



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

The Contribution Of Indian Buddhism To The Culture In Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism, originated from India around the six century B.C. is one of the great contributions of India to all the countries in the world from the ancient to the modern life. It has brought numerous changes in the life of people of the countries, it reached. This is the reason it has been acknowledged by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1986 as a great religion of the world on account of its philosophical relevance. In case of Vietnam, Buddhism, which transmitted into Vietnam around the second century A.D by the sea and land routes brought a great change in the life of Vietnamese, and still continues to reign over the mind of the Vietnamese. The previous scientific research, and the cultural and artistic works along with the architectural and construction works are preserved manifest how the contribution of Buddhism in Vietnam in the fields of politics, economy, social ethics, poetic art, especially to sublimate the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. In the present, Buddhism continues to contribute to the Vietnamese nation under the guidance of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha established more than 40 years ago and going on a strong development momentum and has made many positive contributions to the development of Vietnam today as well as to take care of the spiritual life of Vietnamese people living there and abroad. In this background the paper aims to discuss the contribution of Buddhism in the life of Vietnamese.

Keywords: *History of Buddhism in Vietnam, Contribution of Indian Buddhism in Vietnam, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha*

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a country located at the crossroads of international traffic in Southeast Asia, and it is considered as the stopover for merchants of the Mediterranean region. Based on thus favorable geography Vietnam has established the economic, cultural, and religious relationships with others countries surrounding it. Therefore, Buddhism, one of the great Indian religions, has many advantages to expand. As soon as it was introduced, Buddhism quickly adapted to the life styles of the Vietnamese nation and in the process of formation and development it integrated into all classification of Vietnamese society without encountering any obstacle. It has permeated Vietnamese civilization as naturally and easily as the water seeps into the soil, everywhere in Vietnam's territory and brought the invaluable spiritual values for Vietnamese. Beside this, it has made contributions and positive influences on almost all fields of politics, economy, culture, society of Vietnam during the history of the past eighteen centuries. In this article, it will discuss the contribution of Indian Buddhism to the life of Vietnamese through three parts as follows:

Part 1: Overview of Vietnam Buddhism: the process of formation and development of Vietnam Buddhism.

Part 2: The contribution of Indian Buddhism in the life of Vietnamese, through the roots of thought, philosophy, customs, practices, humanities and society...

Hopefully, through this article, it will help readers grasp the outlines of Vietnam Buddhism and its influence in the lives of Vietnamese people.

CONTENTS

1. The general introduction to Vietnam Buddhism

1.1. Buddhism Transmitted into Vietnam

According to the documents¹ and scientific arguments of many scholars, Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam very early, especially from the end of the second century towards the beginning of the 3rd century C.E. through two roads, namely, Ho Tieu and Dong Co. The Ho Tieu road, also called 'Chemi des epices' in French language, is a sea route which originates from the seaports of the South India and then passing through Srilanka, Indonesia, Vietnam... Through this road, the Indian traders went to the Asian countries in general and Vietnam in particular to merchandise. On each trip, there were usually one or two monks accompanying them to pray for saving of the crew. Therefore, Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam. The Dong Co Road 'Chemin des Steppes' i.e. is the land road also known as the Silk Road which connects East with West. It originates from Northeast India, Assam or Central Asia, and one of branch comes from Europe through the steppes and desert regions of Central Asia, to Lo-yang (洛陽) the ancient capital of China. The merchants and monks crossed Tibet and the banks of the Mekong, Hong and Da rivers into Vietnam. According to the Vietnam's Buddhist history by Nguyen Lang, in the second century B.C., the Indian king Asoka, after the third Buddhist Council, together with the elder Tissa Moggaliputta sent many delegations to Southeast Asian countries to spread the Dharma. One of them the delegation of two high monks named Uttara and Sona were sent to Suvana-Bhumi the land of Kim Dia where the Indo-chinese peninsula is located from Burma to Vietnam. In the Burmese Buddhist historical it records that those monks went to Myanmar to mission and in Thailand also. From the other standpoint of view of Chinese document one scholar asserted that there is a stupa of the King Asoka located in Ne Le fort in Giao Chau, and Ne Le citadel is as Do Son belonged to Hai Phong today. In generally, Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam very early by peaceful means without any force or influence undue.

1.2. Development of Vietnam Buddhism

Vietnam Buddhism has experienced many different periods in which it has own nuance. In the first period, from the second to the fifth centuries, Buddhism established the certain position in Vietnam. Under the efforts of missionary activities of Indian monks, Luy Lau, the capital of Giao Chi, became the largest Vietnam Buddhist center at that time. The first model of Vietnam Buddhism was formed with the images of Thach Quang Buddha and Man Nuong Buddha (the Buddha's image in female form) by an Indian man named Khau Da La who came to Luy Lau around 168-169. At the end of the second century, Buddhism was known as through Ly Hoac Luan, the Buddhist famous work written by Mau Bac, who was born in Tsang-Wu between 165 -170, together other translated scriptures. In the third century, there were three foreign missionaries, including K'ang Seng Houei from Sogdiane, Kalasivi from Kuwana, and Mahajivaka from India, came to propagate Dharma. In the 5th century, Dat Ma De Ba (Oharmadeva) an Indian came to Giao Chau to teach meditation. At that time, a Vietnamese monk, Hue Thang was known as the Zen

¹ Including historical documents of current value are:

- Tran Van Giap(original Chinese characters), Tue Sy (translated into Vietnamese 1967), Vietnamese Buddhism from the beginning to the 13th century, Van Hanh University Library, Saigon

- Thich Mat The(1970), History of Buddhism in Vietnam, Minh Duc Da Nang published

- Nguyen Lang(1994), Vietnamese Buddhist History, Literary publisher, Hanoi,

- Nguyen Tai Thu (editor, 1988), History of Buddhism in Vietnam, Social Science publishing House, Hanoi

master. Thus, Vietnam Buddhism or Giao Chau Buddhism developed quite strongly. Thus, Vietnam Buddhism or Giao Chau Buddhism developed quite strongly as soon as it was introduced to Vietnam.

Vietnamese Buddhism from the 6th century to the end of the 9th century was influenced deeply by Chinese Buddhism because in the VII century Vietnam spent 1000 years in the North under the rule of the Tang Dynasty. The Northern Buddhism (China) prevailed and replaced the existing Theravada Buddhism. During this period, Vietnamese Buddhism was spread in the three main Buddhist Chinese schools, namely Zen, Pure Land, and Tantric.

By the 10th century, when Vietnam began to gain autonomy, Buddhism continued to flourish and make positive contributions to the Vietnam country. It can be said that Vietnamese Buddhism in the 10th century to the end of the 13th century is the peak period of Vietnam Buddhism. It was accepted as the spiritual guiding principle for political affairs under the dynasty of Dinh Tien Hoang King in 968-979, Le Dai Hanh King in 980-1005, as well as Ly Thai To King in 1009-1028. The eminent Zen masters such as Zen master Phap Thuan, Van Hanh and Khuong Viet were invited as political consultant. Under the Tran dynasty, Buddhism reached the highest development. It was unified, and became the national religion, and all Vietnamese in society navigate towards Buddhism. A lot of the large-scale pagodas or unique architectures were built such as Phat Tich, Dai Lam, Linh Ung, Pho Minh, and One Pillar Pagoda. The remarkable achievement in the Ly Tran dynasty extolled by the most of Chinese textbooks with name An Nam Dai Tu Khi is the formation of the four great works art. The first is the bronze statue of Maitreya Buddha located in Quynh Lam Pagoda, which was built in Dong Trieu, Quang Ninh around the 11th century. The second is Bao Thien Tower. It consists of 12 floors, 20 zhang high, made of stone and brick, especially the 12th floor was cast in stone copper, built by King Ly Thanh Tong in 1057 on the grounds of Sung Khanh Pagoda in the West of Luc Thuy Lake as Sword Lake in Hanoi today. During the French period, it was completely destroyed to build a large church. The third is Quy Dien Bell. It was made of bronze in 1101, King Ly Nhan Tong placed on the grounds of Dien Huu pagoda. The last is Pho Minh Cauldron. It was casted by bronze during the reign of King Tran Nhan Tong (1279-1293), and located at Pho Minh pagoda (Tuc Mac village, Nam Ha). Till date, there are still three stone pillars supporting the foot of the cauldron in front of the yard of pagoda.

After that, Buddhism was one again declined under the Later Le and Nguyen Trieu dynasties. In the reign of King Tu Duc, Vietnam lost its sovereignty, and dominated by French. In that context, Christianity was introduced to Vietnam as a new religion, and replaced Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism did not receive any support. However, in the life of Vietnamese it was still the main belief and played the important role reconciliation between the disputing powers, contributed to establish the national spirit as well as to protect the independence of the nation.

Around the years 1920-1930, the Buddhist revival movements arose in the world, especially in Japan, China, India and Burma. In Vietnam, a number of monks and lay Buddhists launched this movement to revive Vietnam Buddhism that led to the establishment of the Vietnam Buddhist Association in the North in 1934, headquartered at Quan Su Pagoda, and the publication of Duoc Tue Magazine. In the Central region, Hoi An Nam Buddhist Studies was also formed at Tu Dam Pagoda. It published Vien Am Journal in 1934, and opened Buddhist Institutes for monks and nuns to study. In the South, in 1920, the Luc Hoa Association was established to unite and mobilize the Buddhist revival movement. Nam Ki Buddhist Research Association was established, headquartered at Linh Son Pagoda, and published Tu Bi Am Journal in 1932. In 1933, the Union of Buddhist Societies was formed. In 1934, the Luong Xuyen Buddhist Studies Association was established, and published Du Tan Buddhist Studies Journal, and opened Luong Xuyen Buddhist School. During this period, there were many Vietnam Buddhist sects appeared that led to the establishment of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam in 1964. Until 1981, it stopped working in the country, but still operated actively in the state of California, USA.

In November 1981, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha was established in which the Most Venerable Thich Duc Nhuan as the Supreme Patriarch of the Verification Council, and the Most Venerable Thich Tri Thu as the Chairman of the Administration Council. Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has two offices, one located at Quan Su pagoda in Hanoi, and another at Xa Loi pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City. Since 2021, in Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, the Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang is the Supreme Patriarch of the Verification Council, and the Most Venerable Thich Thien Nhon as the Chairman of the Administration Council.

In short, Vietnamese Buddhism since its introduction until now has gone through many extremely difficult historical periods. However, Buddhism still retains its core values. Many new Vietnam Buddhist sects, which arise based on Indian Buddhism, contribute to the richness of Vietnamese religion as well as bring its own beauty and adaptability to the Vietnamese people. The development of Buddhism creates the development of moral and intellectual values for people. Therefore, Buddhist education and translation affairs have always been the main goals of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha even today.

2. The Contribution of Indian Buddhism to the culture in Vietnam

2.1. The Contribution of Buddhist Philosophy to the spiritual life of Vietnamese

Buddhist philosophy is a system containing the teaching of the Buddha about the World and Human View. According to Buddhist view about the world is impermanent in which all things are formed based on the doctrine of Dependent Origination which refers to the interrelationship between things that has to obey the law of birth, existence and destruction. From Buddhist teachings are based on the doctrine of the Four Noble Truth, everyone suffers suffering of birth, of old age, of death, and the Noble Eightfold path is the only way leading to the cessation of suffering. The law of cause and effect is also related to the human beings in the essential meaning. It states that you reap what you sown and what you sown you will reap. This law operates following the principle of Dependent Origination i.e impermanent. The doctrine of Dependent Origination, the Four Noble Truths, and the law of cause and effect, has been deeply rooted in the practice of Vietnamese people. In daily life, one believe the law of cause and effect, and pass it on to their descendants from generation to generation. More notably, these philosophy has been boldly imprinted in popular literature, folk and poetry in Nom script in order to illuminate the minds of people to create the deeds of peace and happiness.

For instance, in the XVIII century, the famous poet Nguyen Gia Thieu (1741-1798) wrote *Cung Oan Ngam Khuc* in Nom verse. It consisting of 356 sentences in the Song That Luc Bat genre recounted lamentation of palace maid who was abandoned by the king. The content of the work manifest the three characteristics Buddhism known as annicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering), and anatta (non-self).

In the nineteenth century, the poet Nguyen Du (1765-1820) wrote an immortal literary project named *Truyen Kieu* (Kieu Story) based on the work *Kim Van Truyen Kieu* (金雲翹; Jīn Yún Qiǎo) by Thanh Tam Tai Nhan (青心才人, 1521 – 1593, from China). This story includes 3254 verses in which it was not only a prominent theory of the Truth of Suffering but also implies the law of cause and effect that if one masters the principle of cause and effect, one can change the karma in the present life. The beginning of changing karma is to start changing good and bad action performed through body, verbal and mind. From doing good action, reducing evil, gradually, one can transform and create a happy life for us now and in the future.

Thus, since Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam, its inherent philosophical foundation was quickly accepted; and became the conception of life of Vietnamese nation that contributes to the establishment of the idea and ethics values in Vietnamese Literature.

2.2. The Contribution of Buddhism for the Customs and Practices of Vietnamese

Customs and practices show the uniqueness and specificity of the culture of each nation. Through learning about customs and habits, people find back their traditional cultural values. For the Vietnamese, the customs are heavily influenced by Buddhism. But here to specifically mention the popular customs in the daily life of Vietnamese people that include the practice of vegetarianism, worshipping Buddha, releasing living beings and giving alms.

Regarding vegetarianism, almost all Vietnamese people are influenced by this cultural lifestyle. It comes from the Buddhist concept of compassion and the first of five precepts, not to kill but love all living beings. Normally Vietnamese people, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists also follow it. They are vegetarian twice a month, on the first and fifteenth day. Some people keep it for four days a month, another people make a vow to keep it for a whole month (usually the seventh lunar month) or during Vassavasa or the whole year, sometimes there are some people who make a vow to be vegetarian a long life like the ordained people.

Worshipping the Buddha image or statue is also practice for Vietnamese. The worship of Buddha in folk also has many interesting things. Both Buddhists and non-Buddhists use Buddha statues or the pictures depicting Buddhist elements, to admire and appreciate the qualities of the Blessed One. They believe that Buddhism is an achievement of cultural thought of the nation and humanity.

Also influenced the compassionate spirit of Buddhism, the custom of donation and release of living beings has been deeply rooted in the daily life of the masses. On the full moon and the first day, Vietnamese people often buy the animals captured such as birds, fish or turtles, and then set it free. Vietnamese people also like to do almsgiving and have willing to help the poor and needy. In the great festivals they usually gather in the pagodas. However, in modern society, these formal manifestations are more and more narrowed. Instead, everyone participates in relief for the compatriots experiencing natural disasters, hardships, those living in difficult circumstances, as the accordance with the moral tradition of the compassion and loving kindness in Buddhism.

2.3. The Contribution of Buddhism for the Vietnamese Culture of Art

The Vietnam Culture of Art divides into two types, one is theatrical art including Hat Boi, Hat Cheo, Cai Luong and Drama; and another is the visual arts concluding the architecture and sculpture. Theater art is a type of culture belonged to the heritage bearing the national cultural identity. The philosophy of "causal and retribution" of Buddhism plays an important role in the creation of the contents in order to spread the good values in fact accordance with the Eastern morality and the traditional life of the nation.

About architecture: When Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, it brought along the architectural styles of pagodas, towers, bell towers and drums following the models of India, Burma and China. Thereafter, Buddhism combined with the ideals of Vietnamese people and created the unique Vietnam Buddhist model in the architecture. It is often built in the place with beautiful natural scenery or a quiet place in the special architecture that is the roof of the pagoda always hidden behind the village bamboo ramparts, under the banyan tree. Buddhism left many unique architectural complexes and scenic spots for Vietnam, many famous temples such as One Pillar Pagoda in the North, Tay Phuong Pagoda, Huong Pagoda, in the Central region there are Thien Mu Pagoda, pagodas, etc. Tu Hieu, Bao Quoc Pagoda, and in the South there are Giac Lam Pagoda and Vinh Trang Pagoda.

About sculpture: there are a lot of unique sculptures of Vietnam, such as the statue of Guan Yin thousand eyes and thousand hands, Ha Pagoda 16 wooden ancestral statues of Tay Phuong Pagoda, set of Thap Bat La Han statues of Phuoc Lam Pagoda, Thap Bat statue in Trang pagoda, Tuyet Son statue in Tram Giang pagoda. The statue of Shakyamuni Buddha is an artifact of the Ho Chi Minh Museum. There are also large-scale and historical sculptures such as: the statue of "Buddha Entering Nirvana", the statue of Shakyamuni Buddha sitting cross-legged, "the body of Buddha" statue.

And about painting: Many silkscreens, watercolors, oil paintings, and lacquers referring to Buddhism have been vividly and subtly expressed by aged painters and artisans in Vietnam through works such as Chua Thay composed by Nguyen Gia Tri in 1938, Le Nha Tho by Nguyen Sieu, Duong Tang by Do Quang Em, Di Chua by Nguyen Khac Vinh. Especially from the eighties onwards, there are Thien Trung, Quan Am Thi Hien by artist Phuong Hong, "Hoi Dou Thi Ngan" by Huynh Tuan Ba; "Nhat Hoa Van Phap" by Van Quan..

Thus, Buddhist ideas and images contributes to the creation of the customs, traditions, literature and art of the Vietnamese people in history, and it will continue to shine its unique quintessence for the Vietnamese people in particular and humanity in general in the future.

CONCLUSION

Buddhism has long penetrated into the soul, way of thinking and way of life of the Vietnamese people and has become the essence and identity of the Vietnamese nation. It has influenced all activities of Vietnamese people from philosophy, ideology, morality, literature and art to customs, lifestyle, and the way of thinking. From the concept of human life, worldview, ethics, aesthetics to the speech of the masses, they are more or less influenced by Buddhist philosophy and thought. On Buddhist holidays, the full moon day, the first day or the national holiday, people, no matter how busy they are, visit the temple several times in their life to worship the Buddhas, celebrate the festival, or be close to and find understand the

historical and cultural relics of the nation. The village pagoda once played a central role in the cultural and spiritual activities of the Vietnamese community. The book "General Vietnamese culture 1985 - 1995" asserts that: "If there were no historical Buddhist activities, we would have lost more than half of the monuments and landscapes that we are proud of today." Through the historical process, through many ups and downs of the country, Buddhism has affirmed itself and has a firm foothold in the hearts of the nation, existing and developing together with the nation. Buddhism has contributed to our nation many remarkable achievements in terms of economy, politics, culture and society. History has proven the dangerous period of the country before the invasion; Many Buddhist Zen masters and fellow Buddhists have joined hands with the nation to fight against the enemy, protect the rivers, and fight for justice and freedom. When the country is at peace, the culture and nation has conditions to develop Buddhism also contributes significantly to the cultural quintessence of the nation. The curved roofs of the pagoda are close and graceful, the statues of Shakyamuni, the thousand-eyed and thousand-armed Guan Yin statue, the sets of Arhat statues with sophisticated and vivid lines under the admiring and reverent eyes of tourists. International visitors, bustling festivals, excellent literary works... are forever the pride of the Vietnamese nation.

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