Lộ has much in common with fairy tales. One more exception is the biography of Viên Chiếu, which is based, not on the story of his life, but entirely on his writings. The book fails to give coherent lineages of Thiền Buddhist monks in the chronological order. More than that, some monks, like Không Lộ and Giác Hải, are claimed simultaneously by two schools, Vô Ngôn Thông and Thảo Đường.

Typical biographies concentrate on the way a monk became a Thiền master. For example, according to *Thiền Uyển*, Thiền Master Tịnh Không of Khai Quốc Temple was originally named Phúc Xuyên. He was in his thirties when he turned to the ascetic way of life, eating for six years one grain of wheat and one grain of sesame each day. He stopped sleeping at night, and meditated. Although biographies are modeled on one recognizable scheme, *Thiền Uyển* is a compilation that used various sources for the purpose of “Zinification” of Vietnamese Buddhism. At the onset of this tradition

88 Nguyen Tu Cuong, op. cit, p.26

was Thông Biện (11th century); it was continued by Thường Chiếu (13th century); and culminated by *Thiền Uyển* (14th century).

To J. C. Cleary, “the Vietnamese work is a carefully crafted whole that skillfully weaves its Zen message into a comprehensive picture of a wide range of Buddhist beliefs and practices and popular images of curing, prophecy, and magic.”⁸⁹ He admired the enlightened adepts mentioned in *Thiền Uyển* who valued the beliefs of the folk tradition. Cleary paid attention to the fact that the compilers traced the origins of Vietnamese Buddhism to India. Thông Biện lectured on the history of Buddhism beginning with Sakyamuni Buddha’s Enlightenment. Although it is not said to which places in India some Thiền masters used to go, the book contains information about such pilgrimages. For example, Không Lộ traveled to India in search of wisdom. Đạo Hạnh learned magic in India. Sùng Phạm broadened his knowledge in India.

Thiền Uyển also mentioned Mahayana scriptures. For example, Bảo Tịnh and Minh Tâm chanted the Lotus sutra. Thông Biện taught the Lotus sùtra. Chân Không received fame for his expositions of the Lotus Sùtra. Bảo Giám copied the sutras for use in his temple. Pháp Dung praised the sutras in his poetry. From this, it is clear that Vietnamese Thiền masters venerated the Buddhist scriptures.

Thiền masters practiced austerities. In *Thiền Uyển* strenuous austerities are often mentioned. Quảng Trí

89 Cleary, op. cit, p.93.

“always wore a patched robe and fed himself on pine nuts.” Trường Nguyên “dressed in straw and lived on chestnuts.” The Thiền masters were also involved in good works. The book says that Trí Bảo reentered society to help people, for “he never acted for his own profit or to gain support.” Chân Không was cured during an epidemic of plague and attracted patronage: “He used all that he received to repair temples, build stupas, and cast great bells, in order to safeguard the Dharma for posterity.” Viên Học “regularly took the lead in projects such as repairing bridges, building roads, and so on.” The book assigns the following words to Y Sơn: “Fishing for fame, longing for profit – these are like bubbles floating on the water. Planting merit, sowing the seeds of good causal conditions – these are the truly precious jewels in our hearts.”⁹⁰

8.7. The Buddhist teachers in the period of decline

The period of Golden Age ended with the period of decline, of which little information is available. It was the period when Hương Chân Pháp Tính (1470-1550) compiled the Chinese-Nôm dictionary “Chỉ Nam Học Âm Giải Nghĩa.” From the 15th century comes the text “Phật Thuyết Đại Báo Phụ Mẫu Ân Trọng.” In the 16th century Viên Thái translated the “Cổ Châu Pháp Vân Phật Bản Hạnh” into the Nôm language.

The period of decline has preserved some names:

⁹⁰ Cleary, op. cit, p.93.

Thiền master Chân Nguyên and his disciples Như Hiển and Như Trùng restored the Trúc Lâm Thiền sect tradition. Some texts from that time are also available. For example, Thiền master Hương Hải (1628-1715) preached the Dhamma at Nguyệt Đường monastery. He wrote in his verse “Watchful”:

“Watch yourself every day, constantly/ Watch yourself, be mindful, be alert. In this dream world, don’t search for/ Dharma counselor;/ Watch yourself, and see the Buddha’s face on young face.”⁹¹

He described his meditation practices as follows:

“At the South Shrine, sitting still in front of an incense burner

I am serene all day. Have not a thought

Not that I am blocking the mind or purging the false thoughts

Just that there is not a thing I could ponder.”⁹²

When the king asked him to summarize Buddhist teachings, he responded with the poem about the swallow (See supplement 4 in Vietnamese):

In the sky, the swallow flies;

Underwater its image shines.

The swallow has no intention to leave any trace;

The water, no purpose to keep any image.⁹³

Hương Hải taught that the body is not different from its image, so it can be neither accepted nor rejected. He taught that Buddhas of the three times are in the body.

“The mind without thought is all the Buddhas of the

91 From ancient masters, 6.

92 Ibid, 81.

93 From ancient masters 13.

past. When action comes of serenity all Buddhas of the future are present. When a human being responds to the circumstances in a natural way, all Buddhas of the present are with him. When a human being does not cling to his senses, he is apart from the Defilement Buddha. He becomes the Supernatural Power Buddha when he comes and leaves freely. In a peaceful state is the Unconstraint Buddha. In the purity of mind is the Shining Light Buddha. When the mind is trained in dharma, a human being is aware of the Indestructable Buddha.”⁹⁴

Thiền Master Chân Nguyên (1647-1726) “was born in the Phạm Family with the secular name of Đình Lân, in the village of Tiên Liệt, Thanh Hà District.”⁹⁵ Master Chân Nguyên is the author of the Kiến Tánh Thành Phật Lục (“Essay on Seeing One’s Own Nature and Become Buddha”) which is known as one of the major Buddhist philosophical works. He wrote that “seeing the true eternity acts, through the six senses, you will move across, up and down, among all phenomena with complete Enlightenment.”⁹⁶

Master Thủy Nguyệt (1637-1704), “born in the family Đặng, in the village of Thanh Triều of the Ngự Thiên District,”⁹⁷ observed: “Even when the clouds cover and make illusions appear, the sun is always

94 Ibid, 88.

95 Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, Nhà Xuất Bản Thành Phố Sài Gòn, Việt Nam, 1999, p.443

96 From ancient masters, 51.

97 Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, Nhà Xuất Bản Thành Phố Sài Gòn, Việt Nam, 1999, p.400

in the sky, circular and bright. If the wind comes and blows the clouds away, you will see countless worlds brightened, unobstructed.”⁹⁸

Master Tông Diễm (1640-1711), “born in the village of Phú Quân in the district of Cẩm Giang,”⁹⁹ taught how to see existence and emptiness and what happens when a human being is enlightened: “Seeing existence, you see all things exist; seeing emptiness, you see nothing exists. When existence and emptiness are not established in your mind, the sun of wisdom appears high in the sky.”¹⁰⁰ Chân Nguyên (1647-1726) resorted to the tradition of the transmission of the lamp: “From the lamp of mind, the Buddha’s eyes manifest...Keep transmission of the lamp, shine endlessly, and empower Thiền foresters to help human beings.”¹⁰¹ Như Trừng Lâm Giác (1696-1733) observed that “we originally neither come nor leave. How can birth and death bother us?”¹⁰²

In the period of decline, Buddhism influence was at the local level. Monks practiced mainly in villages.¹⁰³ Buddhist centers were founded in the former Cham territories which, in the 1660s, attracted Chinese monks who considered Thiền and Pure Land as identical.

98 From ancient masters, p. cit, 82.

99 Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, Nhà Xuất Bản Thành Phố Sài Gòn, Việt Nam, 1999, p.410

100 From ancient masters, p. cit, 83

101 Ibid, 85.

102 Ibid, 22.

103 McLeod, M.W., “Culture and customs of Vietnam,” Greenwood Press. 2001

Despite the decline of Buddhist impact on society in comparison with the past, Buddhism developed new sects, like the Lâm-Tế school.

The Lâm Tế School was founded in the 17th century by Nguyễn Thiệu, and the Liễu Quán School was founded in the 18th century. Thiền master Liễu Quán was the leader of the Buddhist restoration and was the disciple of Master Nguyễn Thiệu's student. Although he belonged to the Lin Ji Sect, his teaching was influenced by Vietnamese Buddhist thinking. He left the following observation:

“Emptiness, emptiness, existence, existence – I’ve gone beyond their boundary over seventy years in this world. The vow done, I am going home today and don’t have to scurry about to ask for the patriarchs.”¹⁰⁴

8.8. Recent Vietnamese Buddhist teachers

By the 20th century Buddhism in Vietnam had become unified by accommodating the influences of the Mahayana and Theravada traditions. It was a departure from the concentration on Thiền sects, including those that originated on Vietnamese soil.¹⁰⁵ Nguyễn Đăng Thục claimed that Vietnam “has produced a special viewpoint in regard to life and to life problems.”¹⁰⁶

104 From ancient masters, p. cit, 86.

105 Thích Thiên-An. *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam in relation to the development of Buddhism in Asia*. Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1975.

106 Nguyễn Đăng Thục, October 1959-January 1960, ‘Vietnamese Humanism’, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 9, No. 3/4, pp.129-143, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1397094>, Accessed: 27/08/2008.

Buddhism is inherent in Vietnamese humanism. The 20th century Buddhism continued in line with “transcendental viewpoint denying existence.”¹⁰⁷

The national teacher Phước Huệ (1869-1945), whom people called Dharma Noble Horse, was born in Nhơn Thành city, in the Bình Định Province of central Vietnam. At the age of twelve he became a monk. At the age of the 20 he was ordained a bukkhu. Later he became the Abbot of the Thập Tháp monastery. He was a teacher of the four kings of the Nguyễn dynasty. He guided to open such Buddhist institutions as Thập Tháp, Long Khánh, and Tây Thiên. Many teachers studied with him, including the Most Venerables Đôn Hậu, Trí Độ, Mật Nguyên, Mật Hiện, Trí Thủ, Phúc Hộ, Quy Thiện, Huyền Tân, Giải Hậu, Hiện Thụy, Thiện Trí, Thiện Hoa, Chí Thiên, Thiện Hòa, Giác Tâm, Kế Châu, and Bửu Ngọc. For example, Master Thích Kế Châu (1922-1996) was the abbot of the Thập Tháp monastery. He opened the Phước Huệ institutions and was one of the leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. He wrote and translated *Kim Cang Nghĩa Mạch*, *Kim Cang Trực Sớ*, *Di Đà Giảng Thoại*, *Bách Thành Yên Thủy*, *Thập Mục Ngưu Đồ*, and made the *Long Bích Thi Tập* in two parts. The Vietnamese Buddhist restoration movement was active before World War II. He was an outstanding teacher. He was a great example for everyone and I strongly believe that his life is a great lesson for all people. “We respect and deep appreciate the personification of great compassion, great wisdom

107 Ibid, p.131.

and the Bodhicitta of an extraordinary teacher and great Zen master of all people.”¹⁰⁸

Master Thích Khánh Hòa did a lot to restore Vietnamese Buddhism. However, the process was interrupted by the wars and division the country into two parts. The history of 20th century Buddhist teachings is closely connected with the strife of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. The Most Venerable Thích Tịnh Khiết was the first Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, founded in 1964. Those Vietnamese Buddhist teachers who stayed in Vietnam were prevented, like Most Venerables Huyền Quang, Thích Quảng Độ, Thích Thiện Minh and Thích Kế Châu, from functioning as educators. Others like Thích Thiên-Ân and the founders of Vietnamese Buddhism schools in Australia preferred immigration to oppression. Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century continued teaching Thiền and Pure Land Buddhism. The Pure Land teachers taught the Dhatma, while the Thiền Buddhist teachers taught how to learn from everything. The history of Vietnamese in the 20th century is far from being monolithic. We will discuss main trends that extended the influence of Vietnamese Buddhist teachers beyond Vietnam.

The Second Supreme Patriarch of the United Vietnamese Buddhist Church was Most Venerable Thích Giác Nhiên (Thiền Tôn) He was given the title of Most Supreme Patriarch of the United Vietnamese

108 Phạm Công Thiện, Chân Nguyên, Số 28-29, Tháng 1 Năm 1996, Chân Nguyên Magazine Monterey Park, CA, p.25

Buddhist Church. This title originated from the Đinh Tiên Hoàng Dynasty (968-979) when Khuông Việt whom we have already mentioned, was appointed the First Supreme Patriarch of Vietnamese Buddhism. Master Thích Giác Nhiên was born in 1878. At the age of seven he began studying ancient Chinese. He left home to become a Buddhist novice at Tây Thiên Temple. There he studied under the supervision of Master Thích Tâm Tịnh who renamed his disciple Thích Trừng Thủy. Master Thích Giác Nhiên received Full Ordination in 1895 at Phước Lâm Temple in Hội An city. His recognition as a Buddhist teacher came to him in the 1930s. In 1932, the founders of the An Nam Buddhist Institution invited him to be an advisor to the school. Also in 1932, Master Thích Giác Nhiên became a rector of the Tây Thiên Buddhist School in Huế. In 1934, he was appointed Abbot of Thánh Duyên at Thúy Vân Mountain. In 1936, he became an advisor to Viên Âm Buddhist Magazine. In 1937, he became the Abbot of Thiên Tôn Temple in Huế. This temple belonged to the Tendai Buddhist Sect that was founded by Liễu Quán in 1768. Thus, Master Thích Giác Nhiên became the Eighth Patriarch of the Liễu Quán Thiên Sect. In 1956, Master Giác Nhiên became a rector of Hải Đức Buddhist Institute, a college that trained monks and nuns working in central Vietnam. From 1958 to 1962, he was the Chief Director of the General Central Buddhist Society. In 1973, he became the Supreme Patriarch. He lived over one hundred years.

From his life story it is apparent that Master Giác

Nhiên was a Buddhist teacher who held important educational posts and was a recognized Vietnamese Buddhist teacher. His entire life was devoted to the Dharma teaching.

Master Thích Thiên-Ân not only introduced Vietnamese Buddhist teachings to the West but he also integrated Vietnamese Buddhist principles into the world culture of beliefs and attitudes. Master Thích Thiên-Ân (1926-1980) was the First Most Venerable of Vietnamese Buddhism in the United States. He greatly influenced the creation of the Buddhist community in the United States.

Master Thích Thiên-Ân was born in a Buddhist family. At the age of 14 he entered a monastery. His father, Tiều-Diêu, was one of two self-immolated Vietnamese monks. Master Thích Thiên-Ân received a Doctor of Literature degree from Waseda University in Japan. When he returned from Japan, he founded a university in Vietnam. In 1966 he went to the United States as a Buddhist scholar and an exchange professor. He also started the International Buddhists Meditation Center in the United States. His students revered him for his knowledge, teaching skills, and human qualities.

Master Thích Thiên-Ân is famous for his deep writings about Zen Buddhism (1975) in which he analyzed the rise and development of Buddhism teachings in Vietnam. He left an interesting, thorough survey on the origins of the Thảo-Đường School. In his view, in Vietnam Buddhism became national religion

with the first Sangha established by Đinh Bộ Lĩnh. The early Lê dynasty (981-1009) continued the policy of obtaining Chinese Tripitaka. During the Trần dynasty Vietnamese Buddhism was involved in the national movement. The teachings of Sakyamuni were embraced by the nation. The Thảo-Đường School, as Thích Thiên-Ân emphasized, opened the road to Pure Land. Thích Thiên-Ân emphasized syncretism of Vietnamese Buddhism as its specific feature.¹⁰⁹

Master Thích Thiên-Ân emphasized self-knowledge and the process of knowing oneself. In Chapter 7 of his famous book on Zen Buddhism, Thích Thiên-Ân made it clear that the Buddha nature is within each human being; yet, there are difficulties in uncovering it. The imperfections of people prevent them from doing this. Thích Thiên-Ân taught that meditation removes evil and increases good by overcoming egocentric human thoughts. He taught that self-reflection is the heart of Buddhism. He wrote: “Self-reflection opens to our eyes to the secret contents of our inner life and is thus an indispensable tool in the process of self-transformation. When we become thoroughly pure and good, then we will be Buddhas, Enlightened ones endowed with wisdom and compassion.”¹¹⁰ Thích Thiên-Ân claimed that meditation purifies the mind and makes it perfect.

Thích Thiên-Ân left an interesting account of the other power philosophy that is central to Pure Land Buddhism. He claimed that the practice of the easy

109 Thích Thien An, 1975, op. cit., Ch. 7.

110 Ibid, Ch. 7.

path helps develop self power. Practitioners sit before the Buddha's image chanting his name. Through this meditation practice the meditating mind deepens, so that both subject and object became one. A similar state was achieved by the Buddha when he experience one mind Samadha.¹¹¹

He stated: "We are like the woman who continually pointed to the dust on other people's windows while she did not notice that her own window was covered with dust. We should follow Shenxiu advice and keep the dust from settling on the clear mirror of the self nature."¹¹²

Master Thích Thiện Tâm, also known as Liên Du, was the Dharma master who specialized in both Pure Land and Esoteric traditions and produced a number of very important scholarly works. Thích Thiện Tâm is famous for his translation of "Pure Land Buddhism: Dialogs with Ancient Masters by Patriarch Chih I (Zhiyi) and Master Liên Du" (1992).¹¹³ He not only produced a master translation of the book but he also explained the Pure Land doctrine in the appendix that has a value of its own. The translated book belonged to the Patriarch Zhiyi (Chi I), the founder of the Lotus Sutra School at the onset of the Golden Age. In his introduction to "Pure Land Buddhism: Dialogs with

111 Ibid, Ch. 12.

112 Ibid, Ch. 7.

113 Pure Land Buddhism: Dialogs with Ancient Masters by Patriarch Chih I & Master T'ien Ju, 1992, Translated by Master Thich Thiện Tâm, N.Y.: Sutra translation committee of the United States & Canada, Retrieved: 28/08/08, from http://www.buddhanet/pdf_file/pureland.pdf

Ancient Masters” Thích Thiên Tâm demonstrated his ability and erudition by presenting a theoretical discussion of the Pure Land doctrine.

First of all, he precisely stated the essence of Pure Land Buddhism. He claimed that Pure Land teachings emphasize faith, vows, and the practice of Buddha recitation as the conditions for rebirth. Second, he integrated the Pure Land School’s principles into the Buddhist schools which cultivate Enlightenment through such qualities of the mind as discipline, concentration, and wisdom. Third, he showed the way to Enlightenment that can be achieved by a Pure Land practitioner: a Pure Land Buddhist is disciplined to recite the Buddha’s name to achieve the state of concentration of the mind that is still and calm enough to move on to the Wisdom of Buddhas. Fourth, he defined all possible ways to gain Enlightenment that are cultivated in East Asia.

Master Thích Thiên Tâm viewed the recitation in Pure Land as an alternative to the monastic asceticism of the Theravada School, yoga in the Tantric School, and intensive meditation in the Thiền School.¹¹⁴ In Thích Thiên Tâm’s view, “although the Buddha’s teachings are classified under different headings such as the Door of Emptiness [Zen, etc.], the Door of Existence [Pure Land, etc.], the “Open” Teaching, the “Secret

114 Ibid, Pure Land Buddhism, op. cit, p. xiii.

[Tantric, etc.] Teaching, they all lean forward, rely on and clarify one another.”¹¹⁵

In regard to the recitation method, Thích Thiện Tâm mentions four approaches to this technique: (1) Real Mark [Self-Nature] Buddha Recitation, (2) Contemplation by Thought Recitation, (3) Contemplation of an Image Recitation, and (4) Oral Recitation.¹¹⁶

In his account of the development of Vietnamese Buddhism, he claimed that in Vietnam from the 7th to the 13th centuries Buddhism was synonymous with Thiền (Zen). Almost all monks and nuns were followers of the Thiền School. Three kings abdicated to become Thiền monks. Since the 13th century, the Pure Land School has become as popular as Thiền (Zen) Buddhism. In his view now, Pure Land is the most popular school throughout East Asia. At the same time, Thích Thiện Tâm never ceased to say that a human being can practice any method to be enlightened. His remarkable words are:

“I sincerely call upon you all, even though you may practice a different method, to make the Pure Land your goal. However, if you have reached the stage where a white plum blossom is no different from a yellow chrysanthemum, this writer will gladly rejoice in your attainment!”¹¹⁷

115 Ibid, p. xvii.

116 Thích Thiện Tâm, *Buddhism of Wisdom & Faith*, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taiwa, 1994, pp.116-119

117 Thích Thiện Tâm, *The Bodhi Mind*, Retrieved: 29/08/08, from <http://www.purifymind.com/BodhiMindTam.htm>

He criticized cultivators for “shallow wisdom.”¹¹⁸ He emphasized persistent following of the path that leads to the enlightened mind. In his writing, Thích Thiện Tâm developed Pure Land teachings by integrating them into the current context.

Master Thích Huyền Vi is one of the few Vietnamese Buddhists mentioned in “The Seeker’s Glossary of Buddhism,” (1998).¹¹⁹ Most Venerable Thích Huyền Vi was born in 1926 at Ninh-Thuận in Southern Vietnam. His parents were pious Buddhists. As early as at the age of nine he decided to become a monk and was ordained at the local Buddhist temple. At 12, he studied the Chinese Tripitaka. At 14, he received his novice ordination. At 18, he started teaching. At 20, he received the higher bhiksu Ordination. Then he studied Buddhism in Saigon. He combined learning with teaching at a secondary school. Due to his efforts he became a Buddhist Chinese scholar who specialized in the Abhidharma-Kosabhasya and Vietnamese literature. He also had numerous scientific interests. In 1961 he enrolled in the Nalanda Institute for post-graduate studies in India from which he obtained his Ph.D. in 1971. He continued his teaching career at Nalanda Institute and Saigon State University. However, in 1975 he had to go abroad. In 1977 he was chosen by the World Fellowship of Buddhists Regional Center in France to become its the director. He converted the

118 Shiva Vasi, 2005, ‘Profile and contribution of Buddhists in Victoria’, URL: <http://www.bcvic.org.au/pdf>

119 The Seeker’s Glossary of Buddhism, 1998, URL: <http://www.buddhanet>, pp.579-580.

Monastere Bouddhique Linh Son into a well known Buddhist school that, among other activities, reprinted in Vietnamese the texts from Tripitaka.

Most Venerable Thích Quảng Đức is considered a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being whose self-immolation act has proved that “human beings are capable of incredible actions when they practice mindfulness.”¹²⁰ Born in 1897, he started living with a Buddhist community at the age of seven. He was ordained as a full Buddhist monk, Bhikkhu, at the age of 20. In 1932, he started his Buddhist teaching at Ninh Hòa. For several years he practiced extreme ascetic purification, and participated in rebuilding twenty pagodas prior to 1943. His last post was Director of Rituals for the United Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation. On June 11, 1963, this monk from the Linh-Mụ Pagoda in Huế self-immolated himself at a busy intersection in downtown Saigon in the traditional lotus position. “Amidst the devouring flames his body remained fixed in meditation.”¹²¹ He had explained his motivations to the Buddhist community in his last letter known as the “Letter of Heart Blood.” His self-immolation act is justified by Chinese Buddhist texts of the first millennium of our

120 Interview with Thích Thiện Minh, 02/06/2005, Retrieved: 28/08/08, from <http://www.queme.net/eng/print.php?numb=316>

121 Dwyer, J., *Western encounter with Buddhism: the burning monk*, Retrieved: 29/08/08, from <http://www.quangduc.com/BoTatQuangDuc/15burnt.html>

era. His act was a protest against numerous violations of religious freedoms in Vietnam.¹²²

In Vietnam, those Buddhist teachers whose choice was to stay with their followers, had to live in isolation, deprived of communication with their disciples. Thích Huyền Quang was one of the most respected Vietnamese Buddhist teachers, with a number of works on Buddhism and Oriental philosophy to his credit. In his words, “I have lived without a home; will die without a grave. I walk without a path and am imprisoned without a crime.” He never compromised his beliefs and chose the road of resistance to religious oppression rather than to serve the regime. “He must have lost count of the years he spent in and out of house arrest.”¹²³ He will be remembered as the Buddhist symbol of a fighter for human rights and religious freedom.

The prominent Buddhist teacher Thích Huyền Quang devoted his life to social activism as inherent in his Buddhist teachings. Master Thích Huyền Quang was born in Bình Định province, in 1920 with Lê Đình Nhàn as his secular name. At the age of 12, he became a monk. In 1945, he was vice-president of the Buddhist

122 Shecter, J., Ven Quảng Đức, the first Vietnamese monk to self-immolate, Retrieved: 29/08/08, from <http://www.quangduc.com/BồTátQuảnĐức/16lotus.html>; ⁸⁶⁸Hicks, R., Self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc, Retrieved: 29/08/08, from <http://www.geocities.com/suthatcsvn/hmrights/redlife/relife2.html>

123 Buncombe, A, July 12, 2008, ‘Thích Huyền Quang, Independent, Retrieved: 24/08/08, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/thich-huyen-quang-dissident-buddhist-leader-865843.html>

Movement for National Salvation in Interzone 5. In 1951, he was arrested and imprisoned for four years in Quảng Ngãi for his reluctance to submit his religious activities to government control. In 1957 he was the director of Phật Học Viện Hải Đức Institution, Nha Trang. In 1958 he created Nguyên Thiều Monastery in Bình Định. He was vice president of Buddhist Congregation of Central Vietnam and president of Buddhist Congregation of Thừa Thiên, Huế, Bình Định. He spent many years teaching. When he had to stop teaching because of his house arrest, he taught many Buddhists by his own example.

In 1963, he participated in the Buddhist struggle calling for the abrogation of Colonial Decree No. 10. In line with that decree, only Roman Catholicism was recognized as a church, while Buddhism was considered an association. Master Thích Huyền Quang was arrested again for several months in 1963. At a Congress held from December 31, 1963 to January 4, 1964, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam regained its legitimate status. As a church, it united two principle Buddhist traditions: Mahayana and Theravada. Master Thích Huyền Quang was appointed secretary-general of the executive committee. In the 1970s, he represented the Buddhist peace movement at several international conferences. In 1974, he was appointed vice-president of the UBCV's Executive Institute Viện Hóa Đạo.

Since 1975, he has faced oppression, imprisonment and house arrest. In 1978, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize together with Most Venerable

Thích Quảng Độ. Subsequently, Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience, and United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in Geneva declared him a victim of arbitrary detention by the communist regime. In 1982, Master Thích Huyền Quang was arrested and sent into internal exile at the Quang Phước pagoda in Quảng Ngãi Province. In 1993, he issued a twelve-point “*Buddhist Proposal for Democracy and Human Rights*.” His proposal defined the Buddhist vision of an open society with religious freedom and church independence. He stressed the role of Buddhism in the process of democratic changes.

In his message to Vietnamese Buddhists on the 2547th Anniversary of the Vesak on May 15, 2003, Supreme Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang called for freedom from fear, addressing the members of the UBCV. He wrote: “But how can we fulfill Buddha’s teachings of salvation if we are crushed by innumerable obstacles, oppressed and intimidated?” He explained his point: “Liberating humankind from fear means realizing to the very full the spirit of Absolute Knowledge, which has deeply impregnated Vietnamese Buddhism over the past 2,000 years.” He stated that fearlessness, as understood in Buddhist offerings, is aimed at liberating humankind. He emphasized the central role of Absolute Knowledge, for “the world acknowledges that the key to solving social injustice, inequality, conflicts, and hatred is Absolute Knowledge.”¹²⁴

124 *Freedom from fear*: Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang issues Vesak message to Buddhists in Vietnam, 13/05/2003, IBIB, Retrieved: 24/08/08, from http://coranet.radicalparty.org/pressreview/print_

In his last message to the Buddhist community, in May 2008, Supreme Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang stated that Buddhism confronts society's challenges and restores peace to societies where repressive rules dominate. He places current Vietnamese Buddhism into historical context by pointing out that the unifying efforts of the Đinh, Lê, Lý, and Trần dynasties, under Thiền masters, preserved the Buddhist spirit of the Vietnamese nation. In his teachings, and by his own example, he showed that Buddha's teachings are the path to liberation. A statement that followed the death of Supreme Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang in July 2008 said, "For his uncompromising determination to stand firm, he paid a high price, spending over half his life in prison, internal exile or under house arrest under a succession of political regimes."¹²⁵ Supreme Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang was a famous Buddhist teacher. He was a director of Phật Học Viện Trung Phần Nha Trang and also taught in some other institutes in Vietnam.

His successor Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ, the new Supreme Patriarch of the UBCV, like Supreme Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang, had to live in internal exile for issuing an "Appeal for Democracy in Vietnam

right.php?func=detail&par=5672

125 Võ Văn Ái, 16/07/08, 'The life and times of Thích Huyền Quang', The Wall Street Journal, Retrieved 22/08/08 from http://www.queme.net/eng/news_detail.php?numb=1072; Document-Vietnam: Supreme Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang, a life committed to human rights, July 10, 2008, from <http://www.amnesty.org/lea/library/aset/ASA41/102/2008/ea/c5fc5443-4e93>

on behalf of the UBCV, proposing a nonviolent transition plan for democratic change.”¹²⁶

Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ, whose secular name was Đặng Phúc Tuệ, is known for forging links of solidarity between northern and southern Vietnamese dissidents. He is an eminent scholar in Buddhism and Oriental philosophy. He published a three-volume edition of Buddhist legends, translated the *Đại Phương Tiện Phật Báo Ân* in seven volumes, compiled a six-volume, 8,000 page *Great Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*, and prison poems among other writings.

Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ was born in Thái Bình province, northern Vietnam, in 1928. He became a monk at the age of 14. He has struggled against violence, discrimination, cruelty, fanaticism and intolerance. His Buddhist practice focuses on non-violence, toleration, and compassion.

From 1951 to 1957, The Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ studied at universities in Sri Lanka and India. In the 1960s and 1970s, he was Professor of Oriental Philosophy and Buddhist Studies at Vạn Hạnh Buddhist University in Saigon and the Hòa-Hảo Buddhist Universtiy in Cần Thơ. He also taught Buddhism at the Pontifical College Pius X in Đà Lạt, and Huệ Nghiêm Buddhist Institution.

In 1966, he went to Japan for a lung operation.

126 Most Venerable Thích Huyền Quang, Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, September 2002, Retrieved: 24/08/08, from http://servizi.radicalparty.org/documents/conference_southeast_asia/index.php?func=detail&par=177

He spent two years studying in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Burma before coming back to Vietnam. In 1964, Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ was appointed the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam spokesman and inspector. In 1974, he became secretary-general of the Institute for the Dissemination of the Dharma. However, in 1975 UBCV fell victim to political repressions and he was detained in Phan Đăng Lưu Prison for 20 months. In 1978, together with Most Venerable Thích Huyền Quang, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

When R. Topmiller met Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ in 1999, he described him in the following way: “He is a warm, friendly, articulate person who brings kindness and commitment to his principles. He welcomed me with a firm handshake and seemed genuinely happy to meet me. He told me that he became a monk because he loves Buddhism and wanted to help his people, and, since Buddhism teaches love, it makes him very happy.”¹²⁷ In 1999, Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ was appointed president of the UBCV’s Institute for the Dissemination of the Dharma.

In 2006, Thích Quảng Độ was awarded the “Thorolf Rafto Memorial Prize” from the Rafto Foundation in Norway. Also in 2006, he was awarded the “Democracy Courage Tribute” by the World Movement for Democracy. In 2008, Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by 60 members

127 Topmiller, R., *Vietnamese Buddhism in the 1990s*, Cross Currents, 2000, p.232.

of the European Parliament and “moreover, Thích Quảng Độ is nominated for the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. Over a hundred international personalities, including members of the US Congress, the European Parliament, Senators and MPs from Italy, Great Britain, France, as well as University professors and former ministers from Albania, Croatia, Kosovo etc, sent nomination letters to the Nobel Institute in Norway.”¹²⁸ He is adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.

The Most Venerable Thích Quảng Độ teaches that Buddha’s teachings are the path that will liberate humankind and bring about harmony to human existence. He translated the “Đại Phương Tiện Phật Báo Ân” Sùtra, which was published in seven volumes. He also published a trilogy on the essence of Buddhist thought including Nguyên Thủy Phật Giáo Tư Tưởng Luận (The Essence of Primitive Buddhist Thought), Tiểu Thừa Phật Giáo Tư Tưởng Luận (The Essence of Hinaya Thought), and Đại Thừa Phật Giáo Tư Tưởng Luận (The Essence of Mahayana Thought). He compiled “Great Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology.” a six-volume, 8,000-page encyclopedia of contemporary Buddhist terms that contains 22,608 entries. The manuscript was published outside of his country since Thích Quảng Độ’s religious works are banned in Vietnam. The importance of this work cannot be overstated. It concentrates on the achievements of Buddhist teachings and is a fruitful effort in providing a systematic presentation of

128 Quê Mẹ Action for Demoracy in Vietnam online www.queme-ask-comSearch

Buddhist teachings. In his writings, Thích Quảng Độ resorts to the fundamentals of Buddhism, elucidating them from the perspective of his own epoch. Like other Vietnamese Buddhist teachers, Thích Quảng Độ is famous for Buddhist poetry. He is the author of more than 400 poems in which he expressed his meditation experiences and emotional feelings.

Today, the task of Thích Quảng Độ, in line with the will of the late Fourth Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam Thích Huyền Quang, is the unification of Buddhist schools and sects in Vietnam, as it was during the reign of the Đinh dynasty. Thích Quảng Độ works to advance the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition of non-violence, tolerance, compassion, and a passion for spiritual truth. He teaches the nature of the transcendental Buddha, the formless body of Dharma that surpasses all forms and rites. He focuses on liberation as the specific feature of Vietnamese Buddhism in its practical search for goodness. In his “Keeper of the Flame” (2006) Thích Quảng Độ wrote:

“From the very outset, Vietnamese Buddhism developed a unique tradition of social engagement, and throughout our history, Buddhists have always played an active role in the nation’s social, political and cultural life. But at all times, Buddhism has remained independent of political powers, supporting the State in times of need, checking its powers when it became too authoritarian, offering a freedom outside Confucianist conventions.”¹²⁹

129 Thích Quảng Độ, Keeper of the Flame, 2006, p.17.

The Overseas United Buddhist Church of Vietnam represents the two million people in the Vietnamese Buddhist Diaspora. Its aim is to spread the Buddha's teachings throughout the world in order to liberate humankind from ignorance and oppression. The church emphasizes harmonious existence among people, and teaches how to bring Enlightenment to people in line with the Mahayana tradition. It follows in the footsteps of the Buddhist teachers of the Lê, Lý, and Trần dynasties who showed the Path to humane liberation and were involved in social activism. The Overseas United Buddhist Church of Vietnam sows the seeds of Vietnamese Buddhism and spreads Buddha's teachings of wisdom and compassion. For example, the Buddhism of the BCA in America is a stream of Pure Land doctrine transferred from Vietnam.¹³⁰

In the course of its development, from its rise to its present stage, Vietnamese Buddhism has developed a form of Thiền Buddhism that incorporates elements of both Pure Land and Hinayana.¹³¹ Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have developed an elegant style of writing, typical of Thiền Buddhism in general. They reflect on their meditation practices in poetry that is the embodiment of their teachings and is full of beauty that can be felt, even in the translations from Vietnamese to English. Vietnamese Buddhist teachers emphasize the union of self power and other-power. By this they continue the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha. Vietnamese Buddhist

130 Seager, 1999, op. cit., p.16.

131 Boeree, 2003, The History of Buddhism, np.

teachers view themselves as helpers to those who seek Enlightenment. They help others reach the enlightened state, having themselves acquired through meditation practices wisdom and compassion. Thiên-Ân expressed the essence of Buddhist teaching in his book on Thiên Buddhism (1975) in the following words:

“When a person becomes a Buddhist, this means that he is beginning to practice the way of wisdom, compassion, and virtue, so by the operation of the law of cause and effect, in the perfect world created by the compassion of Amita Buddha, a lotus flower, the symbol of inner spiritual awakening, awaits his rebirth into the realm of spiritual perfection.”¹³²

Thus, present-day Vietnamese Buddhism may be viewed as continuity of Vietnamese Buddhist teachings that concentrate on the Dharma and meditation practices leading to enlightened wisdom and compassion. Vietnamese Buddhist teachers emphasize the practical needs of people in their spiritual awakening. Although social activism is a remarkable feature of present-day Vietnamese Buddhism, it is a non-violent protest against human suffering and the limitations placed on human freedom. Vietnamese Buddhist teachers demonstrate, by their own examples, an enlightened state that motivates people to follow them on the same path to liberation.

8.9. Conclusion

Over the many centuries of the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, there have been many educators who taught

132 Thien-An, Zen Buddhism, op.cit., Chapter 12.

meditation and other Buddhist practices, established institutions of learning, produced learned treatises and contributed to the development of a Vietnamese tradition of Buddhist education. Information on most of them is meager and has to be extracted from a variety of sources. Their efforts have resulted in integrating, into what could be called specifically Vietnamese Buddhism, a rich diversity of teachings and practices which came from India and China. These include the Recitation of Amitabha Buddha in the Pure Land School, the monastic ascetism in the Theravada school, intensive meditation practices in the Thiền school, and yoga practices in the Tantric school. Vietnamese Buddhists cultivate Enlightenment to which purity of mind and practice lead. Thousands of Buddhist monks, among them teachers, masters, Venerables and Patriarchs, all had to step on the path to the Way in their search of the wisdom of Buddhas. From their meditation, they learned and taught the harmony of the pure mind and left verses, prose, and translations to share their insights with new generations of Vietnamese Buddhists.

Vietnamese Buddhism has written its own history in the development of Buddhist schools. Vietnamese Buddhist teachers are enlightened with heightened awareness of the mind and spiritual freedom, combined with social activism. They have developed an adaptive method that is ethical, free of dogmas, and contains a philosophy of observing consciousness instead of theorizing about it. Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have enriched Buddhism with practical methods of becoming

enlightened. Their own way of life and good works are demonstrations of what Buddhism, as a personal choice and persistent search of spiritual freedom, can accomplish. Vietnamese Buddhism is highly ethical and moral. It teaches how to live here, on earth, in harmony with nature, cosmic energies, and all human beings.

To illustrate the manner in which the Vietnamese Buddhist educators made their contribution to the development of Buddhist education, I have highlighted the lives and careers of a number of exceptional Vietnamese teachers, such as: Grand Master Vạn Hạnh as one of the representatives of the Golden Age in Vietnamese Buddhism; Trần Thái Tông as the first king who became a Buddhist monk; the three patriarchs of Trúc Lâm sect; Most Venerables Thích Quảng Đức; Thích Tịnh Khiết; Thích Đôn Hậu; Thích Huyền Quang; Thích Thiện Minh; Thích Đức Nhuận; Thích Thiện Hoa; Thích Quảng Độ; and Thích Kế Châu, and etc. In my view, these Buddhist teachers represent the qualities of Vietnamese Buddhism that make it unique and thus different from geographically neighboring Buddhist schools. All of these Vietnamese teachers can be labeled as humanists and patriots of their country. They have shown interest in its past, concern for its present, and hope for its future. They are enlightened Buddhists whose lives are examples of great achievements, of personal strength on the Way to Wisdom, of modesty and heroism in defending Buddhist principles. They have contributed, or like Thích Quảng Độ, are still contributing to the development of Vietnam as the nation

that cultivates the awareness of mind and achieves harmony.

In the 20th century, Vietnamese Buddhist educators have become active fighters for religious freedom, supporting their own people, sharing the fate of the country, and raising their voices against any injustice and violation of human rights. They reinforce the main principles of Vietnamese Buddhism – humanism, tolerance, respect, compassion, and awareness of the mind. Many of their writings remain untranslated and, hence, unavailable to many scholars involved in the current research of Buddhism. “Decadent” Buddhist texts written by Vietnamese Buddhist teachers opposed to the ruling circles were banned. However, these texts were replaced by hand-written copies to insure that the villagers would be familiar with these teachings.

In the 21st century Vietnamese Buddhism is spreading its teachings globally, creating a two million-strong Vietnamese Buddhist Diaspora in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Buddhist teachers show the way to harmonious existence, which is important in view of the worldwide exaltation of intolerance. Vietnamese Buddhism advances the humanistic and universal values that are attractive to modern humankind. In its development, Vietnamese Buddhism has demonstrated a unique continuity and dedication to the Mahayana tradition, and to the principles that cultivate and advance the human mind on the path to wisdom and compassion.

It may also be noted that with the exception of the current Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist

Church of Vietnam, none of the living educators, teachers or scholars are dealt with in this chapter. There are many people who are currently contributing to the development of Buddhist education, nationally and abroad, who are not mentioned. But this is not a comment or criticism of their work.

Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have always been close to the real world. They have never been separated from the needs of common people. They have tirelessly taught how to overcome difficulties and sufferings by resorting to meditation practices. They have shown that Buddha's teachings involve dynamic change that all people undergo in their development. This remarkable continuity is the specific feature of Vietnamese Buddhist teachings; the development of the path to liberation and Enlightenment.

Chapter Nine

CONCLUSIONS

A. Vietnamese Buddhism

9.1.1. Specificity of Vietnamese Buddhism

The present research has demonstrated that Vietnamese Buddhism has had a remarkable history during which it has strengthened its national character, and has interacted with diverse religions and philosophical groups without losing its specificity. It has had a tremendous impact on every aspect of the historical, socio-cultural and educational development of the country. On the basis of the present research, the following generalizations could be made on the form and development of Vietnamese Buddhism:

- 1- Vietnamese Buddhism is the result of the combination of Thiên, Pure Land and Mantra schools but also identifies itself with Vietnamese culture.
- 2- Within the framework of the dominant Mahayana tradition, Vietnam gave birth to several Buddhist schools and sects with renowned lineages, which, as Ngô Ân realized as early as the 11th century, have much in common.

- 3- Vietnamese Buddhism is deeply rooted in Vietnamese culture and played an outstanding role in unifying the country during the Golden Age period when Lý Thái Tổ (1010-1028), Lý Thánh Tông, Lý Anh Tông, Lý Cao Tông, Trần Thái Tông, and Trần Nhân Tông, among other Vietnamese kings, resigned to devote themselves completely to Buddhism.
- 4- Vietnamese Buddhism has developed a distinct system of Buddhist education that considered diversity as a positive factor, emphasized the domain of attitude-skilled content, and enriched the methods of instruction by gradual method and the body-mindfulness method.
- 5- Present-day Vietnamese Buddhism has grown beyond the national borders of Vietnam with members of the Vietnamese Buddhist Diaspora increasing their influences globally.
- 6- Vietnamese Buddhist education is highly ethical and moral, aimed at teaching the individual about the potentiality of awakening pioneered by Vạn Hạnh.
- 7- Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have developed a devotional form of Buddhism that has a heightened awareness of seeing constantly in order to reach the enlightened state of mind.

Vietnamese Buddhism is a system of beliefs, a way of life, and a philosophy of the Middle Way – all in one.

9.1.2. History of Vietnamese Buddhism: Indian-Buddhist Links

From its earliest history, Vietnamese Buddhism has developed peculiarities that make it distinct from other Buddhist teachings developed in the neighboring countries:

First, the history of Vietnamese Buddhism is rich in schools and sects – all of them harmoniously integrated into Vietnamese cultural life. In the course of its development Vietnamese Buddhism has emerged as a phenomenon whose educational achievements are the accomplishment of many educators, teachers, authors and scholars and their treatises, even though some primary sources are lost and many Vietnamese texts need translation and scrutiny.

Second, Vietnam has always been the land where trade routes met, where political and economic interests of neighboring countries gave rise to conflicts, and where migratory processes resulted in constant movement of the population. Under these conditions, Vietnam never lost its identity as a culturally and religiously diverse nation that is grounded in the Eastern cosmology of Five Elements and Five Regions.

Third, Vietnamese Buddhism has always been inherent in social activity. It educated both monks and laity as to how to live meaningful lives full of spirituality in a continuum of Buddhist teachings and meditation practices.

The present research reinforces the assumption that Buddhism was originally brought to Vietnam by missionaries from India, whether during the time of Asoka (namely, Sona and Uttara sent to Suvarnabhūmi), from the days when an Indian kingdom flourished in Champa, or from those who took the Maritime Silk Route and proceeded via Vietnam to China. The rise of Vietnamese Buddhism was favored by Vietnam's geographical position at the crossroads of the eastward expansion of Indian culture and the southward expansion of Chinese culture. In the most ancient civilization of Southeast Asia, whose traces are found as early as the Đông Sơn culture of the Bronze Age, the Vietnamese used to worship the Hindu trinity of Brahma the Creator, Visnu the Nourisher, and Siva the Destroyer. Hence, before the early periods of Chinese dominance the Vietnamese people had led a fervent religious life, in which Buddhism had already been rooted without confronting the ancient worship of ancestral souls and natural spirits.

Indian-Buddhist elements are among the earliest influential layers in the history of Vietnamese Buddhism. At that time of Buddhism's introduction to Vietnam the local people practiced paganism. Yet, the Buddha's teachings found responses in their hearts. Buddhism introduced teachings that were centered on a human being, not a man-made idol, who through his own education and training showed the others the middle way. The Buddha's teachings must have gained popularity due to their heightened spirituality and goal-

oriented meaningfulness that was highly rewarding. Their goal, an enlightened state of body and mind, was meaningful and desirable.

Buddhism developed as a dynamic part of the world outlook on reaching the Enlightenment through the Middle Way. Having been transmitted to Vietnam by Indian Buddhist missionaries, the teachings of Buddhism were in a continuum, not alien, to traditional worshipping practices cultivated in the Vietnamese territory. Vietnamese Buddhism has earlier roots than Chinese Buddhism.

9.1.3. Influence of Chinese Buddhism

The present research suggests that Vietnamese Buddhism grew while having peaceful contacts with local religious practices. Before becoming the meeting point of Buddhist thought and Confucian tradition, Vietnam, the old land of Giao Châu, had already developed an amalgam of ancient religious practices combined with Buddhist teachings, to which a blend Confucian tradition, a Chinese influence, was later added.

As a result, in the course of time the Indian-Buddhist links in Vietnam weakened, although they can still be traced in Vietnamese Buddhist art, in the statues of the Buddha and in stupas. Vietnamese Buddhism was enriched by many influences, the surviving and historically traceable ones integrated into the Vietnamese ancient traditions of worship. But it was Vietnamese Buddhism that helped make Vietnam a nation under the

Đinh, Lê, Lý, and Trần dynasties that ruled from the 10th to the 15th centuries. At that time Vietnamese Buddhism and the nation may be viewed as one.

However, in its consolidating efforts Vietnamese Buddhism never sought dominance by persecuting other religious views. Vietnamese Buddhism developed in a diverse cultural context, in tolerance to other systems of belief like Hinduism, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, and Tam Giáo (三教). It was mainly due to the heterogeneity of the Vietnamese population, which had various cultural backgrounds. At the same time, Vietnamese Buddhism within itself cultivated a diversity of schools and sects. The Mahayana tradition of Buddhism peacefully coexisted with the Theravada tradition that was brought from the southern territory.

A survey of Vietnam's history points to several waves of invasions and foreign occupations aimed at the control of its strategic trade routes. However, Vietnamese cultural identity survived despite many centuries of foreign dominance.

For over a millennium, Vietnam was under Chinese rulers who thrust on Vietnamese Chinese idiographic writing and philosophical thinking of Confucianism and Daoism. Despite these influences whose overwhelming dominance is now highly disputed and refuted, never did Vietnamese culture lose its heightened awareness of spirituality, which is inherited from ancient religious beliefs cultivated in that territory. Regardless of dramatic invasions and bloody wars that ruined Vietnamese

Buddhist writings and ravaged pagodas, Vietnamese Buddhism revived and continued functioning as the fundamental inspiration for learning and training which preserved Vietnamese culture.

9.1.4. Consolidation of Thiền (Zen) and Pure Land Buddhism in Vietnam

The expansion of Buddhism and its integration into Vietnamese cultural beliefs and attitudes was a long process that lasted for not less than half a millennium. Due to the continuous waves of Chinese occupation, the early history of Vietnamese Buddhism, before the period of consolidation in the 6th and 13th centuries, is shared with Chinese Buddhism. In particular, two eminent Buddhist teachers, Khương Tăng Hội (Kang Senghui) and Mậu Tử (Mouzi), are revered by both Vietnamese and Chinese Buddhists.

Yet, no Sinicization could uproot Vietnamese cultural heritage. On the contrary, Vietnamese culture fruitfully combined Indian-Buddhist tradition with Chinese secular culture. Buddhism denies the world in order to reach liberation, while Confucianism is in search of a practical way of life. Buddhism stresses knowledge, while Confucianism stresses action. The practical wisdom of Confucianism turned Vietnamese Buddhism to meditation practices of practical value instead of theorizing the Buddhist doctrine. Syncretism is fundamental to Vietnamese Buddhism. At the turn of the first millennium Vietnam was influenced by the Chinese Tripitaka. But in the course of time the

distinction between Thiền (Zen – 禪) and Pure Land Buddhism (Tịnh Độ Tông – 淨土宗) has disappeared.

Mahāyāna Buddhism manifests the threefold nature of the Buddha and advances the doctrine of the emptiness of all things. This tradition has historically two forms in Vietnamese Buddhism, Thiền (Zen) and Pure Land Buddhism. The Thiền School of Buddhism is based on the Buddha's Mind Seal and that was introduced by the Patriarch Bodhidharma. Vietnamese Thiền, Chinese Chan, and Japanese Zen represent the Dhyana school of Mahayana that combines Mahayana and each nation's culture. The Pure Land school of Mahayana, established in China in the 4th century by Master Huiyuan (Huệ Viễn – 慧遠 – 334 CE – 416CE), meditates on the name of Amitabha Buddha. Traditional Pure Land teachings emphasize faith, vows, and Buddha recitation as prerequisites for rebirth in the Pure Mind. The Dhammapada Sūtra teaches not to commit evil acts, commit only good acts, and keep to the Pure Mind. It is in line with Thiền Buddhism that shares the same values. Both Thiền and Pure Land Buddhism spread into Vietnam in the 6th century under Chinese rule.

It may be assumed that the Chinese impact on Vietnamese Buddhism was less influential than Chinese scholars have claimed. It was one of the influences, among others, with ancestor worships no less important than others. If it were different, Vietnamese Buddhist texts would not have been transported beyond Vietnam during the disastrous Chinese invasion in 1407-1427 to be destroyed and lost from Buddhist history.

At the same time, Chinese influences prevented Buddhism from becoming a centralized religion in Vietnam. But this lack of centralization had its own advantages. Vietnamese Buddhism was dynamic in its development, open to new influences, never dogmatic, never limiting schools and sects. The main trend was to unify diverse schools within Buddhism beyond territorial borderlines. At the same time it is worth mentioning that it was the Confucian influence that emphasized the role of education in human life, but was not including Buddhist education.

What is being discovered is that Vietnamese Buddhism has an independent history, enriched by foreign influences but characterized by its own recognizable identity. The history of Vietnamese Buddhism has had a great impact on the history of Buddhism in general and the Buddhist educational system in particular.

B. Vietnamese Buddhist Education

9.2.1. What an Examination of the Vietnamese Buddhist Education Reveals

Our specific purpose in the research leading to this dissertation has been to explore the beginning and the development of Vietnamese Buddhist education, to the extent possible with the currently available sources of data and information. The country has gone through so many decades of political upheaval and disorganization that facilities for research, which usually exist in a Buddhist country in Asia, are not readily available in

Vietnam. The most serious impediment is the prevailing political restrictions and policies affecting religion, in general, and communication and interaction among national and international scholars, in particular.

In spite of these drawbacks, a systemic examination of Vietnamese Buddhist education could be conducted:

- to integrate the rise and development of Vietnamese Buddhist education into the country's history;
- to elucidate links between the different Buddhist schools and sects through the concept of Vietnamese Buddhist syncretism;
- to reconstruct a historical account of Vietnamese Buddhist centers of learning;
- to explain the fundamental elements of content, approaches, methods and learning materials, adopted and utilized by Vietnamese Buddhist educators;
- to describe chronologically how Vietnamese Buddhism established principles of Buddhist education that were continuously developed by outstanding Vietnamese Buddhist educators and teachers.

The nature of Vietnamese Buddhist education is explained on the basis of available primary and secondary sources. Theoretical assumptions based on current literature have been validated in two ways through (1) the personal experience of the researcher and his cohorts and (2) a case study of Vietnamese

Buddhist monks who responded to a questionnaire about Vietnamese Buddhist education from their own experiences. Thus the present research has established the three-pronged hypothesis that was chosen for examination: namely,

- 1- In spite of the current situation, adequate data can be gathered from available resources, textual and oral, to reconstruct the history of Buddhism in Vietnam;
- 2- Such data and the recording of the experiences of educated monastics could serve to understand the main features and challenges of Vietnamese Buddhist education; and
- 3- A history of Buddhist education thus reconstructed could be the basis for further examination of issues on which disagreements exist among scholars.

What the study has further indicated is that Vietnamese Buddhism and its educational system have their own history which is not only understudied but also needs revision in the light of new findings.

9.2.2. Beginnings of Vietnamese Buddhist Education

The emergence of new scholarly works on Vietnamese Buddhism, as evident from the extensive printed and electronic resources listed in the bibliography, indicates an increasing interest in Vietnamese Buddhist education, which has not been adequately studied earlier. Particularly important are

those studies that revise existing conclusions on the early stages of Vietnamese Buddhism development. The main difficulty most scholars have to face is the use of Chinese instead of the Vietnamese vernacular in the early Buddhist writings of Vietnamese authors.¹

Our effort concentrated on presenting the history of Vietnamese Buddhist education as completely as possible with special attention paid to overarching goals and objectives, the intellectual contribution of thousands of Vietnamese Buddhist teachers known by name and anonymous, the institutional infrastructure, curriculum, learning materials, instructional methodology, and the impact on the socio-cultural development of the nation. The present research has succeeded in gathering and presenting in a concise and easily accessible manner a vast amount of information on each of these topics. The case study of Vietnamese Buddhist monks objectifies our findings concerning the longstanding tradition of Vietnamese Buddhist education.

9.2.3. Pagoda as the Center of Vietnamese Buddhist Education

Vietnamese Buddhism focused on pagodas as centers of learning and meditation practices. They educated and trained Vietnamese people how to live in harmony, not to be torn by opposites, and never to step off the path leading to enlightened knowledge and wisdom. It cultivated the Buddhist mind, pure and sensitive in its reflections on simple things that serve as

1 Hùng Vương, chữ “A Đầu” or “Việt Nam Cổ tự”

the human environment and are often lost in the hustle and bustle of humdrum lives. Vietnamese Buddhist education assigned priority to the cultivation of the mind through continuous meditation practices, and through lives that seek freedom from worldly conflicts. Vietnamese Buddhist education has been preserved in its purest form: even in a dharma talk in a small temple guiding meditation to reach an enlightened state.

A Vietnamese Buddhist monastery functions as the center of community life. Pagodas have libraries where printed books and manuscripts are respectfully preserved. One of the first educational Buddhist centers in Vietnam was Luy-Lâu whose Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary had a renowned reputation in the 4th-13th centuries. Dâu Pagoda, founded in the 3rd century, was an educational center later famous for its Thiền masters' teachings. The Trần Quốc Pagoda was the home for Thiền Masters Vân Phong, Khuông Việt, Thảo Đường, Thông Biện, Viên Học, and Tịnh Không. It is the birthplace of the Thảo Đường Thiền School founded by Quốc Sư. The first Buddhist university in Vietnam, Quốc Tử Giám, was founded in 1076 and existed for seven centuries. Quán Sứ pagoda of the 15th century in Hà Nội city became the headquarters of the Buddhist Association of Northern Vietnam in 1934. Thập Tháp pagoda, founded in 1665, contributed to the education of monks in central Vietnam. Ấn Quang pagoda is the headquarters of the South Vietnam School of Buddhist Studies, the office of the Dharma Propagation Institute, and houses other Buddhist schools.

During the long years under Chinese dominance, the Buddhist temples provided the Vietnamese people with a high quality education in the vernacular. The pagoda school system was still in existence, parallel to the state school system. In the 1930s Vietnamese Buddhist societies opened new schools at all levels, from elementary schools to universities. The Most Venerables Thiện-Luật, Bửu-Chơn, Kim-Quang, Giới-Nghiêm, Tối-Thắng, Giác-Quang, Huệ-Nghiêm, and Hộ-Tông taught the Dharma in Vietnamese.

The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam put forth untiring efforts to expand the Vietnamese educational network, opening schools and Buddhist studies institutes, building charitable institutions and founding new monasteries. In line with the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, before being ordained, a monk should complete a Buddhist college program, know canonical sūtras, study Buddhist doctrines, possess high personal qualities, and feel an earnest need to become a bhikkhu.

9.2.4. Content of Vietnamese Buddhist Education

The Buddhist method of knowledge is grounded in objective observation of the Four Noble Truths. Most Vietnamese have always belonged to Mahayana Buddhism. They believe that Gautama manifests the fundamental divine wisdom of the universe. Theravada tradition, which is much less popular on Vietnamese soil, denies any divine origins of Gautama. While Mahayana tradition claims that any Buddhist, not just an ordained monk or nun, can be enlightened, Theravada tradition

recognizes Enlightenment as a priority of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns.

The Theravada tradition was much less influential in Vietnam. This Buddhist tradition teaches insight meditation rather than a system of beliefs. Unlike Mahayana, it is strictly confined to the canon of the Tipitaka. But to our study it is of much more interest that the Theravada tradition recognizes the Buddha as the one and only teacher. It is the Buddha himself who teaches how to reach Enlightenment and in that sense he is a role model for all teachers.

Vietnamese Buddhism shares fundamental principles of Buddhist education with other Buddhist schools and sects. The content of Buddhist education is determined by the Buddha's teachings that may be classified into three categories on the basis of targeted educational objectives:

- Cognitive-based content;
- Attitude-based content;
- Skill-based content.

The cognitive, or knowledge-based, content integrates the teacher, the teaching, and the taught in line with Tritatna: the Buddha – the teacher, the Dharma – the Buddha's teachings, and the Sangha – the community living in accordance with the Buddha's teachings.

The awakened and enlightened Buddha had complete insight into all truth (覺了法性). From Ten Perfections (paramitas), teaching and wisdom are directly related

to the Buddha's educational role. They are as important as other perfections such as meditation, patience, and knowledge.

The Buddha pioneered the role of a Buddhist teacher and educator, and directed other Buddhist teachers and educators that would follow in his footsteps. Buddhism defines a person as an entity of five aggregates (skandhas): form, sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. Samsara, or re-becoming of the individual, is a combination of aggregates renewed for each rebirth. The Three Marks are impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and selflessness. Nirvāna is the state of Enlightenment.

The Buddha's teachings contain sacred principles of the Holy Path in the doctrine of Four Noble Truths and the doctrine of Twelve Midanas. Among other fundamental teachings are Six Points of Reverent Harmony, Five Precepts, Six Paramitas, and many others.

The Buddha urged those whom he was teaching to study, practice, cultivate, and develop such fundamental truths as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Kinds of Right Efforts, the Four Means of Accomplishment, the Five Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Sutta Pitaka, the Vinaya Pitaka, and Abhidharma Pitaka are the "three baskets" of the Buddhist canon in the Theravada tradition. Mahayana sutras, alongside with the Buddha's fundamental teachings, emphasized

some new concepts. They reaffirmed the non-existence of the soul. The Mahayana tradition formalized the doctrine of the Threefold Nature of the Buddha.

The attitude-based content of Buddhist education is based on the Buddha's teachings that call for sustained effort, earnestness, temperance, and self-control. The affective aspects of Buddhist education deal with the concept of sila. The Buddha taught that bhikkhus have to take the Dharma and silas as their teachers. The qualities of faith and generosity concern the heart, learning and wisdom concern the intellect, and virtue concerns the heart and intellect combined. Sila develops through the observance of the Ten Precepts. A novice's training begins with the observance of abstinence from harming living beings, taking things not given, sexual intercourse, false speech, intoxicating drinks and drugs, untimely meals, dancing, singing, music, using garlands, perfumes or personal adornment, using high seats, and accepting precious metals. In the Mahayana tradition, a monastic takes upon himself the Bodhisattva vows such as "Sentient beings without number we vow to enlighten," "Vexations without number we vow to eradicate," "Limitless approaches to the Dharma we vow to master," and "The Supreme Enlightenment we vow to achieve." The Bodhisattva vows comprise a code of conduct that leads to Enlightenment developing the peaceful cohabitation of all sentient beings.

The skill-based content of Buddhist education includes three types of skills. First, meditation leads to

self realization, practice and performance of rites and rituals like bowing in the Vietnamese Buddhist worship, mantras, or being a skilled chanter. Second, instructional skills include teaching the Dharma to laity and younger colleagues, public speaking, and counseling techniques. Third, ancillary skills are such Five Sciences as language mastery, craftsmanship, medical knowledge, logic, and knowledge of philosophies and other religions.

These three domains comprise the ultimate goal, or Prajñā, that leads to self-cultivation. Prajñā has three levels: literary prajñā as mastery of Buddhist texts, contemplative prajñā as understanding Buddhist texts, and real mark prajñā as complete knowledge. Self-realization is the ultimate goal of Vietnamese Buddhist education, which is achieved through discipline, concentration, and wisdom. With the role model of the Buddha, body and mind are trained to become spiritually liberated.

9.2.5. Learning Materials of Vietnamese Buddhist Education

At the elementary level Vietnamese Buddhists study Vinaya Pitaka, the Ten Precepts, Twenty-Four Dignities, Eighty-eight Buddhas' repentance ceremony, and the Amitabha Sūtra. At the academic level, the main texts are Shurangama Sutra (meditation on the progress of the Dharma) that frees the mind from delusion, Vijñāptimatratra-trimsika written by Vasubandhu, "Compendium of Sutras" by Nāgārjuna, fundamental sastra of the Dharmalaksana school of philosophy,

Eight Awakening of Great People, Sūtra of Forty-Two Sectors, Four Kinds of Mindfulness Sūtra, the Diamond Sūtra, Maha-Parinirvana Sūtra, Saddharmapundarika Sūtra, the Great Umbrella Jewel Sūtra, the Great Infinite Life Sūtra, Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra, Four Agama Sūtras, the Avatamsaka Sūtra, the Lotus Sūtra and the Tripitaka.

The system of Buddhist education in Vietnam prepares monks to be efficient spiritual leaders in the community. Vietnamese Buddhist education emphasizes the skill-related objectives of education: chanting, meditation, performance of rites and rituals, conduct of worship, funeral procedures, exorcism, and some others. Vietnamese Buddhist monks are inspired by the biographies of famous Buddhist monks that serve as convincing and persuasive examples of complete self-realization.

The traditional curriculum of Vietnamese Buddhist education prepares a teacher and preacher to be highly competent in Buddhist teachings, possesses high moral and ethical qualities, and to be an effective contributor to the Sangha. The affective domain prevails in Vietnamese Buddhist education, which may be considered its specific feature. A Buddhist teacher and preacher is integrated into the culture of the country by studying Vietnamese Buddhist texts created in Vietnamese Buddhist pagodas by outstanding Vietnamese Buddhist teachers. These texts include sūtras, biographies of eminent Buddhist monks, and philosophically rich and varied poetry that elaborate on emptiness, enlightened

wisdom and actual experiences of meditation practices. Unfortunately, many of these texts are still unknown to Western civilization and need translating into European languages. Vietnamese Buddhist culture is still behind closed doors, which are gradually opening, mainly due to the efforts of the Vietnamese Buddhist Diaspora in many countries of the world.

9.2.6. Approaches and Methods of Vietnamese Buddhist Education

A review by present research of the approaches and methods of education noted in Buddhist literature, present research shows that the following 12 practical methods are employed in Vietnam:

- 1- Repetition (Sangayana): memory training through repetitive drills and group recitation;
- 2- Experimental method: the Buddha taught his disciples to question and experiment;
- 3- Narrative explicative method: the Buddha's style of using narratives as a tool for teaching;
- 4- Active mindfulness: the Buddha used every physical action to teach his disciples, namely body language to emphasize the teaching of mindfulness;
- 5- Indirect (subtle) method: the Buddha effectively communicated information indirectly;
- 6- Meiotic (question) method: the truth is discovered by asking a series of questions;

- 7- Investigative method: the right of every learner to ask a question;
- 8- Inductive and deductive method: empirical induction and logical deduction;
- 9- Advance progressively method: learners understand and organize the Dharmas in images, examples, numbers, and the like;
- 10-Regulation method: based on the Vinaya Pitaka rules;
- 11-Prevention (prohibition) method: the four major offences (Parajika) go beyond the usual advising functions of other teachings;
- 12-Silent method: a question may be answered positively, negatively, with a counter question, and with silence, so deliberate silence is a method of instruction.

In addition to these methods, Vietnamese Buddhist teachers use the gradual and the body-mindfulness methods. On the whole, in Vietnamese Buddhism the method of expedient teaching accepts diversity as a positive factor.

9.2.7. Educators and Teachers in Vietnamese Buddhist Education

A Vietnamese Buddhist master teaches Buddhism, practices meditation with his disciples, writes Buddhist texts and manuals, and constantly enriches the capacities of his perceptions. A candidate for ordination has to chant the four books of the Disciplinary Code,

write answers to 40 questions, answer ten questions orally, and undergo a one-week observation under the scrutiny of Vietnamese Buddhist masters. After a successful trial in the presence of the Buddhist masters, a monk is ordained.

Vietnamese Buddhist teachers were not only learned translators of Buddhist texts into classical Chinese, from Chinese, Pàli, Sanskrit into Vietnamese, but some were also learned scholars in Confucianism. Khương Tăng Hội (Kang Senghui), the first Buddhist Master at Luy Lâu Center, translated several Buddhist canonical texts into Chinese. In 1018, Lê Thái-Tôn sent a mission to China to copy the texts of Buddhist sacred writings, including the Tripitaka.

“Thiền-Uyển Tập Anh” (“The Brilliant Stars of the Thiền (Zen) Garden”) is the main source of Vietnamese Thiền discovered in 1927 by Trần Văn Giáp. The collection records genealogies of main Vietnamese Thiền Schools, mainly the Vinitaruci and Vô Ngôn Thông Schools. Typical biographies focus on the way of becoming a Thiền master in a narrative form.

The earliest Vietnamese Buddhist teachers whose names are mainly lost to us, however, laid the foundations of Vietnamese Buddhism and Buddhist education. For half a millennium Buddhism had been rooted in Vietnam before the Buddhist centers of learning received some fame and left traces in the Buddhist annals. The first Vietnamese Buddhist lineage was formed by Mậu Tử and Khương Tăng Hội at the end of the 2nd and the

beginning of the 3rd centuries CE. Khương Tăng Hội, the first Buddhist master at Luy Lâu, was an eminent Vietnamese Buddhist monk who lived in the Chinese Kingdom of Wu.

Vietnamese Thiền lineages include three schools: Vinitaruci, Vô Ngôn Thông, and Thảo Đường. Early Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist teachers followed in the footsteps of Mâu Tử and Khương Tăng Hội, teaching the Dharma and the Buddha-nature activity. The following lines of Thiền Buddhism were established by the Vietnamese masters: Lâm-Tế Line by Nguyễn-Thiền; Liễu-Quán Line by Liễu-Quán; Trúc-Lâm Line by Trần-Nhân-Tông; Ty-Ni-Đa-Lưu-Chi Line by Vinitaruci; and the Vô-Ngôn-Thông Line by Vô-Ngôn-Thông. The Vinitaruci Thiền School was founded by Vinitaruci (Ty-Ni-Đa-Lưu-Chi) at the Fayun Temple in northern Vietnam. His school prospered for at least six centuries. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, the founder of the Lý dynasty unified Vietnam in 968. It resulted in opening an important era in the development of Vietnamese Buddhism. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, brought up by Vạn Hạnh, established the first Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha. His national advisor, an eminent Vietnamese Buddhist monk Ngô Chân Lưu, contributed to the promotion of Buddhism as the country's state policy. A renowned teacher of the Vinitaruci lineage was Vạn Hạnh who practiced the Dharani-Samadhi method that was developed in the Mahayana-Vaipulyadharani Sūtra. Vạn Hạnh contributed to enhancing the influence of Vietnamese Buddhism at the state's level. The Vô Ngôn

Thông School of Vietnamese Buddhism was founded by Wu-yen Tun in the Lineage of the Mâu-Tử school. This school was the first to include a king in the list of patriarchs. The lineage of this school includes Mãn Giác, Không Lộ, Giác Hải, and Thông Biện – all eminent monks and renowned Vietnamese Buddhist teachers. Mãn Giác received the mind-seal from Quảng Trí of Quán Đảnh Temple. A Buddhist leader of his time, he was ranked as “Purple Robed Great Monk” and “Inner Palace Teacher of Enlightenment.” Không Lộ practiced chanting the Great Compassion Mantra. Giác Hải taught the mind’s concentration power which he described in the Eight Change Mantra. Thông Biện is known for the earliest attempts at a systematic presentation of the history of Vietnamese Buddhism. He emphasized the role of Jiaozhou in the rise of Vietnamese Buddhism. Thông Biện opened a teaching center to practice the Lotus Sūtra. The Thảo Đường School was founded by Thảo Đường who was honored with the title of National Teacher. This school blended Thiền and Pure Land practices. King Thái Tông of the Lý dynasty oversaw the creation of this school. The Trúc Lâm Sect of Vietnamese Buddhism was founded by the kings of Trần-Nhân-Tông dynasty. This sect integrated a Chinese form of Buddhism, which was transmitted to Vietnam by Chinese monks, into Vietnamese Buddhist practices. The Bamboo Grove School of Thiền is considered to be the first genuine school of Vietnamese Buddhism. The Trần dynasty opened a new page in Vietnamese Buddhism. Trần Thái Tông, Thánh Tông, Nhân Tông,

Anh Tông, and Minh Tông abdicated from the rank of supreme emperor to teach Buddhism.

Thái Tông of the Trần Dynasty, a national leader and a wise ruler, served his country with complete devotion, and perfected himself in high morality, studied Buddhism, and applied its teachings to his own life. He wrote “A Commentary on the Diamond Sùtra,” “A Guide to Thiền Buddhism,” and “Lessons about the Sùnyata.” He was one of the first to emphasize the humanist concept of Vietnamese Buddhist education. He brought to the consciousness of his people the belief that the nature of the Buddha is universal reality.

The trinity of the Trúc Lâm Patriarchs of the Golden Age is represented by King Trần Nhân Tông, Thiền Mater Pháp Loa, and Thiền Master Huyền Quang. Trần Nhân Tông united the principles of all three Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist schools in one Trúc Lâm sect. He emphasized syncretism of the *prajñā* practice of Thiền and the karma aspect of Pure Land. His successor Pháp Loa was a brilliant commentator of the Dharma. Huyền Quang succeeded the dharma-lineage of Pháp Loa. The Trúc Lâm School is a Dhyana one that is guided by the *Avatmsaka-sutra*.

The Lâm Tế School was established in the 18th century. It combines practices of koans and nian-fo. Its followers represent of the Vietnamese Buddhist communities in America, Canada, Australia and Europe.

Vietnamese Buddhist teachers of these schools and sects were enlightened with heightened awareness

of the mind and spiritual freedom, combined with social activism. They developed the adaptive method that is ethical, free of dogmas, and whose philosophy is observing consciousness instead of theorizing it. Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have enriched Buddhism with practical methods of becoming enlightened. Their own lives and good works demonstrate what Buddhism can achieve when it becomes a personal choice and a persistent search for spiritual freedom.

In the first half of the 20th century Vietnamese Buddhist teachers opened new schools of Buddhist learning. Great National Teacher Phước Huệ guided the opening of Buddhist institutions such as Thập Tháp, Long Khánh, and Tây Thiên etc. He taught many 20th century Buddhist teachers, including Masters Đôn Hậu, Mật Nguyễn, Mật Hiền, Trí Độ, Phúc Hộ, Quy Thiện, Trí Thủ, Huyền Tân, Thiện Hòa, Thiện Hoa, Trí Thiên and others. The necessity for unifying Vietnamese Buddhist schools, a process that remained unfinished for centuries, was considered urgent in view of obstacles that existed during the postcolonial wars that divided the country. Thích Tịnh Khiết was the first Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. The second Supreme Patriarch was Giác Nhiên, a recognized Vietnamese Buddhist educator and scholar, and a well-known authority in Dharma teaching. The leaders of the UBCV, such as the Fourth Supreme Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang, the Fifth Supreme Patriarch Thích Quảng Độ, and Masters Thích Thiện Minh, and Thích Kế Châu, were prosecuted and

prevented from functioning as educators in Vietnamese Buddhist schools. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam joined Mahayana and Theravada traditions and defended the traditional values of Buddhism in Vietnam for over 2,000 years.

Thích Thiên-Ân was the first Most Venerable of Vietnamese Buddhism in the United States. An outstanding Vietnamese Buddhist scholar, he concentrated his educational efforts on establishing the Buddhist Sangha in the United States. His scholarly book on Zen Buddhism is an authoritative scientific research that defines the role of Vietnamese Thiền in Zen Buddhism. He left an important analysis of the origins of the Thảo Đường School, which introduced Pure Land teachings to Vietnamese Buddhists.

Great Teacher Thích Huyền Quang is the symbol of a fighter for religious freedom. Under unfavorable circumstances he had to devote his life to social activism, while his teaching was interrupted by his exile of many years. His successor Great Teacher Thích Quảng Độ, also an outstanding Vietnamese Buddhist teacher, concentrated his efforts on unifying Buddhism. Together with Thích Huyền Quang, he is known worldwide for his fight against injustice and for the right of his people to have religious freedom.

The information collected on Vietnamese educators and teachers highlights how they revealed their insights and meditational experiences in beautiful poetry and attempted to preserve, with all reverence, Buddhism in

its pure form. They also sought to educate people on how to be spiritually integrated into the world within the groundwork of the Buddha's teachings. This purity of high morality and deep concentration on the Dharma teaching is a remarkable feature of Vietnamese Buddhist teachings and centuries-old culture. Vietnamese Buddhist education is now practiced now globally and Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have developed a devotional form of Buddhism that has a heightened awareness of seeing constantly in order to reach the enlightened state of mind.

C. Present and the Future of Vietnamese Buddhist Education

9.3.1. Need for Systematic Study

What was observed in the course of the present research is that Vietnamese Buddhism and Buddhist education are still studied in a fragmentary manner. Scholars concentrate on the Golden Age period, trying to understand how Vietnamese Buddhism consolidated its forces to unify the country. A certain parallel has been drawn between that period and the period since 1964, when the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam began its attempt to consolidate Vietnamese Buddhists. But a more holistic approach to the study of Vietnamese Buddhist education is urgently needed, as indicated by the many issues which came up in the course of our research. There are still many areas that demand attention.

The present research has demonstrated that

Vietnamese Buddhism emphasizes Buddhist education as a life-long path to reaching an enlightened state. Buddhist educators in Vietnam revere canonical Buddhist texts that are studied in accordance with the above-mentioned methods of Buddhist education. Vietnamese Buddhism has added to Buddhist education the element of poetic expression of the mind, which can be found in numerous poetic works now translated from Vietnamese into English. Vietnamese Buddhist teachers are not lost in time because their poetry provides connections to the pagodas they once were living in. These poems have provided the inspiration for Buddhists to experience something of a similar beauty, in which nature, body, and mind are one experience – one successful step along the path to an enlightened state. This poetic meditation through language is a piece of the lived experience presented and symbolized as one entity. These pearls of Vietnamese Buddhism, simple in the selected experience but deep in thought, have proved that the humanistic value of Vietnamese Buddhism is its openness to the world in which knowledge and practical wisdom cannot be separated from each other. This unique literary heritage of Vietnam has received only a limited treatment and deserves to be a subject of more serious study. Further research of Vietnamese Buddhist education regarding Pure Land influences that opened new opportunities for Vietnamese Buddhism may also be put into perspective.

Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have always taught people to live: in harmony, in spiritual peace, in

continuous training, and in never-ending learning. And always inspired by the Buddha's teachings and guided by Buddhist educational principles. Respect, tolerance, syncretism, humanistic value, morality, high ethical codes of conduct, learning, and behavior are all underscored in Vietnamese Buddhist education. At the same time, diversity is given as much freedom as possible -- which has prevented Vietnamese Buddhism from becoming a dogmatic doctrine. Vietnamese Buddhism remains dynamic, which over time seems to be to its advantage.

9.3.2. Future of Vietnamese Buddhist Education

The history of 20th century Vietnamese Buddhist education is divided into Vietnamese education inside the country and Vietnamese education outside the country. The main difference between them is one of social activism.

By restricting the coverage of this study to the period prior to 1975, the status of Buddhist education inside Vietnam has not been reviewed, except for briefly noting that small temples continue to remain the enclaves of pure Buddhist educational standards in an attempt to help young people retain their Vietnamese Buddhist identity, despite Communist rule.

Outside the country, Vietnamese Buddhist centers have been established worldwide. They mainly advance the Thiền and Pure Land tradition, which is getting more and more popular throughout East Asia. There are about 500 centers which are small temples where the Dharma

and meditation practices are taught. Visitors can also study the lives and teachings of famous Vietnamese Buddhist teachers, learn diverse religious beliefs that exist in the present world, and develop lifelong skills on how to reach an enlightened state.

If Vietnamese Buddhism is completely free from all political control and oppression, then the Vietnamese Buddhist education will provide an outstanding curriculum and practical academia, far greater than any Golden Age in Vietnamese history, to benefit everyone in the world.

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