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Vietnamese Buddhism in America

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM IN AMERICA

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Religion
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2007

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Various sources of support from teachers, colleagues, and friends have greatly contributed to the completion of this dissertation. I owe thanks to many people, a few of whom I name here, for supporting me in the accomplishment. First, I wish to thank Dr. Kathleen M. Erndl, my dissertation advisor, whose encouragement, critical judgment, expertise, and moral support are indispensable to the clarity and coherence of this dissertation. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Amanda Porterfield who has given me encouragement and constructive suggestion all along. I wish to thank Dr. David Johnson, who has offered time and moral support since I first arrived to the program. I wish to thank Dr. Bryan Cuevas suggestive topics and friendly support. For final proofreading and editing, I also wish to thank my graduate colleagues in the Department of Religion and the Intensive English Center: Caleb Simmons, Roger Kott, Ty Nguyen and Loan-Lauren Phan Nguyen. I am deeply grateful to Dr. George E. Weaver, the former Dean of Student Affairs, Mr. Jon B. Bridges, the Program Assistant of Department of Religion, for their unwavering support and for working with Dr. Erndl, my Graduate Advisor, in making my studies a possibility. Special thanks to Peggy Gary, Susan Minnerly, Roberta Christie, and Mafe Brooks whose friendly support and encouragement are always appreciated. For financial assistance through scholarship programs, I wish to thank the Congress of Graduate Students, the Office of the Provost, and the Office of Research, for awarding me the Fall 2005 Dissertation Research Grant of \$500 and Mr. Doan L. Phung for bestowing on me the Fall 2006 Douglas Peterson Vietnamese Scholarship of \$3000. These scholarship funds have been a great help to me in covering a part of the needed expenses of my research.

For technical support and programming, I owe special thanks to Vinh Do, Minh Kien, and Minh Truc. For collecting data, I owe special thanks to Trinh Nguyen, Ty Nguyen, and Hao Nguyen, Fred G. Henson, and Dieu Bao, Mai-Ly Nguyen, Minh Huy, Phuoc Thien, Viet Tran, Quang Vien, Quang Dinh, and Truong Nguyen. With my kind English teachers in mind, I wish to thank Mr. Bob Danks, Mrs. Antoinette Smith, Mrs. Jolie Trumann, Mrs. Patricia O'Neil, Mrs. Gail Braverman, Mr. and Mrs. Fred G. Henson who have instilled in me the love of English and an appreciation of the American way of life.

Finally, I wish to thank Thay Minh Tho who has helped to capture the scenes of the sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to shed light on the broad range of practices that Vietnamese Buddhism has contributed to the American religious landscape since its arrival due to the impact of the Vietnam War. Despite the presence of almost one million Buddhist Vietnamese and their Buddhist temples and centers, flourishing in nearly in every state of America, the diversity of this Buddhist tradition, however, has largely been neglected in the current academic study of religion. The major practices, religious activities, adaptations, as well as obstacles faced by the tradition are still issues to be addressed. My dissertation, being grounded in an immigrant's experience and perspective, is intended to fill that gap, adding a more balanced and detailed view to the study of Vietnamese Buddhism. My historical, ethnographic, and phenomenological methods of study will establish the presence of major Vietnamese Buddhist practices, illuminating their contributions to American life, showing their adaptation and impact, and projecting the future prospect of the tradition. This dissertation, essentially, is a case study of religious adaptation and assimilation. I, however, do not limit my analysis to the theory that religious adaptation is promulgated merely by indigenous Buddhist cultural elites who have embraced and advocated the foreign faith in their own terms. Instead, I will add that religious adaptation is also initiated by the immigrants. The Vietnamese immigrants themselves, though trying to retain their Vietnamese Buddhist heritage, have initiated adaptation in order to serve the cultural and spiritual needs of their community in America. Adaptation is a survival mechanism for the immigrant communities.

INTRODUCTION

Since the arrival of the Vietnamese refugees in the United States of America in 1975, the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition has also made its presence. Three decades later, in 2005, the tradition continues to flourish and Vietnamese Buddhist centers are established across the states. Yet, the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition and its activities have not been documented and misunderstanding about the practices of the tradition still goes on without clarifications. Documenting the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition to fill that gap is the purpose of this study. Providing a historical, textual, and ethnographic study of Vietnamese Buddhism in America, I wish to shed light on the particular practices that Vietnamese Buddhism has contributed to the American religious landscape since its arrival in the U.S. during the Vietnam War period. In this study, I will demonstrate that Vietnamese Buddhism has made various adaptations in order to adjust to life in this country, while attempting to preserve its distinctive features. The major categories of adaptation for my study will include monastic organization, fundamental Buddhist practices, and interactions between monastic society and the laity. I will seek to challenge the idea that Vietnamese Buddhist practice has been watered down or somehow streamlined in the United States. Rather, I will show that Buddhist practice has been reinvigorated here as the result of thirty years (from 1975 to 2005) of enforced adaptations made both to preserve Vietnamese monastic tradition and to accommodate lay Buddhist participation in the United States' non-Buddhist society.

The United States' constitutional protection of religious freedom has provided a cultural framework conducive to the continuation and expansion of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. Vietnamese monastic training is flourishing; while more lay people pursue their Buddhist activities, including intensive practices. Buddhist centers run by the laity, an American improvement to the older tradition, continue to develop ways to enhance lay practices and to preserve the Vietnamese identity. As the laity gain more financial security after years of working hard to sustain their lives in the United States, they have more opportunities to devote to serious Buddhist practices. Working together, the monastic and the lay sectors of Vietnamese society have turned obstacles into opportunities for the expansion of their tradition. According to the census of 2000, Vietnamese Buddhists in the U.S. number roughly 900,000, about 80% of the 1,122,528 Vietnamese here. Vietnamese Buddhist temples, numbering at least 279, have

flourished in almost every state of the Union. Nevertheless, the diversity of this Buddhist tradition has largely been neglected by the academic study of religion. Its major practices, religious activities, and adaptations, as well as obstacles facing the tradition, all present interesting issues to be explored. This dissertation, grounded in immigrant experience and perspective, is intended to fill that gap.

Buddhism was established in Vietnam even before the Common Era. A brief introduction to this tradition will offer a glimpse into its unique characteristics and point out the cultural significance of Buddhism in the history of Vietnam. Also, it will illuminate the links among the varieties of Buddhist practice embraced by Vietnamese people, including those who are now living in the United States.

Buddhism, especially Mahayana and Esoteric Buddhism, was initially introduced to ancient Vietnam by Indian Buddhist monks who arrived by sea during the third century B.C.E. After it was assimilated, during the Hùng Dynasty (r. 2000 B.C.E. - 43 C.E.), Buddhism became an integral part of Vietnamese culture and the religion of the land. The Bodhisattva practices of Mahayana Buddhism (the six *paramitas* or perfections), namely (1) giving, (2) morality, (3) patience, (4) effort, (5) concentration, and (6) wisdom, were the dominant ideals underlying traditional Vietnamese ethics. The concept of *Buddha nature*, which emphasized each individual's potential to become enlightened, gave the Vietnamese confidence that they too could aspire to enlightenment in their own homeland.

Thus Vietnam came to be regarded by leading figures as a Buddha land, just like India and other great Buddhist countries of the time. There was felt to be no need for Vietnamese Buddhists to seek Buddhahood abroad. Moreover, the Bodhisattva vow – to work tirelessly for the benefit of sentient beings and alleviate their suffering while seeking enlightenment – offered people incentive to overcome their fear of death, while encouraging individuals to act for the common benefit. These Mahayana Buddhist elements were essential features for the unification of ancient Vietnam; the vows were embraced even by Vietnamese kings.

Mahayana elements were enriched further by the introduction of Indian Buddhism via the land routes, including that of the Silk Road through China. Without compromising its distinctive features, the Vietnamese tradition continued to enhance its vitality by absorbing certain practical elements of Chinese Buddhist traditions. They even made an effective use of *Han*, the classical

Chinese language used to translate the Sanskrit of Buddhist scriptures, as a tool to propagate Vietnamese Buddhism.

Since the fifth century C.E., Esoteric Buddhism, Buddhist meditation, and Pure Land Buddhism have developed interdependently in Vietnam. Vietnamese Buddhism, due to its cultural and nationalistic features, suffered various kinds of attacks and challenges during the frequent historical invasions by the Chinese. In order to maintain its own character under the circumstances, which it did well into the eighteenth century, Vietnamese Buddhism had to constantly revitalize its own tradition while incorporating elements of others, such as Buddhist meditation practices from China. After surviving general suppression during the French colonial period, the Vietnamese tradition continued to revitalize its practices, embracing Theravada Buddhism, which had long had scattered adherents in southern Vietnam. (It was the dominant form in the neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos.) When the communists came into power in Vietnam in 1975, their opposition to religions caused Vietnamese Buddhism to suffer further suppression.

Vietnamese Buddhism came to America in two waves, one during the Vietnam War and then after the fall of Saigon in 1975. During the war, Thích Nhất Hạnh introduced Buddhist mindfulness meditation when he was invited to the U.S. in 1961. Another meditation master, Thích Thiên Ân, initiated Mahayana inward Buddhist meditation when he came to University of California, Los Angeles, in 1966 as a visiting professor. He taught Pure Land Buddhism together with meditation as a unified method. These two leading Vietnamese Buddhist masters together popularized Vietnamese Buddhist meditation in the U.S. After the 1975 wave, when Vietnamese Buddhists escaping the Communist regime arrived in America as refugees, all major Vietnamese Buddhist practices became established in the United States.

In addition to illuminating the meditative Buddhist traditions introduced by Nhất Hạnh and Thiên Ân, this study will show that the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition is distinctly diversified. It includes all the major Theravada and Mahayana practices, such as Samatha, Vipassana, and Vietnamese meditations; Pure Land, Yogacara, Mantric esoteric practices; ritual and folk traditions, and so forth. This study will also highlight adaptations made by the tradition in areas of practice, outlook, and monastic roles, and it will examine adaptive interactions with the other Vietnamese Buddhist communities that scattered around the world after the fall of Saigon in 1975. The underlying reasons for such adaptations will be explored.

My goals are to document the presence of major Vietnamese Buddhist practices, to illuminate their contributions to American life, to show both their adaptation and their impact, and to predict the future prospects of the tradition. My dissertation, essentially, will be a case study of religious adaptation. I, however, do not limit my dissertation to the theory that this religious adaptation was entirely produced by an indigenous Buddhist cultural elite who attempted to articulate their original foreign faith in their own terms, as suggested by Mathew T. Kapstein in *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism* and also by Eric Zurcher in *The Buddhist Conquest of China*. Instead, I will argue that immigrants moving to a new country also initiate religious adaptation. The Vietnamese themselves have adapted in order to serve their cultural and spiritual needs in America.

In order to achieve these goals, I have taken the following steps:

1. I have gathered the historical and religious texts, annual and quarterly chronicles published by Vietnamese Buddhist communities, and also pamphlets and records of public Buddhist lectures or Dharma talks delivered by their monastic figures, so that the historical lineage of the practice can be traced, established, and confirmed. Published primarily in the Vietnamese language, these are public records that are traditionally released to the general public as a report about Buddhist activities, accomplishments, and local concerns.

2. I have observed the practices and rituals performed at various Vietnamese Buddhist communities, especially in California and Texas, where the number of Buddhist centers is the largest, at least 105 centers and 26 centers, respectively. I made visits to those Buddhist centers during *Tet*, the Vietnamese New Year in February. Also, I visited their traditional Buddhist Summer retreats during the summer from June to August. These observations have been analyzed according to the original Buddhist texts, so that traditional practices and their adaptations can be further confirmed.

3. I interviewed leading monastic and lay figures, when possible, in order to clarify their traditional roles and their efforts to initiate adaptations. In the Vietnamese Buddhist community, initiators of particular Buddhist practices have often been prominent monastic figures. The questions for my interviews are attached in the appendices. The Human Subjects Committee at Florida State University has approved the questionnaire; official letters of approval are also included in the appendices. The main objectives of the questions were to gather public information about the origin of congregations, their form of management, the changes in their

membership, their major activities and practices, and the plans for the young generations of Vietnamese American Buddhists at each individual temple. A Vietnamese translation accompanied each question so that it would be convenient and comfortable for participants who were not fluent in English.

4. I have gathered information, including temple information, on residential monastic members, practice schedules, major ceremonies, practices and celebrations from the Vietnamese temple directories and from links posted on the internet. This included the *Pluralism Project* directed by Diana Eck, where a number of Vietnamese Buddhist centers were documented. I also discussed the issue of popular Buddhism in connection to the use of the internet as a new Buddhist medium in the Buddhist communities, as well as its misuses.

Altogether, the collected information has been translated, studied, and analyzed, using historical and phenomenological methods. Textual materials are indispensable as a means for the interpretation and verification of traditional practices within the Vietnamese Buddhist community. I have employed standard ethnographic methods of participant observation and of conducting interviews. Both are vital to this study, since they will show how the Vietnamese Buddhist community has made certain adaptations due to frequent contacts with other Buddhist traditions prevalent in present-day America. These adaptations have included the exchanges, enrichment, and modification of Buddhist practices. Another change has been the embrace of certain practices which have been popularized by a few of those prominent Buddhist figures in present-day Vietnam who are occasionally permitted to visit the United States and other Western countries. These findings have been used to illuminate changes made to the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition within an American context, as well as obstacles to future change.

Being a Buddhist bhikṣu (ordained monk) trained in the Vietnamese Mahayana tradition, the major and the most populous among the Vietnamese Buddhist traditions, gives me the advantage of access to in-depth views of the principal practices of a place, of monastic structures, of major Buddhist organizations and their dynamics of governance and of various interactions between the monastic community and the laity. My Buddhist monastic status can be recognized by the word “Thích” as my last name. Here, in order to familiarize the reader with Vietnamese monastic names which will appear throughout the dissertation, it is worth while to note that the last name “Thích” is the Vietnamese translation of the word “Śākya,” the last name of the Buddha. Ordained Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns use “Thích” for their last names.

Also, after the last name “Thích,” nuns have the word “Nữ” which means “Female.” In addition to monastic knowledge of Buddhist texts and Mahayana Buddhist practices that I obtained from my training at the International Buddhist Monastic Institute located in San Fernando Valley, North Hills, California, I have my knowledge of the Vietnamese language, of *Han* (the classical Chinese language used in the Tripitaka), and of Sanskrit, which have all enhanced my textual investigation by reducing language limitations.

For more than a decade, I have conducted Buddhist teachings and practices and have interacted with and supported various Vietnamese Buddhist communities in the eastern and southeastern United States, including New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Nebraska, Kansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. This has provided me with a uniquely broad experience of Vietnamese Buddhist communities, their temple structures, Buddhist practices, major religious events, and also the obstacles they have faced in establishing such Buddhist communities. Moreover, I have made visits to several Buddhist countries in Asia, including India, Nepal, Malaysia, and Singapore. My observations of their traditional practices, Buddhist activities, and archeological remains will be taken into consideration for the purpose of highlighting the uniqueness of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. In addition, I will discuss the effort to establish a few Vietnamese Buddhist temples in Bodh Gaya, India – the site of enlightenment of Śakyamuni Buddha – by the Vietnamese Buddhist communities in diaspora. Their collaboration has established further interactions between Vietnamese and Indian Buddhists. It is my hope to rediscover what has been lost, to give voice to what has not been heard, and to engage in what has been neglected.

My dissertation has six chapters, as follows:

1. The Transmission of Buddhism to Vietnam before the fall of Saigon in 1975. These will be explored, including their recent developments, and then will be analyze in order, to trace the path of Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhism back into ancient times. I will document the presence of all major Buddhist practices in modern Vietnam and their direct links to those of the ancient Buddhist lineages of the country, as well as the Bodhisattva features underlying the Vietnamese practice of Mahayana Buddhism. Current Buddhist usage in Vietnam will be used to illustrate the differences between what had been practiced there and what is now practiced by

Vietnamese Buddhists in the United States. It will also demonstrate the way the tradition made constant adjustments in order to survive Vietnam's history of foreign domination.

In addition I will discuss the significance, in a religious context, of the language shift from classical Vietnamese (*Nôm*) to modern Vietnamese (*Quốc-Ngữ*). For centuries, the scriptural language of Vietnamese Buddhists had been *Han*, the classical language of the Chinese Tripitaka; this was itself a translation of the Sanskrit. The Tripitaka is the collection of the three Buddhist scriptures called the Sutra, the Vinaya, and the Abhidharma. In classical Vietnamese *Nôm*, a special way of adding certain characters to *Han* characters had been used to distinguish the Vietnamese pronunciation. This furthered, among other things, the national interest of the Vietnamese kings. As a result, *Nôm* was used alongside *Han* in Vietnamese Buddhist literature, and this use of *Han* and *Nôm* continued well into the 19th century, till the time when the French imperialists made Vietnam their own colony in Southeast Asia.

In 1865, in the first Vietnamese-language newspaper, the *Gia Định*, the French imperialist authorities advocated a Romanized version of the Vietnamese language; this was furthered by European missionaries with the goal of making Vietnam a French-speaking colony. They eventually institutionalized this language, in the early 1900s, but the colonial authority did not quite anticipate that it would one day become the national language of the Vietnamese. That came about because by the early twentieth century Vietnamese authorities and scholars, out of their desire to win over the French imperialist force, had initiated a Reformation movement which sought to modernize Vietnamese culture and to fortify the Vietnamese military according to Western models. Various ideas for reformation current in other Asian countries, including India, China, Japan, and Thailand, were examined to find the best options for the Vietnamese situation.

The reformists determined to embrace that Romanized version of the Vietnamese language. They encouraged people to study and use it, while modifying and gradually refining it into an acceptable form; it became the modern Vietnamese language called “*Quốc Ngữ*.” The move to embrace and popularize *Quốc Ngữ* was quite a phenomenon in Vietnam, which can be easily seen in Vietnamese newspapers and literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, beginning with the aforementioned *Gia Định*. This modern form of the language was the official language of the Vietnamese under the Republic of Vietnam, after the collapse of the

French Colonial powers. It continues to be the national language of the Vietnamese even at present day, under the communist regime.

Although *Quốc Ngữ* is an established national language, past debates concerning its pros and cons still offer a valuable insight into insider-outsider issues within contemporary religious scholarship. In Vietnam, during the colonial period, the country was fragmented and weakened due to the colonialist strategy of “divide to conquer.” A feeble royal house backed by a forceful military intervention from France resulted in the entrenchment of divergent interest groups, namely the French colonial oppressors, the colonist's supporters, the Vietnamese anti-colonialist scholars, the revolutionary and anti-imperialist communists, the Vietnamese nationalist scholars, and the Vietnamese Buddhist supporters. These groups naturally favored conflicting agendas on national matters. Just like the insiders and outsiders in the study of religion, with their debates about the best stands for achieving objectivity, each of those groups claimed that their own strategic plans would bring the most improvement to the Vietnamese situation.

However, when it came to *Quốc Ngữ*, an unexpected outcome emerged. These many groups, despite their conflicting perspectives, eventually reached a compromise by adopting it. The reasons for this development are worthy of investigation. The situation may be instructive not only about the defense of one’s own stand in a debate, but also about the effort of reaching a compromise. It may also be relevant to the problems of adopting English encountered by the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in present America. It is my hope that an analysis of the opposing perspectives that were involved in the adoption of *Quốc Ngữ*, especially the Buddhist perspective, will enhance our chance to compromise and tolerate conflicting scholarly stands in the study of religion.

Undoubtedly, scholarly objectivity is indispensable in any attempt to make a valuable contribution to the study of religion. It is, however, quite simplistic to assume that objectivity means that scholars have no stand, no outlook or limits that guide and inform their research and color their conclusions. Like the special interest groups involved in the adoption of *Quốc Ngữ*, everyone has personal interests and individual agendas which are the products of their own cultural bias. Having conflicting interests, however, should not prevent scholars from reaching certain compromises concerning objectivity.

In the Buddhist perspective, any event, including personal experience, is dependent on other related conditions. It is inter-related and inter-penetrated with its surrounding conditions;

this is called *pratitya-samutpada*, having a dependent origination. Thus, scholarship cannot be isolated from its surrounding conditions and contingent influences. This fact was illuminated by Kathleen M. Erndl's remark in *Victory to the Mother* that "no scholarship is value-neutral." It is further confirmed by Rita M. Gross's assertion in *Soaring and Settling* that "all scholars have their agendas." As a counter-balance to any possible tendency of mine to favor privileged monastic training and practices, I will attempt to apply what Gross calls "the unity of methodology rule," defined as "using the same standard to describe all positions and points of view, whether or not one finds them palatable."

Vietnam has not been a democratic country that allows freedom of speech and expression. The country has no stable form of political government: several political regimes have come and gone within the last century. Textual resources from Vietnam, including histories, have been controlled to serve the interest of the authority that holds power at the time. A new regime will expose the dark sides of the previous one and glorify its own achievements while continuing to suppress opposing points of view. As a result, any scholarly investigation that accepts those materials at face value will go astray. Therefore, reading on the lines, off the lines, and between the lines will be all included in this scholarly investigation, since certain pieces of evidence (including those concerning *Quốc Ngã*) could be suppressed and deleted by one group but resurrected and emphasized by another.

In keeping with the mood of reforming and modernizing the country, the leading Buddhist monks also saw a need to revitalize Buddhism. Even though *Hán* was still a major requirement for studying Buddhist scriptures, they chose to support the move to popularize *Quốc Ngã* as well. Adopting *Quốc Ngã*, while maintaining a vital component of *Hán* in monastic education, required a long and sustained effort. Nationally, Buddhism needed to revive in order to better serve Vietnamese Buddhists and the Vietnamese people in general. Internationally, Buddhism needed to maintain its own effective traditional features, while avoiding assimilation by non-Buddhist foreign and Western elements. The Vietnamese revitalization effort was forced to navigate between those conflicting requirements.

The Revitalization Movement became prominent after World War II, when bloody battles among the Western powers, and then the sudden collapse of the economy in the Mekong Delta under the French colonists, had shattered Vietnamese illusions about the invincibility of French colonial and other Western powers and of modernization in general. Vietnamese Buddhism

needed to revitalize in order to avoid the disaster of being outdated, yet it had anticipated that blindly adopting modernization would be equally disastrous. It was thus that the tradition decided to embrace *Quốc Ngữ* while retaining the education requirement of classical *Hán* in the monastic settings.

In addition to learning *Quốc Ngữ* themselves, leading Buddhist monks intensively trained the new monastic generations while encouraging lay people to learn and use *Quốc Ngữ*. They, individually or collectively, extended themselves to translate Buddhist scriptures from *Hán* and *Nôm* to *Quốc Ngữ*. They even managed to publish Buddhist texts, chronicles, and bulletins in *Quốc Ngữ*. One of their visions was having the Vietnamese Buddhist Tripitaka in *Quốc Ngữ*.

Traditionally, Buddhist monks and nuns taught the Dharma and Buddhist practices in their monasteries. However, in keeping with the spirit of modernization they also embraced the new need to teach this modern Vietnamese language. It became a part of the monastic services to the public, helping to eradicate the illiteracy which had become widespread in the Vietnamese population as a result of French colonial policies. Soon monastics began to establish Buddhist schools, or *Trường Bồ Đề*, in order to provide elementary and high-school educations to young people. This became a national trend, especially after 1964 when the old colonial-period restrictions on Buddhism were outlawed. Also, due to the high number of orphans as a result of wars, Buddhist orphanages were established and managed by monastic members. Associations for Buddhist lay devotees emerged in various provinces of Vietnam and institutions were established in major cities by leading Sangha members. In addition to monastic training, Buddhist monks and nuns were allowed to attend public schools in various fields of secular studies.

Buddhist teaching, ideas, and activities from outside of Vietnam were studied and discussed in the hope of generating a more positive direction for Vietnamese Buddhism. In May 1950, the Buddhist Venerable Thích Tố Liên led a delegation of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha on an official visit to Delhi and other Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India. Thích Tố Liên and his group also joined the International Buddhist Conference at Colombo, Sri Lanka. By this time, the experiences of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and Anagarika Dharmapala in the arena of Buddhist revitalization had already made their impact on Vietnam. As a result of this conference, Vietnamese Buddhism established firm and official connections to Buddhist communities worldwide. Another result was that the international Buddhist flag, which had been proposed in

1883 by the American Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, was brought back and raised in Buddhist temples across the land.

This trend toward revitalization of Buddhism in Vietnam continued well into the 1960s, when the National Buddhist Sangha was formed under the name “The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.” I will discuss the establishment of the national Buddhist institution in Saigon, named Vạn Hạnh University, and other major Buddhist monastic institutions in various regions of Vietnam. These are centers for training new generations of monastic members in the modernized Buddhist practices of post-colonial Vietnam.

During the 1960s, in order to update Vietnamese Buddhist educational methods, a generation of prominent Buddhist monks had been sent abroad to study. The majority of those monks eventually became the leading Vietnamese Buddhist monks abroad, since they could not return to Vietnam when the country fell under communism. Those monks are instrumental for the preservation and the propagation of Vietnamese Buddhist tradition among the Vietnamese communities in diaspora.

This brief survey of prominent Vietnamese Buddhist practices will serve as the cornerstone analysis of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition before the diaspora of the Vietnamese after 1975. The unification of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism within the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam appears to be a unique feature of the tradition.

2. The Communist Suppression of Buddhism in Vietnam. One of the major reasons for the Vietnamese Buddhists to escape from Vietnam was the lack of religious freedom. The Mahayana Buddhist Sangha, the leading majority of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, protested against the communist authorities when they restricted religious freedom and human rights. As a result, several leading members of the Mahayana Buddhist Sangha were targeted for stern repression by the communists. A number of them are still under house arrest. The present Constitution of the Social Republic of Vietnam will be explored in order to highlight the reasons for the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha to oppose the communist ideologies of the authorities. The Vietnamese Buddhist refugees, especially those in the United States, exposed to the world the grime reality of the communist suppression of Buddhism in Vietnam. They continue to support the Buddhist Sangha in Vietnam while trying to reestablish the tradition in America. The Buddhist struggle against the communist suppression is a part of the history of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in its transmission to the United States.

3. **Vietnamese Zen in America.** Thích Nhất Hạnh introduced Vietnamese mindfulness meditation and “Engaged Buddhism” to the American public during the Vietnam War before 1975. This can be considered the period of American Engaged Buddhism. Engaged Buddhism, however, is not a new Buddhist practice. It began in Vietnam during the 1960s, with Thích Nhất Hạnh’s “Tiếp-Hiện Order,” or “Inter-Being Order,” as a way to promote peace and to protest against war in Vietnam. Based upon Bodhisattva practices, it encouraged members of the Inter-Being Order to engage in social services that provide comfort to people and alleviate the suffering caused by war and poverty.

This type of social engagement had previously been undertaken by several prominent figures in Vietnamese history who served as the National Buddhist Preceptors and advisors to the Vietnamese kings of ancient times. During the Lý Dynasty (1010-1225), the strategic relocation of the capital of ancient Vietnam to Thăng Long, or Hanoi at the present time, was accomplished at the direction of Meditation Master Vạn Hạnh. One can perhaps visualize the level of political engagement of these ancient Buddhist masters by comparing such a move to the strategic designation of Washington D.C. as the capital of the U.S. in 1800.

Thích Nhất Hạnh also introduced Vietnamese mindfulness meditation along with his engaged Buddhism. Vietnamese mindfulness meditation, which is based upon a Theravada meditative sutta, appeared to be extremely practical in dealing with the daily tasks of life. Soon after its introduction it developed a phenomenal appeal for the American public. It even became an essential part of his Engaged Buddhism. Books written by Thích Nhất Hạnh on this type of mindfulness meditation are still very popular.

Amanda Porterfield, in *The Transformation of American Religion*, recognized that Buddhism has entered the American religious landscape and that its audience continues to grow in response to the positive teaching by prominent Buddhist figures like the present Dalai Lama and Thích Nhất Hạnh on training the mind as a source of happiness. She proposed that Buddhism, with its deconstruction of selfhood and its promotion of personal happiness, has contributed to the transformation of American religion. Her insights concerning those unique features of Buddhism will be highlighted in my analysis of Thích Nhất Hạnh’s texts on meditation.

Thích Nhất Hạnh’s mindfulness meditation was based upon the *Satipattana Sutta* or *The Foundations of Mindfulness*, a Buddhist Sutra drawn from the *Majjhima Nikaya* of the Pali

Tripitaka. An analysis of this particular text will shed light on the appealing aspects of this mindfulness tradition. I will also discuss Thích Nhất Hạnh's commentary on this particular Sutra, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation*, in order to illuminate the Vietnamese features applied to the practice. Also, I will compare it with the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta* of the Pali Tripitaka's *Digha Nikaya* and also the classical Vietnamese version, *Kinh Đại An Bang Thủ Ý*, and the *Buddha's Discourse on the Four Arousings of Mindfulness* from the Chinese version of the same Sutra. Despite its Theravada origin, the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta* had long been combined in the Mahayana meditative practice of ancient Vietnam under the Vietnamese version of *Kinh Đại An Bang Thủ Ý*. These comparisons will illuminate both the authentic Theravada origin and the Mahayana practicality of Thích Nhất Hạnh's mindfulness meditation.

Later, Thích Thiên Ân introduced another Vietnamese Zen tradition when he was invited to teach at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1966. The tenets and instructions for both these types of meditation will be elucidated and traced back to their foundational Buddhist texts and to the traditional Vietnamese lineages involved. I will analyze the three major texts written by Thích Thiên Ân, *Zen Practice and Zen Philosophy*, *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia*, and *The Zen-Pure Land Union in Modern Vietnamese Buddhism*, for the purpose of establishing the origin of his meditative tradition. Also, I will study his vision and activities in establishing Buddhist centers, in order to demonstrate his efforts to introduce Vietnamese Buddhism to the American public. The University of Oriental Studies and the International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles, established under the leadership of Thích Thiên Ân in 1973, will be the focus of my exploration. Moreover, I will elaborate the efforts of Thích Thiên Ân and the Vietnamese masters, those who came to joined him at the University of Oriental Studies, to teach Buddhism and to train the first generation of Western Buddhist Sangha. Also, I will note the aims and impacts of the University of Oriental Studies, especially after the passing away of master Thích Thiên Ân in 1980.

4. Revitalization in Diaspora. The period from 1975 to 1992 was the time of rebuilding and strengthening the Vietnamese Buddhist community outside of Vietnam. Several Vietnamese Buddhist monks, including Thích Thiên Ân as the foremost, made great efforts to establish the tradition in America. Together, they prepared the foundation for the resurgence and expansion of the tradition that occurred in the U.S. a few decades later. The data, which will include my

interviews and other materials collected, will generate information concerning their efforts. I will analyze their activities in establishing Buddhist temples and monastic training centers, and in propagating the Buddhist teachings; I hope to illuminate adaptations of tradition initiated by these prominent monastic figures as they promoted the continuation and expansion of the tradition.

When the University of Oriental Studies ended with the passing away of Thích Thiên Ân in 1980, the remaining leading Vietnamese Buddhist figures were dispersed. These masters moved on to establish their own practicing centers and to fulfill their own visions. In order to illuminate the adaptations that Vietnamese Buddhists made in order to revitalize their tradition, I will focus on three selective Buddhist centers, namely, the International Buddhist Monastic Institute (Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế) in Southern California, the Temple of Perfect Virtue (Chùa Đức Viên) in Northern California, and the Temple of Pure Heart (Chùa Tịnh Tâm) in Tennessee. They are exemplary because all the centers have had to struggle and make extraordinary efforts in order to establish themselves in the United States, and thus their history offers insights into the process of revitalizing a religious tradition. Examination of these centers will also illustrate three fundamental types of leadership in the Buddhist communities: those of the dedicated monk, the nun, and the laity, respectively.

A different Vietnamese meditation tradition taught by Thích Thanh Từ, a prominent Buddhist figure in Vietnam, has also become popular among the Vietnamese Buddhist communities in the United States. This will be discussed in relevant detail. Other prominent Vietnamese monks who arrived as refugees taught all the major Buddhist practices, but especially the Pure Land tradition of directing and transferring consciousness toward the pure realm of Amitābha Buddha. Altogether, the diaspora of monastics re-established Vietnamese Buddhism in America.

In order to serve the educational and spiritual needs of the Vietnamese Buddhist communities in diaspora, an effort was made to reprint Buddhist Sutras and other texts that had been published in Vietnam. Buddhist monks in diaspora also continued to publish newly authorized and translated Buddhist texts. The International Buddhist Monastic Institute (Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế) in Sepulveda, California, with its own publisher, Ananda Publisher, was the foremost contributor to this effort, with a catalogue of more than fifty Buddhist texts in print during the 1980s and more than a hundred during the 1990s. Also, this publisher continuously

shipped Buddhist texts of various kinds as donations to various Vietnamese refugee camps in Southeast Asia, in response to the requests of those who were anxiously awaiting their resettlement. In general, most of the Vietnamese Buddhist temples in America during the 1990s had their own Buddhist texts printed, though the lists of their books were quite limited.

In September 1983, the first traditional high ordination of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in diaspora, the Thiện Hòa High Ordination, organized by Thích Đức Niệm took place at the International Buddhist Monastic Institute in Sepulveda. All of the prominent Vietnamese diaspora Buddhist monks, including those from Europe and Australia, joined together for this three-day-long, full-scale, and elaborate High Ordination. Their vision was to establish a new generation of Sangha for the purpose of preserving the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in diaspora. They also envisioned that new, younger monastics could perhaps better serve the needs of the younger generations of Vietnamese Buddhist outside of Vietnam, while promulgating Buddhist teachings to the benefit of all. However, the precise details and methods of training those people who were ordained as bhiksu and bhiksuni (monk and nun), depended upon individual Buddhist temples.

The culmination of Buddhist Sangha activities in diaspora was the establishment of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam in America in 1992. In Vietnam, the National Supreme Patriarch, Thích Đôn Hậu, passed away in the Thiên Mụ Pagoda of Hue that year. His last message was an appeal for the unification of the Buddhist Sangha abroad, since those in Vietnam has been under stern repression since the communists came into power in 1975. After his funeral (abroad) ceremony, which was organized by the International Buddhist Monastic Institute in Sepulveda, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in diaspora invited all monastic members to join together as the late patriarch had requested. As a result, the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America was established in 1992.

Though individual temples maintained separate Buddhist training, practices, and financial matters, their unification in Buddhist ideology and in voice was intended to make them more effective. Similarly, other groups of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam came into existence in other countries within the same year. Here began the effort of organizing and unifying the Vietnamese Buddhist communities for mutual Buddhist practice and support in a systematic way. In addition to providing Buddhist texts and Buddhist materials to the Vietnamese refugee camps, the Unified Buddhist Church in America tried to dissuade the United

States authorities from repatriating refugees to Vietnam at the closing of the refugee camps in Southeast Asia. The organization also made various efforts to sponsor monastic members who were there waiting for resettlement. Together, the establishment of various Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Organizations abroad fostered further interactions between the Vietnamese Buddhist communities in diaspora and other Buddhist communities.

5. Assimilation, Adaptation, Pilgrimages, and Interactions. Vietnamese Buddhism has flourished among the Vietnamese communities in America from 1992 to present. Vietnamese Buddhist temples have appeared in every state where there is a sizable Vietnamese Buddhist community, including Hawaii. The increasing number of Buddhist centers established will serve as evidence for the positive results of making adaptations. Both the activities and obstacles observed at those Buddhist centers will shed further light on the process of adaptation.

The traditional role of Vietnamese Buddhist temples has been as religious centers which serve the spiritual needs of the populace. The temples have always been recognized as a place for chanting sutras, practicing Buddhism, studying the Dharma, and making dedications to deceased ancestors. However, in America they also function as cultural centers where the Vietnamese language is taught to young people and various types of cultural activities, such as Vietnamese vegetarian cooking, are made available to people of all ages. Some have even managed to organize musical performances during certain days of traditional festivity. Ubiquitously, Vietnamese Buddhist temples continue to be the destination for visits made during *Tet*, the Traditional Vietnamese New Year. These additional functions of the Vietnamese Buddhist temple in America will be analyzed.

The effort, achievements, and obstacles facing the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in the U.S. became quite widely recognized during this period. The Vietnamese Zen and Pure Land traditions have gained extensive support among Vietnamese Buddhists. Vietnamese mindfulness meditation and the movement of Engaged Buddhism initiated by Thích Nhất Hạnh continue to make their strong appeal among Americans. Pressing problems include the shortage of Buddhist monastic members and the difficulty of conveying Buddhism to Vietnamese-American youths.

During this same period, Vietnamese Buddhists also began to embark on pilgrimages from the U.S. to the important Indian Buddhist sites associated with the historical Buddha, Śakyamuni. First of all, the fact of their making pilgrimages indicates that Vietnamese Buddhists have gained an appreciation of their Buddhist roots through their Buddhist training

and practice in America. It also demonstrates that their circumstances here, including religious freedom and financial security, have enabled them to follow their Buddhist ideas and that they have striven to embrace such religious opportunities.

Pilgrimages have been made to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha; to Bodh Gaya, the place of his enlightenment; Sarnath, the place of the first turning the Dharma Wheel; and Kushinagara, the place of his final Nirvana, all established by the tradition as significant places for pilgrimage. The stories, myths, rituals, practices, and symbols associated with these sacred Buddhist sites have inspired hundreds of thousand Buddhists, regardless of nationality and social status, to embark on pilgrimages. They are retold, performed, and explained to pilgrims by their group leaders.

These group activities at pilgrimage sites illuminate the fact that Buddhists, including the Vietnamese Buddhists, do not actively seek a sense of *communitas* where social status and hierarchy are temporarily discarded. I have been a participant observer in these religious activities, and have joined other devotees in order to experience my own practices as well as to observe and document those performed by others, during my three trips to those Indian Buddhist sites. I am inclined to agree with Kathleen M. Erndl, who has stated in her *Victory to the Mother* that the pilgrimage can have a personal significance that has nothing to do with the group as a whole. The Buddhist pilgrimage is an intensely personal thing, especially since everyone, including non-Buddhists, can always find his or her own spot to meditate or to make prostrations in solitude under the shading trees within the boundaries of those sacred Buddhist sites.

In addition to making pilgrimages to those Buddhist sites, Vietnamese Buddhists saw a need to have Vietnamese monasteries established at significant Buddhist sites in India. Thus, they joined other Vietnamese Buddhists abroad, making financial contributions that supported Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns from European countries in the construction of Buddhist monasteries there. The first Vietnamese Buddhist temple in India, situated a short distance from Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya, was inaugurated in 2002. A few others are in progress. Interactions among Buddhist communities outside of Vietnam became more regular, especially when they gained positive support from other Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Church organizations abroad.

Vietnamese Buddhists have followed the religious practice of giving (*dana*, one of the six paramitas) to provide material support to needy Indians and poor students who live near those

sites of pilgrimage. In the process, they also initiated interaction with Indian Buddhists. For example, Vietnamese Buddhist monks studying in India saw the massive conversion of low caste Hindus to Buddhism in Delhi in 2001 as a hopeful sign for the future of Indian Buddhism after Dr. Ambedkar. This event was widely reported and discussed in the Vietnamese Buddhist press and web sites. The Indian effort to revitalize Buddhism, initiated by Dr. Ambedkar in 1956 and now taken up by Udit Raj, an influential Dalit leader, was observed by the Vietnamese Buddhists with keen interest. While embarking on pilgrimages to the original land of Buddhism, Vietnamese Buddhists were enthusiastic to see more Indians returning to embrace Buddhism. Expressing support and solidarity to the new Buddhist converts in India was a part of their international interaction.

6. **Achievements and Obstacles.** At present, the dominant schools within the tradition of Vietnamese Buddhism in America are Zen, Pure Land, and the combination of the two. However, no separate sects of Buddhist practice have evolved from these prominent schools, as they have done in other Buddhist countries like China and Japan. This evidence confirms the fact that the tradition still retains its distinctive Vietnamese Buddhist features. The tradition has made various adaptations in order to assimilate into the American way of life. However, it retains its Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist core, serving the needs of the Vietnamese immigrants without having completely changed into a new sect of Buddhism. Vietnamese Buddhist temples have flourished steadily in every state in the U.S. where there are noticeable Vietnamese communities. However, the lack of monastic members for several of those temples has become a pressing issue. In addition, the first generation of Vietnamese Buddhist masters has become very old, and a few have even passed away. As a result, the training of new Sangha members is vital to the survival of the tradition. Many temples organized by the Buddhist laity are in need of resident monastic members, and Vietnamese-American youths belong to an English-speaking generation and feel most comfortable obtaining Buddhist knowledge through the medium of English rather than Vietnamese. Thus, it is also a pressing concern that the new generation of monastic members must be trained to communicate in English and must have the capability to interact with young people in a more Americanized manner.

As a conclusion, I will analyze the effective models of Buddhist assimilation elucidated in *Buddhism in Hawaii* by Louise Hunter and then make a projection for future directions of the Vietnamese Buddhist community in America. I will also examine Anthony F. C. Wallace's

“Revitalization Movements” for his theory concerning religious revitalization, in order to provide further assessments of the achievements and shortcomings of Vietnamese Buddhists in their adaptation to U.S. society. I will expand the analysis by referring to the reports and the yearly chronicles published by the Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Church in America after their conferences.

In this study I aim to illustrate the great resurgence of Vietnamese Buddhism in America by highlighting the broad range of practices and the unique features of the tradition, especially its ability to continue to embrace the Theravada tradition and the Mahayana tradition, the two major Buddhist schools. Instead of having a move to establish separate Buddhist sects based largely upon certain prominent texts, the tradition has chosen to harmonize the essential practices of certain major schools for the purpose of catering to the Vietnamese way of life. The significance lies not in the name and fame of a particular Buddhist school, but in the practicality of allowing an individual the ability to experience peaceful concentration and to maximize the benefits from the tradition. An individual can embark on Buddhist meditation when he or she has enough time and suitable conditions, or can undertake Pure Land practices while involved in busy daily interactions with others. Adopting these alternatives has been the long-standing practice of the tradition.

I will demonstrate that within Vietnamese Buddhist communities, despite the high regard for the Zen tradition, the Pure Land tradition combined with certain meditative techniques is the most prominent form of practice. On the other hand, I will also illustrate that Vietnamese Buddhist meditative traditions have proven to have great appeal to American Buddhists and have been integrated into the practices of their communities. Also, I will illustrate that the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition has made adaptations in practice in order to assimilate into the religious landscape of the United States. Such adaptations have produced a great flowering of Vietnamese Buddhist practices in America. The dual function of the Vietnamese Buddhist temples in the U.S., being religious centers as well as cultural centers, demonstrates one such adaptation. So does the existence of Vietnamese Buddhist centers run by the laity.

I will argue, however, that the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition still preserves its own Buddhist principles, monastic structures, and distinctively Vietnamese Buddhist practices. Some of these monastic structures will need to be further adjusted in order to accommodate the younger generations of Vietnamese Americans. Vietnamese Buddhism has, since its arrival,

made heroic efforts to establish its roots in America. Serving the spiritual and cultural needs of the Vietnamese in diaspora and reaching out to benefit the general American public always have been the primary concerns of the tradition. In general, however, Buddhism is not a missionary religion, in terms of making an organized and concentrated effort to convert others. Rather, it is interested in accepting those who voluntarily seek to join the tradition for their appreciation of its teachings and their recognition of the benefits from its practices. As a religious tradition, Buddhism offers a solution to the eradication of suffering. It will no longer be needed when all sufferings are removed. This will continue to be the Buddhist tradition. Thus, an important function of Buddhism is to serve the needs of all people effectively, especially in the eradication of suffering. With regard to the young generations of Buddhists, the interests of Buddhism should not involve forcing them into certain beliefs. Rather, Buddhism should be concerned with bringing understanding, illustrating to those youths that they always have an excellent option for overcoming mental afflictions. This can be done by employing various skillful means, including modern technology. All the tasks of preserving and transmitting Buddhist teachings and practices are vital ones.

CHAPTER 1

THE TRANSMISSION OF BUDDHISM TO VIETNAM

As refugees, the Vietnamese Buddhists have come to America since 1975 after the fall of Saigon. As a result of the Vietnam War, the images of the Vietnamese refugees perceived by the American public have been tainted by various colors of war. The Vietnamese Buddhist tradition was seen under a similar lens because the Vietnamese Buddhists protested against war during that time. However, behind that veil of war, the tradition has a rich tradition of peaceful and calm spiritual practices which can be traced back to the glorious Buddhist tradition of India. The American public might have known the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition as a “Lotus in a Sea of Fire.” Yet, they have not seen the other side of the tradition as it is perceived through its effective spiritual cultivations. Not only did the tradition, like the lotus, survive the scorching fire, it also rose dignified above the water and blossomed with serene fragrance, without being tainted by the surrounding filthy mud. This chapter will offer a vision of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition beyond that veil of war. It is my aim to portray the tradition in a vision of the pure and fragrantly blooming lotus above the mud of secular life.

My discussion will begin with the early transmission of Buddhism from India to ancient Vietnam. The first Indian Buddhist masters, their first Vietnamese Buddhist disciples, and the first Vietnamese Buddhist temple will be illuminated to show the long-standing and traceable lineage of the tradition. Various temple records and Buddhist texts will be used to introduce the major Buddhist activities of the time, including the early translation of Buddhist texts, the pilgrimages of the early Vietnamese Buddhist monks to India, and the initial obtaining of the Tripitaka, the standard collection of all Buddhist teachings. The early Buddhist practices of the Vietnamese and its impacts on the country as a whole will be highlighted. As will be shown in this chapter, Buddhism transmitted from India had enriched the life of the Vietnamese and had given them the national identity which enabled them to build a prosperous nation and to survive frequent foreign invasions.

Also, the major Buddhist traditions of Tantra, Pure Land, and Meditation (Zen), will be elaborated to show the flourishing of Buddhism in Vietnam. Unifying in practices, they worked together to enhance the life of the Vietnamese. Through the practices promoted by these



Figure 1. One Pillar Pagoda, a lotus on a pond of lotus and a national symbol.

traditions, the continuous link of Vietnamese Buddhism up to the present time will be established. In diaspora, the Vietnamese will reestablish this link in order to enhance their lives.

Vietnamese refugees, including Vietnamese Buddhists, first arrived in the United States of America in 1975 mostly empty-handed. Rather than having a preparation or a concrete plan for the future, they arrived due to a hurried evacuation as the disastrous result of the Vietnam War. With only the clothes on their backs and a few personal possessions, their only hope was to get to America, the land of freedom and the major ally of their former Republic country, and to escape the Communist rule. They were simply fleeing from their homeland – let alone entertaining thoughts of establishing Buddhism in the new world. One could hardly find any traces of Vietnamese Buddhism in the four major refugee camps in the United States, which were established to receive and settle the first 125,000 Vietnamese refugees, namely Camp Pendleton in California, Fort Chaffee at Fort Smith in Arkansas, Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania, and Eglin Air Force Base at Fort Walton Beach in Florida.¹ A decade after the first wave of arrival, and despite the continued influx of Vietnamese refugees (“boat people”), the Vietnamese Buddhist community did not have a noticeable presence. Rather the world heard more about the perilous escape and the terrible ordeals confronted by the Vietnamese refugees, who were risking their lives while attempting to cross the open sea and without knowing where they would be settled even after landing. This heart-wrenching mass human exodus lay behind the matter, as follows:

At the height of the exodus, over 56,000 Vietnamese left in the month of June [1978] alone and this number reached over a million by the mid-80s. Thousands drowned. Thousands were raped and massacred by pirates. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), around 500,000 to 600,000 boat people perished at sea. Those who survived reached refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. From those camps, many were admitted to the United States and other “third countries.” (Community History 1)

By 2005, three decades later, however, Vietnamese Buddhism has flourished in the new land. In the U.S., Vietnamese Buddhist temples emerged steadily in every state, including Hawaii. In

¹ An account from Frank H. Smoker, Jr., a retired Major General of Fort Indiantown Gap, mentions that in 1975, when over 22,200 Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees arrived at the Fort, “A Vietnamese Catholic Priest conducted services in the Area 6 Chapel on a regular basis. The Area 5 Chapel was also reactivated as a Buddhist temple to accommodate those many refugees who were Buddhists.” (Smoker 2)

those thirty years, with many Vietnamese-Americans were simply in the process of adjusting to the new culture while others were still arriving, a phenomenal number of 279 Buddhist centers were established. This is a remarkable presence for a population of approximately 900,000 Vietnamese Buddhist followers, about 80% of the total Vietnamese population of 1,122,528. Vietnamese Buddhist temples are highly concentrated in the states with the largest number of Vietnamese refugees. California, with a Vietnamese population of 447,032, has 115 Buddhist centers. Texas, with a Vietnamese population of 134,906 has 29 Buddhist centers. The flourishing of Vietnamese Buddhist centers in communities populated by Vietnamese refugees indicates that Vietnamese Buddhism has continued to serve its people well in a new religious landscape and that the tradition has demonstrated its adaptability.

Before shedding light on the remarkable flourishing of Vietnamese Buddhism in America and its future directions, I will journey back in time to the Vietnamese Buddhist past, including the time before the exodus of Vietnamese refugees, so that an overview of the intricate links between the historical transmission and major practices of the tradition can be established. My investigation will define the traceable lineage of Vietnamese Buddhism. It clarifies the transmission of Mahayana Buddhism from India to ancient Vietnam before the Common Era. Also, it offers the doctrinal principles of the tradition through the first Buddhist texts translated for practice by the earliest monks. Illuminating the major contributions of the Buddhist tradition to the ancient Vietnam, a link is drawn between the Buddhist tenets and the formulation of a Vietnamese national identity and sovereignty. In order to shed light on the practice of the tradition in ancient Vietnam, my presentation will cover the three major Mahayana traditions of Mantra, Pure Land, and Meditation (Zen). These major branches of Buddhism have been influential and prominent in Vietnam from its inception until the present. Their major texts, which are still in use, will be examined for their beneficial tenets and relevant applications to the Vietnamese life. Also, I will briefly focus on Theravada Buddhism, which was officially introduced and recognized as a part of the predominant Vietnamese Buddhism since 1930s.

A Brief History of Vietnamese Buddhism.

Buddhism had long been introduced to ancient Vietnam directly from India via the sea route, the well-worn commercial thoroughfare between eastern and western Asia as early as 2

CE,² even before Chinese Buddhism. The introduction of Buddhism into Vietnam can be traced back to the 2nd century BCE under the rule of Hùng Kings, when Indian Buddhist monks arrived and temples were established in ancient Vietnam.³ Luy-Lâu, the capital of Giao-Châu, ancient Vietnam, which is now in the Bắc-Ninh Province, north of Hanoi, became a prominent Buddhist center with temples built and sutras translated. Giao-Châu, because of its location along the coastal part of the South China Sea, became a frequent stop for trading ships along the sea routes between China and India. As a result, a number of Indian monks came to Giao-Châu and taught Buddhism together with the Sanskrit language. Others arranged to find translators or to learn Han, the ancient Chinese language, before heading to China to introduce Buddhism there. Among those, Phật-Quang (Buddha Radiance) was the first known Indian Buddhist monk who arrived in Vietnam between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. The record also had Chủ-Đồng-Tử and his wife, Princess Tiên-Dung, as the first Vietnamese Buddhist followers of Phật Quang. The legendary site where the Indian Master and their first Vietnamese followers met is now identified by the site of Chùa Hang (Cave Temple) at Mount Quỳnh-Viên, Nghệ-An Province.⁴ Also, a stupa, named Tháp A-Dục Vương (Asoka Stupa), was built by the local people during the 3rd century BCE at the same site to commemorate the arrival of the Asokan mission to Suvarṇabhūmi,⁵ led by Sona and Uttara.⁶ During the 11th century, King Lý-Thần-Tông, built the

² Keith Taylor remarks that “As early as A.D. 2, it is recorded that a certain kingdom of Huang Chih, located ‘south of Nhật Nam’ [The southernmost region of Giao-Chau], sent rhinoceroses to the Han court. According to one theory, Huang Chih was Kāñcī, near Conjēveram in South India....Oc-Eo, an archeological site on the lower Me-Kong in what is now southern Vietnam, has yielded abundant evidence of contact with the West. In addition to numerous items of Indian origin, Roman coins have been found. One of these bears the effigy of Antoninus Pius (138-61). The generals of Antoninus Pius’s successor, Marcus Aurelius (161-80), conquered part of Mesopotamia in 162-65. This apparently stimulated contact with the trade routes leading east, for in 166 a group of merchants claiming to be ambassadors of Marcus Aurelius arrived in Chiao-Chih [Giao-Chau] by sea on their way to the Han court.” (Taylor 59-60). Also see Georges Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, p. 17; Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 24; and Upendra Thakur, *Indian Missionaries in the Land of Gold*, p. 85.

³ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 26; and Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam*, p. 82.

⁴ See Đức Nhuận, *Đạo Phật & Dòng Sứ Việt*, p.18; and Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 26.

⁵ According to *Indian Missionaries in the Land of Gold* written by Upendra Thakur, Suvarṇabhūmi (The Land of Gold) is a region not exactly located either in Burma or in Siam, but signifying broadly what is now known as Southeast Asia, comprising Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Malay Archipelago (Java, Sumatra, Bali, and Borneo, now parts of Indonesia), pp. 4-5. In *Some Aspects of Asian History and Culture*, Thakur elaborates further that “The kingdom of Laos, popularly known as ‘the land of the million elephants and of the white parasol,’ Burma, Thailand (Siam), Cambodia (Kambuja deśa), Vietnam (Campā: Tokin, Annam, Cochin-China), and the Malaysia Peninsular were known as Suvarṇabhūmi in early times, and about two thousand and five hundred years ago, when the Laotians came to settle in one of these regions, they named their capital as Muong Xieng Tong (the City of Gold) as the land is said to have been quite rich in gold. Not only Laos, but the whole of the Malay Archipelago was rich in precious commodities in ancient times,” p. 6.

⁶ Mahanama-sthavira, Thera. *The Mahavamsa: The Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka*, p. 151.

Tường-Long stupa on top of the ruined foundation of that Asokan Stupa. Still in existence, the Tường-Long Temple has recently been renovated at the same site.⁷

Mahayana Buddhism was the main tradition in ancient Vietnam, with the monastic community, the Sangha, comprised of both monks and nuns as late as the first century CE. The lineage of Vietnamese Buddhist nuns together with the system of village Buddhist temples appeared to be well established long before the official introduction of the nun lineage to China from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) during the sixth century CE. Biographies of several of those early Vietnamese nuns which have been preserved in Buddhist temples indicate that a number of them had been influential nuns at their village temples before becoming female lieutenants under the leadership of the two Female Trung Kings⁸ (r. 40-43 CE). The Trung Kings were well-known for their courageous battles against the Chinese invasion during the late period of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE). After the Trung Sister Kings lost the war (43 CE), these nuns retreated to the temple and resumed their duties as nuns again while preserving the Vietnamese independence spirit. One of the nuns was bestowed the honorific title Lady Nirvana (Niết-Bàn Phu-Nhon). Lady Nirvana was wounded in battle and retreated to her native village, which remains to this day and is known as Tiên-La temple in Diên-Hà prefecture, Thái-Bình province. Another nun, named Hoàng Thiều Hoa (3 CE- 40 CE), originally practicing at Phúc Khánh Temple (now the Hiên-Quang village temple in Phú-Thọ Province), left to join the army of the two Trung Sister Kings with her 500 recruits and became one of the leading lieutenants. She returned to her temple after the initial victory and passed away a year later. The honorific title bestowed on her is preserved in temple shrine as “Diệt Bạo Tướng Phật” [The Destroyer of the Vicious Enemies of Buddha].⁹ The early establishment of Buddhism in ancient Vietnam, with the complete Sangha of both monks and nuns is also reflected in a Chinese account mentioned by *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* (A Collection of Outstanding Figures in the Meditation Grove). According

⁷ See Đức Nhuận, *Đạo Phật & Dòng Sư Việt*, p.18.

⁸ The Female Trung Kings (Trung Nữ Vương) are Trung Trắc and her younger sister Trung Nhị. They are the Vietnamese heroines who rose up to become leaders of the Vietnamese after Trung Trắc's husband, Thi Sách, one of the Lạc-Việt lords, was killed by the Han. They were victorious over Tô Định (Su-Ting), the vicious Han prefect in Giao-Chau, took over sixty-five fortresses, and forced the Chinese Han out of ancient Vietnam from 40 C.E. to 43 C.E., until they lost the war to Ma-Yuan (13 B.C.E.- 14 C.E.), a Han General, in 43 C.E. (Lê Văn Hưu et al. 21; Lê Mạnh Thát 1999: I 79- 91; Oscar 28; Taylor 37-38) The famous national female high school “Trung Vương” in Saigon before 1975 was inspired by their heroic names, as honorifically regarded by the Vietnamese.

⁹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 26.

to the text, when the Chinese Emperor Sui Gaozo (r.580-611) wanted to send a Buddhist mission to Vietnam, the Dharma Master Tanquian (542-607) informed him the following:

The area of Giao-Châu had long been in communication with India. Early on, when the Buddha-Dharma initially came to China but still had not been established, yet in Luy-Lâu more than twenty precious temples were built, more than five hundred monks were ordained, and fifteen volumes of scriptures were translated. Because of this prior connection, there were already monks and nuns such as Khâu-Đà-La [Ksudra], Ma-ha-Kỳ-Vực [Mahajivaka], Khương-Tăng-Hội [Kang Shenghui], Chi-Cương-Lương [Kalyanasiva], and Mâu-Tử [Mou Bo] there. In our time, there is Venerable Pháp Hiền, who received the transmission from Vinītaruci, and who is now spreading the school of the Third Patriarch (Shengcan). Pháp Hiền is a Bodhisattva living among humans. He receives disciples and teaches the Dharma at Chúng Thiện Temple, where his congregation numbers over three hundred. Thus, Giao-Châu is no different than China.¹⁰

In terms of the earliest Dharma, out of the fifteen volumes of texts mentioned in the passage, the three Buddhist scriptures known to be circulating after the initial introduction of Buddhism into ancient Vietnam until the early 3rd century CE were the following:

1. *Lục Độ Tập Kinh* (The Collection of Six Paramitas Sutra)
2. *Cựu Tập Thí Dụ Kinh* (The Sutra on the Old Miscellaneous Examples).
3. *An-Ban Thủ Ý Kinh*. (Anapanasati Sutra).¹¹

These sutras were used in Vietnam by Khương-Tăng-Hội, a Vietnamese Dharma Master born from Indian (Sogdian) ancestry. He later utilized them to help promote Buddhism in China when he went there in 247 CE. The first sutra, titled *Lục Độ Tập Kinh* or the *Sataparamita-Samgraha Sutra* (as might be reconstructed in Sanskrit), had already existed in the ancient Vietnamese language before it was translated into ancient Chinese Han.¹² In the sutra, the Bodhisattva principle practices of the Mahayana path through the Six *Paramitas* or Perfections (giving, ethical conduct, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom) were elaborated and demonstrated through ninety-one stories divided into eight chapters and accompanied by Buddhist figures

¹⁰ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, pp. 203-204; Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 129, and Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, p. 134.

¹¹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 318.

¹² See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 425; and Upendra Thakur, *Indian Missionaries in the Land of Gold*, p. 88.

featured in various Mahayana sutras and *Jataka* stories. Thirty-six of these stories can be found in the Pali *Jataka*. Among those stories, there are also Vietnamese details reflecting the concern to connect the original Indian Buddhist traditions to the popular cultural traditions of Vietnam. At the beginning of the chapter leading to the particular *paramita*, the definition of such *paramita* will be elaborated with Mahayana principles. The first *paramita* of giving is defined in the first chapter of *Lục Độ Tập Kinh* as follows:

What is the Giving (*dana*) *Paramita*? It is love and caring for humans and other beings, being kind to the unrighteous, rejoicing with the sages, supporting the successful ones, assisting all sentient beings, beyond the land and heaven, pervading the rivers and oceans. [It is] giving to sentient beings, feeding the hungry, quenching the thirsty, clothing those who are cold, bringing coolness to those heated, and giving medications to the sick. Cart, horse, boat, draft, precious things, wife and son, country, and so on, give those to whoever asks for them. Just like Prince Vissantara, who gave to the poor and needy, as parents to their own children, and even getting banishment from his father, the king, was still loving without hatred.¹³

It is significant that under the supporting stories for the *paramita* of giving (*dana*), story number 23 of *Lục Độ Tập Kinh*, a Vietnamese version of the *Avadanasataka*, is given as the source for the origin of the ancient Vietnamese people.¹⁴ According to the legend, whose exact source is unclear, the Vietnamese came from the Lạc Long Quân (a *nagar*¹⁵ Lord) and Âu Cơ (a *devasi*¹⁶), whose union gave birth to one hundred eggs that hatched into one hundred children, who became the Lạc Việt people, as the Vietnamese were called. Fifty of those children were assigned to live on the highland of the mountainous regions along what is now the Trường-Son mountain range running from North to South Vietnam and became known as “Người Thượng” or the Highland Vietnamese. The other fifty children were assigned to live in the lowland delta along the coastal regions and were known as the “Người Kinh,” the Vietnamese people of the lowland regions. Together, they were the first generation of the ancestors of the Vietnamese people. However, further information about the origin of the legend of Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ was unknown for centuries. Nevertheless, this legend has provided the Vietnamese a distinct

¹³ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, pp. 543-544.

¹⁴ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 489.

¹⁵ *Nagar* is a sacred snake being frequently mentioned in Buddhist scriptures. The *nagar* is regarded as the dragon in East Asian context.

¹⁶ *Devasi* is the goddess, a female being of the heavenly realm.

identity that empowered them to resist being assimilated into the Chinese culture, to repeatedly rise up and fight back against the Chinese invaders, even after almost a thousand years of the Chinese Han occupation (111 BCE-939 CE), and to eventually obtain their sovereignty. However, recent studies on the *Luc-Độ Tập Kinh*, which had been translated from ancient Vietnamese to Chinese and was reserved in the Chinese Tripitaka, have reestablished the missing link, connecting the legend to Indian Buddhist culture. In story 23 of *Luc-Độ Tập Kinh*, the link to the Indian Buddhist tradition was reestablished when “one hundred pieces of flesh of *Vadanasataka*” was revised to “one hundred eggs born from the queen,” which were placed in a pot floating down the river protected by the seal of Indra. The eggs were saved and hatched into 100 sons, who later grew to be healthy, strong, and exceptionally wise, and later on were reunited with their mother, the queen.¹⁷ The Vietnamese version of the *Vadanasataka* had been the source for the legend of Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ. Furthermore, Lạc Long Quân, being a *nagar* Lord (the sacred snake figuring prominently in Buddhist texts) is a protector of the Buddha and his Dharma, just like Mucalinda, the sacred *nagar* King, who coiled around the Buddha to shelter him against the torrential rain during his night of enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The story of Mucalinda is portrayed in detail under story number 79 in the chapter of the *Paramita* of Meditation of *Luc-Độ Tập Kinh*.¹⁸ Nowadays, visitors to Mahabodhi Temple, the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, India, can witness the site commemorating this supporting role with an impressive statue of Mucalinda elegantly rising up in the center of a lotus pond while its coiled body and spread hood sheltering the statue of the Buddha sitting in a meditation pose. In addition, the *nagar* King had been depicted in the *Asokāvadāna* as continuing to protect and honor his portion of the relics of the Buddha in his Rāmagrāma Stupa, in an utmost, sincere, and elaborate manner unmatched and beyond the imagination of Emperor Asoka.¹⁹ Âu Cơ, the wife of Lạc Long Quân, was a *devasi*, a goddess of the heavenly realm. In the Buddhist tradition, the *devas* were the ones who initially besought the Buddha to expound his teachings, or to turn the Dharma Wheel at Sarnath the first time for the benefit of heavenly beings and human beings. Their roles were usually considered to be supporting and promoting the Dharma. Thus, the legendary union of Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ produced the protectors

¹⁷ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 621.

¹⁸ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 779.

¹⁹ See James Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, p.69; Li Rongxi, *The Biographical Scripture of King Asoka*, p. 19; Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang’s Travels In India*, vol. 2, p. 20; and John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka*, p. 112.

and promoters of Buddhism, namely the hundred Vietnamese children hatched from the eggs. In other words, the ancestors of the Vietnamese were the valorous protectors and the promoters of Buddhism. In addition, from a literary perspective, the legendary origin of the Vietnamese people can be traced further back to the motifs of fusion between the sources of the healthy and valorous sons hatched from the bag of flesh (*mamsapesi*) of the *Mahabharata* in the Indian Vedic epic and the five hundred eggs of the Buddhist *Abhidharmamahavibhasa-Sutra*.²⁰

Moreover, the *Lục Độ Tập Kinh* also defined clearly the *Paramita* of Meditation (*Dhyana*) in the seventh chapter. Meant to be a practical guide for meditation, it is extensively elaborated, in form of a direct commentary instead of a usual Buddhist story. Recently, a version of *Lục Độ Tập Kinh*, which had long been translated into *Han* and retained in the Chinese Tripitaka, the Taisho, has been extracted and translated into Vietnamese for the first time together with extensive studies and critical commentaries by Lê Mạnh Thát, a well-educated Vietnamese Buddhist monk and scholar trained at the University of Wisconsin. In order to shed light on the method of meditation in the ancient Vietnam of 2000 years ago, a rough translation of the Meditation *Paramita* instructed by the text is included. Meditation, in the simple style of language, appears to suit the Bodhisattva path. It has four meditative stages, popularly known as the Four Meditations. It is stated as follows:

What is Meditation *Paramita*? It is making the mind upright again, by concentrative intention focusing on good deeds. Keeping this in mind when defilements and misdeeds arise in mind, then use the good deeds to eliminate them. There are Four Meditations. The practice of the First Meditation is to eliminate cravings for five unrighteous attractions, namely, the craving for beautiful forms by the eyes which will cause confusion of the heart by lust; similarly, the craving for sound by the ears; fragrance by the noses; tastes by the mouth (tongue); good clothing by the body. One who determines to practice must stay away from those. Also, there are Five Hindrances, namely, greed, anger, dullness, lust, and doubt. Doubt means doubt about whether or not the path (Dharma), the Buddha, and the Sutras exist. Keep contemplate on those, then the mind is clear of all defilements. As the mind is purified, then one will see the reality, obtaining omniscience. *Devas*, *nagars*, and evil spirits cannot deceive that one. As an individual, who has ten enemies, after escaping to the distant location and dwelling in the mountain

²⁰ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 494.

alone, is unknown to anyone and is no longer worried. Thus, one who has eliminated craving and has a pure and calm mind, is accomplishing the practice of the First Meditation.

After attaining practice of the First Meditation, one advances to the Second Meditation. The Second Meditation is like hiding away from the enemy. Though, living in the deep and distant mountain, one is still afraid of the enemies, who are lurking, and must keep oneself sealed away. The practitioner, being distant from those ten craving enemies, is still afraid that the determination to practice can be destroyed. Attaining the Second Meditation, craving, being distant, cannot defile the practitioner. At the level of the First Meditation, the good and bad are constantly in struggle. One must take the good to eliminate the bad. As the bad recedes, the good will advance. At the Second Meditation, the rejoicing heart will calm down, without the need to prevent the bad by using the good. By thinking of rejoicing and good, the bad will disappear by itself, and so will the ten cravings. Here, the outside conditions will no longer be able to sneak into the mind. As in the case of a lofty mountain, the stream at the peak, without additional entry of any rivers, without rains created by *nagars*, the water just comes from inside out to the stream, clear and pervasive. Similarly, the good comes out from the mind, the bad cannot enter through the ears, eyes, nose, or mouth. Regulating the mind this way, one heads to the Third Meditation.

At the Third Meditation, keep the thinking stable, the good and bad will not enter. The mind will as calm as Mount Sumeru, without letting out the good. Both the good and the bad will disappear and will not be able to sneak back into the mind, as the lotus flower submerging its stems and roots in the water together with the undeveloped flower covered under the water. In practicing the Third Meditation, one is pure like the flower, untouched by the bad. Body and mind are both calm. Regulating the mind that way, one proceeds to the Fourth Meditation.

Here, both of the good and bad are eliminated. The mind does not think of the good or the bad. It is pure and bright like lapis-lazuli; like royal females who bathe and cleanse then apply fragrance and adorn themselves with magnificent dresses and ornaments, and who have clean and fragrant skins. A Bodhisattva, with upright mind, attains the Fourth Meditation. All of the unrighteous and defilements cannot obstruct the

mind, as a clean piece of silk will absorb any color of dye; as a potter who forms things from prepared clay that has no sandy fragments can make all kinds of things; as a goldsmith, after purifying and heating genuine gold, can make as many unique and skillful styles as desired.

A Bodhisattva, with a purified mind who obtains those Four Meditations can be free according to personal wish, can levitate and fly with ease, can walk on water, can make the body disappear, can change into numerous manifestations, can enter and exist without obstruction, can be free from gain and loss, can touch the sun and the moon, can make the earth and heaven tremble, can see and hear throughout so that there are no places that cannot be seen and heard. With a pure mind, one can see clearly and obtain *sarvajna* (all wisdom) about the emergence of the earth and heaven together with the changes of beings in the ten directions. Likewise one knows the thoughts of the past, the occurrences of the future, the consciousness of beings subjected to rebirth in the realms of *devas* (gods), human beings, those cast down to Mount Sumeru [Hell], hungry ghosts, and animals, including their punishment after exhausting their merits and their merits regained after paying with their punishment. There is no place in which that one cannot visit. After obtaining the Four Meditations, if one wishes to attain the *Srotapana* [stream entry], *Sakrdagamin* [one-returner], *Anagamin* [non-return], Arhat, Solitary Buddha, or the righteous wisdom of the enlightened and unsurpassed Buddhas, then one will get that. From those who had obtained the five unobtrusive powers of the Tathagata [the Buddha], they all have the Four Meditations as foundations. Likewise everything is produced from the earth. Without the earth to support them, these beings are not able to stand.²¹

Several examples concerning the results of the Four Meditations mentioned in the passage can be traced back to those given by the Buddha in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (*The Fruits of The Sramana Life*) from the Dīgha Nikāya of the Pali Tripitaka.²² Nevertheless, the above passage of *Lục Độ Tập Kinh* directly mentions Bodhisattva, the prototype figure of the Mahayana path, as the typical type of practitioner. Moreover, this meditation practice is a type of meditation on emptiness (*sunyata*) which aims to obtain the mind without duality, as being proposed by the *Prajñāparamita* texts, the foundational texts of the Mahayana traditions. Thus,

²¹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, pp. 761-763.

²² See Maurice Walshe, “Sāmaññaphala Sutta: The Fruits of The Homeless Life,” *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, pp. 102-105.

the meditation practice of the Mahayana path had been introduced into ancient Vietnam at an early period.

The second sutra of the three initial texts known in ancient Vietnam, *Cửu Tập Thí Dụ Kinh* (*The Sutra on the Old Miscellaneous Examples*), prominently promotes Bodhisattva practices by employing various Buddhist stories. Story 59 of the text even has Manjuśrī Bodhisattva successfully expounding the Dharma to the obstinate people and eventually being able to inspire them to visit the Buddha for further Dharma. The whole scenario aimed to praise Manjuśrī Bodhisattva and his marvelous capability to spread the Dharma extensively and effectively, a task beyond the imagination of Mahakasyapa, Ananda, and other Arhats.²³ Together, the stories of the text, sixty-one in number, function similar to the stories promoting Mahayana Buddhist practices of the first text, the *Lục Độ Tập Kinh*.

Mahayana Buddhist meditation, however, was not the only meditation practice of the time. The third text, the *Anapanasati Sutra*, a sutra on Theravada meditation mentioned in both Theravada and Mahayana Tripitakas and translated into Chinese in 148 CE by An Shih-kaio, was also in use in ancient Vietnam. Until the present time, this particular text remains the foundational and the most popular manual for Theravada meditation. It offers the Buddha's direct and lucid instructions to the Buddhist monks of his time, a step-by-step guide on how to meditate using the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, namely the body, the sensation, the mind, and the object of the mind. This type of meditation can be practiced while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. In general, one begins by sitting in the lotus or half-lotus position and counting the breaths that come in and go out of one's own nose. The text was known and practiced in ancient Vietnam after Khương Tăng Hội, an Indian-Vietnamese monk who went to China to promote Buddhism in 247 CE, added his commentaries to it using Mahayana principles: "the Great Vehicle of the Buddhas intended to liberate sentient beings."²⁴ As a result, Theravada meditation instructed by the *Anapanasati Sutra* had been used in conjunction with Mahayana principles. Together, these three initial texts, *Lục Độ Tập Kinh* (*The Collection of Six Paramitas Sutra*), *Cửu Tập Thí Dụ Kinh* (*The Sutra on the Old Miscellaneous Examples*), and the *Anapanasati Sutra*, unified to promote Mahayana Buddhist practices, especially Mahayana meditation, after Buddhism was initially introduced to ancient Vietnam.

²³ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 146.

²⁴ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 307.

These three texts were fundamental in introducing Buddhism to Vietnam and in promoting a Vietnamese identity that led to the overthrow of the Chinese. They have continued to be instrumental in the development of Engaged Buddhism of Thích Nhất Hạnh and the transmission of Vietnamese Buddhism to America. This recent development of the tradition will be elaborated in a later chapter.

After those initial sutras, Buddhist scriptures continued to be introduced to ancient Vietnam. However, the Tripitaka translated from Sanskrit into Han, the classical Chinese scriptural language, was brought to Vietnam for the first time in 1009, twenty-six years after its first printing in China in 983. At the time, even though Vietnam had obtained its sovereignty, Han had become the official language of the Vietnamese court. It was the result of the Chinese policy of Sinicization for about a thousand years, especially its intensification after suppressing the revolt of the Trưng Sisters in 43 CE. King Lê Long Đĩnh (r. 1005-1009) of the Early Lê Dynasty (980-1009) took advantage of the favorable diplomatic relationship with the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1126) to send envoys to China in 1007, and obtained a copy of the Tripitaka.²⁵ The second time the Tripitaka was brought to Vietnam in 1021, under the request of King Lý Thái Tổ (r. 1009-1028), the initial king of the Lý Dynasty (1009-1225). At the time, Buddhism became the religion of the land. The Tripitaka was brought to Vietnam the third time in 1034 under the patronage of King Lý Thái Tông (r. 1028-1054). Though the Chinese Tripitaka had been copied in Vietnam for use, the kings of the Trần Dynasty (1225-1398) also patronized the making of the Vietnamese version of the Tripitaka. They accomplished the first woodblock print version of the Tripitaka in Vietnam in 1319, after 24 years of preparing the wooden blocks. In this version, they edited out certain less popular texts and added a number of Vietnamese Buddhist texts authorized by the leading Buddhist masters of the Trúc Lâm Zen Lineage.²⁶ Unfortunately, this Vietnamese version of the Tripitaka was confiscated and taken to

²⁵ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, pp. 520-521.

²⁶ According to Nguyen Lang's *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, vol. 1, in December 1319, Buddhist monks and the laity donated blood to print the Tripitaka of 5,000 volumes to be stored at Quỳnh Lâm Temple, the national headquarters of the Trúc Lâm Zen Lineage established in 1317. Master Pháp Loa, the Second Patriarch of the lineage, invited people to give blood for the printing after twenty-four years of preparing the wooden blocks beginning in 1295, including a three-year interruption due to the passing away of Master Trúc Lâm, the First Patriarch and also the father of King Trần Anh Tông, who patronized the project by having hundreds of artisans to scribe and carve those wooden blocks (pp. 338-339). At present, Quỳnh Lâm Temple, rebuilt in much smaller scale after being burnt down during wars and looted of valuable treasures, including that set of first Vietnamese Tripitaka, still has statues dedicated to the Masters Trúc Lâm, Pháp Loa, and even Huyền Quang, the Third Patriarch. In its former glory, the temple stood lofty with one hundred-and-three compartments and especially with an imposing

China with other texts and was burnt to ashes during the Ming invasion in 1400. Again, the Vietnamese Buddhists subsequently brought in the Chinese Tripitaka for use. As late as 1975, Vietnamese monks continued to bring in the modern version of the Chinese Tripitaka for use in Buddhist temples, where Han remained the classical scriptural language. This modern version, popularly known as the Taisho, has 100 volumes and is still written in Han characters.

Accompanying the introduction of the initial Buddhist sutras to ancient Vietnam, there were early prominent Buddhist monks whose activities had made Buddhism a meaningful and beneficial tradition to the Vietnamese people. After the initial introduction of Buddhism to ancient Vietnam by the Indian monk Phật Quang, other Indian and Chinese Buddhist monks known for spreading Buddhism were Khâu-Đà-La (Ksudra), Ma-Ha-Kỳ-Vực (Marajivaka), Mâu-Tử (Mou-Tzu), Khương-Tăng-Hội and Chi Cương-Lương-Tiếp (Kalyanasiva). Ksudra and Marajivaka, who were known for miraculous powers like taming wild beasts and creating rains, came to Giao-Châu between 187-226, during the time of the Chinese occupation, and after the Trưng Sisters had lost the war to the Chinese Han in 43 CE. Ksudra, through his association with the Vietnamese *upasaka* Tu Định and his daughter, Man Nương, was linked to the emergence of Pháp-Vân Temple with the statues of the four Buddhas, namely Pháp-Vân (Dharma Cloud), Pháp-Vũ (Dharma Wind), Pháp-Lôi (Dharma Thunder), and Pháp-Điện (Dharma Lightening). Four centuries later, with the arrival of Tỳ-Ni-Đa Lư-Chi (Vinītaruci), Pháp Vân Temple became the center of the Vinītaruci Zen School. Unlike Ksudra, Marajivaka declined Tu-Định's invitation to remain in Giao-Châu. He later went to China. His activities were not reported, except that he left for Loyang, China, approximately 306 CE, and later returned to India when rebellions broke out in China. Mou-Tzu (160-230), a Confucian immigrant scholar, came to ancient Vietnam from China. Mou-Tzu learned Buddhism in Giao-Châu from 183-194 and wrote "Mou-tzu Li-huo-lun" (Mou-Tzu on the Settling of Doubts), the first piece of Buddhist analytical literature written in Han, in order to defend Buddhism against the criticism from the Taoists and Confucians. His text was widely used in Buddhist studies in ancient China and Japan. Mou-Tzu was one of the masters of Khương Tăng Hội, who had

bronze Maitreya Buddha statue more than fifteen feet tall in a compartment with row of front wooden pillars, each with a girth larger than the stretching arms of two persons. At present, the stone plinths in lotus shape, .77 meter in diameter, scattered around, are the old remain of those pillars. See Trần Mạnh Thường, *Đình Chùa Lăng Tâm Núi Tiếng Việt Nam*, pp. 595-596, and Hà Văn Tấn et al., *Trung Tâm Phật Giáo Quỳnh Lâm*, pp. 19-20, 22, 43.

translated several Vietnamese Buddhist sutras to Chinese.²⁷ Khương Tăng Hội (d. 280 CE) went to promote Buddhism in China in 247 CE and was known in Chinese as Kang Senghui. While in China he also translated and wrote commentaries on several sutras, including the first three initial Buddhist sutras of ancient Vietnam discussed previously. By the time of Khương Tăng Hội, the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam had been functioned well according to the Buddhist Vinaya (Disciplinary rules). The required preceptors, including the three Leading Preceptors and seven additional Witnessing Preceptors, had been fully presented at Khương Tăng Hội's High Ordination. In 247 CE Khương Tăng Hội went to Shien-yeh (modern Nanking), China, where he translated sutras, wrote commentaries, and compiled various Buddhist works before his death in 280 CE. After Khương Tăng Hội, Kalyanasiva, an Indo-Scythian monk, translated the *Saddharmasamadhi Sutra*, while staying in Vietnam from 255 to 257 CE.

Inspired by the initial introduction of Buddhism from Indian masters, Vietnamese monks also traveled to India, the original land of Buddhism, during the seventh century to seek further Buddhist Dharma and practices. I-Tsing (634-713), the second famous Chinese pilgrim monk of the Tang Dynasty after Hsuan-Tsang (600-664), informed us about the six Vietnamese monks who traveled to India and Ceylon. They were Vận Kỳ, Khuy Xung, Giải Thoát Thiên, Huệ-Diệm, Trí Hành, and Đại Thừa Đăng. Venerable. Vận Kỳ from Giao-Châu, known in Sanskrit as Kālacakra, possessed a good knowledge of Sanskrit. Vận Kỳ took High Ordination with Ven. Trí Hiền (Jñanabdhra) in Java, Southern Sumatra, Indonesia. He returned to secular life and resided in Śrīvijaya (modern Palembang, Sumatra). Vận Kỳ, however, continued to cross the South Seas from time to time bringing Buddhist scriptures and teachings back to Giao-Châu and China. He was still alive when I-Tsing visited India (Taisho 2066: 4a22-26). The second monk, Ven. Khuy Xung of Giao Châu, was also known in Sanskrit as Citradeva. He was bright and well versed in Sanskrit. Along with his visits to India, he could even compose songs out of newly acquired Buddhist texts using Sanskrit meters. He traveled to Ceylon and India with his Chinese Zen Master, Ming-Chuan, who died along the way to Bodhgaya from Ceylon. Khuy Xung continued to Bodhgaya to pay homage to the Buddha and the sacred Bodhi tree. Afterward, he visited Rajagrha, where he suddenly fell ill and remained at the famous Veṇuvana (Bamboo Grove) until he passed away at the age of about thirty (Taisho 2066: 4b1-6). The third monk, Mộc-Xoa Đề-Bà or Mokṣadeva was a native of Giao-Châu. He sailed across the South

²⁷ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 317.

Seas in his extensive traveling and visited several countries. Arriving in India, he came to pay homage at Mahabodhi Temple and other sacred Buddhist sites. He remained there until he passed away at the age of about twenty-four (Taisho 2066: 4a27-29). The fourth monk from Giao-Châu, Ven. Huệ Diệm or Prajñaratna, also traveled with his Chinese Zen Master Wu-Hsing to Ceylon and India via Śrīvijaya in Indonesia. Huệ Diệm stayed in Ceylon and was not mentioned after his Master Wu-Hsing met I-Tsing at Nalanda Monastery (Taiso 2066: 4b7-8). The next monk of Ái Châu (the present Thanh Hóa Province), Ven. Trí Hành, known in Sanskrit as Prajñadeva, also crossed the sea and reached central India where he proceeded to visit and pay homage at several sacred Buddhist sites. He stayed in the Monastery of Faith (Tín Giã), north of the Ganges, until his death at the age of fifty (Taisho 2066: 4b15-17). The last monk from Ái-Châu was the Zen Master Đại Thừa Đăng (Mahāyāna-Pradīpa). In his youth, he accompanied his parents to Dvārāvati (now West of Thailand) where he embraced the life of a Buddhist household renouncer. He came to China and received higher ordination from the famous pilgrim monk Hsuan-Tsang (600-664) at Tzu-en Monastery. Later, he returned to Giao-Châu and traveled to Ceylon where he paid homage to the Sacred Buddha tooth relics, then continued on to southern and eastern India. He spent twelve years mastering Sanskrit while doing charity work in Tāmralipti, West Bengal. Among his Sanskrit translations, the *Nidāna Śātra* or *The Treaties of Primary Causes* was well-known. He met and accompanied I-Tsing and Wu-Hsing to Central India where they visited Nālandā Monastery, Mahābodhi Temple of Bodh Gayā, Vaiśālī, Kuśīnagara, and other sacred Buddhist sites. Đại Thừa Đăng was the one who provided I-Tsing the clothes after I-Tsing was stripped naked and was running for his life from Indian bandits. He resided at the Temple of Nirvana, Kuśīnagara, and passed away there at the age of sixty (Taiso 2066: 4b18-c14).²⁸ The sea routes taken by those Vietnamese monks are in the following map.

Through this period, other Vietnamese Buddhist monks also went on pilgrimage to India in search of the Dharma as well as a vision of the Buddha and the sacred Buddhist sites, from time to time, though their names went unrecorded. The practice of making pilgrimages to the birthplace of Buddhism continued by Vietnamese monks down through the centuries,

²⁸ For specific references about the Sanskrit names and places concerning these six Vietnamese monks see Latika Lahari, *Chinese Monks In India by I-Ching*, pp. 38-42; Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, pp. 144-192; Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, vol. 1, pp. 106-109; UpendraTharkur, *Indian Missionaries in the Land of Gold*, pp. 98-102; and Trần Văn Giáp, *Le Bouddhisme en Annam*, pp. 224-227.

exemplified by the Zen Master Sùng Phạm (d.1087), who visited India during the eleventh century when Indian Buddhism was losing ground to Islamic powers. Sùng Phạm studied there for nine years before returning to be the leading Buddhist master of Pháp Vân Temple. Also, the Zen Master Đạo Hạnh (d.1116) of Vietnam reached the northern region of Burma within the second half of the eleventh century. At the time, Esoteric Buddhism still flourished in East India, including Bengal, under eminent Buddhist figures, including Tilopa and Atīśa, who became legendary in Tibetan Buddhism. Đạo Hạnh brought back the teaching of Avalokiteśvara's *Great Compassion Dharani*, which continues to enrich Vietnamese Buddhist practices until the present day.²⁹

Together with the introduction of Buddhism to Vietnam through the initial Buddhist texts, the prominent Indian monks, and the Vietnamese pilgrim monks eventually brought the presence of three major traditions of Buddhist practice, namely, Mantra, Pure Land, and Meditation. The Tradition of Mantra (*Mantrayana*) employs mantras, the Buddhist verbal formulas, in the practice of the protection (*tranam*) of the mind (*manas*). The mantra, charged with potency through its own verbal sounds, is activated during recitation to generate extraordinary power for protection and other types of beneficial effects. In general, the tantric texts instructed various methods of performing mantras and other related rituals both in transparent language or in coded language. The Buddhist tradition dealing primarily with mantras and tantric texts goes under the tradition of Mantrayana, a part of Mahayana Buddhism. Tantric Buddhism, Esoteric Buddhism, and Vairayana are other popular names for the same tradition.

The next tradition of Pure Land provides a way to gain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha for further Buddhist practices until reaching Buddhahood. The recitation of the name of Amitābha Buddha and the visualization of this Buddha and his Pure Land are principle methods for obtaining rebirth in that pure realm. These methods also result in conscious dying so that the consciousness, departing the physical body at death, will be directed toward the Pure Land of Amitābha.

Finally, the Meditation (*Dhyana*) Tradition, known as “Thiền-na” in Vietnam and as “Zen” in Japan and the West, offers methods to calm the mind so that the deep levels of

²⁹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, pp. 355, 365; Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, vol. 1, p.132, and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, *Atīśa and Tibet*, pp.1-3.

concentration, called *dhyanic* stages, and the ultimate purposes of purifying and transforming the mind into the Buddha mind can be accomplished. The standard methods of meditation, especially in the Theravada tradition, are calm meditation and insight meditation. Calm meditation is performed in stable sitting positions with legs crossed while being mindful of breathing. Insight meditation employs the concentrated mind to penetrate the impermanence underlying all phenomena or existences. In addition, being mindful in daily activities or focusing on challenging Buddhist issues (*koans*) is also used in meditation. These Mahayana meditation methods aim to purify the mind from being defiled by conventional discrimination and to reach equanimity together with the wisdom of emptiness.

These three major Buddhist traditions, however, had long been combined together in practice in Vietnam. Unified in practice, they formed the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition that continues to the present day. In order to understand the evolution of Vietnamese Buddhist practice from its origin, I will briefly focus on the history, the major principles, the methods employed by each of those three major traditions. In addition, the later introduction of Theravada Buddhist tradition to Vietnam during the 1930s will be discussed.

The Tradition of Mantrayana of Vietnam.

From the beginning of the transmission of Buddhism to Vietnam, though Mantrayana had never stood out as a major Buddhist tradition itself, the miraculous power of mantras had been a captivating element. Phật Quang (Buddha Radiance), the first Buddhist monk from India narrated in the legend of “Nhất Dạ Trạch” (One Night Marsh) in *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, came and taught Buddhism to the first Vietnamese couple, Chử Đồng Tử and Tiên Dung. Magical formulas and Dharma discourses, including Buddhist stories, were reported as his methods of transmitting Buddhism to the couple. The most remarkable esoteric transmission was the use of his staff and a hat. Rather than just ordinary instruments, they were both imbued with miraculous power that could magically create a palace filled with luxuries and could also make the whole palace disappear in a single night without a trace.³⁰ This trend of miraculous elements associated with the power of mantras appeared with the emergence of the first generation of Buddhist statues established during the second century CE at Pháp Vân temple built by the

³⁰ See Lê Hữu Mục, *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, p. 52; Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, pp. 20, 26.

prefect Shih Hsieh (137-226) in Luy Lâu. The *Cổ Châu Pháp Vân Phật Bản Hạnh Ngũ Lục* (The record concerning the original activities of the Dharma Cloud Buddha at Cổ Châu) narrated that an Indian monk named Kṣūdra recited sutras and entered a deep stage of meditation for seven days without eating as his routine practices. He could predict drought three years in advance. Using mendicant staff and mantra, Kṣūdra then magically drew water from deep under the ground and even made rain to support the local people during the long drought. Also, he convinced a big forest tree into lending its support in raising a child belonging to his female Buddhist disciple named Man Nương and bestowed on it that unique power of generating rain when it was carved into the four statues named Pháp Vân, Pháp Vũ, Pháp Lôi, and Pháp Điện, or Dharma Cloud, Dharma Rain, Dharma Thunder, and Dharma Lightning, respectively. All of them, including Man-Nương and the child, were venerated and elevated as Buddhas by Shih Hsieh and the local people together with the Vietnamese kings of the later centuries as their magical power of making rain prevailed the test of time.³¹

During the early sixth century, in 508, Vinītaruci (d.594) translated the *Vaipulyadharani Stotra* from Sanskrit. This marked the initial emergence of a tantric text in ancient Vietnam. The sutra focused on cultivating Bodhicitta and various stages of Bodhisattva practices, including an emphasis on the cultivation of right speech by restraining oneself from slandering others. Employing the tenets of this tantric sutra, Vinītaruci taught meditation at Pháp Vân Temple of Luy Lâu and established the first Vietnamese Zen lineage known as the Vinītaruci Zen School. Later, during the tenth century, the first systematic practice of Mantrayana focusing on a definite mantra in a text titled the *Uṣṇīsavijayadhāranī* emerged under the Đinh Dynasty (968-980). The mantra, in Chinese characters, was carved on hexagonal stone pillars called Bảo Tràng or *Ratnadhvaja*. In 973, Lord Đinh Liễn erected one hundred Ratnadhavajas in order to generate merits to help liberate the spirit of his deceased brother. Liễn established another hundred tantric pillars in 979, aiming to gain a healthy perpetuation of his dynasty.³² Archeological efforts from 1963 to 1987 have recovered 20 of those stone pillars. Some of their fragments also contained the lines “Namo Prahūtaratna [Tathagata], Namo Surupakaya

³¹ The primary source for this tantric perspective is a Han-Viet translation based on the woodblock print version of the “Cổ Châu Pháp Vân Phật Bản Hạnh Ngũ Lục” in *Di Văn Chùa Dâu* by Nguyễn Quang Hồng. Other versions of the text are also consulted in comparison. See also Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, pp. 138-144, Lê Hữu Mục, *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, pp. 75-76, and Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam*, pp. 82-83.

³² Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 420.



Figure 4. Pháp Vân Temple (Chùa Dâu), Bắc Ninh Province. Photo Trần Mạnh Thường.



Figure 5. The statue of Pháp Vân (Dharma Cloud), with attendants. Photo Võ Văn Tường.

[Tathagata], Namo Vipulakāya [Tathagata],” appearing to be a part of the ritual instruction for performing the *dhāranī*. The *Uṣṇīsavijayadhāranī*, carved on those pillars, matched the Chinese version translated by Vaijrabodhi (670-741) and Amosghavajra (705-774), who had translated Sanskrit texts and established Esoteric Buddhism in China during the eighth century. The text narrated that Supratīṣṭhita, a heavenly king whose heavenly life span was about to end, frantically sought and eventually received this *dhāranī* from the Buddha at Śrāvati. By reciting it, he was able to remove his negative karmas. In addition, he regained his former heavenly status endowed with a more superior life span and merits.³³ In Vietnam, those pillars eventually fell into decay, indicating the decline in popularity of the text as time went on. The text, however, had been translated into modern Vietnamese by Ven. Thích Thiên Tâm in 1975, and reprinted in the United States in 1985 by Ven. Thích Hải Quang, who brought it along during his perilous escape as one of the boat people.

The most popular and enduring tantric text in the Vietnam Buddhist tradition has been the *Great Compassion Mantra*, known in Vietnam during the twelfth century. Its complete title is the *Great Compassionate Minded Dharani of The Thousand-Arm-and-Thousand-Eye One*. The text offers a long mantra or *dhāranī* spoken by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the embodiment of compassion, while he was manifesting himself in an enormous form with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes. While an image of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was known in Giao Châu as early as the fifth century because of his golden statue, which miraculously radiated dazzling lights mentioned by the Chinese writer Wang Yen,³⁴ the tantric practice of reciting mantras connected to him was not found on record at the time. *The Great Compassion Mantra* brought back to Vietnam from North Burma in the eleventh century by the Zen Master Đạo Hạnh (d.1115) established a textual foundation for the practice and spread of the popularity of Avalokiteśvara.

The mantra, when recited by a sincere heart and concentrated mind accompanied by proper

³³ In China in 776, the Chinese authorities had even commanded all of their monks and nuns to chant this *dhāranī* twenty-four times each day and made an accumulative report to the king at the New Year day. The mantra made to Japan by Kukai (774-835), who brought back a version of this text when he returned to Japan in 806 to establish the Japanese tradition of Exoteric Buddhism after learning from Hui-kuo (746-805), the lineage holder after Amosghavajra. See Hà Văn Tấn, *Chữ Trên Đá Chữ Trên Đồng Minh Văn và Lịch Sử*, pp. 97-98, 106 & 108; Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, pp. 420, 431; and Yoshito Hakeda, *Kukai Major Works*, p.31.

³⁴ Vương Diễm (Wang Yen), who was born in Thái Nguyên, Giao-Châu, and later grew up to be a well-known Chinese writer after his return to China, wrote in his *Minh Tường Ký (Ming Hsiang Chi)* that at the age of eight he received his golden statue of Avalokiteśvara from a virtuous Vietnamese monk named Dharma Master Hiền when he received his five lay Buddhist precepts from this master in Vietnam. See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 537. Also, for Wang Yen and his *Minh Hsiang Chi* see Ch'ên Shou-yi, *Chinese Literature A Historical Introduction*, p. 271, and Victor H. Mair, *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, p. 171.

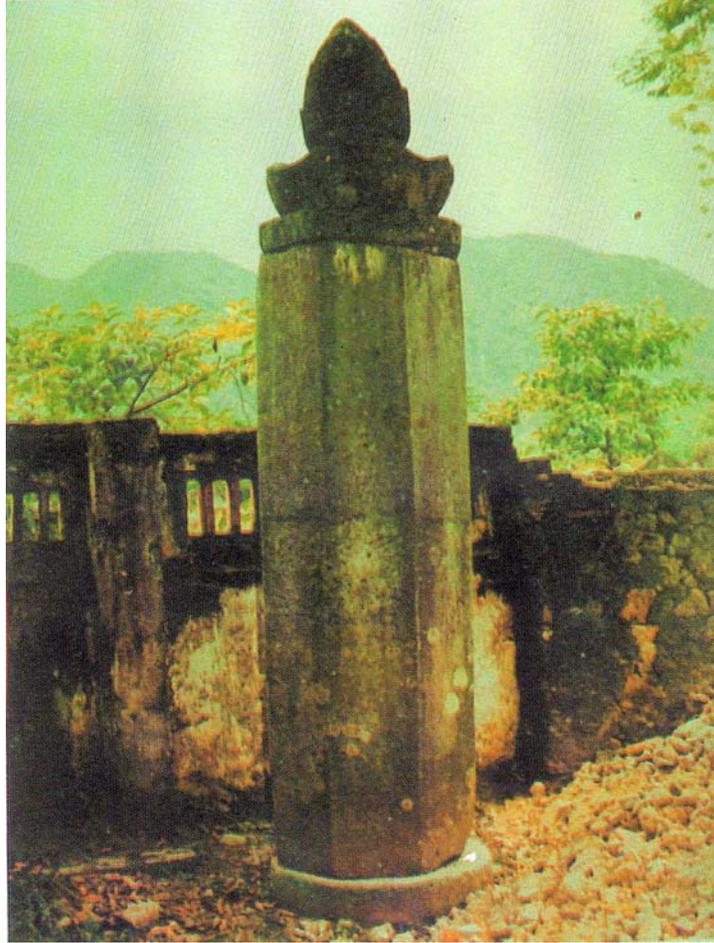


Figure 6. The Bảo Tràng or *Ratnadhvaja* at Hoa Lư, Hà Nam Ninh Province.
Photo Võ Văn Trường.

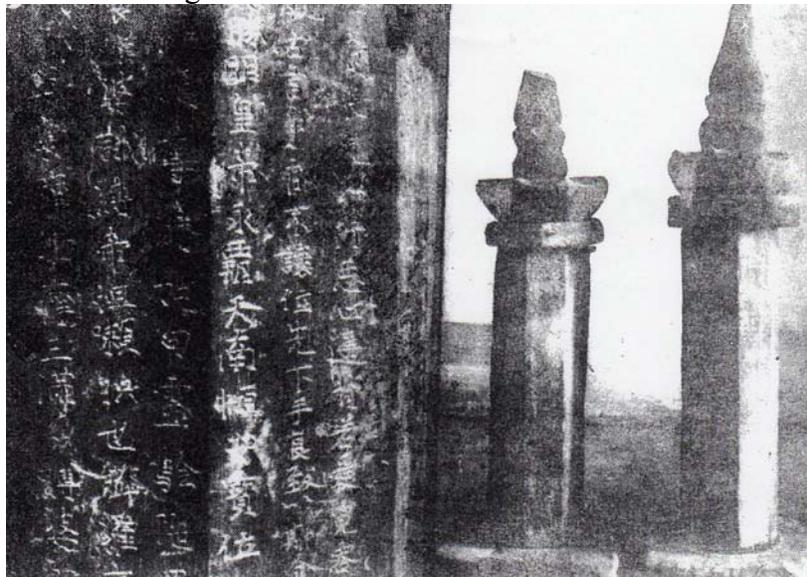


Figure 7. Other *Ratnadhvajās*, with Chinese inscriptions of the *Usnīsavijayadhāranī*.
Photo Hà Văn Tấn.

methods of generating a compassionate mind-set and purification, promises the means to pacify the mind, enhance spiritual progress, remove fear, accumulate merits, purify misdeeds, heal diseases, eliminate obstacles, ward off enemies, and lead to an array of other benefits. It is the wish-fulfilling jewel of the tradition. The text also offers various *mudras* or hand gestures and their respective mantras in order to accommodate individual aspiration. The main mantra, however, can be recited without using *mudras* or complicated rituals. The *Great Compassion Mantra* exemplified itself as the most effective mantra through the story of the Zen Master Đạo Hạnh and is frequently recited during the daily chanting sessions in most Vietnamese Mahayana temples at present. An account of Đạo Hạnh illuminates the legacy of *The Great Compassion Mantra*, as follows:

Once, Từ-Vinh (Đạo-Hạnh's father) offended the Marquis Diên-Thành. Diên-Thành asked the sorcerer Đại-Điên to use black magic to beat Vinh to death and hurl him into the Tô River. When Vinh's corpse got to the Quyết-Kiều Bridge, where Diên-Thành's mansion was located, it suddenly stood up like a living man and pointed [at the mansion]; he remained there the whole day, unmoving. Diên-Thành was scared and rushed word of this to Đại-Điên. Diên came and said, "A monk's anger should not last overnight!" Even as he spoke, Vinh's body flowed away with the current.

Đạo-Hạnh thought about avenging his father's death, but had not come up with any plan. One day, he lay in wait for Đại-Điên to go outside. As Diên appeared, he was about to strike him when suddenly a voice in the air shouted, "Stop! Stop!" Đạo-Hạnh was frightened, dropped his stick, and ran away. He then decided to go to India to learn black magic to fight Đại-Điên. He went only as far as the country of the golden-toothed barbarians (now, Myanmar) where he realized that the road was full of difficulties, so he turned back.

He then went to Mount Từ Sơn to live in seclusion and devoted himself to chanting the *Great Compassionate Mind Dharani* daily. One day, after he had recited it 108,000 times, a god appeared before him and said, "I'm your servant, the Celestial King who is the Guardian of the Four Directions. I was moved by your achievement of chanting the sutra, so I came here to place myself at your disposal." Đạo-Hạnh knew that his magical power was now complete, so he would be able to avenge his father's death. He then went to the head of the Quyết-Kiều Bridge and tentatively threw his walking

stick into the swift running water. The stick went against the current like a dragon and did not stop until it reached the Tây-Dương Bridge. Đạo-Hạnh was pleased, saying, “Now my magic arts will prevail.”

He went directly to Đại-Điền’s house. Seeing him, Đại-Điền said, “Don’t you remember what happened before?” Đạo-Hạnh looked up to the sky, but it was all quiet, and there was nothing to be seen. Then he chased Đại-Điền and struck him. Đại-Điền became sickened and died.

After this, the enmity he had felt previously melted like snow, and this mundane concern became like cold ashes. Đạo-Hạnh wandered to all monasteries to search sanction [for his enlightenment].³⁵

As a distinctive element, Vietnamese Tantrism in connection with the Zen Master Đạo Hạnh, however, did not favor reincarnation in order to further the lineage system in either the religious or temporal realms, especially when the death of a young child was initially required. Unlike the Tibetan Tulku system, in which an enlightened master normally takes consecutive rebirths and gets recognized in the form of a new child called a Tulku in order to lead the lineage, to maintain the purity of the lineage, including its specialized esoteric teachings, and to continue his Bodhisattva vows of benefiting sentient beings,³⁶ the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition did not promote a similar practice since its inception. In February of 1112, Giác Hoàng, a three-year-old lad revealed his supernatural power to the royal court, including knowing the activities of the king inside the palace. He was willing to die in order to be reborn as the son of King Lý Nhân Tông who was without heirs. Đạo-Hạnh articulated that such a scheme of utilizing rebirth to continue the secular power at the royal court was “deceiving people’s minds and disturbing the righteous Dharma.”³⁷ Being an accomplished master in mantras, who even left instructions about his future incarnations until he would be completely liberated from cyclic existence, Đạo Hạnh recited mantras onto magic seals and completely blocked Giác Hoàng from the attempt. His tantric power brought that type of reincarnation to an end. Since then, without a trend of reincarnation similar to that of the Tulku system, Vietnamese Mantrayana went without a heavy concentration on the purity of individual esoteric lineages. Therefore, the tradition did not have

³⁵ See Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen In Medieval Vietnam*, p. 178.

³⁶ See Nik Douglas and Meryl White, *Karmapa: The Black Hat Lama of Tibet*, pp. 34-36, and also its introduction.

³⁷ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, pp. 337- 374; Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen In Medieval Vietnam*, pp. 180-181.

to deal with the problems entailed by such practices of reincarnation, like the contesting Tulkus and the associated power struggles. Also, the tradition removed the possibility of forcing young children to die in order to satisfy certain vanities from the authority in spite of the suffering of the family involved.

In addition to the *Great Compassion Mantra*, the *Śūraṅgama mantra* has also shared significant importance in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition since the fourteenth century, when King Trần Nhân Tông (1258-1308) invited the Indian master named Bồ Đề Thất Ly (Bodhiśrī) to Vietnam to lead the translation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. Its significance and popularity flourished when the Zen Master Pháp Loa (1288-1330), the Second Patriarch of the Trúc Lâm Zen School, attained realization from the sūtra. The fame of the sutra expanded further when the Third Patriarch Huyền Quang (1254-1334) continued to deliver lectures on it publicly in 1313 at the major Buddhist temples of the Trúc Lâm Zen Schools, including Báo Ân temple at the capital Thăng Long.³⁸ The mantra is a part of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, whose Indian origin can be traced back to Nalanda Monastery. Indeed, the *Śikṣā Samuccaya* composed by Śāntideva (687-763) at Nalanda made reference to the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. As a meditation guide, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* discusses twenty-five perfect penetrations as gateways of practice. In practice, it promotes the perfect penetration of hearing faculty introduced by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the one that surpasses all others. Instead of listening to external sounds, one should revert the hearing faculty to be mindful of the self-nature (*svabhāva*). In expounding the essential principles of practicing meditation, the sūtra offers seven perceptions concerning the mind, including an elegant exposition of the illusory, through the illustration of the sky-flower.³⁹ Presenting unique

³⁸ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Trần Nhân Tông Toàn Tập*, p.11; and Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, pp.334, 352. Also, in 1318, another Indian master named Ban Đê Đa Ô Tra Thất Lợi (Paṇḍita Udaśrī) came to Vietnam to translate the tantric sutra titled *Kinh Bạch Tán Cái Thần Chú (Mahasi Tālapatra Dhāranī)*. See Hà Văn Tấn et al., *Trung Tâm Phật Giáo Quỳnh Lâm*, p. 21, and Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, vol. 1, pp. 136, 402.

³⁹ In chapter four of the *Śūraṅgama Sutra*, the example of the sky-flower illustrates that there are no real flowers in space, though they might be seen by eyes infected with disease, just as there is no deceptive perception in the enlightened mind which is pure like the nature of space. Other examples, including the refined gold and its ore, are also offered in the sutra (Thích Chơn Giác 262, *Phật Học Tổng Thư*, VI-VII: 107-108). In *The Life of Hsuan-Tsang*, Hsuan Tsang (602-664) proudly reported that Nalanda Monastery during his time was mockingly named the monastery of the sky-flower doctrine by some non-Mahayana Buddhist venerables in Orrisa, who were then scolded by King Śīlāditya-rāja for not having met the Mahayana venerables at Nalanda (Beal 159). However, Hsuan-Tsang was in no way claiming that the *Śūraṅgama Sutra* was compiled at Nalanda. In Buddhism, illustrious monks have had no problem claiming their own texts. Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and *Śikṣā Samuccaya*, delivered publicly under his name when he was at Nalanda, were and are still renowned in Mahayana Buddhist temples. Naming a Buddhist temple after a Buddhist sutra does not mean that the respective sutra has been composed there. Ubiquitously, numerous Mahayana Buddhist temples have the names of Avatamsaka, Śūraṅgama, Prajñāpāramitā, Sukhāvātī, Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, Great Compassion, and so on. This only means that the sutras or their

instructions for meditation, the text elaborates the results of penetrating each of the five skandhas.⁴⁰ As an indispensable warning concerning Mahayana meditation, it points out in detail a total of fifty deviant mental states, ten for the penetration of each skandha, revealing dangerous pitfalls to be avoided. In the text, the Buddha also instructs Ananda to recite the mantra in order to enhance meditation and to ward off both internal and external obstacles that might be encountered during meditative stages. As usual, the text also indicates various benefits for reciting the mantra. For intensive practice, the sutra even gives descriptive instructions for constructing the mandala using multiple reflecting mirrors to reflect images of the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, and other Buddhist deities. The whole process of constructing and purifying the mandala, including the traditional Indian way of consecration using cow dung and the offering of milk and clarified butter, is complicated. In addition, memorizing the whole extremely long mantra in Sanskrit sounds intensifies the complication. Because of those difficulties, the mantra is not frequently performed in the lay Buddhist communities where time and preparation are less feasible. Rather, it is more popular in the monastic settings, where longer meditation is performed and has long been the primary mantra for morning chanting.

From the fourteenth century onward, Vietnamese Buddhists have utilized the *Śūraṅgama Mantra*, the *Great Compassion Mantra*, together with ten other short mantras. In addition, the *Prajñāparāmitā-hṛidhya sutra*, popularly known as the *Heart Sutra*, has also accompanied those mantras. The sutra itself works as a mantra for several reasons. In Mahayana Buddhism, the core teaching of the *Prajñāparāmitā* on the wisdom of emptiness (*sunyata*) provides the foundation for the Tantric tradition, including the use of Sanskrit letters as mantra. In a version of the *Prajñāparāmitā Sutra*, the Buddha teaches Ananda the meanings of various Sanskrit letters and announces that the Sanskrit letter “ॐ” (“A”) is the representation of the whole text, saying, “Ananda, do receive, for the sake of the weal and happiness of all beings, this Perfection

particular teachings are getting promoted by those individual temples. Samuel Beal (1825-1889), seemingly unfamiliar with this aspect of Buddhism, had speculated that the *Śūraṅgama Sutra* was written there. See Samuel Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, vol. 2, p. 110, fn. 55; and Śāntideva, *Śikṣā Samuccaya*, p. 9; Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, p. 334; and Thích Minh Cảnh, *Từ Điển Phật Học Huệ Quang*, vol. 5, p. 3667.

⁴⁰ The five skandhas are form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness. Altogether they form the physical (form), and the mental parts (the rest of the five skandhas) of an individual.

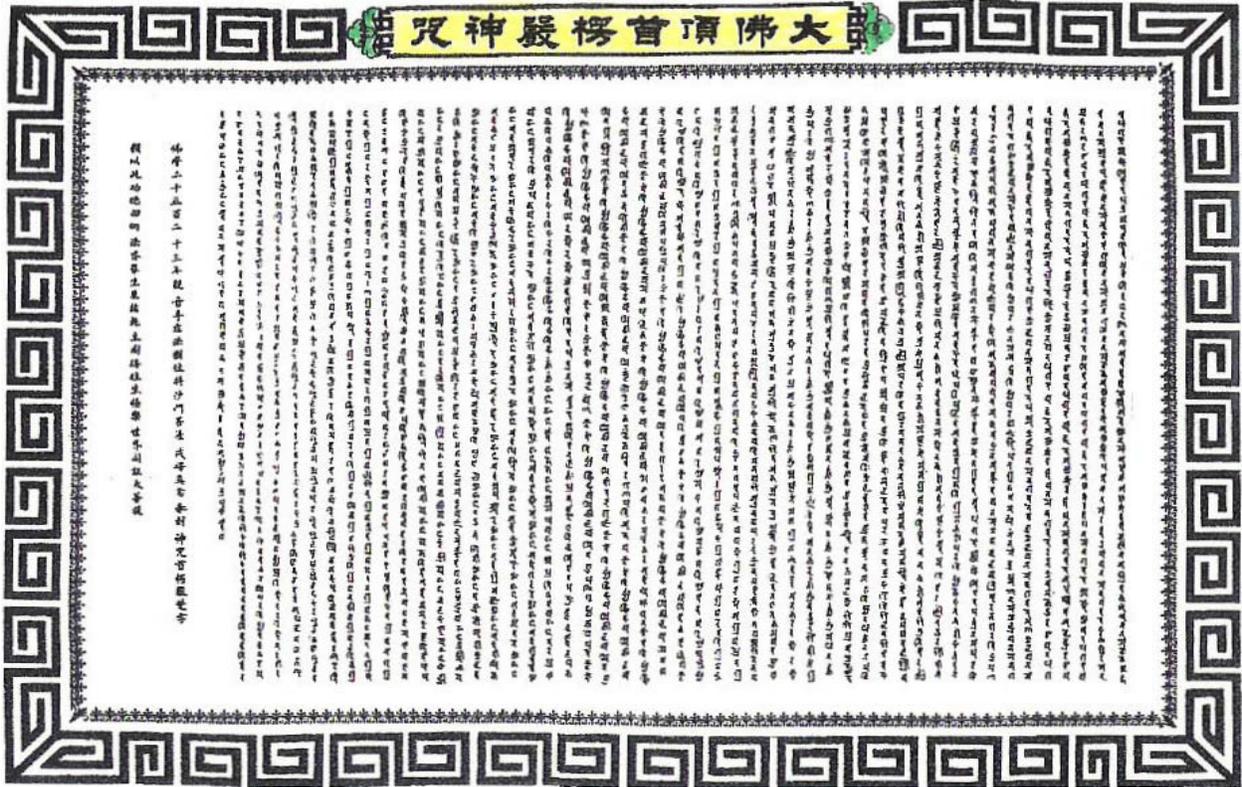


Figure 10. The *Surangama Mantra* in Siddham-Sanskrit, see English translation in Appendix C. Photo Minh Quang.

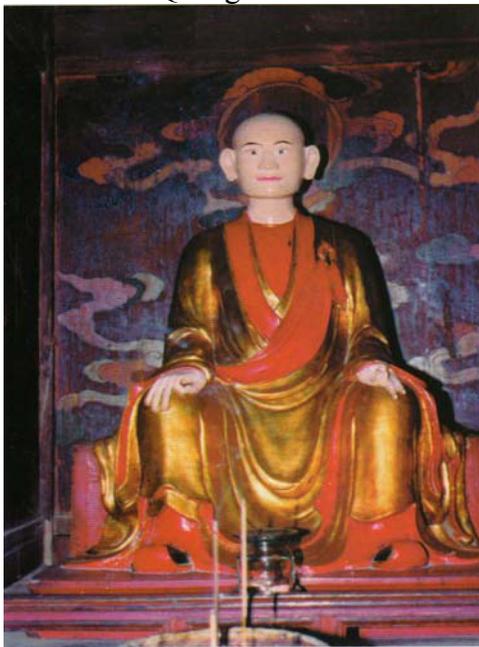


Figure 11. The Zen Masters Pháp Loa and Huyền Quang, the promoters of the *Surangama Sutra*. Photos Thích Thanh Từ.

of Wisdom [*Prajñāparāmitā*] is one letter; i.e. ‘ॐ.’”⁴¹ Similarly, in another version, the Buddha instructs Subhuti the same idea, announcing “Know that all dharmas are like space. This is called the *Dharani* gateway, the precise meaning of letter ॐ.”⁴² In another version, the Buddha teaches Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva “the *Prajñāparāmitā* in a few words.”⁴³ *The Heart Sutra*, the most abridged version of the *Prajñāparāmitā*, is indeed short in comparison to other versions of 8,000 lines or 25,000 lines. In addition, the concluding Sanskrit mantra of this sutra, “gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, svaha,” works perfectly as a mantra. In chanting sessions, the *Heart Sutra* is performed after the main text, right before the dedication. It aims to generate the wisdom of emptiness, so that the accumulated merits will be dedicated toward all sentient beings without attachment. Altogether, these mantras are frequently combined in yogic recitations in order to pacify and feed the *pretas*, or the hungry ghosts. At present, it is still the norm in Vietnamese Buddhist temples, both in Vietnam and abroad, that these mantras, as elements of the Mantrayana, are recited either in their distinctive chanted sessions or in conjunction with other popular Buddhist scriptures. In function, the Vietnamese Tantric practices serve as a complement to the practices of Zen and Pure Land, not as an independent tradition.

The Pure Land Tradition of Vietnam.

In general, Pure Land Buddhism focuses on gaining a better rebirth in order to advance in Buddhist practice, not in this realm of suffering, but in another Buddha realm which is without defilement and without suffering caused by physical harm or inflictive emotion. According to Buddhist cosmology, there are other realms of Pure Land (*sukhāvātī*) established by other Buddhas beyond this mundane realm of existence. Popular among those are the Land of Bliss in the West of Amitābha (Infinite Life or Boundless Light) Buddha, the Universe of Abhirati (Wonderful Joy) in the East of Ashobhya (Undisturbed) Buddha, and the World of Vaiḍūryaprabhāsa (Bright Beryl) of Bhaiṣajyaguru (Medicine King) Buddha. Many sutras devoted to each of those popular Pure Lands are still in practice. However, only Amitābha Buddha and his Western Pure Land manifested themselves as an independent tradition for

⁴¹ See Edward Conze, *Selected Sayings from The Perfection of Wisdom*, p. 125.

⁴² See Thích Trí Tịnh, *Kinh Đại Bát Nhã*, vol. 1, pp. 293.

⁴³ See Edward Conze, *Selected Sayings from The Perfection of Wisdom*, p. 122.

practice, namely the Pure Land tradition. The Indian origin of Amitābha Buddha had long been shrouded in mystery and, consequently, speculations because of the lack of records. Toward the twelfth century, as the Muslim invaders, including Ikhtiyar-ud-din Muhammad, who invaded Bihar and put to death the Buddhist monks dwelling at Nalanda Monasteries, pushed eastward into the heartland of the Buddhists from western India, they “swooped down on them with Khalif Omar’s famous slogan at the siege of Alexandria ringing in their ears: ‘Burn all the libraries, for their value is in one book.’”⁴⁴ At a result, Indian Buddhism had been wiped out of India, together with its textual records. All of the prominent traces of Indian Buddhism, including monasteries, like Nalanda, with their well-stocked libraries treasuring sutras and various manuscripts, had been burnt to ashes, while monks were slaughtered, and Buddhist temples, including their Buddhist statues, were destroyed beyond recognition. It seemed impossible to find ancient evidences of Amitābha Buddha in India. Fortunately, in the late twentieth century, after decades of making tremendous efforts, the archeologists together with Buddhist scholars from India and around the world brought to light the Indian origin of Amitābha Buddha. In 1977, a pedestal of Amitābha Buddha’s statue recovered from Govindnagar, on the western edge of Mathura city, India, confirmed the existence of Amitābha Buddha statue there in 104 C.E., with the following four Sanskrit lines:

1. Mahārājasya huvipaksya sam 20 (6) va di 20 = 6
2. Etasyapūveya satvakasya sāthevāhasya pautro bala ka (i) tesay śreṭṭhisya nāttikenā
3. Buddha balena putreṇa nāgarakṣitena bhagavato buddhasya amitābhasya pratimā
pratiṭhāpi (ta)
4. (Save) Buddha pūjāye imena kuśalamūlena save (satva)anuttara Buddha jhānam
(śrāvitam).⁴⁵

or in English, as follows:

The 26th years of the Great King Huveṣka, the second month, the 26th day. On this day by Nāgarakṣita, the (father) of the trader Satvaka, the grandson of the merchant Balakatta, the son of Buddhapila, an image of the Blessed One, the Buddha Amitābha was set up for the worship of all Buddhas. Through this good root of merits (may) all living things (obtain) the unexcelled knowledge of a Buddha.⁴⁶

Thus, during the early second century, in 104 CE, or the 26th years of King Huveṣka, Amitābha Buddha was known in Buddhist practices in India.

⁴⁴ See Sukuma Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, pp. 293 & 357.

⁴⁵ See R. C. Sharma, *Buddhist Art: Mathura School*, p. 215.

⁴⁶ Gregory Schopen, *Figments and Fragments of Mahayana Buddhism in India*, p. 258.

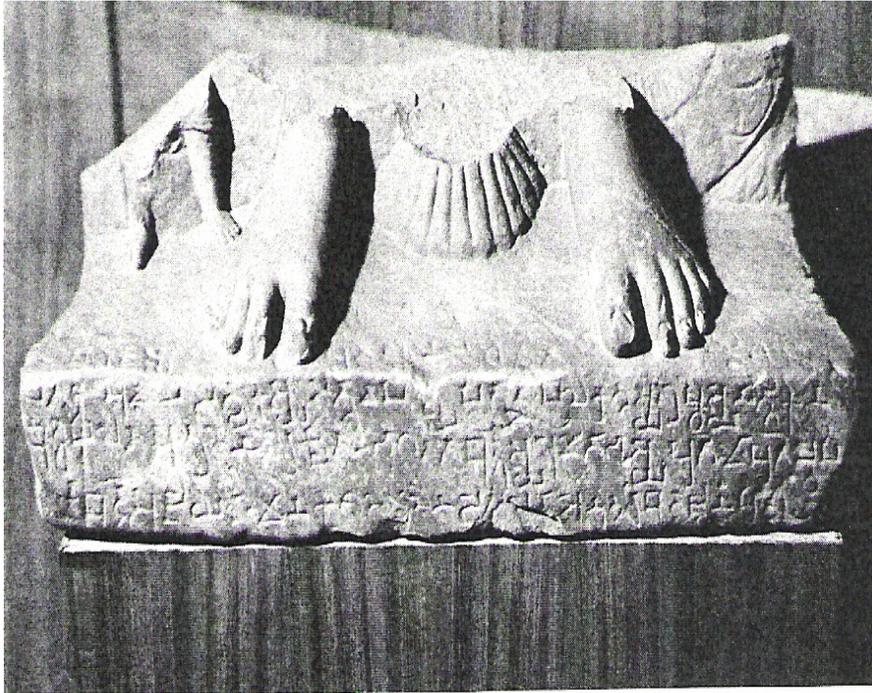


Figure 12. The Kuṣān Amitābha inscription, Mathura, India. Photo J. C. Huntington.

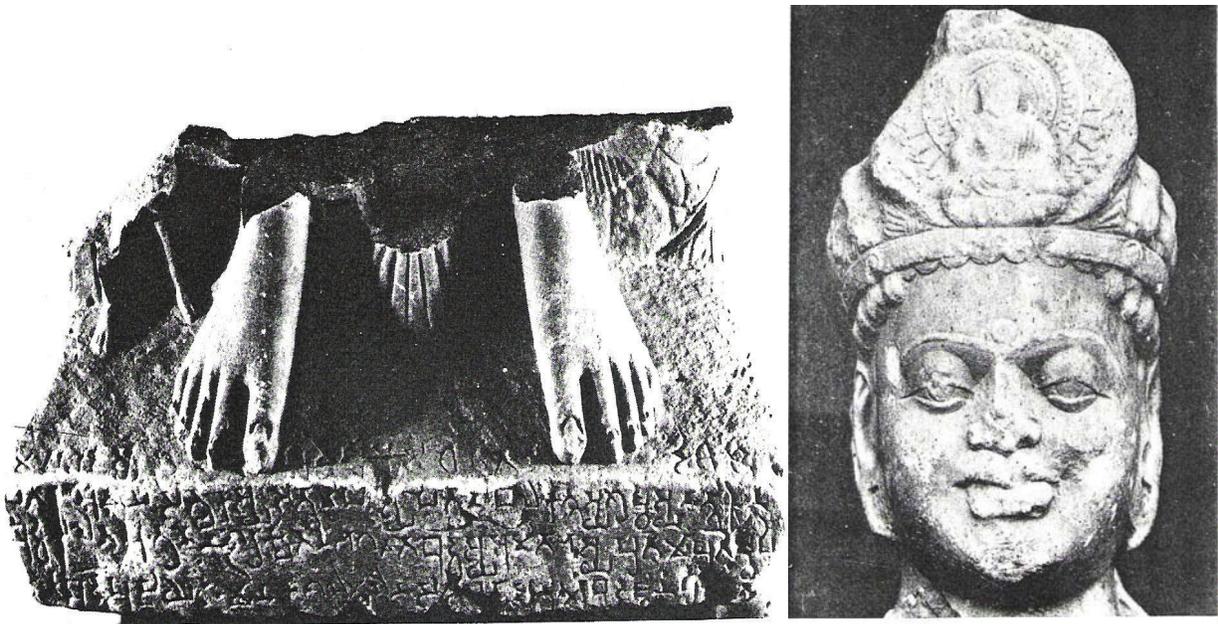


Figure 13. Another photo of the Kuṣān Amitābha inscription and the image of Amitābha on the headdress of Avalokiteśvara, Mathura, India. Photos R. C. Sharma.

The history and practice concerning Amitābha Buddha can be drawn from the available texts in the Chinese Tripitaka, the collection of Buddhist scriptures brought from India, including those from Nalanda Monastery, by Indian Buddhist monks and also by Chinese pilgrim monks, including Hsuan Tsang and I-Tsing. Even though many sutras were dedicated solely to Amitābha Buddha and his Pure Land, only the *Amitābha Sūtra*, the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, and the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* became the foundational sutras of the tradition. The first two sutras still have extant Sanskrit versions. The *Amitābha Sūtra* explains briefly the excellent features of Amitābha Buddha himself, the marvelously blissful qualities offered by his land, and the most succinct instructions for obtaining rebirth there. According to the instructions, making a vow to be born into his Western Pure Land and the recitation focused on the name “Amitābha Buddha” are two essential components of the practice. First, one should make a vow to be born into Amitābha’s Pure Land in order to continue practicing until reaching Buddhahood and then return to this suffering world to assist other sentient beings to reach enlightenment. This is a bodhisattva vow and should be made with firm resolution. Secondly, in practice, Amitābha Buddha is the name used for recitation. As a standard, this recitation can be performed from one day to seven days, until reaching the single-pointedness of mind, without deviant thoughts. Similar to the *samadhi* stage in other Buddhist traditions, this is a highly concentrative stage of mind known as Buddha-recitation *samadhi* (*Buddhānusmṛti-samadhi*).⁴⁷ The sutra also emphasizes that as a result of the practices, anyone can be conscious at death and that even Amitābha Buddha himself and the noble beings of his pure land will manifest themselves at that time in order to help lead the rebirth of that individual. The most popular version of the text is the *Amitābha Sūtra*, translated by Kumārajīva around 402 CE and entered in the Taisho under number 366. Because of its eloquent translation and moderate length, the text became the main scripture for chanting in the evening session in most temples associated with Pure Land practices. In 650, as an effort to support Pure Land Buddhism, Hsuan-Tsang (612-664) again translated a version of the *Amitābha Sutra* (Taisho 367) after returning to China. During the seventh century, I-Tsing (635-713), in the concluding section of his famous pilgrim records concerning India and the Malay Archipelago, made a dedication to his kind *Upadhyaya*

⁴⁷ The term *buddhānusmṛti* or *buddhamanasikāra* means recollection or mindfulness of the Buddha. They appear in the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* and also in the sixteenth and seventeenth visualizations of the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*. See Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, pp. 17, 204, 332-333.

(Master in Reading) Shan-Yu by revoking the devotion to Pure Land practices of the Master. According to I-Tsing, Master Shan-Yu was an “Ocean of Wisdom” with deep insight into the Tripitaka and expansive knowledge of Chinese classics and literatures. However, within his last year the Master discarded his scholarly texts and concentrated on Pure Land practices. Consequently, Master Shan-Yu obtained conscious dying, foretelling exactly his death three days in advance.⁴⁸ In addition in *Chinese Monks in India*, I-Tsing reported that Ch’ang-Min, a Chinese Ch’an (Zen) master and a pilgrim monk, and a contemporary, also practiced Pure Land Buddhism. When the boat was sinking in the open sea, the captain entreated master Ch’ang-Min to get on a small junk so that he could be rescued. However, the small junk was already crowded with people who scrambled to get on in order to survive. Regardless of the offer by the Buddhist captain, master Ch’ang-Min told him to take somebody else in his place and calmly focused on reciting “Namo Amitabha Buddha” willing to accept death on the sinking ship. His disciple also recited the name of Amitābha while invoking Ch’ang-Min.⁴⁹ These accounts illuminate the popularity of the *Amitābha Sūtra* in East Asia, especially in China, during the seventh century.

The second Pure Land text, the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* (Taisho 360), was first translated by the Sogdian Venerable K’an Seng K’ai (Saṃghavarman) during the Wei Dynasty (220-265). It also appears in the fifth chapter, sections 17 and 18, of the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*, or *A Treasury on Mahayana Sutras* (Taisho 310). The scripture narrates the past life of Amitābha Buddha as Bhikṣu Dharmākara, his former practices, his forty-eight original Bodhisattva vows, and various benefits connected to the practices, all in elaborate descriptions. In addition to the simple method of Buddha recitation, the nineteenth vow of Amitābha Buddha allows even another manageable venue to perform Pure Land practice by including anyone who “resolves to seek enlightenment, cultivates all the virtues and single-mindedly aspires to be born in my land.”⁵⁰ In other words, a practitioner can dedicate his or her accumulative merits toward the Western Pure Land as a method of obtaining rebirth there. Also, the sutra explains the establishment of the Pure Land through the *samadhi* power of Bhikṣu Dharmākara for extended *kalpas* (expansive comic ages) and the reasons for the marvelous appearance of the Pure Land in connection to his Bodhisattva vows. Together, those remarkably favorable conditions aim to help sentient beings

⁴⁸ See I-Tsing, *A Record of Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelag*, pp. 199, 204.

⁴⁹ See I-Tsing, *Chinese Monks in India*, p. 26.

⁵⁰ See Luis O. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 168.

advance their Buddhist practices without backsliding. The text functions well as an elaboration on the *Amitābha Sūtra*. It is an indispensable resource for understanding Pure Land Buddhism.

The third sutra, the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* (Taisho 365), was first translated by Kalayasas between 424 and 442. However, at present, no Sanskrit version of the text exists.⁵¹ The text provides special instructions from the Buddha to Queen Vaidehī who was in low spirits. The queen wished for a better realm of living after witnessing that her own son, Ajātasatru, usurped the royal throne and even attempted to kill his own father, King Bimbisāra. After viewing the various pure realms shown by visions of the Buddha, Queen Vaidehī expressed her wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Amitābha, the most appealing realm according to her own perception. In order to fulfill her wish, the Buddha instructed the queen sixteen contemplations, visualizing the marvelous scenes concerning Amitābha and his Pure Land in elaborate descriptions. From the simplest to the most complicated, the instructions start with the setting sun, the crystal-clear water, the beryl land, the rows of jeweled trees, the miraculous lotus pond lined with fine golden sand, light-radiating fragrant lotus flowers, and pure water, whose temperature and level change according to individual wishes, and so on. The list of contemplations ends with the visualizations of the magnificent forms of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, Mahāsathāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, as the two main attendants of the Buddha, and Amitābha Buddha, together with their respective precious jeweled thrones. These intensive visualizations, especially the sixteenth and seventeenth visualizations focusing on the physical characteristics of Amitābha, aim to generate *Buddhānusmṛti-samadhi* and bring instant visions of the Pure Land while being alive on earth and to ensure definite and direct rebirth there immediately after passing away. Altogether, these practices are open to all who can manage them according to their own circumstance and ability. People can perform the practices under various conditions when time is permitted. The portability of the Pure Land practices makes the tradition highly accessible. Neither preliminary practices or intellectual requirements are needed. Also, the practice can be performed safely by an individual without the constant prodding of a master. Altogether, these practices have made Pure Land Buddhism popular even to the commoners.

⁵¹ For the translators, the dates of these three sutras, the extant Sanskrit versions, and their first translations, see Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, pp. 55-57; Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine*, p. 16; Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, pp. 760-762; Luis O. Gomez, *The Land of Bliss*, pp. 126-127; and Victor H. Mair, *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, p. 163.

Furthermore, Pure Land Buddhism also focused on conscious dying and on gaining the rebirth of the Western Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha in order to continue Buddhist practices. The Pure Land tradition was recorded in ancient Vietnam during the fifth century, around 425 CE, when Đàm-Hoảng (d.455) of North China came to practice Pure Land Buddhism at Tiên-Son Temple, Bắc-Ninh, Vietnam. Originally, Đàm-Hoảng (T'an Hung) practiced the Vinaya, the Buddhist disciplinary rules. However, after arriving in Giao-Châu, he focused primarily on Pure Land practice, concentrating on the *Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra* and the *Sutra of Sixteen Contemplations*, and vowed to be reborn in the *Sukhāvātī* only.⁵² Later on, Amitābha Buddha was further introduced to the Vietnamese through the *Vaipulyadharani Sutra* translated by Vinītaruci (d. 594), the Indian founder of the Vietnamese Zen School. Though being tantric in principle, the sutra prominently featured a story of Amitābha Buddha and Śakyamuni Buddha in one of their past lives together. Since then, Pure Land Buddhism has continued to be practiced and promoted in Vietnam. The tradition became widely popular during the eleventh century, under the Lý Dynasty (1010-1225), when the Master Thảo Đường, the founder of the Thảo Đường Zen School, publicly promoted it in his *Warning Statement*.⁵³ Master Thảo Đường highlighted Pure Land Buddhism for offering the precise, quick, and easy method that can be practiced by all regardless of intellectual capacity or gender. He even pointed out that practitioners could embark on reciting Amitābha Buddha individually, without the constant need of a teacher as in other Buddhist practices. It is the most practical and safest path according to his view:

Though you might practice Buddhism in many ways, in summary there are three main methods: meditation, contemplation, and Buddha recitation. The method of meditation has no definite way to follow and is therefore a difficult practice. If you do not have an enlightened master or a capable mind, you may stop midway in your progress or remain mistaken for your entire life. Contemplation is a very subtle method; without a good teacher or prajna wisdom, complete enlightenment is hard to attain. Buddha recitation is a quick and easy method. In all the ages past, both intelligent and dull, both men and women have been able to practice Buddha recitation. Nobody makes a mistake with this

⁵² See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 752; Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine*, p. 41.

⁵³ Some Vietnamese sources are still uncertain about Thảo Đường as the author of the *Warning Statement*. See Minh Chi et al., *Buddhism in Vietnam, from Its Origins to the 19th Century*, p. 51; and Nguyễn Tài Thu, *History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, p. 157.

method because of the applicability of the four types of outlook.⁵⁴ Putting worries aside, you may therefore proceed with a decisive heart.⁵⁵

As a result, the Pure Land method of Buddha recitation spread widely as a common practice in many Zen temples. Moreover, the practice of Buddha recitation also produces *samadhi*, just as in Zen and other types of Buddhist practices. Thus, even the Zen masters would commonly greet others saying “*Namo Amitābha Buddha.*”

The accumulated popularity of Amitābha Buddha during the early twelfth century was shown during *Hội Đèn Quảng Chiếu* or the *Glorious Illuminating Lanterns Festival* under the patronage of King Lý Nhân Tông (1072-1127). The stone stele *Sùng Thiện Diên Linh*, which was erected in 1112 at the Đội Pagoda, Hà Nam Ninh, highlighted the festival with glowing descriptions as follows:

The lofty Glorious Illuminating tower is constructed in front of Đuàn Môn [the main gate of Thăng Long, the capital]. It has a central column, sectioned into seven floors. Each was supported by rolling dragons holding the golden lotus. Silk is sewn into the lantern screens to shade the candlelight. A small machine, concealed on the ground, helps to spin into motion the whole tower which illuminates the sky like a radiating glorious sun. Also, it is spectacularly adorned with precious jewels. There, the golden temples and jeweled palaces are devotedly crafted, adorned with lofty statues of the Buddhas in sitting poses and dignified composure, a marvel of artistic expression.

Also, inside the two floors, adorned with flowers and hanging bells, the forms of Buddhist monks, clothed in meritorious monastic robes, can strike a bell with a handle as the machine is activated, and can stand still looking out as the signaling of clapping on the sheath of the sword, or can nod their heads as the coming of the light radiance.

Also, it has seven spectacular jeweled pagodas arranged in line. The middle one has Prahūtaratna Tathagata situated on a golden mount, displaying the Dharma Wheel on top of the multiple roofs and gleaming with light reflection as from the morning sun, while the tile roof flickers with light as if being reflected from bluish clouds at dusk.

Next, the two silver thrones, situating Amitābha Buddha on the left and Surūpa Buddha

⁵⁴ The four outlooks are I-Hsuan’s methodology of eliminating attachments and gaining self-realization, namely (1) eliminating subject, leaving object; (2) eliminating object, leaving subject; (3) eliminating both, leaving neither; and (4) eliminating neither, leaving both. (Thich Thien An 1971: 19, Thích Minh Cảnh 7177)

⁵⁵ See Thich Thien An, *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam in Relation to The Development of Buddhism in Asia*, p. 89; and also *The Zen-Pure Land Union and Modern Vietnamese Buddhism*, pp. 16-17.

on the right, are both at imposingly valorous heights, with their beauty illuminated by the curving roofs twinkling with lights like the sparkling melting snow. Their glorious composure eclipses the glowing full moon of Autumn. The farther two are the [garuḍa] bird thrones, situated on the left with the compassionate form of the Vipulakāya Tathagata and on the right with the wondrous form of Abhayaṃ Kara Tathagata, and housed in a big compartment which is adorned by dragon bas-reliefs on the wall and towered by precious tiles on the roof. The next farther are two elephant thrones, with Amṛtarāja Buddha on the left and Ratnaśikhin Buddha on the right, carved and polished out of precious stones, installed on tall columns, with jewels adorning the corners of compartments and rhinoceros horns filling the gaps. Also, beautiful *gāthā* [verses] are inscribed on the lotus petals of the throne in order to shine the bright path of diligence for future generations.

Also it portrays the nine levels of heaven in five colors, forming the four pillars by pairs of hanging banners, together with a thousand lamps flickering on either side and with golden crimson illuminating the four directions. This can be called an advancement surpassing past dynasties and beyond creation. Devoted to the happiness of all people, night turns into day. Satisfying hearts and eyes on earth, the old become young. That is your [Majesty's] effort of cultivating meritorious roots.⁵⁶

This festival was repeated four times under the patronage of King Lý Nhân Tông, during the years 1110, 1116, 1120, and 1126. Among those, the last one was organized as a welcoming festival to the ambassadorial envoy from Champa. In addition to the excitement and the marvel of the festivity displayed in public in medieval Vietnam, the inscriptions also reflect popular Buddhist activities at the time. The seven Buddhas, as a particular group, especially Amitābha Buddha, have significance in Pure Land Buddhism. First, the dedication is to those seven Buddhas associated with the yogic practices instructed by the *Du Già Tập Yếu Diệm Khẩu Thi Thực Nghi*, (*The Essential Yogic Manual for the Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts*) (Taisho 1320) and closely linked to the *Cứu Bạt Diệm Khẩu Đà La Ni Kinh* (*The Sutra on the Dharani for Liberating the Hungry Ghosts*) (Taiso 1314). According to those tantric texts, performing the practices help to liberate those unfortunate sentient beings in the lower realms of animals, hungry ghosts, and Hell

⁵⁶ See Hà Văn Tấn, *Chữ Trên Đá Chữ Trên Đồng Minh Văn và Lịch Sử*, pp. 134-138; Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, pp. 319-321; and Nguyễn Tài Thu, *History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, p. 163.

beings. Also, it promotes peace, prosperity, and general health. However, the ultimate aim is to lead the followers to be born in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha after compassionately liberating them from those lower realms. Thus, gaining rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Amitābha had already become popular by then. This popularity could be traced back to the tenth century, when the names of the Buddhas Prahūtaratna, Surupakaya, and Vipulakāya, a part of the group of seven Buddhas, appeared on the stone pillars concerning the *Uṣṇīṣavijayadhāranī*, which was discussed previously. As a result, the *Amitābha Sutra* was also added to the tantric manual and eventually became the evening chanting session in most Buddhist temples.⁵⁷

In an effort to popularize Buddhism, several lineage holders of the Vietnamese Zen schools continued to promote Pure Land Buddhism in conjunction with Zen. They constructed statues of Amitābha Buddha, including the stone statue of Amitābha carving in 1057 which remains intact at Phật Tích Temple, in Bắc Ninh Province. Those Zen masters also taught Pure Land practices through their writings, even in those concerned primarily with meditation. The inscriptions on the stele at Viên Quang Temple, constructed in 1122, portrayed the central statue of Amitābha Buddha with Bodhidharma on his side. Bodhidharma was not a figure of the Pure Land tradition. Rather, he was the Indian Patriarch who introduced Ch’an (Zen) to China. Thus, having Bodhidharma on the side of Amitābha Buddha indicated an acceptable union between the Pure Land and Zen Buddhism. In addition, the Zen Master Tri-Bát (1049-1117), the generation after Đạo Hạnh of the Vinītaruci Zen School, had a statue of Amitābha Buddha installed at Hoàng-Kim Temple. The temple was also locally known as Temple of the Single Roof, in what is now the Quốc-Oai District, Hà-Tây Province.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Zen Master Tịnh Lực (1112-1175) attained the Buddha-recitation *samadhi* while entering a solitary retreat. As an intensive practice, he made prostrations during the twelve hours in order to pay homage to Amitābha Buddha and to purify his past misdeeds. As recognized in *Thuyền Uyển Tập Anh*, the succinct instructions of Master Tịnh Lực continue to be invaluable for Pure Land practices in Vietnam, proposing: “All of you who study the Dharma, in striving as offering to the Buddha, should have no better means besides eradicating and eliminating misdeeds. While reciting with your minds and chanting by your mouths you should generate faith, strive to understand, listen, and

⁵⁷ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, p. 327.

⁵⁸ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, p. 139.

comprehend.”⁵⁹ King Trần-Thái-Tông (1218-1277), the initial king of the Trần Dynasty who had abdicated the throne to seek Buddhist practices, composed *Khóa Hư Lục*, a famous text concerning meditation. Nevertheless, he also devoted a full section of the text to the recitation of Amitābha Buddha. The *Khóa Hư Lục* clarifies the elimination of misdeeds as follows: “During Buddha recitation, while the body sits properly and straight, without doing negative actions, misdeeds of the body are eliminated. While reciting the mantra [Amitābha Buddha], without negative speech, misdeeds of the mouth are extinguished. While the mind focuses on striving, without negative thinkings, misdeeds of the mind are terminated.”⁶⁰ In addition, the Zen Master Huyền Quang, the Third Patriarch of the Trúc Lâm Zen Lineage, constructed the *Cửu Phẩm Liên Hoa Đài*, for the purposes of Buddha recitations and mantras. The structure was a nine-grade lotus tower, which was set on a wheel like a massive Tibetan praying wheel, depicting the nine levels of rebirth mentioned in the Pure Land sūtras.⁶¹ Despite these efforts, Pure Land Buddhism, being limited to the Pure Land sūtras, never stood out as a single school of Buddhism in Vietnam. Rather, it functioned as a complementary practice to Zen – to help spread the popularity of Buddhism. This tradition of popularizing Pure Land Buddhism as complementary to Zen Buddhism has been passed on down through the ages until the present day by the majority of the leading Vietnamese Buddhist masters.

The Meditation Tradition of Vietnamese Buddhism

Following the initial introduction of Buddhism by the Indian masters directly from India, the Meditation Tradition in Vietnam marked its own distinction with many well-established schools. In the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, Meditation (*dhyana*) or Zen in Japan and the West, does not mean sitting meditation as a sole method for enlightenment. Rather, meditation is used by the meditation master to help with the concentration and purification the mind by combining it with various Tantric and Pure Land practices. Henceforth, the popular concept of Zen and Zen master will signify that particular Vietnamese feature of meditation. In terms of lineage, four main schools of meditation in ancient Vietnam were recorded, namely the

⁵⁹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Nghiên Cứu về Thuyền Uyển Tập Anh*, pp. 224,781; Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 145; and Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, p. 199.

⁶⁰ See Thích Thanh Kiểm, *Khóa Hư Lục*, p. 47.

⁶¹ See Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, vol. 1, p. 184; and Nguyễn Tài Thu, *History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, pp. 162-163.

Vinītaruci School, the Vô Ngôn Thông School, the Thảo Đường School, and the Trúc Lâm School. The Vinītaruci School was established in 580 by the Indian master Vinītaruci (d. 594) when he came to Pháp Vân Temple of Luy Lâu. The School spread through eighteen successive generations and ended in the thirteenth century with the Ven. Y-Son (d. 1216). The Vô Ngôn Thông School was established by the Chinese Master Vô Ngôn Thông (d.826) when he came to Kiến Sơ Temple in 820. It continued for seventeen generations and ended in late thirteenth century with Tuệ Trung (1230-1291) and several others. The Thảo Đường School was established by the Chinese Master Thảo Đường when he was brought to Vietnam from Champa by King Lý Thánh Tông in 1069. The School was predominantly led by lay Buddhist masters who were kings and royal officials. It ended in early thirteenth century after continuing for six generations. The Trúc Lâm School was established by King Trần Nhân Tông (1258-1308) of Vietnam, the third king of the Trần Dynasty, after he abdicated the throne to his son and found the Buddhist headquarters at Mount Yên Tử in 1299. These Meditation schools supported the ruling dynasties in various spheres of life and merged with one another as the Vietnamese ruling dynasties shifted successively from the Đinh (968-980) to the Early Lê (980-1009), to the Lý (1009-1225), to the Trần (1225-1398), and then to the Later Lê (1428-1788).

1. **The Vinītaruci Thiền (Zen) School of Vietnam** was predominantly Indian in characteristics. As previously indicated, the tradition of Vietnamese meditation has been established in Luy Lâu since the time of Khương Tăng Hội during the third century CE. The practices of the Vietnamese Zen tradition originated from the instructions of the first Vietnamese Buddhist texts, namely the *Lục Độ Tập Kinh* and the *Anapanasati Sutra*. When Vinītaruci (d.594) arrived in Vietnam in 580 after a few years of sojourn in China, the ancient tradition of Vietnamese meditation continued to be instructed by the Zen Master Quán Duyên, the abbot at Pháp Vân Temple. Vinītaruci brought his own meditation which he had already practiced in India. Seeking to benefit the people, Vinītaruci joined together his methods and the Vietnamese meditative practices. As a result, the Vinītaruci Zen Lineage emerged from the union and grew into a prominent Vietnamese Zen tradition, as shown in Figure 14.

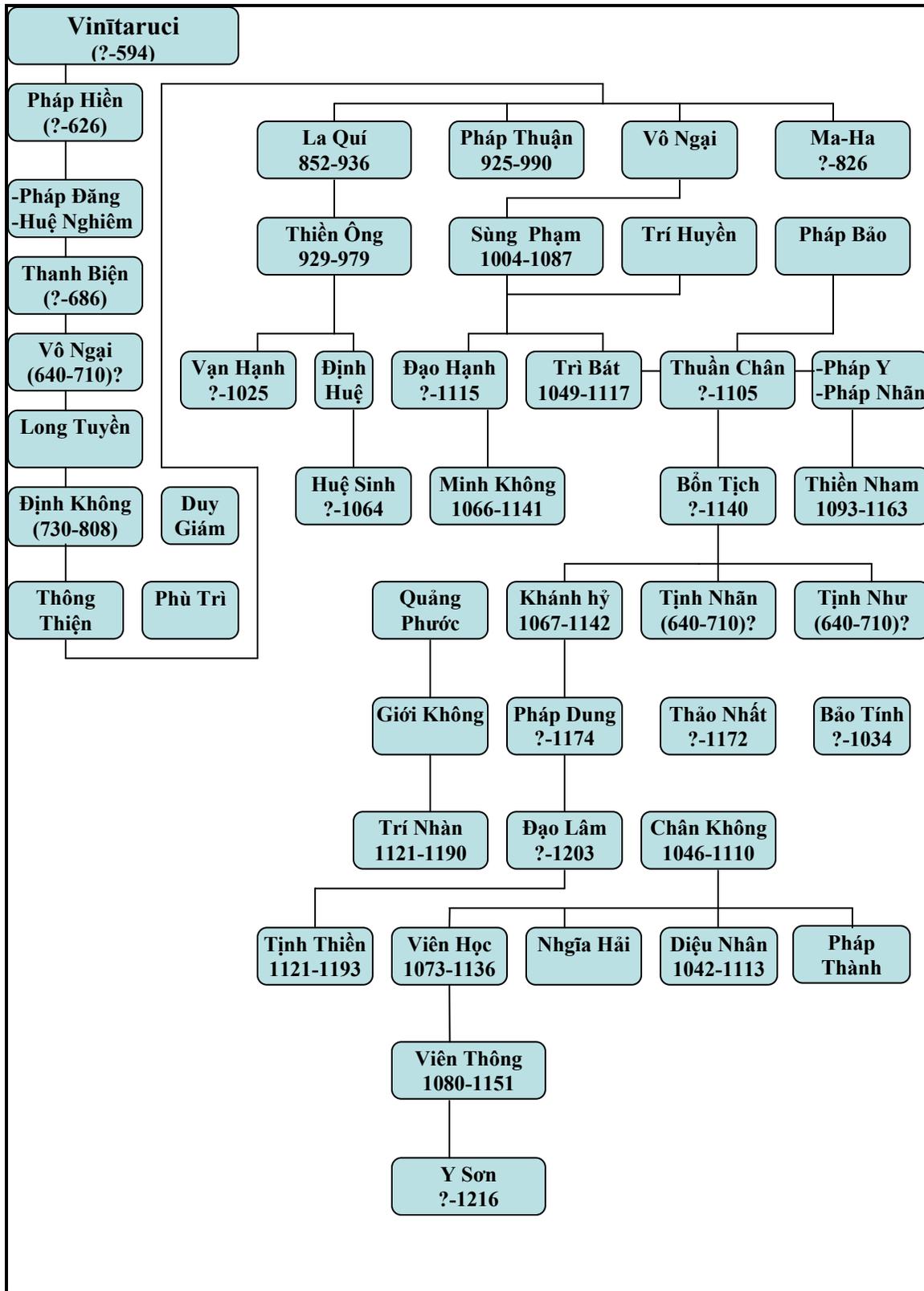


Figure 14. The genealogical lineage of the Vinītaruci Zen School.

While Vinītaruci was certified by the Third Chinese Ch’an Patriarch Seng-ts’an (d. 606) when they briefly met in China in 574, his meditative instructions originated from his former Indian training and from the Sanskrit sutras brought by him. As certification of authentic meditation, Vinītaruci did not pass down the robe and begging bowl of the Buddha, a standard Chinese Zen transmission until the later time of Hui-neng (638-713). Rather, he transmitted the Mind-Seal method passed to him from the Chinese Patriarch Seng-ts’an. It is a certification which passing from the mind of the master to directly to the mind of the disciple without using the scriptures. In the transmission, Zen dialogues were utilized to measure the realization and the accomplishment of the disciple. Those dialogues might be drawn from both Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources, known as *công án*, popularly known as *koans* in Japan and in the West. Intended to be a riddle, the *koans* cannot be answered by normal intellectual reasoning. The non-scriptural source of the Zen dialogues was evident in the Zen dialogues when Vinītaruci transmitted the Mind-Seal to Pháp Hiền (d. 626), a disciple of Quán Duyên at Pháp Vân Temple:

When Vinītaruci first came from Guangzhou and lodged at Pháp Vân Temple and met Pháp Hiền, he looked at him over carefully and said, “What is your name?” Pháp Hiền said, “What is your name, Master?” Vinītaruci said, “You do not have a name?” Pháp Hiền said, “Of course, I am not without a name. But how can you understand it?” Vinītaruci scolded him, saying, “What is the use of understanding?” Pháp Hiền was abruptly awakened and bowed down.⁶²

The more scripturally related issues concerning Zen dialogues were equally puzzling. It is observable from the dialogue testing Thanh Biện (d. 686), the fourth generation of the Vinītaruci Zen School, who had devoted to chanting the *Diamond Sutra* for eight years without understanding the reasons why it was called “The mother of all Buddhas.” After the normal explanation that the Buddhas of past, present, and future and their perfect enlightenment (anuttarasamyaksambodhi), too, all come from this sutra, the master posed the challenge:

“Who speaks the Sutra?” Thanh Biện said, “Isn’t it the Tathagata who speaks it?” Huệ Nghiễm said, “It is said in the sutra that ‘if anyone says that the Tathagata has said something he is slandering the Buddha.’ Such a person cannot understand the meaning of my teaching. Contemplate well on this. If someone says that this sutra is not spoken by the Buddha, that person is slandering the sutra. But if someone insists that it is the

⁶² Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 166.

Buddha who speaks, then that person is slandering the Buddha. What do you think about this? Speak quickly! Speak quickly!” Thanh Biện was about to open his mouth when Huệ Nghiêm suddenly struck him on the mouth with his whisk. Thanh Biện was abruptly awakened and bowed down.⁶³

Since then, the transmission of the Mind-Seal, utilizing Zen dialogues and *koans*, became the standard in Vietnamese Zen tradition. All four Vietnamese Zen schools used it as certification.

In his method of meditation, Vinītaruci drew instructions directly from Buddhist scriptures, especially the Sanskrit sutras brought from India and translated by him upon his arrival. As a continuation and expansion of the early tradition of meditation from the time of Khương Tăng Hội, Vinītaruci also taught meditation and Bodhisattva practices together, employing sutras associated with the *prajñāparamita* scriptures which were popular in Indian Mahayana Buddhism during his time. His principal texts translated from Sanskrit were the *Gayāśśirśa Sūtra*, the *Sūtra on the Differentiation of Karmic Reward*, and the *Vaipulyadhārānī Sūtra*. According to the *Gayāśśirśa Sūtra*, meditation, in principle, should have a focus on the concept of *bodhi* (enlightenment). Afterward, a practitioner can progress to several methods to obtain *bodhi*. Rather than defining *bodhi* as being enlightened or becoming a Buddha, the *Gayāśśirśa Sūtra* defines *bodhi* as formless, an enlightenment resulting from penetrating the *prajñāparamita* teachings on non-duality and non-attachment. Instead of seeking a Buddha or enlightenment, one should strive to perceive all the phenomena in an enlightened mode, namely the formless mode of non-duality and non-attachment, including non-attachment to emptiness, and thereby bring oneself to realize enlightenment. In practice, one should first generate compassion through cultivating *bodhicitta*, the mind of enlightenment, in order to benefit sentient beings. Then one must concentrate thinking on practices, without deviation, and must abide in virtues. The essential practices are the six *paramitas*, being skillful in meditative contemplation, and being constantly mindful of the Bodhisattva vows without forgetfulness. Being properly mindful of *bodhi* will solidify faith. A skillful meditation will terminate sufferings. The ten contemplations for practicing skillful meditations are (1) contemplate on the emptiness of the body (senses) internally, (2) contemplate on the emptiness of external elements (objects of senses), (3) contemplate on the emptiness of both internal and external things, (4) contemplate on all types of wisdom in order to prevent attachment, (5) contemplate on the

⁶³ Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 167.

skillful means of the path being practiced in order to prevent attachment, (6) contemplate on various levels of noble attainments in order to eliminate attachment, (7) contemplate on obtaining tranquility after a long effort without getting attachment, (8) abide in *prajñāparamita* without getting attached, (9) deliver Dharma discourses to benefit sentient beings without getting attached, and (10) contemplate on sentient beings in order to generate compassion without getting attached.⁶⁴

In addition, other elements for standard Buddhist meditation, including those proposed by Khương Tăng Hội, were also used. The objects of contemplation are the skandhas, the contacts through all senses, the sensory categories, the twelve links of dependent origination, the stream of transmigration of birth and death, as well as forms both good and bad. However, these meditative contemplations must be approached under the light of emptiness or the recognition that all are skillful means and illusory. As a result, one should abide at the non-abided place, in non-attachment, in emptiness, and in the formlessness of all phenomena.

Nevertheless, skillful means can become harmful, like a double-edged sword, when improperly used. One might become attached to emptiness itself and neglect that without a true realization of emptiness, karmic results would manifest themselves. As a warning, Vinītaruci translated the *Sūtra on the Differentiation of Karmic Reward*, clarifying the karmic results of various actions. Even though the text no longer exists, its focus is still clear from the title. As a further caution, Vinītaruci introduced the *Vaipulyadhāranī Sūtra*. In addition to promoting the practices of *bodhicitta* and the six *paramitas*, the text provides two lasting innovations in Vietnamese meditations, namely the unification of Buddha Dharma and the focus on purification through repentance. According to the text, actions with the negative intention to slander other Dharma masters will result in grave karmic consequences. They will prevent one from seeing a Buddha, from generating *bodhicitta*, and from obtaining *dharanis* and *samadhis*, because slandering the Dharma masters destroys the *bodhicitta* of others, closing the entrance to liberation on them. As a demonstration, Śakyamuni Buddha recounted his long suffering in Hell and subsequently in animal realm in his former life as Bhikṣu Dharma, who slandered the renowned Dharma master Pure Life, a former incarnation of Amitābha Buddha. The instructions specifically warn against those who do not understand that the Buddha taught his Dharma as expedient means, adapted to the capabilities of listeners. Denouncing a virtuous master is

⁶⁴ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, pp. 744-745.

slander. It will result in a birth in Hell for thousands of years, and in poverty afterward, to make the following claims:

The Buddha taught these Dharmas to the Sravakas (Voice-hearers). Thus, the Bodhisattvas should not study them nor listen to and accept them. Those are not the correct Dharmas. Also, they should not learn the Dharma of the Solitary Buddhas....The Dharmas practiced by the Bodhisattvas, the Voice hearers should not be listened nor accepted. Also, it should be likewise for the Dharmas of the Solitary Buddhas....This should be learned by the Bodhisattvas. That should not be learned by the Bodhisattvas.⁶⁵

In order to avoid the mistake of slandering the Dharma and the Dharma masters, the meditator should respect and tolerate all dharmas. They are the expedient means of the Buddha, intending to help sentient beings according to their individual circumstances. Thus, a meditator should study and use the Dharma suitable to individual cases. This toleration toward all dharmas provides the foundation for Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhism to embrace and practice the suitable Theravada scriptures. Later, during the seventh century, as seen in the Zen dialogues concerning the Master Thanh Biện, the fourth generation of the Vinītaruci Zen School, the introduction of the *Diamond Sutra* also fortified further the element of unifying Dharma. Drawing on the wisdom of the emptiness of the *prajñāparamita*, which promotes non-attachment, the sutra points out that “all dharmas are the Buddha Dharma.”⁶⁶ Also, it instructs that the Dharma taught by the Buddha functions like a draft. The Dharma takes people to the shore of liberation and must be discarded after reaching the shore. Understanding the function of the Dharma, one can skillfully use other teachings, which are not the Dharma, without obsession or attachment. This principle of detachment underlying the respect and toleration toward all dharmas had allowed the leading figures of the Vinītaruci Zen Lineage to embrace various Tantric and Pure Land teachings as a means to enlightenment. They even mastered the arts of prophecy and geomancy in order to render unselfish services to the public. Several of them held the highest religious position as National Preceptors from one dynasty to the next. Together with the renowned masters from other contemporary Zen lineages, they engaged actively in all national affairs. Also, they helped to maintain and protect Vietnam from frequent Chinese invasions. Most renowned among them was the accomplished Zen Master Pháp Thuận (915-

⁶⁵ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 752.

⁶⁶ See Thích Huệ Hưng, *Kim Cang Giảng Lục*, p. 73; Thích Đức Niệm, *Kinh Kim Cang Bát Nhã Giảng Luận*, pp. 121, 164.

990), the tenth generation of the lineage. Pháp Thuận served for years in preparing diplomatic documentations, deciding political and foreign policies for King Lê Đại Hành (980-1005). At one point, he even disguised himself as a ferryman in order to use his literary talent to skillfully receive the Chinese envoy. Despite his substantial contributions, Pháp Thuận declined all royal rewards when the country was at peace. The tradition also included in its seventeenth generation the eminent Bhiksuni Master Diệu Nhân (1041-1113). In addition to being the abbess of the Hương Hải Convent and an expert adept among the Buddhist nuns of her time, renowned for her mastery concerning the profound tenets of the *Diamond Sutras* and the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, she also attained the true *samadhi* from her practice of the Vinaya and Zen.⁶⁷ The most exemplary one was the Zen Master Vạn Hạnh (d.1025), the beloved master of Vietnamese Buddhism, who emerged from the twelfth generation of the Vinītaruci Zen School. While none of the royal awards bestowed upon him was remarked in great details throughout history and even his year of birth was not recognized, it was Vạn Hạnh who raised, educated, advised, and helped Lý Công Uẩn (1010-1225) to begin the Ly Dynasty (1009-1225), the great Buddhist dynasty of Vietnam. Furthermore, being accomplished in *Dharani Samadhi* and even in geomancy, every word spoken by Vạn Hạnh became prophetic. He devoted his life to benefit the people by advancing the country with various improvements in all internal and external matters. As National Preceptor, he was instrumental in the strategic relocation of the capital of ancient Vietnam in 1010 to Thăng-Long, which is now Hanoi, the present capital of Vietnam.⁶⁸ The significance of the move can be comprehended as one looks into the implications of relocating the U.S. capital from Philadelphia to Washington D.C. in 1800.⁶⁹ His famous *gāthā* at the point of passing away continues to inspire the Vietnamese Buddhists in the direction of detachment:

The body, as lightning, exists and again is gone,
 Myriad of things, flourish in Spring and in the Fall is bare.
 Realizing rise and fall liberates from fears,
 Just a dew on the blade of grass is growth and decline.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, p. 476; Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 197.

⁶⁸ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 596 and Thích Minh Tuệ, *Lược Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, p.167. For general information about Vạn Hạnh see Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 175.

⁶⁹ See William M. Maury, *Washington D.C. Past & Present: The Guide to the Nation's Capital*, pp. 39,57.

⁷⁰ For other translations of the *gāthā*, see Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 176.

In the early 1960s, during the modern period of Buddhist revival in Vietnam, his legendary name was bestowed on the first Vietnamese Buddhist University, Vạn-Hạnh University in Saigon. Most of the present monastic leading figures of Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, both in Vietnam and abroad, have been trained at this Buddhist University. During the ancient period of embracing all dharmas, the Buddhist teachings inspired King Lý Thánh Tông to establish the Báo Thiên Stupa in 1056. Altogether, the Báo Thiên Stupa, the Quy Điền bell, the Quỳnh Lâm Buddha statue, and the Phở Minh cauldron, became the renowned four great vessels of Vietnam.⁷¹ In an effort to unify all dharmas accompanied by the spirit of detachment, King Lý Nhân Tông (1072-1127), a devout Buddhist king, established the Văn Miếu (the Temple of Literature) in 1070 in order to dedicate to Confucius and to educate the royal princes. In 1076, he also built the Quốc Tử Giám, the first Vietnamese university, in order to educate his mandarins in Confucianism when he deemed it beneficial to the country and the people of Vietnam.

In addition to the instructions on unifying all dharmas, the *Vaipulyadhāranī Sūtra* offers to those who had already committed slander, the method to purify misdeeds through repentance. According to the text, the Buddha announced to Manjuśrī Bodhisattva that making repentance during the six divisions of day and night was the method, saying, “ In the former seven years, within the six divisions of time, day and night, I had to repent all of the grave misdeeds created by body, speech (mouth) and mind. Since then, I attained purification.”⁷² Based on this instruction, repentance grew to become a strong emphasis in Vietnamese meditation. This feature of repentance became the second innovation of the Vietnamese Zen tradition. The Zen Master Pháp Thuận (925-990) wrote the *Bodhisattva Name Repentance Liturgy*. His disciple, the Zen Master Mahamaya concentrated on repentance together with his recitation of the *Great Compassion Mind Dharani* and eventually obtained the *Dharani Samadhi* in 1014. King Trần Thái Tông (1218-1277), who was also a Zen master, composed the *Lục Thời Sáu Hồi Khoa Nghi* (*The Liturgy for Repentance in Six Divisions of Time*) for the purification of six senses in meditation. His text still exists and was brought back to use in certain Zen temples in Vietnam at the end of the twentieth century.

⁷¹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, p. 27.

⁷² See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 769.

2. **The Vô Ngôn Thông Zen School**, founded by Vô Ngôn Thông (d.826), had a connection to the Chinese Zen tradition because he was a student of Pai-Chang Huai-hai (720-814), who had a link to Hui-Neng (638-713), the sixth Patriarch of Chinese Zen. In 820, Vô-Ngôn-Thông came to Vietnam and met Ven. Cầm Thành (d.860), the abbot of Kiến-Sơ Temple, who was practicing the prevailing Vietnamese tradition of reciting *dharani* and chanting sutras. Similar to Vinītaruci, Vô Ngôn Thông continued to transmit the Mind-Seal, using *koans*. However, he highlighted sudden enlightenment as a novel aim of meditation by pointing out that “when the mind-ground is empty, the sun of wisdom spontaneously shines.”⁷³ Sudden Enlightenment was popular in the Southern Chinese version of Zen connected to Hui-Neng. Even though being certified by the Mind-Seal, the lineage alone does not bring enlightenment. Rather, practicing the Buddhist teaching transmitted by the lineage is decisive, as announced by Vô Ngôn Thông:

People from all over pass rumor,
Falsely disputing the true transmission.
They claim that our first Patriarch
Came in person from India
To transmit the treasure of the Dharma Eye.
He called it Zen.
One flower opens into five petals.
These seeds follow each other in unbroken succession,
In hidden record with the Secret Teaching.
Thousands and thousands have an affinity with it.
Everyone called it the School of Mind,
Pure and fundamentally so.
India is the same as this land,
This land is the same as India.⁷⁴

In the Zen spirit of non-attachment, it is false to insist that enlightenment had been brought to China from India by Bodhidharma and by a succession of Chinese Patriarchs leading to the emergence of the five influential Chinese Zen schools. No enlightenment was transmitted from India to China. Certainly, this Vietnamese Zen tradition had a lineage, as shown in Figure 15.

⁷³ See Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p.106, and Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, p.29.

⁷⁴ See Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p.108, and Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, pp.33-34.

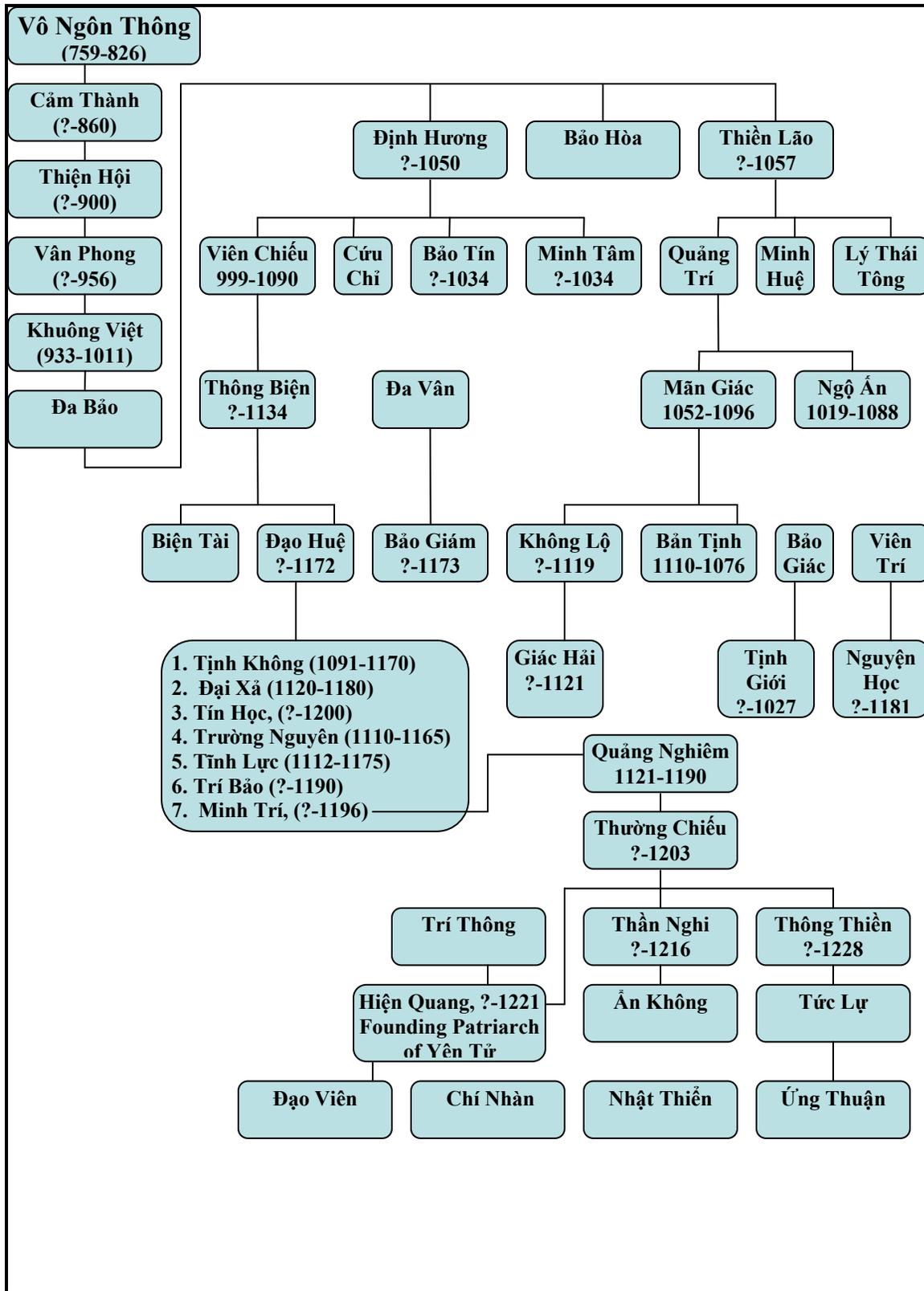


Figure 15. The genealogical lineage of the Vô Ngôn Thông Zen School.

Nevertheless, from the Zen perspective concerning the actualization of enlightened experiences, relying solely on the transmission of lineage for liberation is just a rumor, because enlightenment cannot be transmitted. It arises from the pure mind of the people, including the people of this land of Vietnam. In other words, enlightenment is found in the mind regardless of location, India or Vietnam. The Vietnamese people can be enlightened, making Vietnam the land of enlightenment (Buddha). In this respect, this land of Vietnam is a Buddha land just like India. Rather than the lineage, the mind itself is Buddha. When the mind is pure, nothing is not Buddha. Therefore, Buddha is everywhere, and seeking Buddha outside of the mind is a mistake, as in the following Zen dialogue presented by Cầm Thành, the first generation of the Vô Ngôn Thông Zen Lineage:

A monk asked, “What is Buddha?” Cầm Thành said, “[Buddha is] everywhere.” The monk then asked, “What is the mind of the Buddha?” Cầm Thành said, “It has never been concealed.” The monk continued, “I don’t understand.” Cầm Thành said, “You already missed the point.”⁷⁵

In order to obtain the pure mind, the Vô Ngôn Thông Zen School offered its unique aspect of meditation. In addition to the emphasis on emptiness taught by the *Diamond Sutra*, the masters of the lineage also instructed meditation through the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and the *Lotus Sutra*. Derived from the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, meditation began with a penetration into delusion, the fundamental cause for defilements of the mind. Upon recognizing delusion, just like the sky-flower seen only by eyes inflicted with disease, one immediately separates oneself from it and instantly becomes enlightened, without going through any order of awakening stages. In this respect, enlightenment is sudden and complete, just like fire produced by the ancient way of rubbing two pieces of wood together that will in turn burn the woods to ashes, scattering them in the wind, and eventually leaving the ground completely empty.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, as an expedient means, the sutra also proposes another path of gradual meditation beginning with the penetration into greed and anger. This understanding leads to an insight into the attachment to egocentricity or self, the underlying cause of greed and anger. Together, greed, anger, and delusion are called the three poisons. They create deceptions and defile the mind. In order to completely eliminate deceptions, meditation continues with the separation from

⁷⁵ See Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 109; and Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, p.35.

⁷⁶ See A. Charles Muller, *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, pp. 95, 253; and Huyền Cơ, *Kinh Viên Giác*, p. 25.

deceptive phenomena generated by senses and their objects. It proceeds toward the separation of the awareness of that separation, then the separation itself, and then the separation of that separation, until there is nothing to separate. The primary aim of the overall process of separation is eliminating attachments. In order to provide practical instructions for separation, the sutra distinguishes three contemplations, namely *samatha*, *samadhi*, and *dhyana*. Though appearing as common categories in Buddhist meditation, these focus on realizing the emptiness underlying deceptions. *Samatha* involves calming the mind so that deceptions can be recognized and stilled. *Samadhi* takes the calm mind a step further to contemplate the deceptions produced by the senses and their objects. It leads to the realization of impermanence of conditional existences. Subsequently, it gives rise to a great compassion, aiming to benefit sentient beings affected by such existences, without attachment to them. Recognizing impermanence leads to the realization of emptiness underlying those deceptions. *Dhyana* focuses on generating detachment from even the methods themselves by contemplating on the deceptive nature of both *samatha* and *samadhi*. Together, these three contemplations can be practiced individually or in combinations until all deceptions are completely eradicated. The instructions also mention long retreats of one-hundred-and-twenty days, one-hundred days, or eighty days. During a retreat, the first twenty-one days are reserved for repentance and prostrations to the Buddha names. Then, the practice of contemplation follows afterward.

In addition to the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, the Vô Ngôn Thông Zen tradition further strengthened its meditation utilizing the *Lotus Sutra*, frequently read, studied, and recited by most of the eminent Vietnamese monks. In the third century, the sutra was known in Vietnam in 256, when Master Đạo Thanh, a student of Khương Tăng Hội, edited the *Pháp Hoa Tam-Muội* (Sadharmapundarica Samadhi Sutra) translated by Kalyanaśva. Between the fourth and sixth centuries, its popularity manifested itself when Đạo Cao (c. 360-450) cited the chapters of “The Parable of the Phantom City” and “The Life Span of the Tathagata” and when Master Huệ Thắng (440-510) chanted the whole text once a day as his daily routine.⁷⁷ For the meditative practice, the *Lotus Sutra* provides a powerful support for both Buddhist tenets and practices. In principle, it confirms that all sentient beings have the Buddha nature, the potential to be enlightened, “to

⁷⁷ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, pp. 386, 419, 460; Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 92.

awaken to the Buddha wisdom,”⁷⁸ or to become Buddha. Thus, it agrees with the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* that the mind itself is Buddha and that the mind needs to be awakened. In addition, it announces a similar warning that seeking enlightenment outside of the mind is committing the mistake of the impoverished son who has been wandering away from the parental wealth entitled to him, or the man who neglects that all along he had an invaluable jewel hidden in the hem of his shirt. Then the sutra arrives at a similar conclusion that only recognizing that wealth or jewel can bring an end to his suffering life. In practice, the *Lotus Sutra* inspires a tradition of meditation known as the Six Wondrous Dharma Entries, namely *gagana* (counting the breath), *anugana* (mindful of the breath), *sthana* (stilling the mind), *upalaksna* (contemplating on the five skandhas), *vivartana* (introspecting on the mind itself), and *parisuddhi* (purifying the mind from all defilements). This practice has an intricate link to the similar meditative instructions of the *Anapanasati Sutra*, the Theravada text used in meditation in Luy Lâu, ancient Vietnam. Even though, the eminent Chinese Master Chih-I (538-597) has systematized those Six Wondrous Dharma Entries when he founded the Chinese Tien-T’ai School, Khương Tăng Hội had already mentioned them in his commentaries concerning the *Anapanasati Sutra* during the third century CE.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the instructions associated with the *Lotus Sutra* expand those Dharma entries beyond the contemplations of the five skandhas to cover principle of emptiness. Also they illuminate various levels of enlightenments on the Bodhisattva path, from the initial abiding level to the highest level of wondrous awakening, reaching perfect enlightenment, or Buddhahood. In the Vô Ngôn Thông Zen School, several eminent masters became renowned for spiritual attainment using these sutras. Master Viên Chiếu(999-1090) obtained the *Language Samadhi* from focusing on the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and had thoroughly penetrated the three contemplations instructed by the sutra. Among his famous texts, the *Tham Đồ Hiện Quyết*, a collection of 108 Zen dialogues and koans, still exist. Master Thông Biện (d.1134), the National Preceptor with Consummate Eloquence, after obtaining the gist of teaching from Viên Chiếu, devoted himself to the *Lotus Sutra* and frequently used it to instruct people for the rest of his life. As a result, he was known by his sobriquet “Ngộ Pháp Hoa” or “Awakened to The Lotus.” The most eminent and revered among them was the Great Master Khuông Việt (993-1011), the fourth generation of the Vô Ngôn

⁷⁸ Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, p. 3; and Thích Trí Tịnh, *Kinh Pháp Hoa*, p. 75.

⁷⁹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 1, p. 384.

Thông Zen school and the first Vietnamese Tăng Thống (General Supervisor of the Sangha), who profoundly penetrated the essentials of Zen and had read through the extensive sutras. He served both the dynasties of Đinh (968-980) and Early Lê (980-1009). While Master Pháp Thuận (915-990) of the Vinītaruci Zen School disguised himself as a ferryman to take the Chinese envoy led by Li-Jue across the river, Khuông Việt continued the diplomatic task, receiving them at Hoa Lư, the capital at the time, and brought the whole mission to a successfully peaceful end. Emperor Đinh Tiên Hoàng (r. 968-979), who consulted him for all national policies and diplomatic affairs, bestowed on him the above honorific name which meant “the Preserver and Protector of the Viet.” Being the master of the kings, Khuông Việt had not only been involved with the erection of those hundreds stone pillars concerning the *Uṣṇīsavijayadhāranī*, but also with the tantric ritual invoking Vaiśravaṇa⁸⁰ at Mount Vê Linh in order to support King Lê Đại Hành (r. 980-1005) against the invasion of the Chinese Song in 981. Maintaining the Zen spirit of detachment, he retired to his own temple to teach Buddhism around 1000, pleading old age. His realization of the enlightening potential of the mind taught by both the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and the *Lotus Sutra* reflects through his *gāthā* before passing away:

The fire was already in the wood,
The Fire was there, and it came to life again.
If you say there is no fire in wood,
How could flames spring up when we try to make for fire.⁸¹

3. **The Thảo-Đường Zen school** was founded by the Chinese master Thảo Đường (Ts’ao-tang), who was brought to Vietnam in 1069. Despite his Chinese origin and a lineage that can be traced all the way back to Hui-Neng through the Chinese Zen line of master Hsueh-t’ou Ming-Shueh (980-1052), Thảo Đường was in Champa teaching Buddhism to the Chinese Buddhists in 1069, before being captured as a prisoner of war by King Lý-Thánh-Tông (r. 1054-1072). When his Buddhist mastery was discovered, he was promoted to be the National Preceptor as well as the personal master of the king and eventually was able to establish the lineage shown in Figure 16.

⁸⁰ Vaiśravaṇa is a Buddhist Dharma protector among the Four Celestial Kings (*lokapalas*), and is also popularly known as Kubera in the Vedic tradition in South India and Sri Lanka. Also see Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 436; Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 75.

⁸¹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, p. 408.

The transmission of the Mind-Seal continued with the tradition, with King Lý Thánh Tông as the leading figure of the first generation after Thảo Đường. This was the only Vietnamese Zen school predominantly led by lay Buddhists, especially the monarchs and the court officials. As a result, it functioned as a part of the royal court, engaged in all spheres of life, including politics. It was transmitted for about a century and a half from 1070 to the early thirteenth century, through five generations of 18 patriarchs, including nine monks and nine lay Buddhists. The record of this meditation schools faded out at the end of the Lý Dynasty when the kings of the Trần Dynasty took over the royal power of Vietnam in 1225.

Nevertheless, the link between Thảo Đường and the Chinese master Hsueh-t'ou Ming-Shueh and especially the popularity of the *Tuyệt Đâu Ngữ Lục*, the collection of *koan* teachings of Hsueh-t'ou, from the eleventh century and onward to the Trần Dynasty (1225-1400), indicate that koan continues to be the major focus of the Thảo Đường Zen tradition. In addition, according to *Warning Statement* by Thảo Đường discussed previously, Pure Land Buddhism was also promoted as a complementary practice to Zen. The prominence of Zen and Pure Land Buddhism appeared vividly in 1096, about twenty years into the establishment Thảo Đường Zen school, when the Empress Dowager Ý Lan (d. 1117), the Leading Concubine (Nguyên Phi) of King Lý Thánh Tông and the mother of King Lý Nhân Tông (1066-1127), asked all of the eminent monks present at the vegetarian feast offered by her in the royal palace to clarify the history of Vietnamese Zen, saying:

What is the meaning of “the Buddha” and “the Patriarchs”? Who is superior? Where does the Buddha dwell? Where do the Patriarchs live? When did they come to this country to pass on this Path? Who came first, the Buddha or the Patriarchs? What is the meaning of reciting the Buddha’s name and reaching the Mind-Seal of the Patriarchs?”⁸²

In the last question, the reciting of the name of the Buddha indicated the main practice of the Pure Land tradition. Reaching the Mind-Seal of the patriarchs was the primary aim of Zen. These two traditions became the dominant Buddhist practices at the time, preoccupying the primary concern of the leading authorities, including the Empress Dowager Ý Lan.

Despite her origin as a commoner woman, Ý Lan became the main concubine and was in charge of royal power when King Lý Thánh Tông was fighting the war in Champa in 1069. She kept the country in peace and managed the national affairs successfully. As a result, people

⁸² See Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen In Medieval Vietnam*, p. 128; and Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, p.132.

reverently and lovingly bestowed on her the sobriquet Quán Âm Nữ or the Daughter of Avalokiteśvara.⁸³ When King Lý Thánh Tông passed away in 1072 and her son, Kinh Lý Nhân Tông (r. 1072-1127), ascended the throne at the age of six, Ý Lan together with the famous General Lý Thường Kiệt, continued to help managing the national affairs, including fighting against invasion from the Chinese Song. Among her outstanding ruling activities, the policies to release unfortunate women, including servants, from the bondage of widowhood and to help farmers by prohibiting the slaughtering of buffalos were unprecedented. During her time, the Chinese Tripitaka had been brought to Vietnam several times, during the years 1020, 1034, and 1081. Also, the sets of the Tripitaka copied in Vietnam by the Lý kings were also in use. In addition to being a devoted Buddhist who helped to build more than a hundred of temples, Ý Lan also practiced meditation under the guidance of the renowned Zen Master Mãn Giác (1052-1096), the eighth generation of the Vô Ngôn Thông Zen School. She later attained insight into Zen practice through her *gāthā* of realization related to the *Heart Sutra*:

Form is emptiness, so emptiness equals form,
Emptiness is form, so form equal emptiness.
Only when you are not attached to either,
Then you begin to comprehend the true source.⁸⁴

Thus, above questions posed by Ý Lan come from a highly critical perspective of a knowledgeable Buddhist who has a serious concern for the authenticity of the tradition. As a result, in answer to her questions, a public Dharma discourse in front of an assembly of eminent monks, and royal officials, required a profound understanding of Buddhism, especially the transmission of Buddhism to Vietnam. At the end, Ý Lan honored Master Thông Biện, the “Awakened to the Lotus” of the Vô Ngôn Thông Zen School mentioned previously, with the sobriquet Thông Biện Quốc Sư or the National Preceptor with Consummate Eloquence and other rewards, when the Master provided the most succinct and throughout historical account to all of her questions, beginning with “Buddha” means “enlightenment,” and “The Buddha is the one who abides eternally in the world and who is without birth or demise. The Patriarchs are those who illuminate the source of the Buddha mind and whose understanding and conduct are in accord. The Buddha and the Patriarchs are one. Only undisciplined scholars would falsely

⁸³ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, p. 251.

⁸⁴ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, p. 245; Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 63.

assert that either is superior or inferior.”⁸⁵ Therefore, during the eleventh century, by the second decade of the Thảo Đường Zen School, the other two Vietnamese Zen schools continued to flourish and gain recognition from the royal authorities. This was further confirmed when Thông Biện pointed out the respective leading figures of each Zen school still living at the time:

The present representatives of the Vinītaruci stream are Lâm Huệ Sinh and Vương Chân Không. For the Vô Ngôn Thông stream, they are Mai Viên Chiếu and Nhan Quảng Trí. [The successor of Khương Tăng Hội] is Lôi Hà Trạch. The other side branches [of these streams] are too numerous to mention them all.⁸⁶

Even though the Thảo Đường School had emerged as a new Zen school linked to the monarchy, it continued to coexist with the Zen schools of Vinītaruci and Vô Ngôn Thông. These Zen schools, however, would be combined with the Trúc Lâm Zen School during the Trần Dynasty (1225-1398), as in the next discussion.

4. **The Trúc-Lâm Zen School** was founded in Vietnam by King Trần-Nhân-Tông (1258-1308), the third king of the Trần Dynasty (1225-1398). In lineage, this Zen school has a direct link to the Vô-Ngôn-Thông Zen School, through the Zen Master Thường-Chiếu (d. 1203), the patriarch in the twelfth generation of the Vô-Ngôn-Thông Zen School. Nevertheless, it evolved from the merging of the Vô Ngôn Thông and the Vinītaruci Zen School beginning with Thường Chiếu, who was invited to be the abbot of the Lục Tổ Temple, the former headquarters of Master Vạn Hạnh of the Vinītaruci Zen school. It also inherited the religious mantle, including the Thảo Đường Zen School, from the Lý Dynasty, as the ruling power shifted to the Trần kings. As the Trúc Lâm Zen School gravitated toward its prominence, it eventually merged all other the previous Zen schools into its own.

The tradition continued with the transmission of the Mind-Seal, using Zen dialogues and *koans*. At the time, formal and structural Dharma sessions of Zen dialogue using koans had been well established in Zen temples. In addition, recitation of the Buddha name was also used in the meditation hall. Nevertheless, it was intended to calm the mind and to enhance meditation, as in the following Zen dialogue, reporting by Master Pháp Loa (1284-1330), the Second Patriarch of the school:

⁸⁵ See Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 128.

⁸⁶ See Nguyễn Tú Cường, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*, p. 130.

Pháp Loa asked a monk, “What are they doing there in the assembly?” The monk answered, “Recite Buddha”. The master continued, “What is recitation when the Buddha has no mind?” The monk replied, “I don’t know.” The master asked, “You do not know? Then who is speaking?”⁸⁷

Inheriting the spirit of emptiness and non-attachment from previous Zen schools, the Trúc Lâm Zen School continued to maintain that Buddhism was not practiced separately from the world. At the time, *chữ Nôm*, the Vietnamese language using the Chinese characters in various combinations to denote the Vietnamese sounds and unreadable to the Chinese, was elevated in order to promote national sovereignty. In *chữ Nôm*, the Trúc Lâm Zen School formalized the doctrine of “Cư trần lạc đạo” or “engaged in the world while embracing the Dharma.” Just like “the radiating lotus in a sea of fire,”⁸⁸ one could engage in worldly affairs while continuing to embrace Buddhist practices. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* or the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, the most elaborate Mahayana sutra, entered the list of influential sutras for Zen practice. It expounded on the Bodhisattva practices engaged by various members of the society, including non-Buddhists. Also, instead of addressing the causality at the level of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, it elaborated on a more cosmological level of intercausality, presenting the interdependence and interpenetration of existences, either vast or tiny bodies, all sustaining each other and defining each other. An insight into that cosmic causality would enable one to tolerate, respect, learn, and benefit from the Bodhisattva practices of others who were engaging in various spheres of the society, just like Suhana and his search for practice by visiting fifty-three Bodhisattvas, who appeared as Buddhist and secular individuals, portrayed in the whole *Avatamsaka Sutra*. As a result, a Bodhisattva could practice and even enjoy the Dharma while engaging in the world, or “cư trần lạc đạo.” Trần Nhân Tông himself was a perfect exemplar of engaging in the world while embracing the Dharma. With the unanimous support of the Vietnamese elders who were invited to the Diên Hồng Conference for consultations and who determined to fight against invasions, Trần Nhân Tông, a serious Buddhist, led the country to triumph over the Mongolian Yuan invasions in 1285 and 1288. He was the first Vietnamese Buddhist king who had kindly given a special pardon to high-ranking Vietnamese traitors who had covertly submitted their documentations of surrender to the Mongolian enemy during the

⁸⁷ See Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, p.339.

⁸⁸ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông*, pp. 400, 414; Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, pp.290, 304.

war. Having received those traitorous documents captured in a casket at the end of the war, King Trần Nhân Tông, advised by his father the former King Trần Thánh Tông, burned all of those records in 1289, right after the war. Instead of persecuting the traitors, he obliterated all evidence so that those people would have “their mind peacefully settled” and could live together with others in peace.⁸⁹ Later on, after the country was at peace, Trần Nhân Tông abdicated the throne to his son and devoted his life to practicing Buddhism as a monk, a wish that he had postponed when his country and people were under attack. Later, as the founder of the Trúc Lâm Lineage, in addition to giving the Bodhisattva precepts to the royals, he traveled throughout the country advising people on living according to the virtuous path of Buddhism and on eliminating superstitious rituals.

In order to implement that way of practicing Buddhism while engaging in the world, the tradition offers its unique formula, namely “reflecting the radiance back upon self-contemplation.”⁹⁰ One has to focus contemplation on one’s own mind, as also suggested by the perfect penetration of hearing faculty introduced by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, the one that surpasses all others. Instead of listening to external sounds, one should revert the hearing faculty to be mindful of self-nature (*svabhāva*). Ultimately, it is meditation, reflecting upon oneself to illuminate the mind, rather than looking for enlightenment from external sources. In order to meditate successfully without being scorched by the fire of tangles of secular life, the tradition requires the three standard steps, namely *sila* (moral conduct), *samadhi* (concentration), and wisdom. *Sila* prevents misdeeds and eliminates negative thoughts accompanying those misdeeds from disturbing the mind during meditation. *Sila* for the householders and the household renunciators are distinguished in the Vinaya, the scriptures on disciplinary rules. *Sila* became significant at the time of the Trúc Lâm Zen Lineage, because monks had to conduct themselves properly according to monastic discipline, especially when more than 15,000 monks had been ordained by this Zen school alone. In 1322, four years after accomplishing the first Vietnamese version of the Tripitaka on woodblock prints (1319), Pháp Loa again ordered the carving of the Vinaya and printed five thousand copies to instruct monks in monastic disciplinary rules.⁹¹ Because of the important connection between *sila* and concentration, Pháp Loa himself insists that monks, from novices to elder masters, had to

⁸⁹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông*, p. 162.

⁹⁰ See Thích Thanh Từ, *Tuệ Trung Thượng Sĩ Ngữ Lục*, p.104.

⁹¹ See Nguyễn Lang, *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, vol. 2, p. 344.

observe *sila*, and then join the practice of meditation afterward. He even included the Mahayana *sila* in order to guard the six senses from being attracted to their respective objects.⁹²

For the purpose of obtaining *samadhi* or concentration in meditation, the tradition emphasizes the significance of realizing one's own self-nature (*svabhāva*) before embarking on meditation. Then, the tradition illuminates that it is essential to detach from both body and mind. Stilling the mind is the first step, in which one frequently evokes questions, contemplating: Where does this body come from? Where does this mind come from? Where does the body come from if the mind is not real? Where do the phenomena (physical and mental formations) come from if both mind and body are not real? If the phenomena are not real because there is no real existence, then where does that real existence come from? Without real existence, there are no real phenomena, so what does each phenomenon depend on in order to discriminate if the phenomenon itself is not a phenomenon? Without depending on discrimination, then one phenomenon is not every other phenomenon. Then phenomena are not real and, yet, not unreal. When one recognizes the phenomena as they are (recognizing the emptiness underlying body, mind, and phenomena), and can act upon it without inflictive emotions, then one can attain meditation.⁹³

Nevertheless, the tradition also warns that one should not become attached to one's own cultivation. Rather, one cultivates without being attached to its results. Also, one can concentrate on the *koan* without interruption, restlessness, or drowsiness. Then one can meditate in the four positions, namely walking, standing, sitting, and lying. After realizing meditation, the mind without attachment will radiate and can be used to penetrate the teachings proposed by the Zen patriarchs. This wisdom can generate numerous skillful means to benefit others.

In the past, the Trúc-Lâm Zen School was believed to have transmitted down to Master Huyền Quang, one of the three leading figures in the third generation of the school. The record was no longer clear afterward. However, with recent studies of various temple records in North Vietnam, the lineage is shown to have prevailed itself until the present time, as shown in Figure 17.

⁹² See Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, p. 347.

⁹³ See Thích Thanh Từ, *Tam Tổ Trúc Lâm*, pp. 452-453.

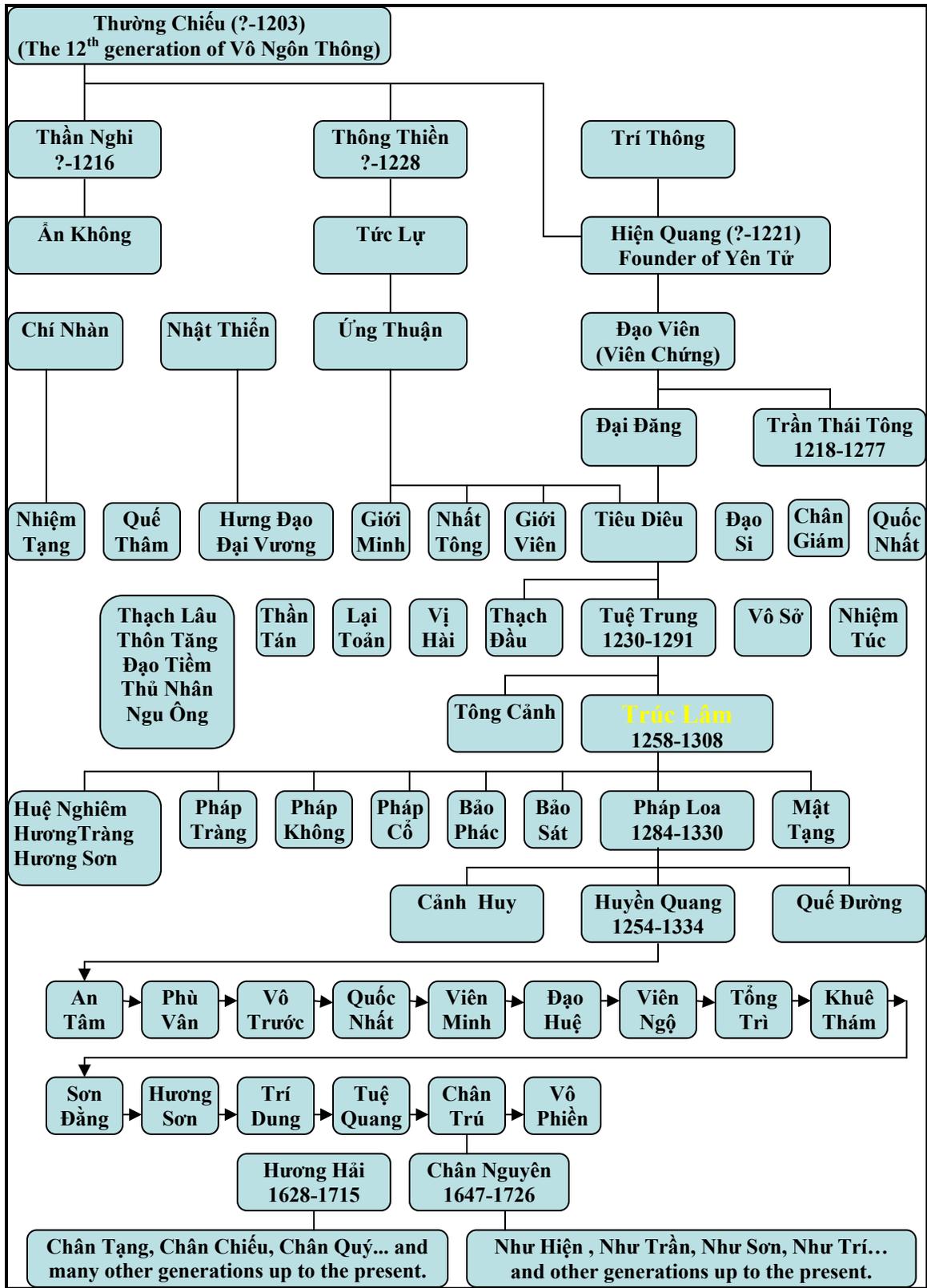


Figure 17. The genealogical lineage of the Trúc Lâm Zen School.

An effort to shed further light onto the transmission of this prominent Vietnamese Zen lineage is continuing.⁹⁴

Again, the temporary obscurity in the transmission only means that the lineage has gone underground or unrecorded because of unfavorable political conditions at the collapse of the Trần Dynasty in 1400, or, especially during the occupation of the Chinese Ming Dynasty from 1407-1427. After Hồ-Quý-Ly took over the throne from the Trần king in 1400, the Chinese Ming (1368-1644) invaded Vietnam under the banner “supporting the Trần and eliminating the Hồ,” in order to turn Vietnam into a district of China. Their severe regulation aimed to eradicate Vietnamese culture, not unlike the intention to eradicate Tibetan culture under the Chinese Communists at present, and included the harsh order from the Chinese king in 1047:

I frequently told you that whatever An-Nam has – from letters to documentations and literature, even local folksongs, texts for teaching children, and the stone tablets established by that land – must be destroyed immediately, as soon as you see any, not to spare a fragment or even a word. Now, I have heard, however, that those texts captured by soldiers were not immediately burnt. Rather they have to be checked and screened before burning. The majority of the soldiers is illiterate. If that was done ubiquitously, then those documentations would be lost. From now on, you must strictly follow the order to the soldiers, regardless of wherever, as soon as you see texts and written words, you must burn them immediately, without hesitation.”⁹⁵

As a result, most of the records and letters written on paper, carved and painted on wood, or inscribed on stone and cultural artifacts, at temples, shrines, palaces, or other public constructions were burned to ashes and smashed to pieces. Most of the Buddhist texts and literature, including the Vietnamese version of the Tripitaka, down to the Trần Dynasty, were burnt to ashes or confiscated by China for destroying later. The loss of that Vietnamese Tripitaka, one of the greatest treasures of Vietnamese Buddhism, which can never be replicated, has continued to be an issue for Vietnamese Buddhism to grapple with, even until the present time.

In addition, when Lê-Lợi rose up and defeated the Chinese Ming invaders in 1427, making him the initial king of the Later Lê Dynasty, he sought to capture and completely

⁹⁴ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông*, pp. 348-349; 354.

⁹⁵ See Nguyễn Hiền Đức, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Đàng Trong* (History of Buddhism in Cochinchina), p. 43.

eliminated those royal members of the Trần Dynasty, who had been seeking shelters in temples under the Trúc Lâm Lineage. The expelling of monks and nuns out of Thăng Long in 1678, under the order of King Lê-Hy-Tông can serve as an example of a suspicious attitude toward Buddhism at the time. The king eventually called off the order and repented his mistake because of the courageous intervention of the Great Master Tông Diễn (1640-1711), who was able to show the king that the five lay Buddhist precepts of the Dharma Jewel alone had been underlying the law of all powerful kingdoms. After realizing the value of such a jewel, sent by Tông-Diễn, the king repented his mistake and even made his own statue in prostrated pose carrying the Buddha on his back. The historical statue still remains at Hồng-Phúc Temple (also known locally as Hòe-Nhai Temple), in Hanoi nowadays.⁹⁶ Thus, most of the masters of the Trúc-Lâm Lineage at the time were under suspicion and stern repression, so that many escaped from Vietnam to hide their Trúc-Lâm identities by taking shelter in the forest regions of the remote land of Champa and Chen-la in the south and by taking on the identities of other Meditation schools, including the Lâm-Tế (Lin-Chi) and Tào Động (Tsao-Tung).⁹⁷ Attempting to maintain ruling power against the former Trần Dynasty, which was built upon Buddhism, especially the Buddhist Meditation Lineage of Trúc Lâm, the kings of the Later Lê Dynasty (1427-1593) promoted Confucianism to replace Buddhism. This political move to utilize Confucianism as the national ideology by the Later Lê Dynasty brought Confucianism to a politically dominant position during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and until the French colonization in 1862. At the same time, the new political direction of gradually eliminating Buddhist influences in the royal court weakened Buddhism in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, at the end of the Later Lê dynasty (1600-1788), when Vietnam was divided into the North and the South at Linh Giang River, ruled by Lord Trịnh and Lord Nguyễn, respectively, Vietnamese Buddhism was then revised in both regions. In the North, the Zen Master Chân Nguyên (1646-1726), the 36th generation of the Lâm Tế (Lin-Chi) School revised the Trúc-Lâm Zen School and became the lineage holder of both Zen schools. In 1722, Ven. Chân Nguyên was bestowed the title “General Supervisor of the Sangha” while assuming the position of the abbot of Long-Động Temple and Quỳnh Lâm Temple, the renowned centers of the Trúc Lâm Lineage. In the South, Master Hương Hải (1628-1715) also emerged from the

⁹⁶ See Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, pp. 415-420.

⁹⁷ See Nguyễn Hiền Đức, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Đàng Trong*, pp. 44-45.

Trúc Lâm Zen School. Most of the royal members and the major officials of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1558-1802) were disciples of Master Hương Hải. Because of their strong support, Buddhism flourished in South Vietnam, including the Trúc Lâm Lineage led by Hương Hải. The practice promoted by Hương Hải continued to be the unification of Meditation, Pure Land, and Tantra.

Later on, after Hương Hải left for North Vietnam, the Trúc Lâm Lineage in the South assumed the identity of the Lâm Tế (Lin-Chi) School which was newly brought in from China by the Zen Master Nguyễn Thiều to cover the vacancy left by Hương Hải. In the North, with the arrival of Hương Hải, the Trúc Lâm Lineage continued to be propagated. The Nguyệt Đường Temple, in Hải Phòng, was rebuilt to become the grand monastery for the propagation of the Trúc Lâm Lineage under Hương Hải in 1700.⁹⁸ Afterward, Vietnamese Buddhism in all parts of the country continued with the main practices of the Trúc Lâm Zen School, even when the tradition assumed the identity of Lâm Tế (Lin-Chi) and Tào Động (Tsao-Tung). This tradition continued through the colonial period during the nineteenth century and up to the present time, even in Vietnamese Buddhism abroad. It was recorded that public debate at the royal court between the Buddhist masters led by Hương Hải and the Catholic missionaries took place in 1714. Back in 1631, the missionaries were still well received by Lord Trịnh Tráng. The Jesuit missionaries led by Gaspar d' Amaral and three other Portuguese named André Palmeiro, Antonio de Fontes, and Antonio F. Cardein, were assigned to stay in royal compartments at Thăng Long. Also, like members of the royal court, they were accompanied on horseback to the annual Competitive Examination, a special honor bestowed by Lord Trịnh Tráng himself.⁹⁹ However, their favorable wind shifted as time went on. In 1714, after losing the public debate with Master Hương Hải, followed by the eight months of investigation, the missionaries were expelled by order of the royal court.¹⁰⁰

With the ascendance of Confucianism promoted by the kings of the Later Lê Dynasty (1600-1788), Vietnamese Buddhism was gradually weakened. The tradition was separated from serving in any major national affairs, as in the glorious past. In this respect, Vietnamese Buddhism became an outsider. It had to manage its own affairs without having major influence on national policies concerning Buddhism. Vital among the masses, the tradition continued with

⁹⁸ See Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, pp. 375.

⁹⁹ Đỗ Quang Chính, *Lịch Sử Chữ Quốc Ngữ, 1620-1959*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁰⁰ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Minh Châu Hương Hải*, pp. 17, 116.

an outsider status while rendering its religious services, even to the royal court, when needed. In terms of Buddhist education and transmission, the tradition could maintain its ground in monastic settings using the Chinese Tripitaka, and continued to survive the loss of the Vietnamese Tripitaka and other major Buddhist texts due to its excellent tradition of its proficiency in Han. During the colonial time, the tradition encountered another grave crisis when Vietnam lost its sovereignty to the French colonists beginning in 1862. The French colonial authorities intended to make Vietnam a French speaking colony. As a result, they eliminated the use of Han and temporarily imposed *quốc ngữ*, the Romanized transcriptions of Hán and Nôm spoken by the Vietnamese, not as a national language but as a transitional language before having French imposed. This political move made Vietnamese Buddhism even a further outsider. The Buddhist tradition was cut off from its main linguistic means to transmit its teaching to the people. Thus, in addition to being completely outside of colonial policies, which sought to alienate Buddhism and to promote their colonial type of Catholicism, the Buddhist tradition encountered the critical challenge of making Buddhism known to the mass in a completely new language or perishing. Despite its status as an outsider, Vietnamese Buddhism managed not only to maintain its ground as the dominant religion of the land, but also to survive the colonial repression and to flourish in Vietnam through the present time, including a successful adaptation in transmitting Buddhism using Quốc Ngữ. How did the tradition as an outsider manage to do that? Will its experience be of any benefit to Vietnamese Buddhism abroad, in diaspora? The whole experience of dealing with Quốc Ngữ from the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition will be explored in order to help shed light onto the questions and especially the scholarly issues concerning insiders and outsiders in the study of religion.

On the issue of Quốc Ngữ, the French colonists, who imposed its use, were the primary insiders. They used Quốc Ngữ in order to replace chữ Nho, the court language of the Vietnamese Confucian scholars written in Han, which they had a tremendous difficulty understanding. Nevertheless, they only wanted to use this language to make a transition to the complete use of French, the language of conquerors. Undoubtedly, being colonists, they were fond of creating a colony out of Vietnam, a French-speaking colony, as a Far-East extension of the so-called greater “Mother French Empire.” Together with their missionary allies, they also dreamt of a vision of Vietnam as “a French Catholic empire in the Far East.”¹⁰¹ In 1862, after

¹⁰¹ See Oscar Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam, From Tu Duc to Bao Dai*, p. 51.

penetrating the Gia Định garrison in a fierce and bloody war, Admiral Rigaul de Genouilly captured the three eastern provinces of Vietnam in the South, namely Gia Định (where Saigon is located), Mỹ Tho, and Biên Hòa. In this war, most of the major Buddhist temples, including those recognized by royal edicts in Saigon-Gia Định, like Khải Tường Temple, Từ Ân Temple, Mai Sơn Temple, and so on, were demolished and razed after being taken by the French army as fortresses.¹⁰² Soon, the Admiral was confronted with the task of communicating to the natives in their Vietnamese language. For interpreters, he turned to his allies the missionaries stationed in Saigon with their missionary school called the College d'Adran and gave scholarships in return. The college was established by Pigneau de Bahaine, the bishop-friend of King Gia Long (r.1802-1819), who had brought in the French to secure his throne. At the time, the college was still allowed to operate right in Saigon, the center of commercial and political activities in the South (Cochinchina), regardless of a series of persecutions and twelve anti-missionary edicts from the time of King Minh Mạng (r.1820-1840) until 1858, and especially after a French missionary named Marchand was involved in the revolt of Lê Văn Khôi in 1835.¹⁰³ Though rarely teaching in French, the college taught their students Latin and the missionary way of reading and writing Vietnamese in Roman letters, known in their religious community and later ubiquitously in the dictionaries and grammar books written in French as the Annamite language, the language of the native people of Annam (the Peaceful South, a name of Vietnam). From this college, the next French Admiral, Victor Joseph Charner, founded the College des Interprètes in 1861. Headed by Abbé Cooc, the personal interpreter of the Admiral, and staffed by Vietnamese Catholics, the college aimed to train Vietnamese as interpreters and to teach native Vietnamese to French personnel through the medium of Romanized writing. Thus, the occupation of the colonial French in the three eastern provinces of Vietnam in the South in 1862 was also the beginning of the imposition of what became known later as Quốc Ngữ.

¹⁰² See *Hội Thảo Khoa Học 300 Năm Phật Giáo Gia Định-Sài Gòn Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh*, pp. 409-413.

¹⁰³ See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language policy in Vietnam*, p. 70. In 1774, due to the rivalry developed among the Jesuit, Lazarist, and Dominican missionaries in Cochinchina, the Jesuit team was eliminated there. Nevertheless, in 1787, Bishop Pigneau de Bahaine helped Lord Nguyễn Ánh, the future Emperor Gia Long, to negotiate the treaty of Versailles in order to have King Louis XVI of France send troops to Vietnam to secure his throne against the challenge from Nguyễn Huệ, the heroic leader of the Tây Sơn army. Without seeing the implementation of the treaty, Pigneau eventually managed the expedition at his own expense to help secure the throne of Nguyễn Ánh. See also Oscar Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam, From Tu Duc to Bao Dai*, p. 3. For the revolt of Lê Văn Khôi, see Huỳnh Minh, *Gia Định Xưa và Nay*, pp. 145-146.

The official introduction of Quốc Ngữ into the public domain, however, began with the first edition of *Gia Định Báo*, on April 15, 1865. (Until then, *quốc ngữ* simply meant “the native language”). Written in Quốc Ngữ and covering four pages on both sides, this monthly newspaper was “destined to diffuse among our native population the news which is worthy of their interest to initiate them into a knowledge of a new process for the improvement of agriculture and progress in rural industry.”¹⁰⁴ It covered public announcements issued from the Admiral and then had a miscellaneous section at the end. As time went on, it was extended to cover various regulations on tax, land distribution, mining, criminal punishment, metric measurement, banking, and so on, and even on the price of opium sold legally and freely in the market.¹⁰⁵ In July 1865, it reflected that the French school for children was operating in Saigon in addition to the missionary Latin school.¹⁰⁶ The application of Quốc Ngữ was extended to Vĩnh Long, Hà Tiên and Châu Đốc, the three western provinces of Vietnam in the South after they were taken over by the French in 1867. The aim for a wider application of Quốc Ngữ manifested itself in June 1875, in a massive plan for recruitment of interpreters and court secretaries¹⁰⁷ announced by Admiral Duperre after the French authorities succeeded in making Vietnam a protectorate and securing French sovereignty over Cochinchina (the six provinces in the South) in 1874. A further application of Quốc Ngữ was implemented in 1883, when the French authorities were in control of North Vietnam and later applied the policy of “divide and rule,” separating the country into three Kys (states), making Bắc Kỳ (Tonkin) and Trung Kỳ (Annam) their protectorates, while maintaining Nam Kỳ (Cochinchina) as their colony. By

¹⁰⁴ See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language policy in Vietnam*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁵ See *Gia Định Báo*, 19 Oct. 1897, p.1.

¹⁰⁶ The third issue of the *Gia Định Báo*, published in July 1865, while pointing out the elaborate procession of religious icons from the government church attended by the Admiral together with his personnel and accompanied by an army riding on horses and cannons firing from big warships, confirmed that the French school had been operating in Saigon in addition to the missionary Latin school. It reported in the Miscellaneous Section that “the students from the French school and the Latin school, and children from the orphanage, being dressed up cleanly to accompany [the religious icons] are quite crowded [có học trò nhà Trường Pha-lang-sa, nhà Trường La-tin, con nít Nhà-phước, ăn mặc sạch sẽ theo hầu rất nên đông lắm].” (p. 3)

¹⁰⁷ In the *Gia Định Báo*, published on June 1, 1875, the terms “quốc ngữ” and “Annamite [chữ Annam]” became interchangeable terms when they were announced in a massive plan for recruitment of interpreters and court secretaries announced by Admiral Duperre. Typically, in addition to an oral examination on translating chữ nhu [chữ Nho] into French, the candidates for the second level of French interpreters were also required to take a written examination, including: “A lesson in *quốc ngữ*, a lesson in French (devoid of difficult words), a translation into French of a section of a story or a piece of literature written in *Annamite*, a composition in *quốc ngữ*, and the translation of a court case or a court decision into the Annamite language (Bài Đọc quốc ngữ. Bài đọc tiếng Langsa, mà tránh những tiếng khó. Dịch ra tiếng Langsa một khúc chuyện hay là khúc văn Annam, viết chữ quốc ngữ. Dịch một án hoặc một lời nghị ra tiếng Annam).” p. 2.

1904, Quốc Ngữ was imposed through the system of government schools, especially in the South, after Admiral Rodier selected sixteen books out of a contest called “books on teaching quốc ngữ (sách huấn môn quốc ngữ [sic]),” for the purpose of teaching young Vietnamese students.¹⁰⁸ However, it was treated as a foreign language, a minor subject of learning in the French-speaking schools operated by the colonial government.

By no means was the systematic imposition of Quốc Ngữ intended to make it the national language for the colony. The French authorities, who looked down on *quốc ngữ* as the native language of the conquered, typically did not even bother to standardize or capitalize its spelling on the previous public announcements issued by their Admirals, who claimed to use it in order to westernize the uncivilized natives. Nevertheless, their intention to sever the Vietnamese from Confucian ideology, which had brought constant resistance to the colonial establishment, was obvious, as in the following announcement made by Paulin Vial, Directeur du Cabinet du Gouverneur de la Cochinchina:

From the first day it was recognized that the Chinese language was a barrier between us and the natives; the education provided by means of the hieroglyphic characters was completely beyond us; this writing makes possible only with difficulty transmitting to the population the diverse ideas which are necessary for them at the level of their new political and commercial situation. Consequently, we are obligated to follow the traditions of our own system of education; it is the only one which can bring close to us the Annamites of the colony by inculcating in them the principles of European civilization and isolating them from the hostile influence of our neighbors.¹⁰⁹

Rather than diffusing Quốc Ngữ as the language of the land, the colonist authorities used it as a transitional step in understanding the natives. Ultimately, they aimed to spread the French language and planned to make a French-speaking colony out of the natives. It was insisted by Colonial Congress in 1890, after the solutions proposed by Etienne Aymonier, the director of the École Coloniale, an elite training school for the colonial administrators in Paris, including:

Official instruction in French Cochinchina will be based to the fullest extent possible on the study of the French language: the budgetary resources of the colony will be used principally for the diffusion of this language....In all of French Indochina the government

¹⁰⁸ See *Gia Định Báo*, 04 Apr. 1904, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language policy in Vietnam*, p. 77.

will examine the means of encouraging the study of French and of making the study of this language easy and inexpensively available to the native population.¹¹⁰

In addition, the colonial authorities also restricted the propagation of Quốc Ngữ when they realized that it could fall under the control of the Vietnamese resisters, who would make it a national language, a weapon in fighting the colonial authorities. The most typical case was an incident concerning the opening of the first University in Hanoi during the early twentieth century. When a group of Vietnamese scholars, who belonged to an activist group named Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục (Tonkin Free School), submitted a request in order to establish a Vietnamese university for the purpose of higher education, Paul Beau, the governor in Vietnam between 1902 and 1908, agreed to it, saying “Ah! You want to establish a university? Very good! Let me establish it for all of you!” A few weeks later, in the first class of the university, a French professor went on and on lecturing in French far beyond the understanding of most of the students. When the students asked him for the texts they should read, the professor replied, “Get to the library and look them up.” The students walked out in humiliation at the end of the class, shaking their heads timidly among themselves.¹¹¹ That was the end of the first university in Hanoi. Regardless of the colonial attempt to widen the application of Quốc Ngữ and the claim that Paul Beau had laid the groundwork for a university in Hanoi but had met with opposition from his colonial companions who believed that “a higher education could only provide the natives with the tool for rebellion,”¹¹² higher education for the Vietnamese, beyond providing the necessary services to the colonial system, was not encouraged. The colonial administration, an insider in the issue of Quốc Ngữ, turned out to be its obstructer instead of its promoter.

The Catholic missionaries, due to their alliance with the French colonists, in both religious and political matters, were also the insiders on the issue concerning Quốc Ngữ. In addition, the Annamite language, the Romanization of chữ Hán-Nôm, had begun with the European missionaries from Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France in the seventeenth century. Their efforts to understand the sayings of the natives and to convey their missionary messages were later compiled into dictionaries and then used by the Jesuit missionary Alexander Rhodes to make the *Dictionarium Annamiticum, Lusitanum, and Latinum* published in 1651. The Romanized Annamite language, *Annamiticum*, confined to the missionaries in their community,

¹¹⁰ See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language policy in Vietnam*, p. 132.

¹¹¹ See Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục*, pp. 91-92.

¹¹² See Oscar Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam, From Tu Duc to Bao Dai*, p. 79.

was later brought to the public domain by the French colonists during the late nineteenth century. Then, only through various refinements accompanied by campaigns for the diffusion of Quốc Ngữ did Quốc Ngữ eventually acquire the full status of a national language and become “very active from 1930 on, then through the campaign against illiteracy promoted by every citizen.”¹¹³ In this respect, the missionaries shared the status of insiders on the issue of Quốc Ngữ due to their initial involvement with the Romanization of the Annamite language. Nevertheless, their primary aim was teaching Latin, the scriptural language of their missionary tradition, as mentioned in the existence of a Latin school by the *Gia Định Báo* previously, so that they could convert the natives more effectively, bringing them under the umbrella of Rome. As a result, they did not become the promoters of Quốc Ngữ, regardless of their insider status:

The missionaries were not interested in the wider diffusion of Quốc Ngữ. “The enlightened classes” also had no idea of adopting the system and would have smiled pityingly at such a thought. For Quốc Ngữ to receive acceptance, it was necessary for “the French Conquerors” to come and impose it by force.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, agreeing with the French colonists, the missionaries supported the elimination of chữ Nho, the Confucian scholar script written in Han. They were even more eager to get rid of chữ Nho so that they could distance the natives from being influenced by the Confucian practice of worshipping their ancestors, a traditional practice that had been forbidden by the Pope in a specific bull issued in 1174.¹¹⁵ As a result, when it came to a language destined to be used by the natives in the colony, the missionary choice was certainly not Quốc Ngữ. After their disastrous experience with chữ Nho and *Nho Gia* (the Confucian Scholars), from whom they won relatively few converts, and usually only those from the economically depressed peasants (unpleasantly labeled “rice Christians,”¹¹⁶ who had converted for a sack of rice), the missionaries would not entertain the idea of creating another national language for the natives. There was “no basis to the widely held notion that the missionaries gave the name ‘Quốc Ngữ’ to the Romanized writing which they had created.”¹¹⁷ In addition, the missionaries continued to use

¹¹³ See Nguyễn Đình Hòa, *The Vietnamese Language*, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language Policy in Vietnam*, p. 111.

¹¹⁵ See Oscar Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam, From Tu Duc to Bao Dai*, p. 47.

¹¹⁶ The label, despite its correct reality concerning the missionary ways of converting the natives, was highly sentimental. This sentiment had been repeatedly manipulated by the colonial authorities and the Western missionaries in order to isolate the Vietnamese Catholics from the non-Catholics. See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language policy in Vietnam*, pp. 48, 49.

¹¹⁷ See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language Policy in Vietnam*, p. 84.

chữ Nôm, including a translation of Quốc Ngữ in the Nôm script instead. Despite some narrow usage of the Romanized script in their mission, in 1837 the mission and its converts still attempted to distribute a printed Nôm tract titled *Thánh Giáo Lý Quốc Ngữ* or *The Holy Principles of Christianity in the National Language*.¹¹⁸ Rather than promote Quốc Ngữ, the missionaries preferred the French language as their choice, as in the direct remarks made by the influential Bishop Monsignor Puginier, who was the head of the Catholic mission in Tonkin, the decisive collaborator behind the French capture of Tonkin, and the person who forcefully demolished the Báo Thiên Temple, one of the four great national vessels constructed by the Lý kings in 1056, and then built on top of it the Hà Nội Cathedral.¹¹⁹

I consider the abolition of Chinese characters and their progressive substitution first by the Annamite language (quoc ngu) and later by French as a very political, practical, and effective means to establish a little France of the Far East in Tonkin.¹²⁰

Thus, regardless of their insider status, the missionaries had not made the diffusion of Quốc Ngữ their focus.

In the other camp of the insider/outsider issue, the Confucian scholars, including the mandarins, opposed Quốc Ngữ as imposed by the invaders, making themselves the outsiders. However, after witnessing the futile attempts to resist the well-equipped French army, especially after their failure to prevent the French from taking control of Vietnam, many Confucian scholars revised their strategies. They sought to improve and westernize themselves in the hope that they could catch up and even beat the French using their own means, just like the Japanese and their victory over Russia after their modernization. In their effort, those scholars picked up quốc ngữ, the Romanized Annamite, the language installed by the enemy, and refined it as Quốc Ngữ, the National Language, a weapon to unite the Vietnamese, to foster national spirits, and to write anti-colonial literature, fighting against French. In the process, this particular group of Confucian scholars, the outsiders, emerged as a decisive factor in promoting Quốc Ngữ. Typically, this is illuminated by the case of Nguyễn Hiến Lê, one the most respected and influential writers under the Republic of Vietnam, who tried to learn chữ Nho in his youth and

¹¹⁸ See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language Policy in Vietnam*, p. 65.

¹¹⁹ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 3, p. 36; Minh Chi et al., *Buddhism in Vietnam, from Its Origins to the 19th Century*, p. 86; and Nguyễn Tài Thu, *History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, p. 157.

¹²⁰ See John De Francis, *Colonial and Language Policy in Vietnam*, p. 141.

was advised by his great uncle a lesson on modern learning for the Confucian scholars, as follows:

With your French education, why do you want to return to learn *chữ Nho*? At least ten years of study are needed to get to understand it. Also, Confucian learning has become useless now. I think it is proper that Thím Tư (my mother) wanted you to study from me so that you can read our genealogical record on both sides of the family. Nevertheless, there is no need for you to study the classical literature and poetry. There is no need! You should put in your effort to study science.” That is the common mentality of the Confucian scholars of the time. They had witnessed the danger of literature in ‘eight rhyme words’ and had seen that the ‘white devils’ were taking over our country solely through their powerful ships and excellent guns. Thus, they only wished that their children and grandchildren concentrate on studying Western technology so that they could surpass and could beat them, as did Japan in 1905. They had scrubbed off the words ‘Khoa cử’ [Competitive Examination]. Now, they also want to abandon Chinese literature and poetry.¹²¹

In order to popularize and to make Quốc Ngữ out of the colonial *quốc ngữ*, in 1936, fifteen scholars of Confucian background affiliated with the prestigious colonial École Française d’Extrême-Orient¹²² in Hanoi, led by Nguyễn Văn Tố, established *Hội truyền-bá quốc ngữ*, or Society for the Diffusion of the National Language. Despite the prestigious affiliation and the fact that Tố had an excellent command of French in addition to his eloquence in Chinese history and letters and his many scholarly articles to interpret the local culture to westerners and at the same time to popularize western culture among his people, the French Governor of Tonkin was

¹²¹ See Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Đời Viết Văn của Tôi*, p. 22.

¹²² École Française d’Extrême-Orient, the French School of Far Eastern studies, founded in 1898 by Paul Doumer, the then Governor General of Indochina. It was a research institute, an eastern counterpart of the two renowned French institutes in Athen and Rome, dedicated to the study of and research on the archeology, history and languages of Greek and Latin civilization. It was a magnificent symbol of French culture in the Far East, where French scholars joined together with linguists, historians, archeologists, anthropologists, and physicians from Indochina. It focused on disseminating knowledge of Vietnam and of other countries in the region and published several scholarly articles by well-known authors including Pelliot, Maspéro, Cadière, Gaspardone, Bezacier, Parmentier, Gourou, Codès, Lévy, Huard, Durand, and so on. Also, it served as an informative resource for the colonist authorities to make policies concerning the native Vietnamese. See Nguyễn Đình Hòa, *From the City Inside the Red River*, p. 31.; and Nguyễn Văn Trung, *Phạm Quỳnh: Văn Học và Chính Trị*, vol. 2, pp. 114-115.

quite alarmed and only approved the project after changing its name and mission to *Hội truyền-bá học chữ quốc-ngữ* or Society for the Diffusion of the Roman Script.¹²³

The main mission of the society was the “aim to diffuse the learning of *chữ quốc-ngữ* (the Romanized script) to teach the Vietnamese people how to read and write their language so that they can easily learn the common knowledge needed for their daily activities nowadays.” Also, it aimed “to help everyone to write *chữ quốc-ngữ* uniformly correctly.”¹²⁴ In addition, it clarified its voluntary mission by declaring that the instructors who had decided to join society should take the difficult task of teaching *chữ quốc ngữ* “just by the joyful heart, seeking no other personal benefits.”¹²⁵ With the support of eager high school and college students, the society could teach adults how to read and write their mother tongue in three or four weeks. It was a gigantic success. Until 1944, it provided free instruction to more than fifty-nine thousand adults who were until then completely illiterate. Later, the society members and volunteer teachers won a great deal of admiration as champions of the worthy cause of literacy campaigns, to which UNESCO would formally devote its effort on a worldwide scale twenty years later.¹²⁶ The society ended, however, in 1945, when Japan overthrew the French in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the impacts left by the society were lasting. Among the fifteen members of the board of directors, the advisor of the society, Hoàng Xuân Hãn (1908-1996), a math teacher at Pomelo High School, designed couplets in the native six-eight verse as a mnemonic device, singing in song to help teach the alphabet:

O tròn như quả trứng gà (O is round like an egg).

Ô thì đội mũ, Ở già thêm râu (Ô has a hat on, O being old, a whisker).

For the critical marks, it goes:

Huyền ngang, sắc dọc, nặng tròn, (Huyền is horizontal, sắc vertical, nặng round)

Hỏi lom khom đứng, ngã buồn nằm ngang, (Hỏi bending in stand, ngã sadly lying flat)

He and others in the group also used a better spelling system to read Quốc Ngữ, rather than follow the Latin way of spelling each letter in the word. For instance, the Vietnamese word “biên” is read quickly as “bờ-iên,” rather than the clumsy Latin way of “bờ-i-bi-e-bê-en-

¹²³ See Nguyễn Đình Hòa, *From the City Inside the Red River*, pp. 31-32.

¹²⁴ In Vietnamese, the mission statement goes as follows “Mục đích của Hội có hai điều: (1) Cốt truyền-bá học chữ quốc ngữ: giạy [dạy] cho đồng bào Việt-nam biết đọc, biết viết tiếng của mình, để dễ học những điều thường thức, cần dùng cho sự sinh hoạt ngày nay; (2) Cốt cho mọi người viết chữ quốc-ngữ đúng nhau.” See Hội Truyền-bá học Quốc-ngữ, *Điều Lệ*, p. 1.

¹²⁵ See Hội Truyền-bá học Quốc-ngữ, *Mấy Điều Cần Thiết: Các Thầy Dạy Giúp Hội Nên Biết*, p. 7.

¹²⁶ See Nguyễn Đình Hòa, *From the City: Inside the Red River*, p. 32.

biên.”¹²⁷ Hoàng Xuân Hãn was later a leading figure of the national education board and was well known for designing the national curriculum for high school. The advisor of the society Trần Trọng Kim went on to become the Prime Minister in the first independent government in 1945. He later wrote the *Việt Nam Sử Lược* (*History of Vietnam, a Survey*) and *Văn Phạm Việt Nam* (*Vietnamese Grammar*) for school use in South Vietnam. The Supervisor Trần Văn Giáp became a well known scholar in Vietnamese archeology and a leading figure of the Hán Nôm Institution in Hanoi. Võ Nguyên Giáp, a teacher at the time, later followed a new direction, joining the Communists, and made himself famous for being the General who led the Communist army to triumph over the French colonial troops and forced them to withdraw from Vietnam in 1954, after the decisive battle at Điện Biên Phủ, a remote location in the Northwestern Highland, near the golden triangle, the land of opium in Indochina. Later, in the battle against illiteracy, the Communists repeatedly charged against the colonial authorities for neglecting education in Vietnam while exposing the ignoble focus of the colonial authorities on amassing opium.

In 1948, the Communists in North Vietnam took over the course of diffusing Quốc Ngữ and used the methods invented by the Society for the Diffusion of Quốc Ngữ to eradicate illiteracy, spreading Quốc Ngữ to even the lower strata of Vietnamese society. They truly used it as a weapon against the French colonial administration, discrediting its tall claim on bringing “Peace,” “Knowledge,” and “Civilization” to Vietnam. Literacy, the ability to read and write Quốc Ngữ, became a critical point for attacking the French authorities:

It is worthwhile noting that for nearly 25 million of the inhabitants that Indochina had between 1939 and 1941, the number of school students rose from 409,777 to 422,407, and the number of prisons rose from 14,350 to 20,582. On the other hand, the amount of opium sold rose from 57,592 kilograms to 71,746 kilograms, and the revenue from opium rose from 11.5 million to 19.5 million piatres. It seems that the French thought that prisons and opium built a better civilization than literacy.¹²⁸

By 1948, the communist authorities reported to UNESCO their glaring accomplishment in wiping out illiteracy in North Vietnam. With typical Communist language, they, the outsiders on

¹²⁷ See Hội Truyền-bá học Quốc-ngữ, *Mấy Điều Cần Thiết: Các Thầy Dạy Giúp Hội Nên Biết*, p. 11.

¹²⁸ Vietnam News Service, *Viet-Nam Wipes Out Illiteracy*, p. 4.

the issue of Quốc Ngữ, openly claimed their victory in spreading Quốc Ngữ far beyond the incompetent French colonists and their missionary allies, as follows:

The crusade against illiteracy has left no person illiterate in many villages. Not counting South Viet-Nam and the Southern provinces of Center Viet-Nam, 7 million people are free from the shackles of ignorance. What could not be achieved within 80 years under the French rule has been achieved in less than three years under the most difficult and adverse circumstances....For the people of Viet-Nam, this victory in the battle against illiteracy is of great significance. It is not the work of some legislative reforms. It is not the achievement of some social or cultural uplift movement. Nor is it an accomplishment of some missionary work.¹²⁹

In South Vietnam, the effect of the colonial educational system, in which French was used as the primary language medium in higher education, lingered up to 1966, until Nguyễn Hiến Lê and others writers, out of concern for students, wrote a series of articles publicly calling for the use of Quốc Ngữ in the universities in place of French. It was quite a struggle, because those leading professors, who had been trained abroad in the French language, kept resisting the change due to their individual interests. They came up with all types of reasons, including that Quốc Ngữ, being a new language, did not have a sufficient scientific vocabulary, and that quite a few years would be needed to translate hundreds of thousands of scientific terms and words. Nguyễn Hiến Lê, a prolific writer and translator, however, pointed directly to the crux of the problem, namely “the Board of Education, for more than a decade did not consider Vietnamese [Quốc Ngữ] as important. They neglected the language of the mother tongue.” Alluding to those individuals, he even quoted a friend, saying “They are independent, but have not gotten over slavery.”¹³⁰ In 1963, he and Professor Trương Văn Chính of Huế University wrote *Khảo Luận Về Ngữ Pháp Việt Nam (Vietnamese Grammar, A Survey)*, a text of more than 600 pages, in order to illuminate various styles of beautiful writing in proper grammar. Indeed, it had been a long struggle for Quốc Ngữ to earn its complete status as a national language.

In 1978, three years after taking over South Vietnam, the Communist authorities again declared to UNESCO their final success in spreading Quốc Ngữ in South Vietnam, and celebrated with a giant festival “held in Ho Chi Minh City to hail the elimination of illiteracy in

¹²⁹ Vietnam News Service, *Viet-Nam Wipes Out Illiteracy*, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Vài Vấn Đề Xây Dựng Văn Hóa*, pp. 37, 49-50.

the southern provinces and throughout the Social Republic of Vietnam.”¹³¹ Thus, from 1865, when Quốc Ngữ was initially brought to the public domain with the *Gia Định Báo*, to 1978, it took the Vietnamese more than a century to learn and adapt themselves to Quốc Ngữ, because of the devastation caused by constant war, shifts in political regimes, and various natural disasters, including the tragic famine in 1948, which took a toll of two million lives.

In that turbulent century, the Buddhists, as the outsiders, also adapted themselves to Quốc Ngữ. Unlike other outsiders, they had no intention of making Quốc Ngữ a weapon on any front. Rather, they turned to this Romanized script because it began to be used by the Vietnamese, and because they could use it as a vehicle to transmit Buddhist teaching. Their primary intention was to make people understand Buddhism through this new language medium so that they could all practice and would continue to support the tradition. It was prominent in the concern of the Venerable Lê Khánh Hòa (1877-1947), the initial leading figure in the revitalization of Buddhism in Vietnam during the colonial time:

Today, Buddhism in the South is confronting the internal problems of uneducated monks, who are confused and mistaken about the *Vinaya*, and the external problems that Buddhist followers do not understand Buddhism and fall prey to superstitions. Now, we should join together to establish a library, obtaining the Tripitaka. On the one hand, we have to study and then translate sutras for publication as texts or chronicles in order to circulate among the population so that everyone can comprehend the Buddha Dharma, and so that we can eliminate all superstitions. On the other hand, we must strive to teach and train the Sangha members so that they will be capable of undertaking the Buddhist tasks in the future.¹³²

Witnessing the advancement of the more modern colonial society and the dwindling of the classical Confucian structure, the Buddhist masters, being in the tradition of accepting change or impermanence in order to make positive alternatives, recognized that Buddhism could be used in cultural transition. In that respect, they used Quốc Ngữ to transmit Buddhist teachings in order to smooth out the rough cultural transition between East and West and to bridge the gap between the old and new:

¹³¹ Department of Complementary Education, *The Elimination of illiteracy and the Use of Complementary Education in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*, p. 3.

¹³² See Lê Khánh Hòa, “Tự Trần” (An Individual Report), *Pháp Âm*, vol 1, p. 43.

Today, the study of Han has been stalled. Though our countrymen have turned toward modern studies, within the last forty or fifty years we have not absorbed many of the effects of modern philosophy. Old and new are both incomplete. Some took this side, others the other side. Classic education has been fading out while modern education has not been quite established. As a result, the direction of culture and of people's minds has not been settled. Buddhism, encompasses perfectly other principles of secular philosophy without obstruction. If the profound teachings of Buddhism are carried out, they can harmonize both classic and modern studies so that a solid ethical and philosophical foundation can be established for the settlement of people's minds. When the profound and unsurpassed principles of Buddhism are absorbed, then there should not be a worry that the educational system of our country will not solidly progress day by day. That is a reason to propagate and illuminate Buddhist studies.¹³³

During the colonial time, life in Vietnam was fragmented by raging warfare and traditional values were neglected. Gradually it was replaced by a colonial-style of living aimed to gratify an individual with material and modern conveniences. Confronting the decline of ethical morals in a transitional society, the Vietnamese Buddhist masters sought to make contributions, helping to stabilize the society through Buddhist principles of wisdom and compassion. It was not a simple task because the Buddhist monks did not have the support from the colonial authorities. Rather, they had already faced various suspicions and restrictions set by the colonial authorities, including a law that prohibited a Buddhist gathering of more than nineteen individuals.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the Buddhist masters found the way through education, one of the means to civilization championed by the authorities. Rather than accusing others for the tragic reality of the society, the Buddhists tried to construct a more beneficial society by using Quốc Ngữ to convey Buddhist values to others. In this respect, Quốc Ngữ became a means to make a contribution to society. Master Trí Hải, a leading monk in North Vietnam, expressed the Buddhist concerns toward the moral and cultural decline and the pervasive problems of uneducated youth in his clarification for the use of Quốc Ngữ, without neglecting to be diplomatic to the colonial authorities who had set various restrictions on Buddhism:

¹³³ See Annam Phật Học Hội, *Quảng Ngãi Tỉnh Hội*, p. 19.

¹³⁴ See Tự Lai, Tỳ Khiêu (Bhikṣu), *Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo*, p. 41.

Concerning our people today, how declined our culture is! How confused people's mentality is! How desperate human beings are! Son murders father! Wife kills husband! Our ethical tradition has been disrupted. Many people are without food, clothes, or jobs, living riskily in suffering like a rootless tree, like a water bubble or a floating water hyacinth, drifting aimlessly, without a place to anchor. That is the mental suffering. Concerning our villages, how many unruly, mischievous, and filthy youngsters there are! Later, they will grow up to be illiterate and be inadequate servants for others who will push their heads down and sit on top of them. How many will get to study? Without studying, how will they get to know our ethical and cultural values? From a village, we can anticipate the larger picture of a district, a province, and then the whole county....With those conditions, our native people will have no hope to advance in the future.

In education, though the government has sincerely tried to educate people, unfortunately their limited capacity cannot cover the large number of pupils. There are at least three hundred children in each village, but the school can accommodate between fifty to seventy or a hundred at the most. It is difficult to popularize education that way. Therefore, we must revitalize Buddhism in order to bring the teaching of the Buddha to help educate people. As a result, our association has established a study board for the purpose of studying the teachings of the Buddha, translating them into Quốc Ngữ, printing them in a book and on *Báo Đuốc Tuệ* so that the Buddhist followers can understand the Buddhist teachings and know the righteous path from the wrong one.¹³⁵

With the intention of bringing Buddhist understanding to people through the use of Quốc Ngữ, Buddhist monks joined together in unifying Buddhist organizations rather than remaining in their individual lineages. Together they established centers for Buddhist studies, Buddhist public schools, libraries, the translation of Buddhist sutras into Quốc Ngữ, and even Buddhist orphanages. They also purchased the Tripitaka for their libraries as a resource. In order to learn Quốc Ngữ, they made an innovation in monastic training, namely inviting Confucian scholars who were competent in both Han and Quốc Ngữ to teach monastic members so that they could learn the eloquent way of translating Han into Quốc Ngữ:

¹³⁵ See Trí Hải, *Vì Sao Mà Phải Chấn-Hưng Phật-Giáo*, p. 3.

To invite literary scholars who are adept in chữ Nho to temples in order to join the monks in translating sutras into quốc ngữ, so that those who are unable to get to the temples will have Buddhist sutras to read and to understand the tenet of Buddhist teachings. Due to the fact that many monks do not understand quốc ngữ yet, several temples have invited teachers there to teach them to learn quốc ngữ. Though some can read and write, they are still unable to write good literature. Thus, they should invite those Confucian scholars to stay in temples to teach them to learn quốc ngữ and then write good literature in quốc ngữ so that they can later translate Buddhist sutras and texts into quốc ngữ.¹³⁶

Also, they proposed to invite those with an excellent command of French to translate the Buddhist sutras translated into French by Europeans into Quốc Ngữ. In order to expand their perspectives of recent Buddhist studies, they also included other texts on Buddhist ethics and history. Moreover, they also hoped to select the most suitable ideas among those texts and then make adjustments as needed for possible use in Vietnam. In their library, they also suggested a collection of secular literature and news in Quốc Ngữ, from which monks could obtain outside knowledge concerning international, national, and native affairs so that they could apply their Buddhist clarity, practice their writing skill, and explain Buddhist texts accordingly.

Furthermore, they considered expanding Buddhist studies beyond monastic learning. They even encouraged monks to study secular subjects popularly taught in public education, including social studies, law, geography, history, mathematics, astrology, chemistry, physics, and so on. They especially emphasized the need to study philosophy, psychology, and mythology,¹³⁷ which had become influential in Western ideology. In order to reach a wider audience in their effort to communicate Buddhist ideas, they also made use of the modern literary media introduced by the colonial authorities, namely the news and chronicles, by establishing connections with other news publications.

As a result, during the 1930s, following such novel models of Buddhist education, centers for Buddhist studies were established in three regions of Vietnam, namely in the South, the Buddhist established Hội Nam Kỳ Nghiên Cứu Phật Học (The Association of Buddhist Study in Cochinchina), in Saigon in 1931; in the Center, Hội Annam Phật Học (The Association of Buddhist Study in Annam), in Huế in 1932; and in the North, Hội Bắc Kỳ Phật Giáo (The

¹³⁶ See Tự Lai, Tỳ Khiêu (Bhisksu), *Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo*, p. 24.

¹³⁷ See Tự Lai, Tỳ Khiêu (Bhisksu), *Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo*, pp. 25, 55, 62.

Buddhist Association of Tonkin), in Hanoi in 1934. Each purchased its own Tripitaka and published its own chronicles circulated in Quốc Ngữ. Soon, they established Buddhist institutions using Quốc Ngữ as the teaching language, in addition to the traditional monastic learning in Han, for training monks and nuns under those modern guidelines. Also, monks and nuns were allowed to attend public schools to study other secular subjects. As the same time, the Buddhists also established Buddhist schools at the elementary and then high school levels to teach youths using the language medium of Quốc Ngữ. In addition, monks also joined local groups to teach in the Popular Education Association (Bình Dân Học Vụ), helping to eradicate illiteracy in adults. Among the Buddhist teachers, Ven. Thích Thiện Hoa was well known in the Mekong Delta region for effectively teaching the Latin alphabet using the rhyme couplets beginning with the “O,” the method that he had learned while studying Buddhism in North Vietnam during the 1930s. This trend continued throughout South Vietnam, after North Vietnam was taken over by the Communist regime in 1954.

Traditionally, Buddhist monks and nuns taught the Dharma and Buddhist practices in their monasteries. However, because of the new spirit of adopting Quốc Ngữ, they also embraced the role of teaching this modern Vietnamese language in public. It became a part of the monastic services to the public, namely helping to eradicate illiteracy, which was widespread among the general Vietnamese population due to the ruling policies of the French colonists. Later on, they established Buddhist schools, or *Trường Bồ Đề*, in order to provide elementary and high-school education to the youth. This became a national trend, especially after 1964, when the restrictions on Buddhism from the colonial time were outlawed. Also, because of the high number of orphans as a result of war, Buddhist orphanages were also established and managed by monastic members, especially by Buddhist nuns. Buddhist associations for Buddhist lay devotees emerged in various provinces of Vietnam. Buddhist institutions were established by leading Sangha members in the major cities for the purpose of revitalizing Buddhism. In addition to monastic training, Buddhist monks and nuns were allowed to attend public school to study in various fields of secular studies. Buddhist teachings, ideas, and activities from outside of Vietnam were studied and discussed in the hope of generating a more positive direction and vision for Vietnamese Buddhism. By May 1950, when Venerable Thích Tố-Liên led the delegation of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha to make an official visit to Delhi and other Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India and to join the International Buddhist Conference at

Colombo, Sri Lanka, the experience of Buddhist revitalization from Anagarika Dharmapala and Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar had made its impact in Vietnam. As a result of the conference, Vietnamese Buddhism made official connections to the Buddhist communities worldwide. Also, the international Buddhist flag, which was proposed in 1883 by the American Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, was brought back and raised in Buddhist temples across Vietnam. The trend of revitalization of Buddhism in Vietnam continued well into the 1960s, at the time when the National Buddhist Sangha was formed under the name “The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.”

During the 1940s, when the Kim Son Buddhist monastery was established in Huế, the participating Buddhist masters envisioned it as a center for studying and translating the Tripitaka into modern Vietnamese or Quốc Ngữ. However, their earnest vision was cut short due to ongoing warfare and political chaos caused by the Japanese and French struggles in Vietnam from 1945 onward. In 1951, a second attempt to establish a committee for translating and compiling a Vietnamese Tripitaka took place at Thiên Mụ Pagoda in Huế. Again, the plan was abandoned due to the political turmoil leading to the division of Vietnam into North and South in 1954. The result of their continued effort was the Vạn Hạnh University in Saigon in 1964. In 1974, after ten years of providing education in Quốc Ngữ, the university offered bachelor and master’s degrees to 5,000 students in Buddhist studies, literature, philosophy, social studies, economics, linguistics, journalism, and so on.¹³⁸ In keeping with the spirit of studying and translating the Tripitaka, the university continued to obtain Buddhist Tripitaka sets for use. On July 14, 1968, at the solemn ceremony for the presentation of the Korean Tripitaka to the university by the Korean Ambassador in Saigon, the university had not only obtained a set of Tripitaka, but altogether five sets in Burmese, Pali, Chinese, English, and Thai.¹³⁹ The wish for a Vietnamese version of the Tripitaka was again highlighted in the address of the Rector of Vạn Hạnh University, Dr. Thích Minh Châu:

Before leaving his disciples for Nirvana, He told Ananda who cried sorrowfully over His leaving the world: ‘Don’t think that when I am gone you won’t have any master to honor. Dharma and the law that I taught you will be your Master.’ This teaching during the

¹³⁸ Thích Minh Châu, “Phật Giáo với Sự Nghiệp Giáo Dục và Đào Tạo tại Sài Gòn-TP Hồ Chí Minh”, *Hội Thảo Khoa Học 300 Năm Phật Giáo Gia-Định-Sài Gòn Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh*, p. 238.

¹³⁹ Thích Minh Châu. *Vạn Hạnh University: A Newsletter for Friends and Neighbours*, No. 10; June & July, 1968, p. 9.

ceremony of the presentation of the Holy Korean Tripitaka, should impress us more strongly than ever. And as a result, we hope in the near future that a Tripitaka set in Vietnamese will emerge and respond to the strong desire of the Vietnamese Buddhists. Then all of us will welcome it with honour and happiness.¹⁴⁰

Since then, regardless of the grave hardship inflicted upon the tradition by religious suppression and discrimination during Diem's regime, Thích Minh Châu had translated the majority of the Pali sutras into Quốc Ngữ, while Thích Trí Tịnh and others translated most of the major Mahayana sutras, including a well-known collection of *Phật Học Phổ Thông* (*Popular Buddhist Studies*) for standard Buddhist training in twelve volumes compiled by Thích Thiện Hoa. Vạn Hạnh University also sent other eminent monks abroad to study, so that they would be able to manage the task of translating and making the complete Vietnamese Tripitaka. At present, most of the leading figures of Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns abroad have been trained or have been closely associated with this university. In 1973, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam also convened eighteen eminent Dharma Masters endowed with both monastic competence and scriptural qualifications and established a translating committee for the purpose of translating and making a Vietnamese Tripitaka.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, their excellent progress was interrupted in 1975, when the Communists took over South Vietnam. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam came under stern repression by the Communist regime and Vạn Hạnh University was closed as a result. That ended the chapter of free Buddhist activities in South Vietnam, but at the same time opened a new chapter when the Buddhists escaped from Vietnam to take refuge and eventually reestablish Buddhism in the democratic countries of the free world outside of Vietnam.

Concerning the issue of Quốc Ngữ in Vietnam, evidently outsiders could accomplish the task of promoting the language that the insiders were unable to do. As an outsider, Vietnamese Buddhism had adapted well in using Quốc Ngữ. Having adopted Quốc Ngữ, the Buddhist tradition had also managed to use it to convey religious teachings and to teach people with varied levels of education. On the other hand, it is obvious that the insiders failed on the issue at hand. Nevertheless, it is not because the insiders were incapable of performing the task. Rather, they

¹⁴⁰ Thích Minh Châu, *Vạn Hạnh University: A Newsletter for Friends and Neighbours*, No. 11 & 12; August & September, 1968, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Bùi Ngọc Đường, "Làm Thế Nào Để Hoàn Thành Đại Tạng Kinh Việt Nam" (How to Accomplish the Vietnamese Tripitaka), in *Kỷ Yếu Đại Hội Văn Hóa Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, p. 33.

had no intention of accomplishing the task due to their conflict of interests. The colonial authorities in Vietnam could have successfully popularized Quốc Ngữ if they had intended to do so. Therefore, the position in tackling a religious issue, being the insider or the outsider, is not as significant as the intention of the group behind that position. Of course, competency is a matter of fact, regardless of insiders or outsiders. In the issue concerning Quốc Ngữ, competency in that language is essential in conveying Buddhist understanding. Indeed, the Vietnamese Buddhist masters accomplished their tasks because they had made themselves competent in the classical language of the Buddhist scriptures, namely Han. Also, they trained themselves to be competent the modern languages of Quốc Ngữ and French. Even in the remote past of Vietnam, the ancient Buddhist masters, were able to transmit Buddhist understanding successfully, including promoting Buddhism in China, because they were highly competent in Sanskrit, Han, and ancient Vietnamese. In fact, languages have been the indispensable tools of the Vietnamese Buddhist masters. As tools for understanding religious teachings, they continue to be essential for the scholars of religion. Envisioning the significance of languages in the studies of religion, Coomaraswamy insists on a linguistic requirement for scholars of religion, saying:

We need scholars to whom not only Latin and Greek, but also Arabic and Persian, Sanskrit or Tamil, and Chinese or Tibetan are still living languages in the sense that there are to be found formulations of principles pertinent to all men's lives; we need translators, bearing in mind that to translate without betrayal one must have experienced oneself in the content that is to be "carried across."¹⁴²

In religious studies, in order to understand a religion, instead of championing the insiders as the mere authorities, we can also include the outsiders who are competent in the task. Privileging the insiders alone can lead to a monopoly of religion claimed by religious tyrants who would gladly accept Wilfred Cantwell Smith's proposal that "no historian of religions should ever make a statement about any religion that some members of that religion would not recognize and accept."¹⁴³ On the other hand, merely championing the outsiders is committing the mistakes of the Orientalists who "spoke for the Orient through a lineage of scholarship whose task it was to represent the Orient because the Orient was incapable of representing itself,"¹⁴⁴ or of those who march behind the shadow of Clifford Geertz and Mahnowski shouting, "You don't

¹⁴² See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*, p. 73.

¹⁴³ See Russell T. McCutcheon ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁴ See Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Curators of the Buddha*, p. 13.

have to be one to know one.”¹⁴⁵ Rather, both the insiders and outsiders are qualified to study religion when they are competent. Those without this qualification must be trained more at their scholarly institutions, including learning from the insiders as needed, just like the Vietnamese Buddhist monks making an effort to learn from both the Confucian scholars and the westernized scholars who had an excellent command of Han or French in addition to Quốc Ngữ, until they can manage the assigned tasks. In Buddhist term, the positions of the insiders and outsiders are just mere skillful means, aimed at the final goal, which is to bring benefits from the particular understanding of a religion, the ultimate intention, and also the mission of religious studies.

With that mission in mind, a scholar of religion should seek to maintain the intention of benefiting others through religious studies. Regardless of being an insider or outsider, at least, one should not harm oneself or other related participants in the course of studying. Instead of being selfish, promoting only individual benefits and fame, one should aim at the generous effort of broadening the knowledge of the field for other generations of scholars in the future. It is destructive to close off the path for future scholars by some negligence or inconsideration of the subjects of study. Instead of intentionally deceiving and misrepresenting, one should show genuine concerns for the welfare of the subjects. Nowadays, even animal subjects are protected by law. Why should it be less for human subjects in the study of religion? In the case of Quốc Ngữ, the Buddhist effort was successful because it put the benefits of the people as the priority. Instead of claiming that the classic Han was the scriptural language and merely insisting on using it, the Vietnamese Buddhist masters of the past promoted Quốc Ngữ, a new language that would benefit people. Also, in promoting the new language, they paved the way for new generations of Buddhists to progress. Selflessly, they sacrificed their comfort in order to provide the means for new generations to study Quốc Ngữ. Master Khánh Hòa (1877-1947), the initial leading figure in the Buddhist revitalization in South Vietnam, even donated his temple, including the money intended to renovate the main hall, in order to raise funds to purchase the Tripitaka and for other activities of the Institute for Buddhist studies. Also, his associate, Master Chánh Tâm, donated the income from his best temple land for fifteen years in order to fund the institution.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ See Clifford Geertz, “‘From the Native’s Point of View’: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding,” *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, Russell T. McCutcheon ed., p. 52.

¹⁴⁶ See Thích Thiện Hoa, *50 Năm Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, p. 38; Trương Ngọc Tường, “Hòa Thượng Thích Khánh Hòa và Cuộc Vận Động Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo (1921-1933)”, *Hội Thảo Khoa Học 300 Năm Phật Giáo Gia-Định-Sài Gòn Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh*, pp. 389-390.

Together they have made it work by joining efforts under the positive vision of benefiting people.

One might have doubts about the critical judgments of an insider. Undoubtedly, having certain tendencies is the case for the insiders, because of their individual experience and background. Nevertheless, it is also the case for the outsiders under similar considerations. Of course, it is always the case, as remarked by Kathleen M. Erndl in her text titled *Victory to the Mother*, that “no scholarship is value neutral,”¹⁴⁷ and by Rita M. Gross in her *Soaring and Settling* that “all scholars have their agendas.”¹⁴⁸ However, under the guidance of the mission to benefit others, the scholars of religion can still be critical without compromising their scholarly stands. It can be observed from the previous example of Trí Hải, a leading Buddhist monk in North Vietnam, when he diplomatically presented reasons for using Quốc Ngữ in order to spread Buddhism to educate people, especially the youth. In *Đuốc Tuệ*, a Buddhist chronicle subjected to serious censorship before publication, he had openly and publicly portrayed the tragic results of colonization in Vietnam without invoking any irritation or sentimental opposition from the colonist authorities. Certainly, scholars of religions are quite capable of making critical judgments without resorting to the “truth” claim, which always entails the duality of the truth from or to whom. Also, they can consistently apply what Gross calls “the unity of methodology rule,” so they will be able to use “the same standard to describe all positions and points of view, whether or not one finds them palatable.”¹⁴⁹ In this regard, the outsiders, as they seriously participate in the issue, can be as critical as the insiders.

Moreover, in order to be critical, a scholar of religion can also adopt the stand of a participant observer proposed by Brian Josephson, the French scientist who shared the 1973 Nobel Prize for Physics. At the subatomic level, nuclear physicists like Josephson see their minds as subatomic particles, beginning with the concept of an electron. Thus, the object of study is no longer separated from the mind. No absolutely objective phenomena can exist independent of the mind of the observer. The distinction between the subject and the object is blurred at this subatomic level. Josephson even points out that “‘objective’ observation is not

¹⁴⁷ See Kathleen M. Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁸ See Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁹ See Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, p. 31.

possible.”¹⁵⁰ Rather than being an observer separated from the object, one can take the stand of a participant, taking a part in the object. It is also the case in experiencing mindfulness meditation taught publicly by Nhất Hạnh. It is difficult to comprehend and to experience the results of the practice unless one participates in it. As a result, Nhất Hạnh agrees with Josephson, suggesting that instead of having the audience just observe and listen to his lectures, he wants them to be participant observers, to “be one” with him, “to practice and to breathe” in order for a type of “right perception to take place.”¹⁵¹

Without being a participant observer, a scholar of religion assuming the stand of an outsider can misinterpret the evidence, a common mistake caused by cultural bias. In this regard, Horace Miner proposes that cultural and etymological confusions can arise, and that they might make a religious ritual or “private mouth rite” out of the ordinary American daily activity of brushing one’s teeth in the morning. Also, they might cause a scholar of religion to wrongly decode the word “American” into the word “Nacirema,” which has a totally novel meaning, including the possibility of an unwanted aura of mystery.¹⁵² By the same token, Kenneth L. Pike suggests that outsiders, having the “etic” lens and without the experience of being a participant in the process of observation, can only provide a “plat” image or understanding of an event rather than a multi-dimensional understanding of human behavior like those who have their “emic” lens.¹⁵³ Likewise, Kathleen M. Erndl warns her students that it is an American fallacy to assume that one can understand a religion by merely reading the texts. In her scholarly quest concerning Vaiṣṇo Devī, a popular Hindu Goddess in the Panjab region of northwest India, Dr. Erndl has gone beyond the archaic mode of studying as an armchair scholar doing research by reading books in the library, and has made herself a participant observer. Mingling among the Indian female pilgrims to visit the mountains and temples dedicated to Vaiṣṇo Devī and conversing with them in their Hindi dialect, she deeply realized the emotional impact of the popular pilgrim vocal formula, “Jay mātā dī” or “Victory to The Mother,” both in the religious sense and on the Indian national scale when it is employed to incite people politically. Also, she came to a profound understanding of the Indian meaning of having a *darsan*, or vision of the Goddess, a significant

¹⁵⁰See Brian D. Josephson, “Some Hypotheses Concerning the Role of Consciousness in Nature,” *Consciousness and The Physical World*, B. D. Josephson and V. S. Ramachandra ed., p. 116.

¹⁵¹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 39, and also *The Sun My Heart*, p. 34.

¹⁵² See Horace Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema,” *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, Russell T. McCutcheon ed., p. 25.

¹⁵³ Kenneth L. Pike, “Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior,” *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, Russell T. McCutcheon ed., p. 33.

reason for the Indian devotees of the Goddess to travel thousands of miles to reach the pilgrimage sites despite hardships and discomforts on the road. Dr. Erndl learned from the pilgrims that participation brought an option because the *darsan* of the Goddess is open to all participants, saying: “But they seemed to take my presence for granted, saying that one can enter into the powerful presence of the Goddess only in response to her ‘call.’”¹⁵⁴ Similarly David L. Haberman joined Indian pilgrims on their *Ban Yatra*, walking on the *Journey through the Twelve Forests* in the Mathura region during the rainy and steamy monsoon season in India and was able to relive his experience surrounding Krishna, a popular Hindu God. Rather than follow in the footsteps of Max Muller, who forbade his students from going to India and never made the journey himself, Haberman claims to be “a disobedient child” of Muller’s. In addition, he is determined to follow Bronislaw Malinowski and other anthropologists who endorse that “the best way to learn about the rituals of another culture is to participate in them as directly as possible.”¹⁵⁵ By participating, he learned about not only the ancient history of the tradition, the physical layout of the pilgrimage sites, and the hardships accompanying the pilgrimages, but also the religious concepts and rituals in actual performance. More important, he comes to have a deep appreciation concerning life as *lila*, the playful joy of life, essential to understanding the interaction between Krishna and the *gopis*, the female cowherds. Unless he had been there in the rain to participate, and unless he had abandoned his resistance to getting wet while being there, he would still harbor his disbelief in gaining *ananda*, or bliss, in the cold torrential rain. In appreciation of his experience through actual participation that he would have missed otherwise, Haberman recounts:

There was no way to avoid getting wet, yet I tried. I struggled to balance on a high and narrow strip of earth that had not yet been submerged. Suddenly the ridge I was depending on gave way, and I slipped into the muddy water, shoes and all. Something inside me burst, and I could hold on no longer. I let go and surrendered to the water. The most wonderful thing then happened. Exploding with laughter, I realized that this *was fun*. I looked around and suddenly became aware that many others were laughing and

¹⁵⁴ See Kathleen M. Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ See David L. Haberman, *Journey through the Twelve Forests*, pp. x, xv.

playing in the rainy water, joyfully shouting, ‘Radhe! Radhe!’ One man fell flat on his ass. He laughed. What a riot!¹⁵⁶

Without taking an active role in participations, Rita Gross also anticipates a problem at a deeper level for an outsider who confronts Tantric texts coded in twilight languages. Coded Tantric texts are not the only problem in Tantric Buddhism, however. In her field of Tibetan Buddhist studies, Rita Gross acknowledges that even certain practices are kept behind esoteric veils and are not taught to people unless they are serious participants. Offering her own experience as a scholar of religion, Rita Gross highlights the role of being a participant observer as a means to share a certain “insider” point of view, saying:

Some aspects of some religious traditions *cannot* be adequately understood unless one has access to the “insider” point of view. This claim irritates the religious studies scholar who believes that objectivity is possible and desirable. But certainly regarding the tradition about which I write most directly – Vajrayana Buddhism – a claim that one must have access to “insider” information is more than accurate. Like any tradition that emphasizes initiation and does not “publish the password,” Vajrayana Buddhism studied only from the “outside” is limited because critical aspects of the tradition are simply inaccessible to the uninitiated outsider-scholar.¹⁵⁷

Obviously, a scholar of religion does not need to venture too far into the subatomic level of quantum physics or Vajrayana Buddhism in order to see the worth of being a participant observer. It is just the common concept of “stepping into someone’s shoes,” advised in a popular American adage. Also, one can recognize it in American English textbooks by contemplating the lively story “Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America,” reported by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790). Though the account was set in America’s remote past, in 1774, during the Treaty of Lancaster, in Pennsylvania, between the government of Virginia and the Six Nations, it still has lasting value concerning understanding as a participant observer if one has a problem with trying as a serious insider. The record reveals that at the settlement of the treaty, the Commissioner of Virginia established a fund for educating the Indian youths and politely requested that if the Six Nations would send a half a dozen of their young lads to Williamsburg College, then the government would take care of their living expenses and would instruct them

¹⁵⁶ See David L. Haberman, *Journey Through The Twelve Forest*, pp. 197-198.

¹⁵⁷ See Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, p. 46.

“in all Learning of the White people.” The offer sounds generous. However, the response from the Six Nations is uniquely unexpected. It took them a day of deliberation, but the diplomatic decline came out. The essential part of it, as might be beneficial to our understanding as scholars of religion, goes eloquently as follows:

We have had some Experience of it; Several of our young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the Woods, unable to bear either Cold or Hunger, knew neither how to build a Cabin, take a Deer, or kill an Enemy, spoke our Language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are however not less oblig'd by your kind Offer, tho' We decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take great Care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make *Men* of them [sic].¹⁵⁸

Sound judgements can be reached by understanding the view of others, just as Benjamin Franklin could understand the point of view of the people of the Six Nations. Participating with the object or being a participant observer opens up a venue for such toleration of points of view leading to sound judgments. During the course of using Quốc Ngữ to transmit Buddhism, the Vietnamese Buddhists masters have shared their concerns of understanding Buddhism through a new language medium with the people. From being outsiders, they have mastered the issue by becoming the participants, learning and applying Quốc Ngữ in all spheres of monastic activities and beyond. By their constant participation in dealing with Quốc Ngữ, they have been able to establish their own educational institutions instructing in Quốc Ngữ, even at the university level. Rather than losing their sound judgment and critical standing, they came out confidently and as competent as other insiders.

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin Franklin, “Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America,” *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, vol. 1, Paul Lauter ed., p. 746.

Theravada Buddhism in Vietnam

In Vietnam, during the 1930s, Theravada Buddhism also entered the mainstream of religious discourse by using Quốc Ngữ. Though Theravada Buddhism had dominated Khmer communities in the Mekong region when the land was annexed into the territory of Vietnam beginning in the 15th century, it remained contained within those communities with monks ordained and subjected to *Sangharaja*, the head monks in Cambodia. A small number of ancient Theravada Buddhist temples surrounded by the Khmer Vietnamese communities can serve as a sketchy picture for the early existence of Theravada Buddhism in Vietnam. However, Theravada Buddhism began to emerge as a more prominent mainstream Buddhist tradition in South Vietnam in the 1930s, during the colonial period when Buddhist revitalization exploded. The tradition was initially introduced to Vietnam from Cambodia by Venerable Hộ Tông (Vansarakkhita) (1893-1981), who entered the Sangha and dedicated his life to practicing Theravada Buddhism at Unalom Temple, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 1940. In 1934, still a lay Buddhist working for the French authorities in Cambodia and practicing Theravada meditation there, Venerable Hộ Tông published in Quốc Ngữ the *Luật Xuất Gia* (*The Monastic Vinaya Rules*) and the *Nhật Hành Của Người Tại Gia Tu Phật* (*The Daily Practice for the Buddhist Householders*). The simplicity of the translated language in Quốc Ngữ attracted many Vietnamese, who joined him as Buddhists. Later in 1936, together they transformed into the Theravada tradition the Sùng Phước Temple, an old Mahayana Temple in Phnom Penh, and established the first Theravada Buddhist center in Saigon, named Bửu-Quang Temple (Ratana Ramsyarama) in 1939.

Hộ-Tông first learned the teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path from Choun Nath, who even recommended a book written in French titled, *La Sagesse du Buddha*, by a German author named Georges Grimm. This was because Hộ Tông was formerly a young veterinary doctor educated in the French colonist style in Hanoi and was sent to work in Phnom Penh for the French colonists. Hộ Tông's monastic training in Pali also took place at the Buddhist Institute directed by Choun Nath. In 1940, Hộ Tông obtained his ordination from Choun Nath. At Unalom Temple, he also learned meditation drawn from the *Anapanasati*, or the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, with a focus on breathing used as a part of the Noble Eightfold Path.

In terms of lineage, the Vietnamese Theravada tradition was linked to the Theravada Buddhist tradition of Cambodia. Out of the two dominant Theravada groups prevailing in Cambodia, the Dhammayutika Nikaya (Thommayut) and the Mahanykay, the Vietnamese Theravada tradition has a direct link to the Mahanikaya, which has its headquarters at Wat Unalom or Temple of Unnaloma,¹⁵⁹ Phnom Penh has its influential Buddhist Institute accompanied by the École Supérieure de Pali established in 1930, during the colonial time, for training Buddhist monks in Pali. From this link, the tradition connected with Venerables Uttamamuni Um-Sou, Choun Nath, and Hout-That, who were called “the Unalom Three,” and were known for being Mahanikaya modernists with scholarly backgrounds in Theravada scriptural languages and in French, and for advocating modern critical approaches to the study of Buddhism and related fields. Uttamamuni Um-Sou (1880-1939) became the Vice Sangharaja during the late 1930s. Samdech Sangh Choun Nath (1883-1969), a Khmer Krom, or a Cambodian from the Mekong region of Southern Vietnam, was most famous for writing the Khmer dictionary (1938) which was considered as “one of the cornerstones of Khmer culture.”¹⁶⁰ Also, Chuon Nath was a professor, the director of the École Supérieure de Pali from 1915 to 1942, the chief monk of Wat Unalom in 1944, and then the Cambodian Sangharaja in 1948. Under the guidance of Choun Nath, the Cambodian Tripitaka, which comprised 110 volumes between 400 and 800 pages each in length, translated from Pali into Khmer by the Tripitaka Commission from 1927, was completed in 1969. The last of the three, Hout-That (1891-1975), became the Vice Sangharaja and was murdered by Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge in 1975. Both Choun Nat and Hout That had visited Hanoi between 1922 and 1923 to receive detailed training from Louis Finot, the director of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient in Hanoi.¹⁶¹ There, they also met and worked with Suzanne Karpele, who had studied with both Alfred Foucher and Sylvain Levi in Paris and came to Hanoi in 1923 to work with Louis Finot. As an outcome of their meeting at the Buddhist Institute of Phnom Penh in 1930, the Institut Indigène d’Étude du Bouddhisme du petit Véhicule, was established and based on the Franco-Cambodian educational agenda aiming to save Cambodia Buddhism from “degeneration” and to revitalize Khmer pride by utilizing the Khmer Krom in the following political maneuver:

¹⁵⁹ The temple of Unnaloma was built to hold the hair (*loma*) of the Buddha’s *usnisa*, the tuft of hair between his eyebrows. (Harris 29, 67)

¹⁶⁰ See Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*, p. 119.

¹⁶¹ See Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*, pp. 116-117.

These Cambodians from southern Vietnam, the Khmer Krom, became part of Karpele's larger project to revitalize Cambodian culture, pride, and aspirations. She surveyed the Cambodian minority community in southern Vietnam and led a crusade encouraging Cambodians to remember that the entire Mekong Delta was once their homeland. (In fact, it was Cambodian for only a short while, perhaps a century. Previously it was home to the Chams, who were among the rivals of the Khmers.) [Sic] These Campuchea Krom immigrants became the most ardent of nationalists in subsequent years, the favorite recruits of both the American CIA and the Khmer Republic.¹⁶²

The political agenda instigated by Karpele backfired when the French colonist authorities attempted to Romanize the Khmer script in the late 1930s, as had been done with the Vietnamese language and Quốc Ngữ. Nevertheless, the Buddhist Institute, under the directorship of Choun Nath and Hout Thah, gained the fullest expression of Buddhist education in Cambodia and was able to support training the first generation of Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist monks, including Hộ Tông, and several others.

This lineage of Cambodian-Vietnamese Theravada Buddhism was further fortified by the direct support from the Cambodian Sangha to the first Theravada Buddhist temple in Vietnam, Bửu Quang Temple, established in Saigon in 1940. Venerable Chuon Nath, together with 30 Cambodian monks, came to legitimate the tradition by conducting a ceremony consecrating the *Sima* boundary at this temple.¹⁶³ This close Theravada relationship, including the diplomatic connection between Cambodia and Vietnam during the present Communist era, enabled the Vietnamese Theravada Sangha, led by Venerables Bửu-Chon and Giới-Nghiêm, to come to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 1979, to give ordination to eight Cambodian monks, re-establishing the Cambodian Sangha, which was destroyed by the Khmer Rouge during their reign of terror when they occupied Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. It is worthy to note that Venerable Thích Hộ-Giác, the Executive President of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congregation In The United States Of America, who is now residing at Pháp Luân Temple in Texas, was also ordained in this Cambodian Buddhist tradition.

This direct connection to the Cambodian Theravada tradition, however, does not exclude the significant Sri Lankan link to the Vietnamese Theravada tradition. During the late 1930s,

¹⁶² Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People*, p. 53.

¹⁶³ See Nguyễn Tối Thiện, *Lịch Sử Truyền Bá Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy Tại Việt Nam*, p. 5.

Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka, through its revitalization, had made an impact in Vietnam. Venerable Narada Maha Thera (1898-1983) of Sri Lanka had been instrumental in promoting the Theravada teachings in Southeast Asia by various Buddhist activities, including delivering Dharma talks, providing Theravada Scriptures, exhibiting Buddha relics, establishing temples, etc. Being renowned in both monastic training and scholarly studies including a former background in Catholicism, Narada went to promote Buddhism at Mulagandhakuti, Sarnath, India, where Anagarika Dharmapala had been pioneering a Buddhist revival for the Indians. During the 1930s, Narada together with Cassius Perera, A. Ranayake, and Niel Hewaviratna comprised the delegation sent from Sri Lanka to Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India to meet the Hindu Priest Mahanta, who was occupying the Mahabodhi Temple, trying a peaceful solution for restoring the site to the Buddhists.¹⁶⁴ Since then, Narada also extended his support to revive Buddhism in other southeastern Asian countries. Through his unwavering support and dedication, Narada visited Vietnam frequently from 1936. His pervasive compassion and his vegetarian ways together with his amiable demeanor and countenance won the admiration of Vietnamese Buddhists. Later, in addition to his usual Buddhist activities, he also encouraged the translations of Theravada teachings into Quốc Ngữ and helped to establish local Buddhist temples, including the famous Thích-Ca Phật Đài (Shakyamuni Buddha Monument) at Vũng-Tàu Bay in 1963.¹⁶⁵ Because of his effort, a large number of Buddhists were attracted to the Theravada tradition. Among them was Phạm-Kim-Khánh, who has translated several texts authorized by Narada into Vietnamese. One of those texts, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, published bilingually in Vietnamese and English in 1970, had a phenomenal success extending beyond the Buddhist boundaries to general readers because of its explicit and pellucid writing style. Also, due to its informative and precise qualities, the text was welcomed and continues to be printed for Buddhist training, even in Mahayana Buddhist temples. The practice *metta* (compassion), meditation taught by Narada, was transmitted to Venerable Hộ-Pháp (1901-1987), who came to Pháp Vân Temple in California in 1980.

In addition, the Vietnamese Theravada meditation had also been influenced by Myanmar Vipassana meditation. In 1954, Venerable Giới Nghiêm (1921-1984), a leading Theravada senior monk, native of Huế, came to Myanmar, learned, and brought back to Vietnam the

¹⁶⁴ Gunaseela Vihanage, *Venerable Narada Maha Thera*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ See Nguyễn Tối Thiện, *Lịch Sử Truyền Bá Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy Tại Việt Nam*, p. 11.

Vipassana method taught by the renowned Mahasi Sayadaw. Being a Mahayana monk of origin and with several Mahayana monks as his Dharma brothers, Giới Nghiêm maintained a close relationship to and respect of Mahayana Buddhist monks in Huế, especially Thích Trí Thủ and Thích Trí Quang. This positive association continued to nurture the mutual support between Theravada and Mahayana in Vietnam. Furthermore, Venerable Kim Triệu, Khippapanno, went to Nalanda University, India, and also received training in Anapansati and Vipassana meditation from Mahasi Sayadaw in 1980, before coming to the United States in 1981.¹⁶⁶ According to this particular Vipassana method, one can concentrate on impermanence using the rising and falling of one's own abdominal wall, in addition to the standard method of focusing on inhaling and exhaling. The links between the Vietnamese Theravada tradition and the traditions of other Theravada countries, especially Thailand, became more prominent because of the constant effort of sending Buddhist monks abroad for further studies in Theravada traditions.

As of 1975, after more than 30 years of propagating Theravada Buddhism in the Republic of Vietnam, the Vietnamese Theravada Sangha had established 38 temples in various provinces. However, like other religious organizations under the Communist regime since 1975, the tradition was no longer able to run its Buddhist activities and practices the way it used to. While the history of tradition enters its new course, sealed behind the Communist curtain, the once active image of Theravada Sangha in Vietnam has been reduced to the remarks made by a Theravada source from Vietnam, as follows:

The Buddhist activities [brought by those who studied abroad] succeeded only during the first stage, but get scattered and dissipated at the middle and the last stages. The reasons are the constant warring conditions of the country, together with the disrobing of monks who have returned to lay life, and, in addition, the leading venerables of Theravada Buddhism have passed away too soon, all of a sudden.¹⁶⁷

However, one can get a last glimpse into the Vietnamese Theravada Sangha by reading between those lines using the following remarks made in the U.S. by the Narada Center, a Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist group dedicated to preserving and propagating the Theravada Buddhist tradition of Vietnam:

¹⁶⁶ Khippapanno Kim Triệu, "Lời Giới Thiệu," *Mười Ngày Thiền Tập*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Thiện Minh. *Vài Nét về Sự Phát Triển Của Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy Tại Việt Nam*, p. 2.

Those elders departed one after another. Venerable Bửu-Chơn passed away in a mysterious incident that occurred during his trip to Cambodia orchestrated by the Vietnamese government. Mr. Thong Kham was assassinated and died horribly in his individual dwelling in Chợ Lớn. Gradually, Venerables Hộ-Tông, Ân-Lâm, Giới-Nghiêm, Tịnh-Sự, and Hộ-Pháp passed away because of aging and wearing out. However, they have left us with an enormous mantle of spiritual and literal teachings.... We vow to not let their mantle fall into oblivion, despite wherever we are in any remote corner of this world.¹⁶⁸

Though suppressed in Vietnam, the Dharma wheel turned by the Vietnamese Theravada tradition is still rolling, transmitting the lineage beyond the land of Vietnam. As of 2005, there were 16 Theravada temples in the United States, including three in the State of Florida, namely Chùa Phật Pháp (Buddha Dharma Temple), Pháp-Đăng Thiền Viện (Dharma Light Meditation Institution), and Chùa Tam Bảo (Three Jewels Temple), at St. Petersburg, Spring Hill, and Apoka, respectively.

Having Theravada as the fundamental core, Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist monks were not vegetarians and often went for alms like Theravada monks in Sri Lanka, Thailand, or Myanmar. Nevertheless, Theravada monks also joined together with Mahayana monks and nuns, performing teaching duties and studying Buddhist Dharma from various Buddhist traditions in the same setting like Vạn-Hạnh University and other provincial Buddhist institutions. When Vietnamese Buddhism was suppressed by discriminatory laws during the First Republic under the Diem regime, the Theravada and Mahayana traditions joined together for their survival. Though united, each tradition has still kept its distinctive practices and teachings as well as its traditional organization. Now, in America, Vietnamese Buddhist monks from both traditions continue to shoulder the work together, sharing the Buddhist tasks in the Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha Abroad, while running their temple affairs individually, as it has always been.

Similar to the Theravada Sangha, the Mahayana Sangha in Vietnam has encountered suppression from the communist authorities. Being the majority and the leading Buddhist group, the Mahayana Buddhist Sangha was targeted under a more systematic and stern suppression, including a serious attempt to replace it with an so-called Vietnamese Buddhist Church

¹⁶⁸ See Nguyễn Tỏi Thiện, *Lịch Sử Truyền Bá Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy Tại Việt Nam*, pp.14-15.

instituted by the communist authorities. Even at the present time, the leading members of the Mahayana Buddhist Sangha in Vietnam are still under house arrest and are restricted from conducting their Buddhist activities in the public realm. Their national Buddhist organization, the Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Church, which has officially presented both the Mahayana and the Theravada tradition, is still barred from performing its Buddhist functions. Attempting to seal off the suppression of Mahayana Sangha under the communist curtain, the Vietnamese authorities display their façade of religious freedom to the world. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese Mahayana monks, who escaped to America and other countries in the West and joined together internationally to protest, show the opposite. They expose to the world the grim reality of the communist suppression of Buddhism in Vietnam. Regardless of the burden of reestablishing the tradition and adjusting to American life, many leading Vietnamese Buddhist monks in America united together to voice their protest against the Communists of Vietnam. It is still an on-going struggle. Before considering the efforts of reestablishing Vietnamese Buddhism in America, let us have a glimpse into the reality concerning the communist suppression of Buddhism in Vietnam.

CHAPTER 2

THE COMMUNIST SUPPRESSION OF BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM

The following discussion will offer a glimpse into the fate of Vietnamese Buddhism under the communist regime. Rather than providing a mere report about cases of religious repression, I will also analyze the Constitution of the Social Republic of Vietnam to highlight the communist agendas, especially its stern elimination of basic human rights. In contrast, I will illuminate the direction of Buddhism in Vietnam in promoting religious freedom and human rights and then reveal the fundamental issues underlying the communist repression of Buddhism.

Even though the communist suppression of Buddhism takes place in Vietnam, the whole incident is closely connected with the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in America. Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns in America continue to support the Mother Buddhist Sangha in Vietnam. They constantly monitor and protest against the Vietnamese communists for their inhuman suppression of the Unified Buddhist Church in Vietnam. They go for hunger strikes and appeal to various Amnesty and Human Rights organizations to put pressure and restrict the Communists from further violations of religious freedom and human rights. It has been an on-going battle. Yet, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in America also has the burden of trying to reestablish the tradition in America. In America, the path is already loaded with difficulties concerning adapting to the American way of life. Offering a glimpse into the severe trouble of the Buddhist Sangha in Vietnam, the section shows that the difficulties are double for the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in America. The path is perilous from both inside and outside of Vietnam. Yet, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in America continues its path of establishing Buddhism in America and supporting the Sangha in Vietnam, because all are interconnected. The contemporary Vietnamese Buddhist masters abroad are in debt to the Vietnamese Buddhists, especially the old masters, who had dedicated their lives to support and train them in the past. It is a moral obligation for them to support the Buddhists in Vietnam, who are in troubles.

While the surging waves of Vietnamese refugees fleeing the communist regime gradually came to be settled abroad by the end of the 1990s, the lack of religious freedom in Vietnam itself erupted as an issue after simmering behind the communist curtain for decades. Since 1975, one after another, the economic disasters caused by the centralized government, all aggravated by

economic sanctions from the U.S., had made Vietnam one of the poorest countries in Asia. In 1994, the U.S. authorities lifted its nineteen-year economic embargo on trade with Vietnam and began to normalize the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Of course, the U.S. was now pursuing new political motives; these included spreading democratic ideas in addition to saving Vietnam from further economic disasters. The American authorities hoped to see a more democratic and more cooperative Vietnam. Instead they came to witness what had been reported by the Vietnamese refugees to the U.S., that there was no freedom in Vietnam. The communist regime had not changed its tactics of controlling and manipulating people even after more than two decades of economic sanction. Many had been imprisoned without trial for speaking out against the harsh policies of the authorities. Among them were prominent Buddhist leaders who protested the authorities' suppression of religious freedom and human rights. On November 19, 2003, in order to deal with the lack of religious freedom under the Social Republic of Vietnam, the House of Representatives of the United States passed a resolution known as the H. Res. 427, calling on Vietnam to cease those assaults on religious freedom and human rights. The passing of H. Res. 427, with a majority of 409-13 indicated how seriously U.S. legislators viewed the issue.¹⁶⁹

Anyone familiar with the yearly reports from Human Rights Watch concerning the violations of religious freedom in Vietnam cannot be surprised to hear about the repression of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. Instead, it will simply seem preposterous that the communist authorities of Vietnam, while managing to ban the Unified Buddhist Church and even to put several of its leading figures, including Thích Huyền Quang and Thích Quang Độ under house arrest for more than two decades, keep insisting that religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and faithfully preserved in the land of Vietnam.

In presenting the case of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, I will demonstrate that the Social Republic of Vietnam, due to its own communist ideologies, has tried to eliminate or control other possible sources of competing power. I will offer the Vietnamese Constitution and other relevant rules of law as evidence. Vietnamese authorities demonstrably see the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam as a powerful and principled competitor, and thus have employed repressive maneuvers to reduce its power with the ultimate goal of eliminating it altogether. As

¹⁶⁹ See Congressional Record, *Final Vote Results for Roll Call 639*, p. 1; and *H. Res. 427: In The House of Representatives, U.S., November 19, 2003*, p.1.

a result of this, real religious freedom will be difficult to achieve under the present Social Republic of Vietnam.

The positive contributions of Buddhism to the land of Vietnam have since the beginning been nationally recognized by all Vietnamese political regimes. After almost a century of struggling under French colonization, Vietnamese Buddhism had begun to revive itself by about 1950. Leading Buddhist dignitaries attended the first World Buddhist Conference held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, between May 26 and June 7, 1950, and co-founded the World Buddhist Association, which had a branch at Quán Sứ Pagoda in Hanoi. Thus Vietnamese Buddhism was recognized, and was registered as a religion or "Church" under the international charter. In 1951, six Buddhist delegations from the three regions (North, Central, and South) of Vietnam met at Từ Đàm Pagoda, in Huế, and formally established the Federation of Vietnam Buddhist Association. As a result of the Geneva Conference in 1954, Vietnam was divided into two parts along the seventeenth parallel. The Federation of Vietnam Buddhist Association, after surviving religious persecution under the Diem regime in South Vietnam, eventually transformed into the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.¹⁷⁰ After formally being established in 1964, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam settled its headquarters at Ân Quang Pagoda, Saigon, which was also the location of the Nam-Viet Buddhist Institution, the leading Buddhist institution for training monastics in the South.

However, since the unification of Vietnam under the communist regime in April 1975, most Buddhist leaders have been murdered, arrested, or forced into exile, while activities at Buddhist temples have been restrictively regulated. All of the Buddhist schools and orphanages, along with many other facilities have been confiscated. Such brutal repression has continued well into recent years. One only needs to read the yearly reports from the Human Rights Watch to see the alarming magnitude of religious freedom and human rights violations in Vietnam.

Here, to give some insight into the protests of high-ranking Buddhist monks, a number of relevant incidents are illustrated. In 1975, in reaction to the wave of repression initiated by the authorities, 12 Buddhist monks and nuns immolated themselves at Dược Sư Pagoda in Cần Thơ Province. In April, 1977, six Buddhist leaders including Thích Huyền Quang and Thích Quảng Độ, the Deputy Chairman and the Secretary General of the Unified Buddhist Church

¹⁷⁰ See Hoang Nguyen Tran, *The Complexity and Dynamics of the 1963 Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam*, pp. 36-37.

respectively, were arrested, detained and tortured. Among them, Thích Thiện Minh, one of the most respected high dignitaries of the organization, was tortured to death. In October 1978, Thích Đôn Hậu, the Secretary General of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, made his public protest by resigning from the honorific titles forced on him by the communist authorities: Member of the National Assembly and Member of the Fatherland Front.

In November 1981, the communist authorities set up the state-run Vietnamese Buddhist Church and attempted to dissolve the Unified Buddhist Church. In July 1982, they forcefully confiscated Ân Quang Pagoda, the headquarters of the Unified Buddhist Church, and arrested twelve prominent Buddhist scholars including Thích Trí Siêu and Thích Nữ Trí Hải, who were educated in American Universities. Again, Đôn Hậu protested. Anticipating future repressions by the communist authorities, he sent a message in 1991 urging the unification the Vietnamese Sangha abroad. As a result, the four branches of the Unified Buddhist Church abroad were established a year later, in America, Asia, Australia, and Europe, the places where Vietnamese refugees had scattered after the fall of Saigon. Among those four branches, the Second Office of the Institute for the Propagation of the Dharma was formed in the United States. Its main office was located at the International Buddhist Monastic Institute in San Fernando Valley, California, with the Most Venerable Đức Niệm as Executive Chairman and the Most Venerable Hộ Giác as President of the Executive Committee.¹⁷¹

As expected, the communist authorities' repression intensified right after the passing away of Venerable Đôn Hậu at Linh Mụ Pagoda, Huế, on April 23, 1992. During the funeral of Đôn Hậu, in which Huyền Quang was appointed the Patriarch's successor, the communist authorities intervened and attempted to set up a substitute state funeral. However, they immediately met a wave of protest, with a hunger strike by Buddhist monks and a demonstration of about 30,000 people in Huế. Because there was also a flood of international protests following the incident, the authorities eventually gave in. However, they intensified their aggression afterwards. All of the Buddhist monks, especially Thích Trí Tụ, the superior monk of the lineage at Linh Mụ Pagoda, and the Buddhist followers who took part in the funeral were subjected to police surveillance, interrogation, and frequent harassment. A few months later, on August 6, 1992, the authorities arrested Huyền Quang and confiscated the official seal of the

¹⁷¹ See Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the U.S.A., *Thực Trạng Phật Giáo Việt Nam, 1951-2000* (The Real Situation of Vietnamese Buddhism, 1951-2000), pp. 5, 28.



Figure 18. Thích Đôn Hậu (left). Thích Huyền Quang came to pay homage to the Stupa of the Late Supervisor of the Sangha Thích Tịnh Khiết when he was briefly released (right).

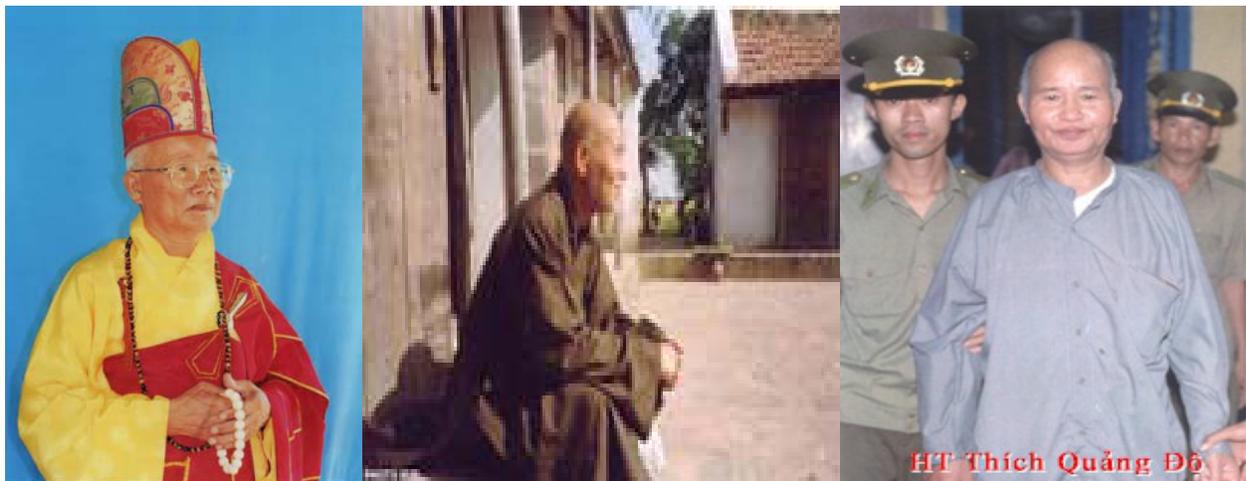


Figure 19. Thích Huyền Quang in ceremonial robe (left), Thích Quảng Độ under house arrest (center), and Thích Quảng Độ stands trial by the Communist authorities (right).

Unified Buddhist Church. Also, they announced that the official transmission of the Buddhist lineage had been a forgery and summarily banned the Unified Buddhist Church organization.¹⁷²

Huyền Quang was undeterred, however. On August 24, 1992, despite his house arrest in Quảng Ngãi Province, Huyền Quang continued to protest against the communist authorities. He insisted that his "Nine-point Letter of Claims" of June 1992, which articulated the brutal suppression of Buddhism in preceding years, had to be properly addressed by the top communist authorities. He also demanded that the Unified Buddhist Church be officially reinstated. In January 1993, 56 high-ranking Buddhist dignitaries from 17 temples in Huế, of both the Unified Buddhist Church and the state-sponsored Vietnamese Buddhist Church, joined together and issued a "Joint Petition" in order to protest against the authorities for interfering with the appointment of Buddhist superiors. In May 1993, a 50-year-old Buddhist layman immolated himself on the tomb of the late Đôn Hậu at Linh Mụ Pagoda, Hue. All of his belongings, including the bag that contained letters explaining the reasons for his act, were confiscated by the security police. Authorities removed his body through the back way of the pagoda in order to avoid being seen by the public. The government-controlled radio station in Hue later announced the immolation as "the suicide of a desperate drug addict who was suffering from AIDS."¹⁷³ The monks at Linh Mụ Pagoda were interrogated. Refusing to accept the version of the immolation fabricated by the Security police at the People's Committee Headquarter, Trí Tựu staged a hunger strike right where he was interrogated. Twenty other monks of Linh Mụ Pagoda also joined in the hunger strike on his behalf. This was soon followed by a huge demonstration: a crowd of 40,000 Buddhists met in front of the People's Committee headquarters, demanding his release. Later on, Trí Tựu and two of other monks were charged with disturbing public order. Huyền Quang and Quảng Độ continued their protest while being placed under house arrest.¹⁷⁴

In April 2003, the authorities suddenly allowed Huyền Quang to receive urgent medical care in Hanoi. During his stay in that city, Huyền Quang was received by the Vietnamese Prime

¹⁷² See Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the U.S.A., *Thực Trạng Phật Giáo Việt Nam, 1951-2000* (The Real Situation of Vietnamese Buddhism, 1951-2000), pp. 39-41.

¹⁷³ See Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất Hải Ngoại-Hoa Kỳ, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam Biến Cố và Tư Liệu: Hai Mươi Năm Trong Chế Độ Cộng Sản (1975-1995)* [Vietnamese Buddhism Incidents and documentations: Twenty years under the Communist Regime (1975-1995)], p. 55, and UBCV, *Venerable Thich Quang Do Condemns the Secret Detention of Buddhist Monks Thich Tri Luc and Calls for His Immediate Release*, pp. 1-4.

¹⁷⁴ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On The Front Lines With The World's Great Peacemakers*, pp. 173-177; and Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the U.S.A., *Thực Trạng Phật Giáo Việt Nam, 1951-2000* (The Real Situation of Vietnamese Buddhism, 1951-2000), pp. 10-14.

Minister Phan Văn Khải. The Prime Minister admitted that the detentions of him and Ven. Quảng Độ were the mistakes made by local officials. He then asked that the senior Buddhist monks would extend Buddhist forgiveness toward past actions of the government.¹⁷⁵ In June, 2003, Huyền Quang was allowed to visit various Buddhist temples in Hue and Saigon as he journeyed back to the South. In addition, the detention order against Quảng Độ, the Executive President of the Unified Buddhist Church, was dropped.

These hopeful signs, however, soon faded. The same old obstruction tactics by the authorities resurfaced in October 2003, when the Unified Buddhist Church publicly held a convention at Nguyễn Thiều Pagoda, the headquarters of the Liễu Quán Zen Lineage in Bình Định Province, in order to select a new leadership. The authorities restricted the travel of Buddhist monks in an attempt to prevent them from entering Bình Định Province. When the restriction did not work, they stopped the vehicle that carried the new leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church and detained eleven members. Again, Huyền Quang and Quảng Độ were arrested and taken back to where they had been isolated and detained before. Four senior monks, the Ven. Tuệ Sỹ, Thanh Huyền, Nguyễn Lý, and Đồng Thọ, were immediately sentenced to 24 months of administrative detainment under the order of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee. Similar sentences were charged toward Thích Thiện Hạnh, Thích Thái Hòa, and Thích Nguyễn Vương by various local authorities. Protesting against such sentences, on October 19, 2003, Thiện Hạnh initiated a hunger strike which had caused a wave of protest internationally.

In the United States, Congress moved quickly to deal with the urgent situation; the House passed Resolution 427 on November 19, 2003, by a huge majority, proposing specific measures to protect and promote religious freedom in Vietnam. The resolution urged the Vietnamese authorities to restore religious freedom and also instructed the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam to closely monitor cases of abuse of religious belief and practice.¹⁷⁶ However, in 2007, even now that Vietnam has joined the World Trade Organization, Huyền Quang and Quảng Độ are still under house arrest.

¹⁷⁵ See Buddhist News Network, *Viet PM Hold Talks with Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang*, p. 1; Minh Mẫn, *Chuyến Đi Lịch Sử* (The Landmark Visit), p. 3; and VNS, *PM Attributes Renovation Success to Entire Nation*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁶ See Congressional Record, *Expressing Sense of the House Regarding Courageous Leadership of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (House of Representative-November 19, 2003)*, p. 2.

Learning about such incidents of repression may incline the reader to inquire into the reasons why the communist authorities of Vietnam have taken such measures against the Unified Buddhist Church. In order to provide a reasonable answer, an understanding is needed of the political agendas underlying the measures taken by the Social Republic of Vietnam. One can begin with the Constitution of Vietnam, under which all political authorities operate and the relevant decrees concerning the treatment of religions are issued.

Before examining this Constitution, however, it is critical to mark a major distinction between the Constitutions of Socialist countries and their counterparts in Western democracies. In a democratic country in the West, the constitution does not confer power. Instead it is considered to be a social contract or a permanent document reflecting the will of the people to be governed according to certain principles that they hold to be fundamental, the goal of which is to safeguard the welfare of the people. This is observable from the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution, which announces the following:

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide common defense, promote general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.¹⁷⁷

The Constitution is regarded as the supreme law of the land. It has a fairly stable status because it cannot be altered under the normal legislative procedure. Furthermore, it is intended to limit potential abuses of the power that may be exercised by the state. As a result, boundaries between the state and society are clearly defined so that "the state may not encroach" into the boundary of individual rights.¹⁷⁸

The constitutions in socialist countries, on the other hand, are not a permanent reflection of either the will or the political and philosophical values held by the people. Furthermore, they are not intended to regulate the relationship between the state and society. Instead, they serve as a tool to confer power onto the state authorities, legitimizing their functions, and especially sanctioning and monitoring of the progress of the society toward the final stage of classless Communism. A section of the Preamble of the Vietnam Constitution can be cited as example:

¹⁷⁷ See Thomas, *The Constitution of The United States*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ See Joanna Harrington, *Constitution Revision in Vietnam: Renovation but No Revolution*, p. 3.

This Constitution establishes our political regime, economic system, social and cultural institutions; it deals with our national defense and security, the fundamental rights and duties of citizen, the structure and principles regarding the organization and activity of State organs; it institutionalizes the relationship between the Party as leader, the people as master, and the state as administrator.¹⁷⁹

In the same token, the Preamble of the 1977 Constitution of the USSR also maintained:

The Leading role of the Communist Party, the vanguard of all the people, has grown. In the USSR a developed social society has been built....The supreme goal of the Soviet state is the building of a classless communist society in which there will be public, communist self-government.¹⁸⁰

Moreover, due to the fact that the socialist Constitution is enacted by a supreme legislative body so that temporary policies can be established to motivate the populace and to prepare the objectives for the next stage, it can be changed with relative ease. Instead of being a static document, the socialist Constitution can be changed as the state authorities desire. Again, the Preamble of the 1992 Constitution of Vietnam is evidently an illustration in its own announcement:

In successive periods of resistant war and national construction, our country adopted the 1946, 1959, and 1980 Constitutions. Starting in 1986, a comprehensive national renewal advocated by the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam has achieved very important initial results. The national Assembly has decided to revise the 1980 Constitution in response to the requirement of the new situation and tasks.¹⁸¹

Thus, the socialist Constitution is used to confer power on the ruling party and can be changed easily by those authorities in order to accommodate their political strategies. Particular features of the socialist agenda manifested in the 1992 Constitution of Vietnam aim to fortify the role of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

Being a totalitarian socialist country, Vietnam logically has a socialist Constitution which does not truly reflect the will of the people. However, the document does appear to claim that it represents the people. As evidence, here is Article 2 of the Vietnam Constitution, which declares:

¹⁷⁹ See Embassy of Vietnam, *Constitution of the S.R. of Vietnam 1992, Preamble*, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ See Geocities, *1977 Constitution of the USSR, Part I*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸¹ See Embassy of Vietnam, *Constitution of the S.R. of Vietnam 1992, Preamble*, p.1

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a State of the people, from the people, for the people. All state power belongs to the people and is based on an alliance between the working class, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia.¹⁸²

However, the democratic appearance of this statement evaporates when one comes to realize the actual meaning of the term "people," as it is used. In general, especially in a Western democracy, the term "people" denotes the common citizens. However, in the socialist Constitution of Vietnam the concept of "people" can instantly take on the meaning of "the Representatives of the people" or "the Communist Party," especially when it comes to administrative and legislative matters.

As has been mentioned above, Buddhist monks staged a hunger strike and 40,000 Buddhists demonstrated in front of "the People's Committee Headquarter" in Hue, demanding the release of Hải Tạng when he was arrested and interrogated there by the security police. Again in November 2003, the monks in Saigon were arrested and sentenced to 24 months of administrative detainment by the so-called "Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee."¹⁸³ This People's Committee is made up of the not of simple people but of security police who are the most loyal members of the Party. A glimpse into the Ultra Secret Report from the Director of Security of the Province of Quảng Trị, instructing the People's committee to take various measures against the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, underscores this fact:

Propose to the various Permanent Committees of the Provincial People's Committee that they issue directives to all their organs (Committee, Front and so on) to convene assemblies of the Board of Directors in view of an in-depth examination of a number of actions carried out by these extremist opponents, and in order to become well acquainted with the matter in view of improving coordination. At the same time, ask the Administrative Board to circulate a text inside [the country] that stresses the illegal nature of activities conducted by these reactionaries of the An Quang Buddhist Church, and

¹⁸² See Embassy of Vietnam, *1992 Constitution, Chapter One: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Political Regimes*, p. 1.

¹⁸³ See Congressional Record, *Expressing Sense of the House Regarding Courageous Leadership of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (House of Representative-November 19, 2003)*, p. 2; and Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the U.S.A., *Thực Trạng Phật Giáo Việt Nam, 1951-2000 (The Real Situation of Vietnamese Buddhism, 1951-2000)*, p. 14.

confiscate all the documents [that they] sent to the representatives committees, the pagodas, meditation centers.¹⁸⁴

According to the passage, the members of such People's committee are the only ones to share and to carry out the covert operation of the Communist Party, and they are none other than the loyal communist members. Thus, a clear distinction should be made between the concept of "the people" used by the democratic countries and the one used by the socialist countries. Instead of believing that Vietnam is "a State of the people, from the people, and for the people", one should take it to be "a State of the Party, from the Party, and by the Party."

Apparently the Social Republic of Vietnam is a country dominated by a single political party, the Communist Party. The monopoly of power held by the Party can be observed in the fact that there is no constitutional provision for the separation of powers among the Executives, Legislative, and Judicial branches nor any practical means of check and balance within those three branches. No other competitive authorities are constitutionally recognized beside the Communist Party. Moreover, constitutional measures designed to regulate and restrict the Party are nowhere to be found. In other words, the Communist Party is an autonomous leading identity far greater than any Constitution of the land. Indeed, this is reflected under Article 4 of the Constitution, as follows:

The Communist Party of Vietnam, the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, the faithful representatives of the rights and interests of the working class, the toiling people, and the whole nation, acting upon the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and Ho Chi Minh's thought, is the force leading the State and society.¹⁸⁵

In Vietnam, the Marxist-Leninist doctrine comes down to dialectical materialism (also known as economic determinism) in which the economy is the fundamental social driving force, class struggle is necessary to eliminate an evil capitalist society, and religion is seen as the opiate of the masses. Even though the implementation of Marxist-Leninist ideology has ultimately created economic disaster in Russia and even in Vietnam, the theory is still praised at length by the Vietnamese communist authorities. On November 28, 2003, a Hanoi newspaper continued to

¹⁸⁴ See Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the U.S.A., *Thực Trạng Phật Giáo Việt Nam, 1951-2000* (The Real Situation of Vietnamese Buddhism, 1951-2000), p. 34.

¹⁸⁵ See Embassy of Vietnam, *1992 Constitution, Chapter One: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Political Regimes*, p. 1.

elevate Karl Marx while celebrating the birthday of his great socialist friend Friedrich Engels. A passage concerning the event gives the following reflection:

In a lengthy article in the "Nhan Dan" [People] newspaper, recalling the influence of Engels on the theories of Marxism and dialectical materialism...Mai Trung Hau wrote that Engels' and Marx's theory "was not about doctrine, that people have to learn by heart but a theory of development and guidance for revolution...we should sharpen our dialectical thinking and address doctrinal ideology and...fight against opportunist and revisionist thinking." Hailing Engels as "a genius of creativity for the labor emancipation," Dr. Pham Van Nhuan wrote in the Quan Doi Nhan Dan (People's Army) that "Engels was a leader of the international communist and labor movement, a great friend of Marx and together with him founded a perfect scientific theory, a methodology for the working class to free themselves and the whole human kind."¹⁸⁶

Marxist ideology obviously continues to be used to legitimate the Party as the sole representative of the people, especially the working people. It is retained as a guide for the Party in promoting class struggle and revolutionary activities in order to liberate the working class, to defeat its rivals, and to achieve Communism.

Though the Marxist idea concerning the sedative influence of religion on the masses is absent in the above passage of the Hanoi newspaper, it appears later in the materials dealing with the tension between leading monks and the authorities. The idea is always taught to students in Vietnam. Back in the 1980's, before escaping to the U.S. as a refugee, I was drilled in that Marxist concept during a Politics class that all students must take. According to this dogma, religion, like opiate, is a powerful force that can control the mass in certain ways, especially potent in paralyzing them so that they will undertake no socially active or revolutionary roles. Marxism thus holds that religion is potentially dangerous and should not be trusted.

Nikolai Lenin appeared to have faithfully and successfully executed Marx's doctrine. Through class struggle and strategies of elevating the labor class, he overthrew the ruling authorities of the old Russia and made the Communist Party the single leading force in the U.S.S.R. The Leninist idea can be summed up in the following introductory passage to the Preamble of the 1977 Constitution of Russia:

¹⁸⁶ See VNA (Vietnam News Agency), *Newspapers Recall Engels Birthday, Calling Him 'Genius of Creativity,'* p. 1.

The Great October Socialist Revolution, made by the workers and peasants of Russia under the leadership of the Communist Party headed by Lenin, overthrew capitalist and landowner rule, broke the fetters of oppression, established the dictatorship of the proletariat, and created the Soviet state, an new type of state, the basic instrument for defending the gains of the revolution and for building socialism and communism.¹⁸⁷

Ho Chi Minh's thoughts are in the same way constitutionally enshrined and deemed worthy of obedience by the Party; they call for struggle against any colonialist power or foreign invasive force. They also suggest taking advantage of religious authorities. Ho Chi Minh in his 1945 Declaration of Independence of Vietnam makes his anti-imperialist agenda and patriotic appeal for national unity quite clear:

For more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice. In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty. They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Center, and the South of Vietnam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united. They have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots – they have drowned our uprisings in rivers of blood....The French colonists so intensified their terrorist activities against the *Vietminh* members that before fleeing they massacred a great number of our political prisoners detained at Yen Bay and Cao Bang.¹⁸⁸

The mention of the Vietminh League is an official recognition of Ho Chi Minh's communist covert organization, who operated under the guise of a national resistance movement against the colonial French of 1941.¹⁸⁹ The goal of the movement was presented as liberating Vietnam from foreign domination so that national sovereignty could be gained; this claim would be key to attracting and uniting talented individuals from various patriotic groups. In order to appeal to the Buddhists, in July 1947 Ho Chi Minh himself made the following statement:

¹⁸⁷ See Geocities, *1977 Constitution of the USSR, Part I*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸⁸ See Viet Ventures, *Government Decree on the Management, Provision and the Use of Internet Services*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸⁹ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On The Front Lines With The World's Great Peacemakers*, pp. 183-184; Arvo Mahattan, *Vietnam, Why Did We go: The Religious Beginnings of an Unholy War, Chapter 1*, p. 1; and Hoang Nguyen Tran, *The Complexity and Dynamics of The 1963 Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam*, p. 8.

Only in an independent nation can Buddhism blossom easily. The French colonists want to rob our country. They burn our pagodas, destroy statues of Buddhas, mistreat clergy, and kill lay people. They aim to exterminate Buddhism.¹⁹⁰

The goal of spreading Marxist ideology was, however, kept in the dark instead of being publicly promoted, for fear that it would alienate potential supporters. As a result, even the American intelligence services provided aid and support to the Vietminh freedom fighters.¹⁹¹ However, the Vietminh League began to show its true Communist colors in 1950 by implementing actions to eliminate religions and to arrest religious dignitaries and their followers. The authorities even dissolved patriotic Buddhist organizations established during the resistance and forced them to join the Lien Viet Front, the predecessor of the present National Fatherland Front. Several patriotic freedom fighters from the Vietminh League had quietly withdrawn upon realizing its actual communist identity and its relentless manner of eliminating rivals.

Huyền Quang's first arrest was in 1952 after he protested against the authorities for dissolving the Inter-zone 5 Patriot Buddhist Congregation in 1951.¹⁹² Reflecting on the strategy used by the Vietminh, Quảng Độ came to the same conclusion. In an interview, he stated:

Yes, in order to unite the entire Vietnamese people, they did not interfere into individual life. But now, they interfere in all matters of individual life: what we are allowed to eat, to think, to say.¹⁹³

Thus the Communist Party saw fit to reach its goal of obtaining power by making a fraudulent patriotic appeal and taking advantage of the widespread desire for national unity and autonomy. These strategies of Ho Chi Minh, one can easily see, have been incorporated into various abusive legal measures established by the authorities.

In addition to having the constitutional status to maintain its monopoly on power, the Party was also permitted to establish the so-called the Vietnam Fatherland Front (or "the Front" for short), its own political foundation. Like the Party, the Front has a legitimacy above and beyond the Constitution. Instead of describing any limits of the Front, the Constitution simply outlines the broad functions of the organization to direct the State, including its power in dealing

¹⁹⁰ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On The Front Lines with The World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 176.

¹⁹¹ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On The Front Lines with The World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 164.

¹⁹² See Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the U.S.A., *Thực Trạng Phật Giáo Việt Nam, 1951-2000* (The Real Situation of Vietnamese Buddhism, 1951-2000), p. 17.

¹⁹³ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On The Front Lines with The World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 183.

with religious or spiritual matters. The State is constitutionally required to support the Front and be supervised by it, as is mentioned in Article 9 of the Constitution, as follows:

The Vietnam Fatherland Front and its member organizations constitute the political base of people's power. The Front promotes the tradition and national solidarity, strengthens the people's unity of mind in political and spiritual matters, participates in the building and consolidation of people's power, works together with the State for the care and protection of people's legitimate interests, encourages the people to exercise their right to mastery, ensures the strict observance of the Constitution and the law, and supervises the activity of State organs, elected representatives, and State officials and employees. The state will create favorable conditions for the effective functioning of the Fatherland Front and its component organizations.¹⁹⁴

With the absolute power ordained by this Constitution, the Communist Party is able to rule by fiat. It can take any constitutional measures under the pretext of national security and unity to eliminate or control other competitive authorities. This clearly enables antipathetic behavior toward organized religions. As a result, the Social Republic of Vietnam, like the People Republic of China, can be categorized as "a radical secular Authoritarian state."¹⁹⁵

The Vietnamese authorities always claim to have respected and allowed religious freedom in Vietnam. Article 70 of the Constitution is frequently pointed out as evidence. On September 19, 2003, the spokesperson of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, based upon the Vietnamese Constitution, had no hesitation in announcing publicly that "in Vietnam there is no one arrested or detained on religious ground" and that "only law breakers are punished in accordance with the law."¹⁹⁶ At first glance, Article 70 promises religious freedom in a reasonable manner as long as the religious activities are legal:

The citizen shall enjoy freedom of belief and of religion; he can follow any

¹⁹⁴ See Embassy of Vietnam, *1992 Constitution, Chapter One: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Political Regimes*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ Sumner B. Twiss, *Religious Intolerance in Contemporary China, Including the Curious Case of Falun Gong*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁶ See Foreign Policy, *Answer by MOFA's Spokeswoman Phan Thuy Thanh to Correspondents on 5 June 2003*, p. 1.

religion or follow none. All religions are equal before the law....No one can violate freedom of belief and religion; nor can anyone misuse beliefs and religions to contravene the law and State Policies.¹⁹⁷

Nevertheless, the Communist Party managed to work Ho Chi Minh's strategy for curbing religious freedom into the law by issuing Decree No. 26/1999/ND-CP of April 19, 1999.

According to the decree, the Party can use national security as a pretext whenever they wish to outlaw religious activities. Their rhetoric may be seen in the following selection of Article 5:

All acts that violate the freedom of belief and religion, all acts of misusing belief and religion to oppose the State of the Social Republic of Vietnam, prevent believers from discharging the citizen obligations, undermine the national unity and healthy culture, and practice superstition shall be dealt with by the law.¹⁹⁸

Hopes for religious freedom are extinguished as one reads the Constitution and reaches article 9, which requires the regulation of religious practices by the State. Any type of religious practices performed in public sessions, which involves the gathering of several adherents over a long period of time, will be subjected to regulation by the State agency in every province. In other words, all crowded religious gatherings that entail a long period of meeting are considered to be potentially dangerous activities and should be regulated. This is made clear in the following passage:

Meditation sessions of priests in the diocese, or of priest coming from various establishments and orders of Catholicism, the spiritualization of ministers and missionaries of Protestantism, and purification sessions of Buddhist monks and nuns, and similar religious activities of other religions shall be conducted according to the regulations issues by the provincial-level State management agency on religion.¹⁹⁹

As if those regulations were not enough to restrict religious freedom, the authorities also granted the Communist Party the power to recognize the achievements of religious orders. This is executed by Article 20, requiring the approval of the Prime Minister for bestowing religious titles to high-ranking dignitaries. Separation between church and state is nowhere to be found in Vietnamese politics. Instead of keeping a distance from the internal affair of religions, the State wants to exert its influence on them by making itself the highest religious authority of the land.

¹⁹⁷ See Embassy of Vietnam, *Constitution, Chapter Five: Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Citizen*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ See Thế Giới Publishers, *Decree No. 26/1999/ND-CP of April 19, 1999, on Religious Activities*, p. 1.

¹⁹⁹ See Thế Giới Publishers, *Decree No. 26/1999/ND-CP of April 19, 1999, on Religious Activities*, p. 2.

The Party confers on itself the authority to directly interfere with the managing of religious organizations, by controlling the appointment of religious dignitaries. Its ambition to state-manage organized religions becomes obvious, as shown by Article 21, following:

The appointments and transfer of dignitaries and clergy and professional religious activists including those elected by followers shall have to be approved by the Chairman of the People's Committee in charge of administrative management of the concrete area of operation of these persons.²⁰⁰

The Communist Party also has not neglected to secure its power over the propagation of religious faith. In order to survive and pass on their traditions, religious organizations need to use various methods of disseminating their teachings and practices. Those methods naturally include the publication and transmission of information. Again acting under the pretext of national unity, the Communist Party has attempted to place those under its control. A clear indication of this attempt appears in the following passage of Article 14:

The printing and publication of bibles, religious books and other publications, the production, business and export-import activities in religious cultural articles, products used in religious practice shall be carried out according to regulations of State.... It is forbidden to print, produce, deal in, circulate and store books, magazines and cultural products with contents which oppose the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which cause religious division and disruption of solidarity among the people.²⁰¹

Textual information, printed documents either legitimately found or simply fabricated, can at the discretion of Party officials be arbitrarily labeled as opposing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and thus outlawed. Based upon such a broadly enabling provision of the law, the Party has frequently put Buddhist dissidents in jail. In 2003, the arrests of Huyền Quang and Quảng Độ were, according to the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, executed because those two were found carrying materials that were summarily deemed "documents classified as State secrets."²⁰²

During the 1990s, with the technological advancement of Internet, all kinds of information began to be transmitted electronically, in Vietnam as elsewhere. The Communist

²⁰⁰ See Thế Giới Publishers, *Decree No. 26/1999/ND-CP of April 19, 1999, on Religious Activities*, p. 5.

²⁰¹ See Thế Giới Publishers, *Decree No. 26/1999/ND-CP of April 19, 1999, on Religious Activities*, p. 3.

²⁰² See Ben Rowse, *Vietnam Says Two Dissident Monks Could Face House Arrest*, p. 1; and Christina Toh-Pantin, *Vietnamese Buddhist Monks Stopped by Security*, p. 1.

Party promptly moved to control this field by issuing, on September 30, 1992, a government decree regulating the management, provision, and use of Internet services. Article 6 of the decree required that the use of digital information comply with all press laws, publication laws, and relevant ordinances. The Party did not neglect to incorporate Ho Chi Minh's thoughts into several provisions of the decree, the better establish rigid control. For an example, one can examine Article 11 of the General Division, which announces that "taking advantage of the internet to do hostile actions against the Social Republic of Vietnam or cause security unrest, violate morality and good customs and other laws and regulations" will be prohibited.²⁰³ On June 18, 2003, Pham Hong Son was sentenced to thirteen years in prison because he had translated into Vietnamese an English article titled "What is Democracy" and posted it on the Internet. Due to international protests, including those from Human Rights Watch and the US Congress, his sentence was eventually reduced to five years in prison on August 26, 2003.²⁰⁴ Evidently, neither freedom of the press nor of expression are guaranteed in Vietnam.

The fact that the Communist Party has sought to eliminate, control, or manipulate nearly all major religious functions through constitutionally-based regulation or legal prosecution indicates a paranoid attitude toward organized religions. Instead of having confidence in and building relations of trust with religions, it has harbored a deep, resentful fear of religious authorities. According to the statement concerning the Politics of Religion in Vietnam given to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, in February 2001 by Zachary Abuza, such fear is caused by four inter-related reasons. Abuza enumerates them as follows:

1. Organized religions can pose a threat to the Party's monopoly of power.
2. Foreign forces using a process of "peaceful revolution" are trying to undermine its monopoly of power.
3. Autonomous religious organizations are a manifestation of civil society that the Party would like to control or eliminate.
4. Religious activity, after years of repression is enjoying a revival.²⁰⁵

The first reason proposed by Abuza can be verified by ample evidence generated from the previous discussion concerning the absolute power given to the Party by the 1992

²⁰³ See Viet Ventures, *Government Decree on the Management, Provision and the Use of Internet Services*, pp. 3-4.

²⁰⁴ See Margot Cohen, *Political Arrest Illustrates Vietnam Lags in Reform*, p.1; Prima News, *Vietnamese Dissidents Sentenced to 13 Years in Jail*, p. 1; and RSF, *Vietnam: Cyber-dissident Gets Five-year Prison Sentence*, p. 1.

²⁰⁵ See Zachary Abuza, *The Politics of Religion in Vietnam*, pp.1-3.

Constitution and other rules of law. The point about the Social Republic of Vietnam's fear of foreign forces seems to be only partially correct. Undoubtedly, the collapsing of Communism in East Germany in 1989 and the dismantling of the U.S.S.R. have created insecurity for the Party. It is also evident that Vatican and the Catholic Church had played an essential part in the collapsing of Communism in Poland and East Germany. However, it is not quite correct to assume that those facts are the reasons that the Party has come to see religion as "being a primary way in which foreigners can continue to interfere in Vietnam's internal affairs" and eventually bringing foreign invasion.²⁰⁶

First of all, this might be applicable to various denominations of Christianity in Vietnam because they have been instrumental in foreign interventions, including Vatican intervention, into Vietnam since the time of the colonial French.²⁰⁷ However, the Communist Party did not need to wait for the dismantling of the Berlin Wall to feel the impact of foreign intervention and invasion. The Party, while embracing Ho Chi Minh's thoughts, has long been concerning about resisting invasion and maintaining national sovereignty. As previously discussed, the Party freely used crises of foreign invasion to promote patriotic feelings. They also smoothly employed the need to maintain national unity and sovereignty as a pretext to attract religious authorities and other political powers to join the Vietminh League. Moreover, Vietnamese Buddhism does not appear to be a reasonable target for these suspicion of seditious activity. It has never been considered to be a foreign religion by the Party. The Unified Buddhist Church has never been controlled or supervised by any higher, foreign Buddhist authorities outside of Vietnam. The Communist Party clearly does not have much legitimate cause to fear that the Unified Buddhist Church could be an avenue bringing in foreign invasion to overthrow the Vietnamese authorities.

The third fear proposed by Abuza, namely that autonomous religious organizations have threatening roots in civil society, appears to be closely similar to the first one. Undoubtedly, organized religions can effectively provide social services due to having nation-wide networks, morally upstanding leaders, activists in most communities, an authority structure, publications, and channels to disseminate information. By providing temporary relief aid, they are, however,

²⁰⁶ See Zachary Abuza, *The Politics of Religion in Vietnam*, p. 1

²⁰⁷ See Arvo Mahattan, *Vietnam, Why Did We go: The Religious Beginnings of an Unholy War, Chapter II*, pp. 1-4; and Hoang Nguyen Tran, *The Complexity and Dynamics of The 1963 Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam*, p. 9.

not quite significant as an economic power. Under a Marxist system guiding by economic determinism, only the Party has the monopoly on economic power; it derives its power from controlling the distribution of good and services. The "all out campaign" mobilized by the authorities to prevent the Unified Buddhist Church from distributing relief aid to the victims of the flooding in South Vietnam in 2000,²⁰⁸ can be taken as showing the Party's fear that the Buddhist Church might gain stature with the needy masses. This can be understood by observing the following explanation provided by Quảng Độ concerning his own arrest during the flood relief of 1994:

They accused me of trying to overthrow the government, of trying to incite the flood victims to stand up against the government. But I replied, "They can't lift their heads.

They are nearly dead. How can they do that?' ... This time they brought me to court and I was sentenced to five years in prison and five years' house arrest.²⁰⁹

Positive images of organized religions providing relief aid to the masses would obviously enhance the influence of the religious authorities. As discussed above under the first point, such influence of organized religion is viewed as a political threat to the Communist Party's monopoly of power.

Lastly, the fear of the revival of religious activity after years of repression is a reality, because such revival reflects the change in the communist ideology. The economic reform called the campaign of *Đổi mới* or Renovation, institutionalized by the 1992 Constitution, is quite a deviation from the Marxist doctrine of economic determinism. It allows the centralized market economy to step down and an open-market economy to spring up again. It clearly represents a public acknowledgement of the failure of the Marxist economy. With a high rate of unemployment, inadequate food production, and soaring inflation, the Marxist economy had reduced Vietnam to the level one of the poorest counties in the world by the 1980s.²¹⁰ This weakened the legitimacy of the Communist Party and thus hampered its ability to run the country. In addition, it is an indication that the Party's claims to be triumphant over feudalism, colonialism, and the decadent capitalism of Vietnam's past has been all empty talk. Embarking on a system of open market economy and inviting foreign investors surely allow western standards, morals, and consumer preferences to be introduced to the Vietnamese, especially to

²⁰⁸ See Zachary Abuza, *The Politics of Religion in Vietnam*, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with the World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 187.

²¹⁰ See Joanna Harrington, *Constitution Revision in Vietnam: Renovation but No Revolution*, p. 1.

the youth. These represent social "contradictions" and "maladies" for the Marxist system.²¹¹ Thus, they must be monitored by the Party.

At this point, it seems over-optimistic to conclude that Marxism is finished. However, the loosening of Marxist ideological control has triggered the revitalization of religious ideas and practices. Instead of keeping a distance from religion, the opiate of the masses, more and more of the populace are being attracted to and participating in it. This will further weaken the Marxist legacy that the Party has long been trying to sustain. Thus, the Party is having to confront its fear of the decay and eventual collapsing of Vietnam's Marxist foundation. Having failed to eliminate religion, the Party hopes that controlling religious expression will be an effective way to deal with the problem at hand. Various provisions of the 1992 Constitution and of the rules of law seem designed to restrict religious freedom in order to serve precisely those purposes.

More specific reasons for the grave repression of the Unified Buddhist Church may be found by examining the ideology and motives behind activities of the leading Buddhist figures Huyền Quang and Quảng Độ, its victims. The Party wishes to retain its monopoly of power and so must seek to eliminate competing authorities. Though it seems surprising that nonviolent Buddhist leaders could be powerful enough to challenge the authority of government, actions taken by Huyền Quang and Quảng Độ to maintain their Buddhist legacy would seem to indicate that the Party's fear is well-grounded.

Based on population figures, Buddhism is the major religion of Vietnam. This is confirmed by a report to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom in 2001 listing the major recognized religions of Vietnam:

Of the country's 86 million people, 80 percent are nominally Buddhist, over 8 million are Catholic, while Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects claim to have nearly 3.5 million adherents and there are 800, 000 Protestants in the Northwest and Central Highlands. Ancestor worship, Buddhist festivals, folk religions, and cults around historical figures are commonplace.²¹²

Holding 80 percent of the Vietnamese population of 86 million people, Buddhism is not an insignificant force. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, as the largest Buddhist

²¹¹ See Sumner B. Twiss, *Religious Intolerance in Contemporary China, Including the Curious Case of Falun Gong*, p. 13.

²¹² See Zachary Abuza, *The Politics of Religion in Vietnam*, p. 1.

organization and one known for its ability to raise demonstrations with crowds of 30, 000 or even 40,000 followers, cannot be ignored.

Instead of joining the state-run Vietnamese Buddhist Church, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam has demanded independence and freedom of action. By propounding such demands the Unified Buddhist Church sets itself against a Party which allows no opposition. How could the Party, if it allowed religious freedom, continue its monopoly over the power to bestow religious titles, appoint dignitaries, and grant approval for various religious functions and practices? To guard itself against such dangerous demands, the Party has moved to suppress the Unified Buddhist Church. Nothing more than the lust for absolute power is behind the Party's actions against the Church. Greed is, however, a poison to the mind according to Buddhism. As a Buddhist organization, the Unified Buddhist Church does not value greed of any type, and so a monopoly of power is not its ambition. Despite the arrests and other forms of harassment, the Unified Buddhist Church has continued to maintain its position. Quảng Độ made this clear when the authorities imprisoned him:

They simply thought that I was trying to topple the government, so they didn't care for me. But I told them that even if I was asked to take a chair in the government, I couldn't do that. If I was asked to be the director of the government, I couldn't do that. What I demand from you is that you give me freedom of worship. "I said to them, 'freedom of religion, freedom of teaching Buddhism. That's all.'"²¹³

Unlike certain Christian denominations that have foreign backing from powerful foreign organizations like the Vatican, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam has no higher authorities than itself. It only has its small, subsidiary branch offices among the communities of Vietnamese refugee abroad. Though minor and scattered, those offices certainly can collectively be an addition to the strength of the Unified Buddhist Church, making it more difficult for the Party to control. A hint of such additional strength can be observed from the fact that the Party has even made efforts to prevent those branch Buddhist offices from gaining enough power to effectively assist the Mother Unified Buddhist Church at home. Quảng Độ has received letter under a false name telling him not to fight the authorities and not to have a high hope of those branch offices. A part of the letter goes as follows:

²¹³ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with the World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 186.

Why are you fighting the government? You know, there are many Vietnamese secret police serving in the diplomatic corps in the United States, especially in California. They are trying to divide the Vietnamese community. There is trouble within the Vietnamese community. Even from 1975, they sent spies with the refugees when many people were leaving Vietnam. Now we have so many agents in the US!²¹⁴

In addition to having the strength drawing from a majority of the population and having the support from its branch offices, the Unified Buddhist Church also has the most powerful and skillful voice raised in opposition to Marxist ideology. The Communist Party, as discussed above, built its power on Marxist doctrines of class struggle, of economic determinism, and of manipulating the masses by proclaiming that religion is nothing more than their sedative opiate. The Unified Buddhist Church, however, based its opposition upon the Buddhist perspective that perceives Marxism as a doctrine of hatred, of greed, and of insufficient wisdom. As a result, the Unified Buddhist Church did not hesitate to demolish the logical foundations for such Marxist doctrine by pointing out its own contradictions and flaws. The Unified Buddhist Church distinguished it self as the single most capable and most potent force in doing so. Thus, the Communist Party has constantly subjected it to cruel repression.

First, Quảng Độ publicly challenged the Marxist concept of class struggle. According to him, such a theory promoted hatred and social ill instead of prosperity, unity, and peace. He exposed its disastrous failure at the same time, in the following passage:

The Communist culture has destroyed our Vietnamese culture. The poor fight against the rich; the ignorant fight against the educated. They created classes. Ho said every citizen must be a policeman and believe only in Ho and the Communist Party. They have the religion without God! Actually Marx and Lenin are their gods and Marx's book is their dogma! But people hate the communist government....The hatred of the people especially in the North, is very great. Land reform killed 700,000 people, landlords, and peasants. Their relatives remember this and have great hatred toward the communists.²¹⁵

Moreover, Quảng Độ has been able to present some substantial evidence of horrors of class struggle in his eye-witness account of the cold-blooded murder of his Master. His account exposed and condemned the grim reality of a totalitarianism that glorifies its brutality as "class

²¹⁴ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with the World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 188.

²¹⁵ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with the World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 192.

struggle," a reality that the Communists have been trying to conceal ever since they took over North Vietnam. It was nothing noble, but the horrifying murder of innocent people. Here is one of his accounts which has deeply touched the hearts of Vietnamese Buddhist refugees, and which affected the conscience of all peace-loving people after it was sent directly to the Secretary General of the Party and then distributed internationally:

Should I die, nobody would prevent me from expressing my own profound conviction, namely that the communists will not survive very much longer. This conviction was not born in me today. It appeared in me at the age of 18, precisely on the August 19, 1954, at ten in the morning, when I saw my Master with his hands tied behind his back with steel wire, two signs hanging over his neck, on his back, carrying the inscription: "Traitor to the Fatherland." He was at the center of the communal house yard. On each side of him were gathered men carrying batons, knives, sickles, and rakes. In front of him...was a group of persons, the presumed "judges" of the People's Court. They ordered my Master to kneel down on the ground and to bow his head while the court declared him guilty. My Master refused. Then one of the judges descended from the veranda and came so close as to almost touch him: "You are a traitor to our Fatherland and you are still obstinate in your attitude!" He punched him in the jaw. A sliver of blood oozed out from his mouth and trickled down from his chin to his chest, reddening the sign hanging over his chest....As soon as the sentenced was pronounced, they took him to the meadow....Blood continued to drip down his chin, reddening his tunic and dropped on the courtyard soil....at the meadow, my Master was forced to lie down on his side. A man shot him three times in the temple....and the red blood surged out horizontally.²¹⁶

Based upon such evidence, Quảng Độ continued to argue against their Marxist logic and work for the end of Communism. He says the Marxist idea of class struggle has roots in hatred or anger, another poison of the mind according to Buddhism. Instead of bringing peace to the individual and unity to the people, it would bring only harm. His insightful reasoning appears to be quite a match for the Marxist logic, as in the following passage:

In my pain, with tears rolling down from both of my eyes as I sat on the green grass of the meadow. I contemplated the body of my Master, and I knew that Communism would not last very long. The reason is advocating hatred, class struggle, the fight pitting one

²¹⁶ See Thích Quảng Độ, *Buddhism and Communism*, p. 2.

against the others, the murder of one's neighbor. All this is evil, and evil does not last; history has never ceased to demonstrate this truth. The love of good and the hatred of evil are inscribed profoundly in the psyche of most people. That which people detest cannot subsist long. The 74 years of existence of the Soviet regime do not constitute a long period of time in comparison, for example, to the 215 years of the reign of the Ly Dynasty of Vietnam.²¹⁷

Furthermore, Quảng Độ was able to expose the fallacy of the Marxists' faith in manipulating the masses. According to him, there was no wisdom in such ideology. He used the present social reality of Vietnam to indicate that Marxism is a self-defeating proposal. Instead of taking time to defend religion, he first attacked the Party on their own ground:

We have a long history of compassion, of respect for human rights and freedom. But the young people born since the war know nothing of these traditions. The government wants them to be content with karaoke and discos and these things. They are not supposed to worry about freedom. And you are right; the youth know nothing of Buddha's teaching, especially under the Communist regime, where they want to take out every religious feeling in the people's mind. They want to reeducate people to think only of food and clothing. In general, young people are not allowed to go to the temples. For the Communists, religion is just like a drug. Marx said so. So they try to destroy all religions. Mao started the counterrevolution in China and tried to destroy everything cultural, all the temples, even Confucian ideas.... And now the Chinese Communists are destroying all of Tibetan culture because it is a Buddhist country. That is how the Chinese believe they can control Tibet forever.... In Vietnam we have an expression, "Man proposes but God disposes."²¹⁸

Then Quảng Độ offered himself and Buddhism as counter examples. He proposed that one should view Buddhism not as a sedative but an optimistic philosophy, because Buddhism promotes hope. Being a Buddha means being an enlightened person who no longer holds on to greed, anger, and ignorance. His writing displays other positive features of Buddhism, such as compassion and tolerance, that bolster the argument:

²¹⁷ See Thích Quảng Độ, *Buddhism and Communism*, p. 2.

²¹⁸ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with the World's Great Peacemakers*, pp. 182-83.

Buddhism makes people hopeful, because in this moment you are greedy, but in the next you might become a Buddha. It is not far away. Therefore Buddhism makes people hopeful. We Buddhists are very optimistic. I have never been pessimistic. I always hope for good. Even the communists are loveable people. We just have to change their way of thinking; make them think of goodwill, not hatred, give up their policy of power. We are all the same people, and we must love each other. We are all the same people; we must stop fighting each other.²¹⁹

Having logically and reasonably refuted Marxist doctrine, Quảng Độ launched another attack on the Party for being infatuated with foreign influences, including that of Marxist ideology. Merely borrowing and copying foreign ideas do not constitute national independence. Rather, they indicate a lack of authentic wisdom. While illustrating the ways that Communism has failed to serve the needs of the Vietnamese, he criticized the Party for unwisely introducing further foreign influences while neglecting the native traditions of the Vietnamese. The Party's appeal for national sovereignty, originated by Ho Chi Minh, was made to look entirely cynical under this particular attack. Quảng Độ boldly reminded the Party of the failure in their commitment to the Vietnamese. As the same time, he pointed out that Buddhism has consistently served the needs of the people and again concluded that Buddhism should be granted its freedom. His criticism was made clear in the following arguments:

The books of prayer in Vietnamese language have been burned by the Communists, who have considered them "decadent literature". Today the faithful from the North go to the South in order to buy those books, and then copy them by hand and pass them on to other people for worship. This is the proof that the people still need Buddhism, which is not the case of other cults. I remember well that people were forced to hang in their houses the big portraits of communist leaders such as Karl Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Malenkov, Mao Tse Tung, Kim Il Sung....But when I was exiled to the North in 1982, I did not find any portraits of these people, including those of Party members. Kim Il Sung just died and the Vietnamese Communist Party devoted a day of national mourning for him last July 17....Hundreds of thousand of Vietnamese died from the results of class struggle, during the Agrarian Reform of 1956 in the North. Not long afterwards, the Communist Party corrected its policy (having recognized it had killed by mistake), but why has it not set up

²¹⁹ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with the World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 193.

a national day of mourning for those who died? Who will carry on the mourning for the innumerable Vietnamese who have died at sea since April 30, 1975?²²⁰

In general, people would be imprisoned or even executed for saying anything against Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party. Mrs. Cúc Foshee of Orlando, Florida, an American citizen of Vietnamese origin and an activist, experienced this when she made her visit to Vietnam in September 2005. Because of fabricated evidence, Cúc Foshee was imprisoned there for more than a year.²²¹ Likewise in April 2007, Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez of California publicly criticized Vietnamese authorities for their uncivilized treatment of people after she visited the country and witnessed with her own eyes how Vietnamese policemen blocked her from meeting the wives of Vietnamese dissidents who were imprisoned or under house arrest. In her own words, Loretta Sanchez remarked:

As you may know, during the trip, the treatment I received from the Vietnamese government was not from a civilized government. As I left Vietnam, I wondered, “I can leave, but what about the 80 millions Vietnamese that cannot leave?” If the Vietnamese authorities treated me like that, how do they treat their own citizens?²²²

On March 15, 2007 three Norwegians from the Bergen-based Rafto Foundation also experienced similar hostile treatment. Indeed, they were briefly detained by policemen when they came to Vietnam to present the Rafto annual human rights award of 2006²²³ to Quảng Độ who was then still under house arrest. Quảng Độ, as a leading figure of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam had been courageous enough to challenge the Marxist foundation of the Party and even of Ho Chi Minh's thoughts. This unprecedented daring merited their award. Quảng Độ is again nominated for the Nobel Peace award in 2007 for his unwavering courage. The repressive treatment of Quảng Độ and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam is emblematic of the Party's approach to civil rights.

Consequently, it becomes evident that the Party has given itself absolute power under the 1992 Constitution of Vietnam. Authorized by Marxist ideology, the Party has made itself the sole representatives of the people. In order to maintain its absolute status, the Party has tried to

²²⁰ See Thích Quảng Độ, *Buddhism and Communism*, p. 3.

²²¹ See Gia Đình Magazine, “Câu Chuyện Bà Cúc Foshee” (The Story of Mrs. Cúc Foshee, with pictures from the Orlando Sentinel), *Gia Đình Magazine*. Số 162, December 2006, p. 12; and Liz McCausland, *UCF Students Help Obtain Signatures*, p. 6.

²²² See Loretta Sanchez, *The Honorable Rep. Loretta Sanchez Congressional Human Rights Caucus Hearing, May 10, 2007*, p. 1.

²²³ See Quê Mẹ, “U.S. Visited Outlawed Vietnamese Buddhist Group 2007-04-10,” *Reuters*, 10 Apr. 2007, p. 2.

eliminate any other competing authorities through various means of repression. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam stands as a potential competitor because it has the favor of a majority of the population and also because it has publicly opposed and challenged ideological foundation of the Communist Party. The repression of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam indeed illuminates the fact that the Constitution of the Social Republic of Vietnam is just a façade for controlling and regulating religious and other freedoms. As a result, the lack of religious freedom in Vietnam is in no way hypothetical, but grimly real. There is no religious freedom allowed under the Social Republic of Vietnam.

Thus, the Vietnamese Buddhists in the United States, as will be shown in the following chapters, have been made to struggle constantly for their organizational stability. They have struggled to reestablish their Buddhist tradition and to adapt it in ways that will preserve the tradition within the American religious landscape. At the same time, they have to take on the burden of supporting the Unified Buddhist Church in Vietnam in its efforts to promote Human Rights and religious freedom. In America, when positive Buddhist values and practices are recognized and embraced by new generations of Vietnamese Buddhists, then the tradition will be stable. In Vietnam, only when the Communist authorities return to embrace the humanistic values of Buddhism can the tradition again flourish.

It was not a culturally sound way to sway the hearts of the Vietnamese and to heal the wounds of war when General Trần Văn Trà demanded, “Now, what is left for you to transfer to us?” He said this to General Dương Văn Minh of South Vietnam, who was awaiting in the Palace of Independence in Saigon to transfer the ruling power to the new authority, in April 1975.²²⁴ One tragic result of these communists' hostile attitude was the interment of 500,000 officials of South Vietnam for years in roughly 150 of the horrific re-education camps.²²⁵ Another was the perilous escape attempts of more than a million Vietnamese refugees, of whom roughly five hundred thousand perished on the seas. Rather, General Trần Văn Trà and other Vietnamese Communist authorities should have clung to the Buddhist values of the Vietnamese rulers of old. Vietnam became peaceful and united when Kings Trần Thánh Tông and Trần Nhân Tông, who promoted the Trúc Lâm Zen Lineage through the practice of “embracing the Dharma while living in the world” (cư trần lạc đạo), decided their course. They had all of the

²²⁴ See Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Hồi Ký, Tập III*, p. 23.

²²⁵ See Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with the World's Great Peacemakers*, p. 172.

traitorous documents found in 1289 burned, right after winning the war against the Mongolian Yuan, so that people would have “their mind peacefully settled” and could live together with others in peace.²²⁶

At present, the Communist authorities of Vietnam are soliciting American diplomatic favor, seeking relationships to strengthen and improve the country. Materialistic success is not all America has to offer, however. The U.S. also has an admirable democratic tradition that they can emulate and thereby make themselves more humanistic. The American leaders of the Union and the Confederate Armies embraced each other at the conclusion of the American Civil War. Life in America was improved and the country was united and became powerful, but not through the use of retaliation and imprisonment in re-education camps. Rather, the culture pursued a path toward increasing tolerance by interpreting its law to ensure basic civil rights. The United States of America is a democratic country of the people, by the people, and for the people. The people are always the most significant, the indispensable resource for any country. It is tragic for a country to waste this human resource. Indeed, hatred does not bring peace. Only compassion can do this. The Vietnamese Buddhist tradition can always contribute to its country's welfare by maintaining its focus on compassion.

With the historical transmission of Buddhism to Vietnam and the relevant background concerning achievements and obstacles of the tradition in Vietnam up to the present time, let us proceed to the next chapter on the history of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism in America.

²²⁶ See Lê Mạnh Thát, *Toàn Tập Trần Nhân Tông*, p. 163.

CHAPTER 3

VIETNAMESE ZEN IN AMERICA

Initially, Vietnamese Buddhism was not introduced to America by the Vietnamese refugees. Rather, it was pioneered by Thích Nhất Hạnh and Thích Thiên Ân, when they were invited to America during the 1960s. At the time, because of the involvement of America in the Vietnam War, especially with the portraying of the tragic war destructions in Vietnam, many Americans became dissolute and lost their directions in life. Many young Americans protested against the war. They revolted against the orders of the authority and of the established religions. Seeking for a new spiritual direction, many of them resorted to LSD and other psychedelic drugs and related activities. Helping to redirect those individuals to a more healthy mental cultivation, Nhất Hạnh and Thiên Ân offered the Buddhist practices that, according to their perspectives, would be best suited to the American social conditions of the time. In this chapter, the Buddhist teachings of Nhất Hạnh and Thiên Ân are discussed with this social milieu.

Nhất Hạnh taught Engaged Buddhism while Thiên Ân taught Zen Buddhism. Nhất Hạnh promoted social activism with his Engaged Buddhism. His Buddhist principal aims were to bring peace and reconciliation between conflicting parties. The Bodhisattva ideal of seeking enlightenment while benefiting sentient beings was applied to promote social activism. For the cultivation of wisdom, mindfulness meditation was added to the core practices of his Engaged Buddhism. Thiên Ân motivated others to reflect and strengthen themselves spiritually. Instead of looking outwardly for social satisfactions, encourages the American public to contemplate inwardly in order to regain their wisdom. Traditional Vietnamese meditation was used as a method for contemplation. His Zen meditation was combined with certain Pure Land techniques for more effective practices.

The teachings of Nhất Hạnh and Thiên Ân have contributed to the growing interest in Buddhist practices, especially the practice of meditation, in America. In order to understand their Buddhist methods and aims, I will elaborate on the Buddhist activities of these Vietnamese Buddhist masters. Their fundamental texts for practices and their motives for using them will be investigated. As further evaluation, I will then link them to the traditional texts of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. Also, their adaptations to the American setting and their

rationalization for doing so will be examined. However, let us now begin the chapter with the initial contact between the United States and the Kingdom of Vietnam, which the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition was first made known to the American authority through diplomatic venue.

Vietnamese Buddhism began to flourish in the United States of America after the influx of Vietnamese refugees in 1975. Nevertheless, the American people already had some knowledge about the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition by the early nineteenth century, long before 1975. According to John White (1782-1840), a member of the East India Marine Society and the first American merchant to Vietnam, the Buddhist tradition of Vietnam was evident when his ship, the *Franklin*, landed in Saigon on October 7, 1819. In his book, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, published in 1824, Mr. White recognized that Buddhism was the predominant religion of the Vietnamese. At the time, Vietnam was called Annam, and the Vietnamese were called the Annamese. Through his pronunciation, Mr. White called the Vietnamese as the Onamese. He was excited about and profusely praised the tropical fruits, which were “in great abundance and high perfection.” While admiring the citadel of Saigon with its “most beautiful constructions” of more than one hundred and fifty galleys mounted with six or sixteen guns each, all of brass and “most beautiful pieces,”²²⁷ Mr. White could not ignore the dominance of Buddhist Temples there. Because of his Western vision, he sought the familiar towers of Christian churches. While sighting only a single Catholic church, he saw numerous Vietnamese Buddhist temples, as in his following remark:

The city of Saigon contains one hundred and eighty thousand inhabitants....In the western part of the city are two Chinese pagodas, and the Onamese have a great number of their temples in various parts of the city....The Onamese have no towers to their pagodas: the bells, of which there are generally from two to four, of different sizes, to each place of worship, are hung on wooden frames before each entrance and are never swung, but stuck by hand. They differ in shape from those of European construction, for they bear a nearer resemblance to a truncated cone.²²⁸

Later on, in his actual tour of one of the largest Buddhist pagodas in Saigon, John White could not restrain himself from reporting about its elements in detail. His Western bias could have incited both wild imagination and marvel from his Western fellows. Also, his limited

²²⁷ See John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, pp. 230, 235, and Thái Văn Kiêm, *The Twain Did Meet: First Contacts Between Vietnam and the United States of America*, pp. 7, 12-13.

²²⁸ See John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, pp. 232-234.

knowledge of the Buddhist tradition might have given him a number of cultural and religious confusions. However, by going beyond his Western cultural conditions, one can relive a partial experience of the traditional Vietnamese Buddhist temple, which was no longer in existence when the citadel of Saigon was captured and destroyed by the French colonists in 1861. Also, one can still admire the grandeur and magnificence of the largest Buddhist temple in Saigon by following his descriptive details. In asserting that the Vietnamese practiced Buddhism for the most part, John White reported:

We arrived at the largest pagoda we had yet seen in the country. It was of brick, covered with tile, and in a totally different style from others in the city. It bore traces of great antiquity, which with its immense proportions, and a certain air of gothic grandeur and druidical seclusion, were admirably calculated to inspire involuntary awe, and to render it a proper retreat for the most rigid ascetic....An old priest with a grey beard, but not otherwise distinguishable from the laity, accompanied by a young aspirant, advanced a few steps to meet us and received us with a great appearance of cordiality; and when informed by the linguist that our object was our curiosity to see the temple, he readily proceeded to gratify us. In front of the pile were suspended four bells of different sizes and tones and forms,...by a side [entrance], we entered a spacious vestibule, separated from the nave of the church by a massive partition of polished wood in panel work. In this place were three immense drums, mounted on frames, and on a table, a small brass idol, with an elephant's proboscis, before which was a burning censor filled with matches, one end of which had been burned. The priest then threw open a large door in the partition and led the way into the body of the temple....Several groups of idols, some of hideous and some of colossal proportions were visible through the dim twilight that pervaded the temple, and this seemed to render them still more hideous and unearthly....It would be futile to attempt any description of the various monstrosities in the pantheon of pagan divinities....The religion of the Onam is polytheism, as may be seen by the foregoing. The basis is Chinese, on which are engrafted many of the rites and superstitions of Buddhism. They do not, however, appear to believe in the metempsychosis, but in a future state of happiness where they will have plenty of rice and no work. Indeed, their anticipated blessing in another life consists principally in sensual

gratifications. This belief is, however, more universal among the least informed of them.²²⁹

The American authorities of the early nineteenth century also recognized the Buddhist tradition of Vietnam by consulting the information published by John White in order to seek diplomatic contacts with Vietnam. Again, the Buddhist tradition was still evident from the Vietnamese records when President Andrew Jackson officially sent Edmund Roberts on the *Peacock*, a ship of the United States Navy, for diplomatic missions to Vietnam, first in 1832 and later in 1836. Kept in the National Archives, the diplomatic letter from President Andrew Jackson, written in 1832, was direct in seeking peaceful diplomatic contact, as follows:

Andrew Jackson, President of the United States of America

To _____

Great and Good Friend,

This will be delivered to your Majesty by Edmund Roberts, a respectable Citizen of the United States, who has been appointed Special Agent on the part of this Government to transact important business with your Majesty. I pray your Majesty will protect him in the exercise of the duties which are thus confided to him, and to treat him with kindness and confidence, placing entire reliance on what he shall say to you in our behalf, especially when he shall treat the assurances of our perfect Amity and Good will towards your Majesty.

I pray God to have you always, Great and Good Friend, under his safe and holy keeping.

In Testimony whereof, I have caused the Seal of the United States to be hereunto affixed. Given under my hand, at the City of Washington, the thirty-first day of January A.D. 1832, and of the Independence of the United States of America, the Fifty-Sixth.

Andrew Jackson,

By the President,

Edw. Livingston,

Secretary of State.²³⁰

²²⁹ See John White, *A Voyage to Cochin China*, pp. 275-277; Thái Văn Kiêm, *The Twain Did Meet: First Contacts Between Vietnam and the United States of America*, pp. 15-16.

Unfortunately, the first diplomatic mission to Vietnam was a failure regardless of the official banquet from the Vietnamese delegation to honor the Americans. Edmund Roberts was not able to obtain an audience with Emperor Minh Mạng (r. 1820-1840), the second emperor of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1845) of Vietnam. President Andrew Jackson did not have the name of the emperor and the name of the Vietnam in his official diplomatic letter. (A facsimile of the original letter is in the following page.) Quite unexpectedly to President Andrew Jackson, those missing parts became a problem of courtesy after his letter was translated into Vietnamese. Even on his second mission to Vietnam in 1836, Edmund Roberts still failed to have an audience with the emperor of Vietnam. However, Emperor Minh Mạng did not refuse him this time. Rather, the emperor granted an approval to receive Edmund Roberts at the royal court, regardless of some dissuasive suggestions from some of the court mandarins. Indeed, Emperor Minh Mạng was very cautious of Western influences, especially the French intervention after the French Catholic missionaries were caught as collaborators in the revolts, including the revolt of Lê Văn Khôi in 1833.²³¹ Nevertheless, the royal annals of Vietnam, the *Đại Nam Thực Lục*, indicated that Edmund Roberts and the *Peacock* left on their own account. Unknown to Emperor Minh Mạng, Edmund Roberts got sick from his previous negotiation in Thailand (Siam) before visiting Vietnam. Furthermore, it was unfortunate that Roberts died in Macao on June 12, 1836, after hastily departing from Vietnam. As an end to this chapter in diplomatic contact, the royal annals of Vietnam recorded the following:

But the Emperor stated: “They have come from over 40,000 leagues beyond the seas, thus providing their admiration for our virtue and the prestige of our Court. How could we reject them? If we do, we would display a lack of magnanimity.

The Emperor then gave orders to a delegation composed of Đào Trí Phú, Lê Bá Tú who was Vice President of the Ministry of Interior, and other officials of the Diplomatic Service to present his good wishes to the visitors. The delegation was not received, however, the commanding officer of the ship pleading illness. The interpreter was then sent to pay a formal visit, a visit which was returned. On the very same day the

²³⁰ See Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat, in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock, David Geisinger, Commander, During the Years 1832-3-4*, p. 204; and Thái Văn Kiểm, *The Twain Did Meet: First Contacts Between Vietnam and the United States of America*, pp. 15-16, 37.

²³¹ See Oscar Chapuis, *The last Emperors of Vietnam: From Tu Duc to Bao Dai*, p. 13, and Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược* (Vietnam History, a Survey), p. 475.

Andrew Jackson, President of the United States of America,
To

Great and Good Friends,
This will be delivered to your Majesty by Edmund Roberts
a respectable Citizen of these United States, who has been appointed
Special Agent on the part of this Government to transact important business
with your Majesty, I pray your Majesty to protect him in the exercise of
the duties which are thus confided to him, and to treat him with kindness
and confidence, placing entire reliance on what he shall say to you in our
behalf, especially when he shall request the forgiveness of our perfect Amity
and Good will towards your Majesty.

I pray God to direct you always Great and Good
Friends under his safe and holy keeping.

In Testimony whereof, I have caused the Seal of
the United States to be hereunto affixed, Given under
my hand at the City of Washington the thirty first
day of January A.D. 1822; and of the Independence of the
United States of America, the fifty Sixth.

Andrew Jackson,
By the President,
Edw. Livingston, Secretary of State.

帝批示云來者弗拒去者弗追中節禮法何責外夷
去殊無禮義
長稱病不見我使通言來探彼亦令人然言謝
即日揚帆而去致富等以奏且言彼不來仁
帝曰彼遠隔重洋四萬餘里今仰慕朝廷威德而來
奈何拒絕示人以不廣乎乃命陶致富與吏而待
爾黎伯秀作為商船員就處勞問既至船
內閣侍郎黃焯奏曰彼國巧譎萬端當拒絕
之若一容受恐遺後世慮古人閉玉關謝西
域禦戎誠為得策
對曰彼外國人情偽亦未可知臣以為為姑聽
來京而雷于商船公館派員款待以觀來意
通請得瞻觀省臣以聞
帝問戶部侍郎陶致富曰觀彼情辭恭順當納之否
麻離根師船泊廣南沱澗茶山澳言有國書求

Figure 20. The diplomatic letter from President Andrew Jackson to the Emperor Minh Mạng and a page of the royal annals, *Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên*, which recorded the second diplomatic mission headed by Edmund Roberts. Source Thái Văn Kiểm, Director of Cultural Affairs.²³²

²³² See Thái Văn Kiểm, *The Twain Did Meet: First Contacts Between Vietnam and the United States of America*, pp. 36-37.

ship weighed anchor. Đào Trí Phú and the delegation came back to report to the Emperor, asserting, “These fugitives have proved how uncivil they are.”

The Emperor then wrote on the report: “They came to us without our rejecting them; they left without our sending for them: we have conducted ourselves in accordance with Chinese courtesy. We do not need to take offense when we are dealing with foreign barbarians.”²³³

Regardless of his unsuccessful mission in establishing commercial trade with Vietnam, Edmund Roberts was able to report back to the American authorities about general Buddhist practices in Southeast Asia, especially when he was received in Thailand. He learned in detail about the life story of the Buddha and the Indian origin of the Buddhist tradition. Also, he reported about the ten novice precepts of restraining from (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) sexual relations, (4) lying, (5) taking intoxicants, (6) decorating oneself, (7) sitting on luxurious chairs and beds, (8) eating after noon time, (9) singing and dancing, and (10) handling gold and silver. Roberts even noticed the requirement that Thai men had to spend a part of their training at a Buddhist temple.²³⁴

More than a century later, during the 1950s and the 1960s, while involved in the Vietnam War, the American authorities became more conscious about the tradition and its functions in the lives of the Vietnamese. Hoping to prevent the “domino effect” of the Communists in Southeast Asia, the American authorities supported Ngô Đình Diệm, a Catholic, to his presidency in South Vietnam, where eighty-five percent or more of the population was Buddhists. As the war escalated, they learned in deeper detail about the tradition, especially when the Buddhists rose up to protest against the war. Also, the American public began to have knowledge about the tradition after a series of self-immolations by Vietnamese monks and nuns in order to protest against the suppressive and discriminative policies of the pro-Catholic Diem regime.²³⁵

²³³ See Thái Văn Kiểm, *The Twain Did Meet: First Contacts Between Vietnam and the United States of America*, p. 20.

²³⁴ See Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat, in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock, David Geisinger, Commander, During the Years 1832-3-4*, pp. 294-296.

²³⁵ The reasons underlying such discriminative policies are illuminated by Amanda Porterfield in her remarks that “Catholicism in Vietnam was closely associated with foreign influence and especially with French imperialism. During the “Monks’ War” from 1885 to 1898, Buddhists and Confucians had joined together in resistance against the French. When the French regained control, they extended special privileges to Vietnamese Catholics, even though the majority of the population was Buddhist. During the Diem regime, government positions went to Catholics, Catholic refugees from North Vietnam received special privileges, and merchants were required to support Catholic “charities.” Diem’s brother, the bishop of Vinh Long (later an archbishop), established the Vinh

Beginning with the self-immolation of Venerable Thích Quảng Đức on June 11, 1963, the issue concerning Vietnamese Buddhism and its conflicts made the headlines in major American newspapers and on television. With limited understanding concerning Buddhism, the American public was puzzled about the role of the Buddhist tradition in the fabric of Vietnamese life and sought more understanding. They became more curious after the failure and the collapse of the Diem regime in 1963. Afterward, many American people, concerned about the power abuse of the pro-Catholic Diem regime, were still confused about the immolation of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and their Buddhist practices. A typical American rationalization concerning the relevant issue of self-immolation went as follows:

Diem had been kicked out of his refuge in a New York monastery by an American expert on Southeast Asia, endorsed by the American Roman Catholic hierarchy, and put in power by our State Department. Diem was a Catholic, and his opposition was predominantly Buddhist. We understood Catholics (though very few of us knew much about the Vietnamese Catholics and their relationship with the French, or even that some of them also opposed Diem); Buddhists were an unknown quantity, a strange uncivilized sort of religion that didn't believe in Jesus Christ and did believe in reincarnation, with monks who went around in yellow robes collecting alms.

But one of the monks had burned himself to death to protest the Diem regime, and photographs of Thich Quang Duc sitting in the lotus position of prayer while the flames consumed him, although horrifying, were sobering. The official insistence that Diem's opponents were not really monks but Communists in monks' clothing had few takers. A kind of resident common sense made it seem unlikely that even Communists would carry a charade to the point of setting themselves on fire for it.²³⁶

Long Personalist Philosophy Center where all public servants, Catholic or not, were required to receive training in Catholic personalist philosophy, which was presented as the correct alternative to Communist philosophy. (Porterfield 127) The Vietnamese in Vĩnh Long had no problem in recognizing those types of political abuse of power. Seeing the throng of vehicles of the government officials getting in line to cross the ferries at the Mỹ Thuận River to enter Vĩnh Long Province to pay a courtesy visit to Diem's brother, the Bishop (who was later stripped off all Catholic religious rank and punished with excommunication by the order of Vatican in the early 1980), the local people ironically told one another that they did not know that the presidential palace in Saigon had already moved to Vĩnh Long. See Cửu Long (Lê Trọng Văn), *Những Bí Ẩn Lịch Sử Dưới Chế Độ Ngô Đình Diệm* (The Historical Secrecies under the Ngô Đình Diệm's Regime), pp. 17, 218; and also Minh Không (Vũ Văn Mẫu), *Sáu Tháng Pháp Nạn 1963* (Six Months of the Buddhist Crisis in 1963), p. 211.

²³⁶ See Alfred Hassler, *Saigon, U.S.A.*, p. 36.

For a number of the more specialized American scholars of religion, including Amanda Porterfield, this unique Buddhist incident of self-immolation had influenced the American mentality. Also it became a sign for “a widespread transformation in consciousness beginning to occur in the United States” due to the following reasons:

In addition to being the most vivid pointers imaginable to the suffering going on in Vietnam, the immolations were signs of the deconstruction of cherished notions of selfhood associated with American individualism and with conventional forms of heroism, moral virtue, and salvation.²³⁷

The Buddhist immolations stirred the conscience of the Americans who were against the ignoble aspects of American involvement in the Vietnam War. American people began to see another side of the war, other than what had been presented to them by the American authorities. As a result, they became anti-war and distrustful of the authorities. Their distrustful and anti-war mentality and activism eventually contributed to the exposure of Watergate, the political scandal or “constitutional crisis” that “nearly paralyzed the White House staff” and brought the resignation of President Richard Nixon on August 9, 1974.²³⁸ In addition, Americans who were serious about the religious aspects of Buddhist practice might have wondered about the extraordinary remains of the heart of Thích Quảng Đức, which miraculously survived the crematory fire, even after the second time that it was subjected to the maximum crematory fire at the request of about fifty international journalists who were witnessing the event and reported it on and in the news. The Vietnamese Buddhists did have their unique tradition of practices and their spiritual achievements.

Despite the early knowledge of a few American people about Vietnamese Buddhism, the actual teaching and practice of the tradition only arrived in America during the early 1960s. Venerables Thích Nhất Hạnh and Thích Thiên Ân pioneered in introducing Vietnamese Buddhism during those initial years. In their individual ways, these Buddhist masters transmitted different aspects of the tradition to enrich American spiritual pursuits. Thích Nhất Hạnh promoted socially engaged Buddhism through Mindfulness Meditation. Thích Thiên Ân advocated Zen Buddhism through Mahayana inward contemplation in conjunction with Pure

²³⁷ See Amanda Porterfield, *The Transformation of American Religion*, p. 126.

²³⁸ See Arleen Keylin and Suri Boiangiu, *Front Page Vietnam as Reported by The New York Times*, p. 211; Johanna McGeary, “Inside Watergate’s Last Chapter,” *Time*, June 13, 2005, p. 31; Robert Shogan, “the Year That Shook America,” *The Americana Annual 1974*, pp. 22-27; and Herman Pritchett, “Watergate v. The Constitution: The Scandal Posed Serious Questions about the Power of Presidency,” *The Americana Annual 1974*, pp. 32-33.

Land Buddhism. The benefits and legacies brought by them continue to influence American Buddhism until today. In order to understand and to provide a learning experience concerning their various efforts of transmitting the tradition, I will devote this chapter to address the role and practice of these two Vietnamese Buddhist masters.

Thích Nhất Hạnh and Engaged Buddhism.

During the early 1960s, when Vietnamese Buddhism made its entry into the American religious landscape, establishing Vietnamese Buddhism in America was not the intention of the Vietnamese Buddhists. Rather, the Buddhist Sangha in Vietnam had received American educational scholarships to send Buddhist monks to America to study at the university level. It was also the case of Thích Nhất Hạnh, who came to the United States in 1961 to study and teach as a teaching and research assistant at Princeton and Columbia Universities.²³⁹ Though Nhất Hạnh belonged to the forty-first generation of the Lâm Tế Zen School, and was later recognized as a prolific Buddhist writer, a poet, a peace activist, and even a respected Zen master in the West, including in America, he initially had no intention of staying in the United States, much less of spreading any type of Buddhism here. After only two years of study, he left in 1963 and returned to Vietnam after being entreated by his Buddhist colleagues to return home in order to resolve the escalating tension in South Vietnam between the Catholic Diem government and Buddhist religious leaders. At the time, the Vietnam War was at its deadliest, and eventually would cost the precious lives of more than 58,000 American soldiers and more than three million Vietnamese, including 230,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and 1.1 million North Vietnamese soldiers.²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, his initial entry to America had paved the way for Nhất Hạnh to introduce Buddhism to Americans after he had made a subsequent visit to Washington D.C. in 1966. Again, rather than having any intention to spread Buddhism in America, he came to make a direct petition for peace, hoping to resolve the Vietnam War, which intricately involved the top

²³⁹ In mentioning his early days in New York while spending a quiet winter at Princeton, New Jersey, Nhất Hạnh remarked: “I am currently a teaching and research assistant at Columbia. I teach five hours a week and have office hours as well to meet with students and assist them in their research, for which I receive \$350 a month, which makes me relatively ‘wealthy.’” See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves, Journals 1962-1966*, p. 72.

²⁴⁰ See Micheal Clodfelter, *Vietnam in Military Statistics: A History of the Indochina Wars, 1772-1991*, p. 255.

American policymakers.²⁴¹ Because of his anti-war speeches and activities while touring North America and Europe, he was barred from returning until 2005, first by South Vietnam and later by the Communist regime, when he was allowed to make his first visit after thirty-nine years. In addition, his book *Vietnam, Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, published in America at the time, had further intensified the problem. His critical perspectives concerning the wartime conditions in Vietnam, as he personally perceived them, had provoked strong opposition from the authorities on all sides, who were trying to legitimize their reasons for going to war. Furthermore, his peace activism in the West had brought tension to Vietnam, where the Buddhist Sangha was frequently facing accusations and retaliations from the controlling regime. There had been an assassination attempt on Nhất Hạnh's life shortly before his international tour.²⁴² In order to protect Nhất Hạnh from further possible assassination or imprisonment, his colleagues from the Buddhist Sangha advised him not to return. They even issued an official statement distancing themselves from Nhất Hạnh in order to protect Vạn Hạnh University and his organization of Buddhist youths in Vietnam from retaliation, announcing:

On page 58 of *Vietnam: Lotus in the Sea of Fire* by Thích Nhất Hạnh, there is a reference to the "School of Youth for Social Services of Vạn Hạnh University." I wish to point out that all connections between that school and Vạn Hạnh University were severed in 1965, and that (in contradiction to the list on page 128), Thích Nhất Hạnh no longer serves this University as an advisor.

(Signed)

Dr. Thich Minh Chau, Rector,
Van Hanh University.²⁴³

In his exile, Nhất Hạnh eventually settled in France in 1969, and continued to make an effort to end the war by promoting peace through Buddhist practices extending to the realm of social activism, including helping Vietnamese refugees when they escaped the communist

²⁴¹ In his own words, Nhất Hạnh wrote "in May 1966, when I left Vietnam, I did not think I would be gone long. But I was stuck over here. I felt like a cell precariously separated from its body, like a bee separated from its hive. If a bee is separated from its hive, it knows that it cannot survive. A cell that is separated from its body will dry up and die. But I did not die because I had come to the West not as an individual but with the support of a Sangha and for the sake of the Sangha's visions. I came to call for peace." See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, pp. 22-23.

²⁴² See Sallie B. King, "Thich Nhat Hanh and the Unified Buddhist Church," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King eds., p. 324.

²⁴³ Thích Minh Châu, "Notice," *Vạn Hạnh University: A Newsletter for Friends and Neighbours*, Sept. 1967, p. 8.

regime of Vietnamese after 1975. The pattern for the religious transmission of Vietnamese Buddhism by Nhất Hạnh did not seem to fit into the categories of import, export, and baggage proposed by Jan Nattier. According to Jan Nattier, Buddhism, like other religions, was transmitted to new places, including North America, in three ways. Treating the religious motives underlying the transmission as economic commodities in her “economic metaphor,” Nattier labeled them as import, export, and baggage. In the imported label, the followers actively sought out the tradition through travel, meeting Asian visitors, and reading books, due to the “demand-driven” motives to benefit themselves. In the export label, the tradition was transmitted by a Buddhist missionary who actively tried to attract followers through “selling” a wide range of systematic settings. Under the baggage label, the tradition was brought along by the immigrants who arrived in North America in search of jobs, new opportunities, and a better future for their families.²⁴⁴ However, the transmission of Buddhism to America by Thích Nhất Hạnh does not seem to fit neatly into any of those labels. There was no “demand-driven” motive in the transmission by Nhất Hạnh in order to categorize it as an “import.” Moreover, it was not “export” Buddhism because Nhất Hạnh was not a missionary who tried to sell Buddhism as a religious commodity. Buddhist monks only gave teaching when requested. Furthermore, it was not quite “baggage” because Nhất Hạnh did not transmit the tradition as an Asian immigrant who came to North America in search of a job, a new opportunity, and a better future for his family. Rather, Nhất Hạnh had no intention of transmitting Buddhism to the North American people to begin with. He only began his Engaged Buddhism after he was suddenly forced into exile against his will, without knowing where to go and when he would be able to return to Vietnam. Those labels do not quite apply to Nhất Hạnh. In addition, labeling is a sensitive issue that can cause discomfort to the objects of the label. Religious teaching is not an economic commodity for sale. Moreover, transmitting a religious tradition is not quite the same as selling an economic commodity. As a result, those economic labels of import, export, and baggage, do not work well in offering reasons for the serious motives of religious transmission. A disaster can result when such an economic metaphor is similarly applied to the teaching profession. In the university system, though negotiating, with or without strikes, for a better salary is a part of the hiring package, a university professor will be more comfortable with the label of an “educational promoter” rather than the economic label of a “salary seeker.” If Nattier were comfortable with

²⁴⁴ See Jan Nattier, “Landscape of Buddhist America,” *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, pp. 189-190.

the possibility of being labeled as an “economic scholar of religion,” then she could ignore this sensitive issue of labeling. Regardless of any labels, the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition transmitted by Nhất Hạnh began the period of Engaged Buddhism in Europe and in the United States.

After a humble beginning in France with his Sweet Potatoes Community in Southern Paris in 1975, Nhất Hạnh established Plum Village in 1982. Located near Bordeaux, in Southwestern France, Plum Village grew from rustic eighteenth-century stone farm buildings on eighty acres of land and became a major center for his Buddhist practice in the direction of Engaged Buddhism. In addition to the usual monastic aim of being an abode of harmony and peace, Plum Village also intended to foster religious diversity. Since then, the center has experienced rapid growth, especially in recent years when it expanded its facilities to train the increasing monastic members and to accommodate the thousands of international retreatants annually.²⁴⁵ In 2004, there were more than seventy monastic members at Plum Village. As of 2006, Plum Village had a practicing community living there permanently consisting of about 150 monks, nuns, and resident lay-practitioners of various nationalities. In 1997, after three decades of visiting the United States to teach Buddhism to the North American people, Nhất Hạnh established the Maple Forest Monastery in Woodstock, Vermont, as his first major center in the United States. The center is situated on a property of 120 acres offered to him by a generous donor. A year later, in 1998, he founded the Green Mountain Dharma Center Nunnery in Hartland-Four-Corners, Vermont, after acquiring 120 acres of land by the help of the same donor. Also, he established the Mindfulness Practice Center of Queechee, Vermont, the first of its kind in the United States to operate without religious overtones in order to accommodate practitioners of Mindfulness Meditation from non-Buddhist faiths. As of 2006, twenty-two of his monastic members are administering those centers in Vermont. In May 2000, with the

²⁴⁵ Nhất Hạnh recalled his moderate beginning in Plum Village, saying: “In 1983, we held our first Summer Opening with 117 practitioners. We had not yet developed the practice of Touching the Earth or the daily practice with *gāthās* (meditation poems). However, we already had sitting meditation, walking meditation, tea meditation, and consultations. There were no monks or nuns yet, so I led all the practices from the beginning to the end, from A to Z. I had to walk around and correct people’s sitting posture, straightening each person’s back and neck. During our first Summer Retreat, there were a few Westerners among many Vietnamese people. In the second Summer Opening, there were 232 people. In the third 305, the seventh, 483, and in the ninth, there were 1,030. In 1996, 1,200 people came for the Summer Retreat, and in 1998, there were 1,450 practitioners. In the year 2000, the number increased to 1,800....People also came throughout the year to practice with us. In the first few years, Western practitioners stayed in the Upper Hamlet while Vietnamese and Asian practitioners stayed in the Lower Hamlet so they could enjoy traditional dishes of their homeland.” See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, p. 20.

support of the Vietnamese community in California, he established Deer Park Monastery on 434 acres of valley land in Escondido, San Diego, as his major center on the West Coast. By 2006, the center was opened to a variety of monastic activities and retreats for both Vietnamese and North Americans with more than forty monastic members in residence. Together with 230 other affiliated lay Buddhist groups in various regions, these Buddhist centers provide Nhất Hạnh the foundation to progress in training monastic members and offering retreats to a wide range of interested groups in various walks of modern life, including retreats for environmentalists, artists, children, teachers, college students, peace activists, inter-religious communities, psychotherapists, veterans of war, business leaders, prisoners, police officers, prison officers, judges, officers in the field of public protection, members of the Congress of the United States, neuroscientists, and many other retreats for couples, parents, and families. On September 11, 2006, aiming at future peace and trying to reduce violence, Nhất Hạnh even prepared a retreat for a Hollywood film crew when they agreed to practice Mindful Meditation for two weeks so that they could actualize their roles and promote peace in the soon-to-be-released epic movie, *Buddha*, based upon the perspective presented by his text, *Old Path White Clouds*. Under the guidance of Nhất Hạnh, these Buddhist centers continue to grow and to offer Mindful Meditation, spreading Engaged Buddhism to thousands of Eastern and Western retreatants of diverse nationalities, races, religions, genders, and ages.

Engaging Buddhism in the social realm, however, is not a new Buddhist practice. Even Nhất Hạnh himself asserted that it had been a part of Vietnamese Buddhism as he accredited the origination of Engaged Buddhism to King Trần Nhân Tông (1258-1308), the king who had abdicated his throne to become a Buddhist monk and later on to found the famous Vietnamese Trúc Lâm Zen lineage.²⁴⁶ This type of social engagement, however, had also been assumed by several prominent Vietnamese Buddhist figures who served as national Buddhist preceptors and advisors to the Vietnamese kings of the ancient time. As previously mentioned, during the Lý Dynasty (1010-1225), the strategic relocation of the capital of ancient Vietnam to Thăng Long, or Hanoi at the present time, was done under the advice of the Zen master Vạn-Hạnh (d. 1025).

²⁴⁶ See Andrea, "A Monk for All Seasons," *Shambhala Sun*, p. 56; Christopher S. Queen, *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, pp. 51, 37; and Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, p. 57. For the actively engaging role of Buddhism under the Trần dynasty, see Nguyễn Lang (Thích Nhất Hạnh), *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận*, vol. 1, pp. 416-417.



Figure 23. The Deer Park Monastery, San Diego, California. Photo Nguyễn Tạng.



Figure 24. Thích Nhất Hạnh and his Sangha in walking meditation. Photo Lộc Uyển.

One can anticipate the level of engagement of the ancient Buddhist masters by comparing such a move to the strategic designation of Washington D.C. from Philadelphia as the capital of the U.S. in 1800.

Nevertheless, as a Buddhist movement in the contemporary era, Engaged Buddhism began in Vietnam 1964, when Nhất-Hạnh established the “Tiếp-Hiện Order” or “Inter-Being Order” in order to promote peace and to protest against war in Vietnam, beginning with six lay Buddhists who were between twenty-two and thirty-two years of age and who were serving as the board of directors at the School of Youth for Social Service. However, the seeds of Engaged Buddhism had been sown a decade earlier when Nhất Hạnh joined the call for an actualization Buddhism, attempting to render further services to the changing society of Vietnam during the 1950s. In August 1962, in recalling the difficult beginning of the Order, Nhất Hạnh wrote: “For eight years, we tried to speak about a need for a humanistic Buddhism and a unified Buddhist church in Vietnam that could respond to the needs of the people. We sowed the seeds against steep odds, and while awaiting them to take roots, we endured false accusation, hatred, deception, and intolerance. Still, we refused to give up.”²⁴⁷ Undoubtedly, this effort of updating Buddhism was in line with and was also a continuation of what had been done earlier by the elder generations of Buddhist masters, who had sacrificed their individual monastic lineages and joined together adopting Quốc Ngữ in order to train the new generations of monastic members for a better future of the tradition during the period from the early 1900s until 1954, when Vietnam was divided into North and South along the seventeenth parallel. Even Nhất Hạnh himself was among the first fruits of the updated Vietnamese Buddhism. He and his Dharma brother were the first two young monks of his temple to obtain an education outside the monastery and attend university.²⁴⁸

A more concrete plan for the Order of Interbeing emerged when Nhất Hạnh and his group sorted out their ideas while retreating to the Phuong Bồi Hermitage, a retreat of sixty acres purchased in 1957 from the Mongtagnards, the minority Vietnamese in the highland region of Dalat, Center Vietnam. There in Phuong Bồi, Dalat, far from civilization, in the midst of rustic nature, majestically spell-binding mountain ranges, and immense wild tropical forests infested with insects and even leeches, together with meditation and discussions lightened up by an

²⁴⁷ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves, Journals 1962-1966*, p. 51.

²⁴⁸ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, p. 34; and Rick Fields, *Taking Refuge in L.A. Life in a Vietnamese Buddhist Temple*, p. 164.

occasional bonfire, Nhất Hạnh and his group compiled their idealistic plans into a more definite scheme for the Order of their Engaged Buddhism:

We continued our activism even after we moved to Phuong Boi. Though we spent many days exploring the forest, reciting poetry, and just enjoying ourselves, we also devoted hours to studying, discussing, and writing about a new, “engaged” Buddhism.²⁴⁹

At Phuong Bối, in addition to advocating a social aspect of Buddhism in his Engaged Buddhism, Nhất Hạnh and his group also sought an avenue of release from the social pressure and opposition forced upon them. Later on, when highlighting the pervasive stress of conventional society to his American audience, Nhất Hạnh also referred to his time at Phuong Boi as a time of being free from social conventions:

In the conventional world, we have to speak with restraint, guarding each word. Society dictates how we must eat, greet each other, walk, sit, and dress. When we came to Phuong Boi, we wanted to cast off all of these rules and conventions. We ran and yelled to shatter social restraints and prove to ourselves that we were free. Here in America, people greet each other by asking, “How are you?” Everyone agrees that the way it is asked is meaningless, but if you don’t ask, other feel as though something is missing. It’s especially odd when you visit a doctor. He asks, “How are you?” and you answer, “Fine, thank you.” If you were fine, why would you be visiting a doctor?²⁵⁰

Though not reaching the radical extent of American sexual liberation proposed by Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* or Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Nhất Hạnh and his group would have definitely appreciated Henry David Thoreau and his *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience* if he had been familiar with the early American Transcendentalists and their literature. Though idealistic, American Transcendentalist activities fostered certain positive democratic values that would have offered certain incentives to the plan for the Order promoted by Nhất Hạnh.

Based upon Bodhisattva practices, Nhất Hạnh required the members of the Order to apply Buddhist activities to engage in social services in order to provide comforts to people and to alleviate sufferings caused by war and poverty. In his own journal entry written on July 12,

²⁴⁹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves, Journals 1962-1966*, p. 51.

²⁵⁰ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves, Journals 1962-1966*, p. 29.

1965, Nhất Hạnh called for a Buddhist type of activist when he made the following justification to mobilize Buddhist youths for his proposal for Engaged Buddhism:

Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam teaches that good works do not need to be reserved for the pagoda, but can be extended to town and villages. Thu explained to Mr. Bay: “People are suffering so much that even the Buddha himself goes out to the people.” I was surprised at how skillfully Thu expressed these ideas. Buddha does not just sit in the temple anymore! Of course, the only reason he ever did was because people place him there...How can a Buddha or bodhisattva stay indoors? If Bhaisajya Guru (Medicine Buddha) spent all his time in the temple, who would heal the people’s wounds of body and spirit? Avalokitesvara must continue to move if she is to hear and respond to the cries of those who suffer. It does not make sense for students of the Buddha to isolate themselves inside the temple, or they are not his true students. Buddha is to be found in places of suffering. Thu said it perfectly. We do not need to borrow the words of theologians like Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Barth, or Martin Buber to tell us what to do. We are already on our way, bringing about a revolution in Buddhist teaching. Young people like Thu are leading the way into new streams of Buddhist thought and action. They are giving birth to engaged Buddhism.²⁵¹

In this Order, even meditation becomes a means for social engagement. In the usual monastic practice, meditation aims to generate peace and calmness by pacifying afflictive emotions and negative habits imposed by the complications of life. As a result, it might be perceived as a method for getting out of society, escaping from society, or leaving everything behind, including family and society and all of their complications. Rather than follow such a pessimistic perspective, Nhất Hạnh points out a brighter side of the practice, namely meditation as a method “to prepare for a reentering into society.”²⁵² Rather than escaping society, the members of the Order for Engaged Buddhism meditate in order to regain their energy and wisdom to reintegrate into society, helping to improve it. The Order, with its limited members and activities during wartime, ended ten years later, in 1974. According to Nhất Hạnh, this was the ten years of experimentation for the Order.²⁵³ When the Communists came to power in Vietnam in 1975, the whole Buddhist tradition, which had provided the foundation for all Buddhist activities,

²⁵¹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves, Journals 1962-1966*, pp. 196-197.

²⁵² See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 45.

²⁵³ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing*, p. 16.

including its social activities, was restricted and suppressed. The Order of Nhất Hạnh, engaged in social activism, lost its supporting ground and disappeared. Nevertheless, outside of Vietnam, as of 2003, after being restarted and promoted by Nhất Hạnh as a part of Engaged Buddhism in the West, the Order was reported to have more than seven hundred members worldwide.²⁵⁴

During this time in exile in the West, Nhất Hạnh has taken into serious consideration when to introduce Engaged Buddhism. With his experience after several years of traveling and teaching, he believed that Buddhism would be compatible with Western society and singled out the appealing Western values of science, free inquiry, and democracy. He envisioned that the West, because of those values, would make an effective use of Buddhism to further benefit human beings. He publicly asserted it in his talk to an American audience concerning peace:

I believe that the encounter between Buddhism and the West will bring about something very exciting, very important. There are important values in Western society, such as the scientific way of looking at things, the spirit of free inquiry, and democracy. An encounter between Buddhism and these values will give humankind something very new, very exciting.²⁵⁵

Rather than making an intellectual speculation, he has recognized a vivid pattern in the interaction between cultures, namely that the West has been quite capable of having worldwide influence by using ideas from non-Western cultures. In the past, instead of just replicating and copying, the West had been able to develop and produce new applications that were able to have regenerative effects on an international scale. At the present time, under the guidance of selflessness, or non-duality, the seed for peaceful life stemming from Buddhist teaching, Nhất Hạnh has envisioned that the West can again produce worldwide benefits without harming other civilizations. He candidly has high hope for Americans in leading the world in a positive direction. As a demonstration for his reasons, Nhất Hạnh pointed out the particular cases taken place in the history of our real world:

Printing was invented in China and movable metal type was invented in Korea, but when the West began printing, it became a very important means for communication. Gun powder was discovered by the Chinese, but when it came to be manufactured by Westerners, it changed the face of the earth. And tea that was discovered in Asia, when

²⁵⁴ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, p. 29.

²⁵⁵ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 83.

brought to the West, became tea bags. When combined with the Western way of doing things, the Buddhist principle of seeing and acting non-dualistically will totally change our way of life. The role of American Buddhists in bringing Buddhism into the encounter with Western civilization is very important for all of us.²⁵⁶

In considering the form of Buddhism to be introduced, Nhất Hạnh recognized that his Vietnamese Buddhism would not be completely assimilated into American culture. He also acknowledged that Buddhism had to be adjusted to suit the new culture, just as it had centuries before when it came to Vietnam. Moreover, as a Mahayana Buddhist master, Nhất Hạnh was well acquainted with the concept of eighty-four thousand Dharma entrances, which proposes that there are countless Buddhist Dharma entrances, as expedient means, to suit countless individuals.²⁵⁷ Thus, instead of insisting on a particular type of Buddhism in his native land of Vietnam, he went beyond the norm of cultural attachment and encouraged Americans to establish their own type of Buddhism. In 1985, during his tour of the United States to teach peace activists and meditation students, without being requested, Nhất Hạnh even made the establishment of an American tradition of Buddhism an issue for American Buddhists to consider:

Buddhism is not one. The teachings of Buddhism are many. When Buddhism enters one country, that country always acquires a new form of Buddhism. The first time I visited Buddhist communities in this country I asked a friend “Please show me your Buddha, your American Buddha.” The question surprised my friend, because he thought that the Buddha is universal. In fact, the Chinese have a Chinese Buddha, Tibetans have a Tibetan Buddha, and also the teaching is different. The teaching of Buddhism in this country is different from that in other countries. Buddhism, in order to be Buddhism, must be suitable, appropriate to the psychology and the culture of the society that it serves.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, pp. 83-84.

²⁵⁷ In his book, *Nẻo Vào Thiền Học (Zen Keys)*, Nhất Hạnh remarked, “In Buddhism, it is frequently said about the eighty-four thousand Dharma entrances (tám vạn bốn ngàn pháp môn) that the Dharma entrance is the door to the truth. A Dharma entrance is also skillful means. Thus, people often call it as “the Dharma entrance of skillful means.” In Zen, people clearly acknowledge the significance of the suitable and appropriate skillful means in training and in generating enlightenment. The ability to select the appropriate and creative skillful means of a Zen master contributes not a small part in the course of making the flower of awakening blossom in the disciple.”(60) See also Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Đạo Phật Đi Vào Cuộc Đời (Buddhism Enters into Life)*, p. 149.

²⁵⁸ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 84.

Undoubtedly, a suitable and appropriate form of Buddhism to American psychology and culture will generate an interest in learning about Buddhism. Nevertheless, having an impulsive interest in Buddhism is not sufficient to produce a lasting Buddhist tradition. As envisioned by Nhất Hạnh, in order to have an American form of Buddhism, Americans have to assert themselves in the effort of establishing Buddhism. Otherwise, any recent form of Buddhism is just another form of foreign Buddhist groups, similar to those of other temporarily-exotic, self-contained religious groups, and will fade out of the scene as time goes on, especially when the original interest wanes and is replaced by a more fashionable interest. Nhất Hạnh has witnessed with his own eyes while visiting Europe and America that in a few small Chinese or Japanese Zen centers scattered here and there, trainers had their practices replicated exactly as those in China or in Japan, including food, dress, sutras for chanting, daily language, and so on. He believes that those types of Asian Zen would “not be accepted and flourish here” in America, because according to him, “Zen is a creativity, not an imitation.”²⁵⁹ Moreover, one cannot create a Buddhist tradition out of reading the scriptures alone. Also, one cannot create it by mere intellectual debates and speculations. Furthermore, one cannot get it by relying on others or by sporadic practices. Rather, one has to work and dedicate one’s own efforts to make it happen. In other words, one has to make oneself a serious Bodhisattva, who strives to attain enlightenment through Buddhist practices while trying to benefit others. At least, one can follow the traditional way of transmitting Buddhism by becoming a Buddhist monk or nun, so that one can submerge into and experience Buddhism in a complete manner, and then assume the monastic responsibility to carry on the Buddha Dharma to benefit the Buddhist followers. It would be difficult to have a Buddhist tradition without having at least a monk or a nun and a center to begin with. Nhất Hạnh shows Americans the way to make it happen, by summing up as follows:

My question was a very simple question. “Where is your Bodhisattva? Show me an American Bodhisattva.” My friend was not capable of doing that. “Show me an American monk, an American nun, or an American Buddhist Center.” All these things are not apparent yet. I think we can learn from other Buddhist traditions, but you have to create your own Buddhism. I believe that out of practice you will have your own Buddhism very soon.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Nẻo Vào Thiền Học*, p. 148.

²⁶⁰ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 84.

It is correct that Nhất Hạnh has gone around to several countries to help the Buddhist laity to practice and to find peace in their daily activities. As a master, his task is helping the fellow Buddhists in practices. However, it is a mistake to assume that his sole intention is promoting lay Buddhist practice in the West. Rather, he is devoting his effort to training monks and nuns who in turn will transmit his Buddhist practices further to the wider Buddhist population. He openly makes the remarks, saying:

In the beginning, in Plum Village, there were only laypeople, so they were my principle disciples. When I ordained monks and nuns, the monastic became the primary focus of attention.²⁶¹

The lay Buddhists do not always commit themselves to the task of transmitting the Dharma. Also they cannot be trained twenty-four hours a day, 365-days a year. They can always leave the center to go back to use their money saved in the bank and to their own homes. On the contrary, the monks and nuns are “100-percent committed.” After having given up everything, they shave their heads to enter the monastic life. They have nowhere to go and commit themselves to the practice fully. Nhất Hạnh admits that their practice might be weak at the beginning. Nevertheless, by committing all energy and time to the practice without thinking about “their position, power, or things like that,”²⁶² they progress quickly and can assume the task of transmitting the Dharma to the general public much sooner.

As a Buddhist master, a teacher, Nhất Hạnh has envisioned his task as providing a most suitable and beneficial Buddhist practice to American people so that an American tradition of Buddhism would be possible. In view of that, he decided to introduce Engaged Buddhism through his Buddhist organization of the Tiếp Hiện Order, or the Order of “Interbeing,” which had a legacy of twenty years of experience and believed that his Engaged Buddhism “may be accepted here in the West” because it had many suitable conditions to modern society and met the expectations of American people.²⁶³ In the name of the Order, *Tiếp* means “to be in touch” or “to continue.” *Hiện* means “the present time” and also “to make real, to manifest realization.” Without having an exact equivalence in English, Nhất Hạnh used the word “interbeing” taken from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. In combining “interbeing,” Nhất Hạnh encompassed the compounded meaning of “mutual” and “to be,” denoting the Buddhist concept of Dependent

²⁶¹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I am Home*, p. 29.

²⁶² See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I am Home*, p. 29.

²⁶³ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 85.

Origination, *pratityasamuttpada*, at the Mahayana levels of interconnectedness and interpenetration, where all existences are mutually related and conditioned. In American culture, under the philosophical influence of Descartes, people tended to accept their individualism as a kind of psychological isolation, “I think, therefore I am.” However, an individual is also connected and dependent on others, especially in modern society. Nhất Hạnh, by introducing Americans to the term “interbeing,” suggested a more inclusive Buddhist perception of the individual at the social level appropriate to modern times, namely “I am, therefore you are. You are, therefore I am....We inter-are.”²⁶⁴ Indeed, no individual can survive without interacting with and depending on other social and environmental elements.

Nhất Hạnh seemed to be optimistic about the American scientific way of looking at things without being aware that this particular scientific perspective had also been the cause of the American’s psychological isolation. Since the early establishment of the United States, science has been embraced and promoted by the American Founding Fathers to unlock, demystify, and then control nature for human benefits:

Many of the Founding Fathers who shaped the new republic of the United States of America were Deists. Coming of age in the years following the Great Awakening, and educated for the most part in the two decades preceding the American Revolution these men all held in high regard works produced by the trinity of English Enlightenment, Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and John Locks, whose works were full of optimism that human beings through their own reason and observation could unlock the laws of nature and thereby control it for human good. Among the founders who rejected the faith of the Puritan Fathers for the Enlightenment were Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, all of whom, with the exception of Franklin and Paine, had attended college during the period from 1755 to 1775.²⁶⁵

Rather than being in harmony with nature, science, as an established tradition, has been promoted in an attempt to conquer and master nature for the sole benefit of human beings. The effort has gradually isolated human beings from nature. This scientific quest to control nature coupled with the Cartesian ideal of individuality, namely, “I think, therefore I am,” has further

²⁶⁴ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 87.

²⁶⁵ See Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America*, p. 161.

intensified the psychological isolation in American culture. Whether or not Nhất Hạnh was aware of this intensification of psychological isolation, his proposal of Interbeing had contributed to the fulfillment of a need for a balance among human beings and also between human beings and nature, namely all and everyone are mutually and interconnected to one another. Thus, it is not an accident to see Engaged Buddhism being embraced to deal with environmental issues by the circle of American peace activists since its introduction by Nhất Hạnh.

Furthermore, Nhất Hạnh proposed that his Engaged Buddhism through the Tiếp Hiện Order is compatible to the modern society of American culture. This compatibility is extended to the American psychology, which will allow the practice to be accepted and flourish. His reasons can be traced back to the mission of Order of Engaged Buddhism, including its principles and practices. The mission of the Interbeing Order, despite its old establishment in 1964 in Vietnam, appears to match the practical expectations of religion in the modern American setting. Back then, rather than aiming to preserve certain Buddhist doctrines or certain Vietnamese cultural Buddhist traditions of the remote past, the Order sought to apply Buddhism to modern life in an effective way through study and experimentation. Instead of neglecting the individual or the society, it sought to benefit both. Instead of promoting the Buddhism as a primary religious goal, it aimed to benefit people in the society. The original Charter of the Order maintained that evidence in its mission: “The aim of Tiếp Hiện is to study, experiment, and apply Buddhism in an intellectual and effective way to modern life, both individual and societal.”²⁶⁶ Furthermore, as its foundational principles, the Order even insisted on non-attachment to views, direct practice-realization, appropriateness, and skillful means, which would further enhance benefits pursued by the mission of the Order.

By experimenting with Buddhism, Nhất Hạnh specifically meant to understand the spirit of science and free inquiry which continues to champion and dominate the world, especially in North America, since the Great Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Nhất Hạnh himself, being the among the earliest generation of Vietnamese Buddhist monks who became acquainted with Western education during the French colonial period,²⁶⁷ had embraced the scientific attitude of experimentation, which also entailed systematic methods for practice with tangible and

²⁶⁶ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, p. 16.

²⁶⁷ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Nẻo Vào Thiền Học*, p. 10

verifiable results. He found the harmonious compatibility between science and Buddhism, especially through the *Kalama Sutra*,²⁶⁸ which advised against accepting ideas without personal experimentation. Having the *Kalama Sutra* already embedded in the original Charter of the Interbeing Order, Nhất Hạnh was confident that the mission of his Order would still meet the expectations of the American scientific minds. In his commentaries for American audiences, he highlighted the experimental features of the Charter as follows:

Experiment as used in the Charter denotes the application of Buddhist principles and the methods to one's own life in order to have direct personal understanding of them. This type of understanding differs from an understanding derived from theoretical study that primarily relies on the intellect. It is only through this direct experimentation that one can know whether these principles and methods are appropriate and effective. The *Kalama Sutra* advises neither to believe nor act without the spirit of experimentation. The results of our practice should be tangible and verifiable.²⁶⁹

In the United States, those who had grown to embrace the central message of the American Founding Fathers during the Great Awakening in the eighteenth century, namely the call for people "to trust only in 'self-examination' and their own private judgments, even though, 'your Neighbors growl against you and reproach you,'"²⁷⁰ can recognize the appeal of a very similar spirit of experimentation in the Buddhist message conveyed in the Order established by Nhất Hạnh.

In principle, the Order of Interbeing is clearly built upon a Buddhist foundation because Nhất Hạnh had derived its fundamental tenets from major Buddhist sutras. In addition to the *Kalama Sutta*, Nhất Hạnh continuously made references to various popular texts in both Theravada and Mahayana traditions throughout his commentaries concerning the Order of Interbeing, including the *Anapanasati Sutta*, the *Satipatthana Sutta*, the *Dharmapada*, the *Avantamsaka Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, and the *Lotus Sutra*. This fusion of Buddhist teachings indicates the influence of the traditional way of unifying the Buddha Dharma throughout the history of Vietnamese Buddhism. Though using texts from both Theravada and Mahayana

²⁶⁸ In brief, the *Kalama Sutta* says that one should not believe in anything simply from oral repetitions, traditions, rumors, religious scriptures, authority of teacher or elders, and that one should only accept and follow it after careful observations, analysis, and personal experiment that it is beneficial to one's own and to all others. For details, see the *Kalama Sutta*, in *Anguttara Nikaya*, vol.1, pp.188-193.

²⁶⁹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, p. 17.

²⁷⁰ See Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America*, p. 145.

traditions for inspiration, the Order considered no particular sutras as its basic texts.

Nevertheless, it has a Mahayana foundation due to the Bodhisattva ideal as its core. Nhất Hạnh suggested that such an open spirit, which can be termed as being eclectic at the present time, would allow the Order to progress and open to a wider participation:

The Order is open to all forms of activities that can revive the true spirit of understanding and compassion in life. It considers the true spirit of Buddhism more important than any Buddhist institution or tradition. Inspired by the Bodhisattva ideal, the members of the Order of Interbeing seek to transform themselves in order to help change society in the direction of increased understanding and compassion.²⁷¹

This openness to all activities, regardless of the established institutions and traditions, can also be viewed as an example of the American spirit of free inquiry and democracy. In January 1844, Henry David Thoreau had initially introduced Mahayana Buddhism to an American audience in the Transcendentalist chronicle, *The Dial*, because he was attracted to the democratic spirit presented in the chapter, “Parable of the Medicine Herbs,” of the *Lotus Sutra*,²⁷² namely that human beings could always learn and benefit from the Dharma in their own manner according to their individual capacities, just as various medicinal herbs can always absorb the water from the same the rain according to their individual abilities and then produce their unique medicinal potencies according to their distinctive nature. In Vietnam, being aware of the *Lotus Sutra*, Nhất Hạnh envisioned a similar democratic spirit being present when one could still participate in the Order without being subjected to any systematic arrangement of the Buddhist teachings as proposed by various schools of Buddhism. It also implied that one does not need to renounce one’s personal belief or practice while participating in the Order. Moreover, one could contribute ideas to make more meaningful activities without being limited by monastic restrictions. The Order was established primarily for the lay Buddhists and remained free of the restrictions allowed for them. The spirit of free inquiry is prominent as Nhất Hạnh allowed that members have the freedom to seek, “to realize the Dharma spirit within primitive Buddhism as well as the development of that spirit throughout the Sangha’s history and the teachings in all Buddhist traditions.”²⁷³ When the Buddhist aim was peace, as Nhất Hạnh had sought after his attempt to reconcile war and social crises in Vietnam through the Order of Interbeing, then the

²⁷¹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, p. 19.

²⁷² See Henry David Thoreau, “The Preaching of the Buddha”, *The Dial*, pp. 391-401.

²⁷³ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, p. 8.

Dharma practiced by all Buddhist traditions became a means to generate peace. Thus, a lay Buddhist was free to seek after and embark on the most suitable Dharma.

The spirit of free inquiry is also reflected in the fourteen precepts established in order for the Order to function as an organization. The members of the Order observe fourteen precepts, and gather together to recite them every two weeks. The first seven precepts deal with the mind, the next two with speech, and the last five with the body. However, Nhất Hạnh established those not as rules or religious prohibitions to control bodily actions. Since the members of the Order are voluntary, participating by their own decision (without gaining any special monastic status, not even shaving their heads or having a special robe), they have the liberty to make up their own mind in order to observe their precepts. Without any materialistic incentives, it would be difficult to enforce the precepts as prohibitions. Rather, those are guidelines motivated by compassion, a type of unconditional love without asking for anything in return, and by extending beyond the monastic boundary to reach various paths of society in order to alleviate suffering. They are intended to guide the mind, the root of all bodily and vocal actions. Regulating the mind is always a major practice in Buddhism:

Most religious rules or prohibitions begin with the control of bodily actions. Thus, there are the traditional commandments not to kill, not to steal, and so on. The Tiếp Hiện precepts begin with the mind, and the first seven precepts deal with problems associated with it. This is not at variance with Buddhism. “The mind is the King of all Dharmas,” say the sutras. “The mind is the painter who paints everything.” The Tiếp Hiện precepts are very close to the Eightfold Path, the basic teaching of both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.²⁷⁴

When one becomes mindful of these rules, they will act as guides in generating positive mental virtues like toleration and compassion, which one can verify for oneself. The first precept goes, “Do not be idolatrous about or bound up in any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. All systems of thoughts are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.” Buddhism even speaks of its own teachings as a raft to cross over the river rather than an absolute truth to be worshipped and safeguarded. In studying and observing this precept, Nhất Hạnh points out that one will recognize that “knowledge can be an obstacle for a true understanding, and views are a

²⁷⁴ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, pp. 19-20.

barrier of insight.”²⁷⁵ As a result, one learns to become free of clinging to one’s own view, a subject dealt with by various sutras including the *Kalama Sutra* and the *Vajracchedika Sutra*. Also, one learns that attachment to views is the cause of dogmatism and fanaticism, which have brought much tragedy and suffering around the world. At the same time, when one enters the true dimension of Buddhism, there is a total openness and unconditioned tolerance. Again, this Buddhist dimension is compatible to the spirit of free inquiry in American culture.

In practice, Nhất Hạnh introduces Mindfulness Meditation as the main method for his Order. The seventh precept of his Order has mindfulness meditation as its core, namely: “Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Learn to practice breathing in order to regain composure of body and mind, to practice mindfulness, and to develop concentration and understanding.”²⁷⁶ Nhất Hạnh even insists that this practice of mindfulness is essential to the survival of the Order. Without mindfulness, other precepts cannot be completely implemented. As a Buddhist organization, the members of Order still aim to achieve wisdom, a clear and penetrating understanding so that one cannot only be free of fear, anxiety, and passion, but also gain more confidence and freedom in helping others effectively. In Buddhism, this wisdom can only be gained only through a high stage of mental concentration which begins with mindfulness, a type of Buddhist meditation. With his social activism in mind, Nhất Hạnh believes that mindfulness meditation should not be restricted to a particular meditation hall nor performed in front of a scripture in a monastic setting. Rather, it should be extended to cover various actions of an individual’s social life, including walking, sitting, standing, lying down, working, and resting.²⁷⁷ These are all occasions to practice mindfulness.

Originally, Nhất Hạnh was trained from Vietnamese Buddhism, which has a long-standing tradition of unifying Dharma with the combination of Zen-Pure Land as the predominant practice. Even now, at Từ Hiếu Temple in Huế, where Nhất Hạnh had taken his monastic training, the Zen-Pure Land is still the main tradition of practice. Nhất Hạnh, however, chose to introduce Mindfulness Meditation to the United States as a single Zen method because it would make the most contributions to fulfill the American need where Pure Land could not, namely because of the American psychological mentality of being independent. Pure Land Buddhism with its devotional appearances seemed to bring no novel contributions to America,

²⁷⁵ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, p. 27.

²⁷⁶ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 94 and *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, p. 42

²⁷⁷ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, p. 42.

where Christianity, as a main religious tradition, has already offered similar devotional practices. Moreover, it did not seem to bring any inspirations and incentives to the American tradition of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Nhất Hạnh had personally witnessed this unappealing prospect when he visited the American Buddhist Academy, a Japanese Temple of the Pure Land sect, in New York, in October 1962, during his studies at Columbia:

I have to admit that I didn't find the sermon very inspiring. Such sermons will hardly be effective in sowing seeds of Buddhism in America. The Pure Land sect emphasizes seeking salvation from what appears to be an external source. This approach is familiar to Europeans and Americans, who have plenty of seminaries and eloquent ministers to spread the words of Christian salvation. The Pure Land sect's efforts to look like a Western church seem to me to reflect their lack of understanding of the true American needs. Americans place a high value on independence. Their children are encouraged to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. A Buddhist approach that emphasizes, as Zen does, self-effort and self-realization to build, develop, and awaken the individual seems to be better suited to the American spirit. Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism have the appearance of considering that humans are too weak to achieve salvation without divine intervention.²⁷⁸

On the other hand, Nhất Hạnh had also noticed that Zen Buddhism had already made an appeal in the United States. Right in New York City, Daisetz Taitaro Suzuki, after coming to Columbia University in 1951, had already popularized Japanese Zen among the American public, especially educated individuals. However, those young people and Western intellectuals did not seem to absorb the full positive benefit of Zen. He pondered that perhaps after witnessing the tragic destruction created by scientific weapons of the two World Wars in the West, especially that of the atomic bombs of World War II, the people had had enough of material civilization and the rationalist way of life. Then, he saw the crises and revolts of the hippy era and the LSD-psychedelic generation as reactions to the culmination of technological civilization based upon logic and science, which linked the Vietnam War and the Cold War together. Also, he noted those ideas which had lured countries of Zen to abandon their spiritual life to chase after the fame of science. Perhaps, with the looming threat of the disastrous atomic destruction of a Third World War, accompanied by "the spiritual bankruptcy of man" in both the East and

²⁷⁸ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves, Journals 1962-1966*, p. 96.

the West, Nhất Hạnh conceived that American people would begin to seek an alternative, finding certain interests in Zen. In addition, Nhất Hạnh also noticed the frenetic pace of industrial society in America had exhausted the people, including the educated people, and made them long for a more tranquil type of life, “a thirst for serenity and self-contentment.”²⁷⁹ He was inclined to believe that Zen could fulfill that need by adding a spiritual element as a guide to the human quest to find a new cultural direction out of destruction.

However, ethnic Zen was not a complete solution. It was a burden for Americans to practice Buddhism while trying to align themselves with uncomfortable cultural features of non-American cultures, especially in the long run. It prevented creativity and hindered Buddhism from taking root among Americans. That was the reason for Nhất Hạnh to encourage his American audience to consider their own American form of Buddhism, a form that would make them most comfortable. As a result, during the 1980s, while living in exile in the West, in order to provide a compatible solution to that American need, Nhất Hạnh introduced his Mindfulness Meditation along with his Engaged Buddhism. This Zen method was simple and free of an emphasis on cultural baggage so that American creativity would be encouraged. Nhất Hạnh pointed out that in Zen, creativity should take the place of cultural tendencies, saying:

Here and there in Europe and America, I have seen a few small Zen centers directed by Chinese or Japanese trainers, and their practices are replicated exactly as those in China or in Japan, including food, dress, sutras for chanting, the daily language, and so on. I do not believe that the Asian Zen can be accepted and flourish here. Zen is a creation, not an imitation.²⁸⁰

As a demonstration for creativity, Nhất Hạnh introduced the mindfulness *gāthās* (verses) to be used in meditation. In Zen Buddhism, meditation in action has been well known since the time of Hui-Neng, the sixth Chinese Zen Patriarch, who practiced mindfulness while cooking, cleansing, and performing other chores in the kitchen of his monastery. With his creativity, Nhất Hạnh offered the *gāthās* of mindfulness to help extend meditation into action beyond the monastic settings to the realm of the householders, reaching almost every usual activity in daily life. In addition to the traditional *gāthās*, Nhất Hạnh also created several new ones. Even the *gāthās* of mindfulness used by Nhất Hạnh have been adjusted to the Western way of life. First

²⁷⁹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Zen Key*, pp. 148-149; *Nẻo Vào Thiền Học*, pp. 231-232; and *Fragrant Palm Leaves, Journals 1962-1966*, pp. 96-97.

²⁸⁰ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Nẻo Vào Thiền Học*, p. 148.

of all, they are not rules to follow. Rather, they are merely suggestions to those who can use them at their own convenience in gaining mindfulness, so that the purposes of dwelling in the present moment and the deep awareness of action can be achieved. A number of them come from the inventive effort of Nhất Hạnh, just like the following *gāthā* for driving a car:

Before starting the car,
I know where I am going.
The car and I are one.
If the car goes fast, I go fast.²⁸¹

Or the following *gāthā* to be recited in order to be mindful of one's own constructive speech before picking up the telephone:

Words can travel across thousands of miles.
They are intended to build up understanding and love.
Each word should be a jewel,
A beautiful tapestry.²⁸²

These particular *gāthās* are nowhere to be found in Buddhist scriptures, since the car and the telephone did not exist during the time of the Buddha to be mentioned in ancient Buddhist scriptures. However, they are simple, very easy to remember, and can be quite practical in helping individuals to be mindful while talking on the telephone or driving a car, especially in America, where driving to work is essential, and having conversations using the telephone is a daily routine.

Instead of being ambivalent about departing from the traditional Buddhist practice by developing his own *gāthās*, Nhất Hạnh considers that it is the genius of practicing Buddhism intelligently, a part of being creative:

In my temple, I was the first monk to ride a bicycle. At that time, there were no gathas to recite while riding a bicycle. We have to practice intelligently, to keep the practice up to date, so recently I wrote a gatha you can use before you start your car. I hope you will find it helpful.²⁸³

²⁸¹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 66; and *Nhật Tụng Thiền Môn Năm 2000*, p. 212.

²⁸² See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 95; and *Nhật Tụng Thiền Môn Năm 2000*, p. 211.

²⁸³ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Being Peace*, p. 66. In the list of gathas published in the Vietnamese version of the chanting and recitation book by Nhất Hạnh, his gatha for riding a bicycle is: "Sit straight on the bike, stable and balanced. Merit is cultivated with wisdom; practice and discourse are compatible." See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Nhật Tụng Thiền Môn Năm 2000*, p. 212.

Nhất Hạnh even composed a *gāthā* to be used with the computer, the most revolutionarily technological invention of the twentieth century. His *gāthā* goes as follows:

Turn on the computer,
A thinking mind contacts the consciousness,
May habits be transformed
To foster understanding and love.²⁸⁴

With his additional *gāthās*, Nhất Hạnh also believes that they will keep the process of mindfulness active because the memory will not run out of fresh and practical gathas when it gets used to the old ones. Of course, one can always use the more traditional *gāthās*. They are compiled in *The Vinaya (Discipline) for Male and Female Novices*, which is also known as the *Little Manual of Discipline*, under the heading of first subtext titled, “The Essential Discipline for Daily Use.” As a tradition in Vietnamese Buddhism, the *gāthās*, which have been used in the temple since the time of waking up in early morning to the time of lying down to sleep at night, are taught to the novices as a part of their monastic training. In standard Vietnamese monasteries, they have frequently been memorized and recited every other day in the morning session of recitation as a part of the Vinaya, the disciplinary rules. In addition to guiding the novices in their monastic activities, the gathas also help to cultivate selflessness and compassion toward all sentient beings because each gatha, after instructing the performance of each activity, makes its dedication to all sentient beings. For example, the standard *gāthā* for inviting the bell to sound, the monastic way of striking the bell, goes as follows:

May the sound of the bell penetrate deeply into the cosmos.
In even the darkest iron cells, may it be heard by all.
The hearing and its objects tranquilize and purify, reaching perfect penetration.
May all beings attain noble enlightenment.²⁸⁵

In the last line of the *gāthā*, as the dedication is made toward sentient beings, it is a cultivation of Bodhicitta, the mind aiming for enlightenment while seeking to benefit sentient beings. Thus, those *gāthās* traditionally function not only as a guide in being mindful of one’s own actions, but also as an excellent method of cultivating Bodhicitta, a requirement for the Bodhisattva path of Mahayana Buddhism. Nowadays, even in standard Vietnamese Buddhist temples in the United

²⁸⁴ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Nhật Tụng Thiền Môn Năm 2000*, p. 212.

²⁸⁵ See Thích Trí Quang, “Tỳ Ni Nhật Dụng Thiết Yếu [The Essential Discipline for Daily Use],” *Luật Sa Di, Sa Di Ni*, p. 976.

States like Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế (The International Buddhist Monastic Institute) in California, where I was trained, monks still keep this tradition of reciting these gathas every other day, during the morning chanting session.

Nhất Hạnh also remarked that his novice training, when he entered the monastery at the age of sixteen, began with learning precisely from the *Little Manual of Discipline*, which includes those traditional *gāthās*. In order to highlight the significance of the *gāthās* in Zen practice, Nhất Hạnh revealed his own monastic experience with them. Nhất Hạnh recalled that initially he found no Zen philosophy in the text as he read over it upon receiving it from the monk who was in charge of his case and who was supposed to teach him some Zen methods when he presented his personal request. In the first part of the manual, *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use*, he found only the *gāthās*, each of which as a mental formula intended to bring awareness of being (*samyaksmirti*) accompanying each act performed by the novice. The *gāthā* accompanying the act of washing one's hands was: "Washing my hands, I wish that all sentient beings should have very pure hands, capable of holding the Truth of Enlightenment." Nhất Hạnh reported his disappointment. Moreover, being familiar with Western education, he even considered that the traditional monastic teaching of using that particular *Little Manual* was old-fashioned. Regardless of his initial distastefulness, he memorized those *gāthās* in that manual after learning from another senior novice that it was the way to follow and had to be accepted in order to learn Zen there. In spite of his confusion and doubt, after almost thirty years of Zen practice, he insisted that the manual is truly essential to Zen and Buddhism as a whole:

When I was seventeen years old, I thought that *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use* was designed for children or for people at the fringes of Zen. I did not attach any more importance to this method than as a preparation. Today, twenty-nine years later, I know that *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use* is Zen in itself and is the very essence of Buddhism.²⁸⁶

Moreover, Nhất Hạnh clarified that those *gāthās* in *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use* were Zen tools to bring miracles of mindfulness. He insisted that mindfulness underlies the Buddhist doctrine of enlightenment. Others saw no differences from their usual activities and those similar daily activities done by the Buddha, namely walking, eating, washing, sitting down, and so forth. However, maintaining mindfulness or awareness while performing those normal

²⁸⁶ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Nẻo Vào Thiền Học*, p. 14; and *Zen Key*, p. 21.

activities highlighted the distinction. Nhất Hạnh quoted mindfulness as a core Buddhist practice using the reply of the Buddha to one of those who missed that distinction, saying: “Sir, there is a difference. When we walk, we are aware of the fact that we walk; when we eat, we are aware of the fact that we eat, and so on. When others walk, eat, wash themselves, or sit down, they are not aware of what they do.”²⁸⁷

In addition to illuminating the practicality of those *gāthās* and their traditional use in a monastic setting, Nhất Hạnh also offered the authoritative source of the text in order to establish the practice as a valid Buddhist tradition. In recalling his first entry to the monastery in which all novices, including him, had to study and memorize *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use*, he mentioned that the text was written by the Buddhist monk Doc The, a Zen master, from Bao Son. He also highlighted that it was used to awaken his mind while doing a task by having those *gāthās* to guide the novices in taking hold of their own consciousness.²⁸⁸ An examination of the colophon of *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use* indicated that Độc Thễ compiled those gathas when he was a Buddhist monk at Pao-hua Shan (Jewel Flower Mountain). More extensive research has revealed that Độc Thễ (1610-1697) was a famous Vinaya master when he compiled the texts at Pao-hua Shan, Nanking, China. At the time, Pao-hua Shan was renowned in its discipline and was even considered as the “West Point” of Chinese Buddhism.²⁸⁹ In general, such an exemplary monastery, with such superb and dignified conduct, which became the model for other monasteries, is respectfully regarded as a Zen monastery. Nhất Hạnh seemed to have referred to Độc Thễ as a “Zen Master” because of this. However, Master Độc Thễ also embarked on other Buddhist practices beside Zen meditation. Originally, Độc Thễ entered the monastery after gaining inspiration from the teaching of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Later on, he was devoted to studying the Vinaya, the disciplinary rules that govern monastic daily life, and was ordained by a famous Vinaya Master Samadhi Tịnh Quang (Chin-Guang). He seriously observed the Vinaya and set himself as a model in order to inspire others to observe the Vinaya. To further promote sublime monastic conduct, Độc Thễ also led the ninety-day Pure Land retreat of *Pratyutpanna Samadhi*, a combined practice of visualizing while walking in meditation and reciting the name of Amitābha Buddha for an immediate vision of all the present Buddhas in all

²⁸⁷ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Nẻo Vào Thiền Học*, p. 15; and *Zen Key*, p. 21.

²⁸⁸ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, pp. 6-7.

²⁸⁹ See Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900-1950*, p. 289.

the cardinal directions.²⁹⁰ He even added a short mantra to accompany each *gāthā*, like the *gāthā* for drinking water, which made Buddhist monks seriously mindful and feel not too distant from being scientific at the same time: “The Buddha observed that there were eighty-four thousand microbes in a bowl of water. Drinking it without reciting a mantra is like eating a being’s flesh.” Then the short mantra went, “Án [Om] phạ tất ba ra ma ni sa-ha [svaha].”²⁹¹ Thus, in addition to being a Vinaya master, Độc Thễ also practiced Pure Land Buddhism and Tantrism.

Độc Thễ compiled *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use* for the same purpose, trying to promote monastic conduct in Buddhist monasteries and to prevent the Vinaya from declining. The authoritative source of his gathas was the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*. He drew most of the gathas from the extensive list of gathas enumerated in Book Eleven, “Purifying Practice,” of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*.²⁹² In addition to the *gāthā* for washing one’s hand previously mentioned, one can find *gāthās* for various activities of daily life including brushing one’s teeth, putting on clothes or robes, bathing, shaving, leaving home, being on the road, encountering difficulties, seeing various natural objects of the environment, meeting various types of people, entering meditation halls, sitting in meditation, circumambulating the stupas, eating a meal, sleeping, and so forth. These *gāthās* accommodate the Bodhisattvas of both monastic members and householders. The one for the householders while putting on adornments goes as follows:

When putting on adornments,
One should wish that all beings
Give up phony decorations,
And reach the abode of truth.

The *gāthā* for the monastic members upon receiving High Ordination is:

Receiving High Ordination,
One should wish that all beings

²⁹⁰ See Thích Minh Cảnh, *Tự Điển Phật Học Huệ Quang*, vol. 3, p. 2668Đ, for the biography of Độc Thễ. Also see his vol. 2, pp. 543-44, for the textual history of the *Pratyutpanna Samadhi* drawn from the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-sammukhavasthita-samadhi-sutra* (the *Sutra on Establishing the Vision of the Present Buddhas in the Ten Directions*), an early Mahayana sutra translated into Chinese in 179 CE.

²⁹¹ See Thích Trí Quang, “Tỳ Ni Nhật Dụng Thiết Yếu [The Essential Discipline for Daily Use],” *Luật Sa Di, Sa Di Ni*, p. 980.

²⁹² This origin from the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* had been mentioned by the late Venerable Thích Đức Niệm when he taught the text to his own disciples. Also see Thích Trí Tịnh, *Kinh Hoa Nghiêm (Avataṃsaka Sutra)*, vol. 2, pp. 152-177; and Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sutra*, pp. 312-329.

Fulfill all skillful means of liberation,
And master the supreme Dharma.

And, the *gāthā* on the occasion of using or seeing flowers is:

Seeing flowers blooming,
One should wish that all beings'
Miraculous spiritual powers
Blossom like blooming flowers.²⁹³

A list of similar *gāthās* is extensive. Also, the popular *gāthās* for taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, ubiquitous to the concluding part of all Mahayana chanting sessions, are also drawn directly from this chapter. The dedications to all beings repeated in each *gāthā* indicate concern for others and the intention to generate compassion through selflessness and detachment. Moreover, within this particular section of “Purifying Practice,” Bodhisattva Manjuśrī, the embodiment of wisdom, confirms the function of the given *gāthās* as methods for practitioners to use their minds for the purpose of attaining all supreme sublime qualities, even while living among sentient beings. Also, he highlights the underlying function of generating compassion for all beings, including celestial and human beings. Before offering the *gāthās* as instructions to properly use the mind to Bodhisattva Wisdom Leader, Manjuśrī made his clarification:

Excellent, O, Child of Buddha! You have asked this out of a desire to benefit many, to bring peace to many, out of pity for the world, to profit and gladden celestial and human beings. Child of Buddha, if enlightened beings use their mind properly, they can attain all supreme qualities, can have a mind unhindered in regard to all enlightened teachings, can remain on the path of the Buddhas of past, present, and future, and never leave it even while living in the midst of sentient beings, can comprehend the characteristics of all things, cut off all evil and fulfill all good.²⁹⁴

Thus, it is clear that the *gāthās*, teaching the path to the Bodhisattvas, aim to offer two major functions, namely the proper use of the mind in practice and the compassionate benefiting of sentient beings. When Nhất Hạnh employs the *gāthās* for the purpose of gaining mindfulness of the present moment, it is also an aim to use the mind properly. Thus, Nhất Hạnh still follows the

²⁹³ See Thích Trí Tịnh, *Kinh Hoa Nghiêm* (Avataṃsaka Sutra), vol. 2, pp. 159, 160, 166; Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sutra*, pp. 314, 316, 320.

²⁹⁴ See Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sutra*, p. 313.

first major part of the original intentions. In Buddhism, using the mind properly is already a difficult task to maintain in practice. No practitioner is forced to follow all instructions from the original sutra. Rather, one can choose to practice according to individual capability so that the benefit can be actualized and maximized. The liberty to choose individual practice is always open to every practitioner. Also, one can make adaptations as suitable, as long as beneficial results are obtained. On the other hand, one also has the liberty to disregard them when they are not beneficial. Likewise, it should be the case, even for the additional *gāthās* composed by the creative efforts of Nhất Hạnh. Nevertheless, if one has already been benefiting from using a part of the original instructions introduced by Nhất Hạnh, then it will be of greater benefit when one is able to gradually apply all of the instructions in the original texts, *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use* and the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, as one becomes more competent and adept.

In addition to those gathas of guiding the mind in the present moment, Nhất Hạnh also introduced Mindfulness Meditation along with his Engaged Buddhism. In his core text on Mindfulness Meditation, Nhất Hạnh provides step-by-step instructions for the practice drawing from two of the most fundamental Theravada sutras on meditation, namely *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing (Anapanasati Sutta)* and the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana Sutta)*. The former teaches sixteen methods of being mindful of breath in meditation. The instructions come from the direct teachings of the Buddha to his fellow Buddhist monks. Also, the sutra confirms that being mindful of breath in meditation will lead to fulfilling the four foundations of mindfulness, namely the body, the feelings, the mind, and the objects of the mind. The second text instructs elaborately on those four foundations of mindfulness. In Buddhist meditation, the instructions insist that one should focus on those four foundations, rather than chasing after any random thoughts, so that detachment from the concept of a permanent self can eventually be obtained. These texts are essential guides for meditation in Theravada Buddhism to the present day. Despite their Theravada origin, these texts work well with his gatha on mindfulness and appear to be practical in dealing with the daily tasks of life. Soon after being introduced by Nhất Hạnh, they made a phenomenal success with the American public. They continue to be the essential guideline for his Engaged Buddhism and a major principle underlying the theme of achieving individual happiness throughout his various publications on peaceful living. Books written by Nhất Hạnh on this type of Mindfulness Meditation continue to maintain their popularity. The implication and the public acceptance of

Mindfulness Meditation introduced by Nhất Hạnh illustrate precisely the point made by Amanda Porterfield, in *The Transformation of American Religion*, when she recognized that Buddhism has entered the American religious landscape and continues to gain more of an audience due to the positive teaching on “training the mind” as a source of happiness from prominent Buddhist figures like the present Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat-Hanh, and that Buddhism, with its “deconstruction of selfhood” and its promotion of personal happiness, continues to attract American minds, opening them up to “the wild and often happy eclecticism of the process of assimilating Buddhism into American culture at the turn of the twenty-first century.”²⁹⁵

Though Mahayana texts are an indispensable part of Nhất Hạnh’s teachings, it is curious that he has used Theravada texts to promote Mahayana meditation in the West. Apparently, there are prevailing Mahayana sutras on meditation. However, Nhất Hạnh uses those Theravada sutras because they are fundamental to the practice of Buddhist meditation, especially in calming the mind and in generating peace. Those texts instruct the precise techniques of sitting and regulating breath, which continue to be essential in all methods of meditation, including those of the Mahayana. They are not only essential to Theravada meditation, but also provide “a deeper vision and more comprehensive grasp” of the Mahayana sutras, “just as after we see the roots and the trunk of a tree, we can appreciate its leaves and branches.”²⁹⁶ Another significant reason for Nhất Hạnh to introduce those important Theravada sutras to teach meditation to the West was because this method had been the tradition in introducing meditation to Vietnam and China in the past. As previously mentioned, Master Tăng Hội (d.280) of Vietnam had written commentaries on the *Anapanasati Sutra* for use in Mahayana meditation in ancient Vietnam and China. Nhất Hạnh highlights the role of Tăng Hội in using that particular text by publishing a whole book on this ancient Vietnamese master, titled *Master Tang Hoi: First Zen Teacher in Vietnam and China*. In his publication, while translating into English the complete commentary and preface written by Master Tăng Hội concerning the *Anapanasati Sutra*, Nhất Hạnh confirms that the text was translated for use in Giao Châu (Jiaozhou), ancient Vietnam before the year 229 CE.²⁹⁷ He also notes the Mahayana principles underlying the commentary written by Tăng Hội and asserts the Vietnamese tradition of the fusing the Dharma, saying:

²⁹⁵ See Amanda Porterfield, *The Transformation of American Religion*, pp. 133-134.

²⁹⁶ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, p. 19.

²⁹⁷ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, p. 18.

From this text it is clear that Tăng Hội practiced and taught basic meditation sutras of the Theravada, such as the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, and that he applied the methods of the Mahayana in his teaching. It is also clear that Buddhism in Jiaozhou in the second and third centuries came from India and that it was Mahayana Buddhism. When Tăng Hội left Jiaozhou and went to teach in Dong Wu, he also taught meditation according to the Mahayana there.²⁹⁸

As a result, Nhất Hạnh is entitled to the established legacy of Vietnamese meditation, namely the introduction of Theravada meditative texts in Mahayana meditation. Rather than claiming to have created anything new, he asserts that in using the Theravada texts to teach Mahayana meditation, like the *Anapanasati Sutra*, he is “just following what Tăng Hội did many centuries ago.”²⁹⁹

Though following the legacy of master Tăng Hội, Nhất Hạnh only focuses on features that can be verifiable according to his own experiences and understanding. Since the time of Tăng Hội onward, meditation emphasizes the technique of counting breaths, beginning from one to ten, and then the reverse. It has also been a standard practice in Buddhist meditation across various Buddhist traditions. Buddhist meditation normally starts with counting the breath in order to calm the mind down by eliminating disturbing thoughts. As the mind is calmed, one can enter a meditative concentration called the first meditative (*dhyanic*) stage. Maturing and progressing from this meditative stage, one obtains the second, third, and fourth meditative stages, popularly known as the Four Meditations, accompanied by the tranquility and buoyancy of body and mind plus certain miraculous powers as the byproducts of meditation. Tăng Hội also gave the successive stages of mental absorption named the Four Formless Concentrations in which a practitioner has already abandoned the realms of form and enters into the formless realms of Limitless Space, Limitless Consciousness, Nonmaterialism, and Neither Cognizant nor Non-cognizant. He even spoke of the Six Wondrous Dharma Doors, which continue to be essential in Mahayana meditation, namely counting the breath, monitoring the breath, concentrating the mind, observing phenomena, returning the source of the mind, and transcending the duality of subject and object. In his translation, Nhất Hạnh recognizes the

²⁹⁸ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Master Tăng Hội: First Zen Teacher in Vietnam and China*, pp. 112-113.

²⁹⁹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Master Tăng Hội: First Zen Teacher in Vietnam and China*, p. 113.

teachings of counting breath and the resulting meditative stages mentioned in the preface to the *Anapanasati Sutra* written by Tăng Hội, reporting:

During one day and night, thirteen hundred thousand recollections can take place in consciousness and we are not aware of them, just as the person who is planting seeds in the dark. That is why we have to practice attentiveness, binding our mind to our breathing and counting our breaths from one to ten. If the practitioner while counting from one to ten does not forget the count, his mind has begun to have concentration. Shallow concentration takes three days; profound concentration takes seven days. During this time not a single dispersed thought breaks into the mind of the practitioner. The practitioner sits as still as a corpse. This is called the first meditative concentration.³⁰⁰

Nhất Hạnh, however, proposes that counting breath and the Four Meditations are dispensable in Buddhist meditation. In December of 1962, while spending a winter break in solitude on the campus of Princeton University, he himself had personally experienced certain peaceful stages and meditative insights by practicing mindfulness, dwelling happily in the present moment,³⁰¹ rather than by counting breath. Moreover, he finds no mentioning of counting breath and the four meditative stages in the *Anapanasati Sutra*. In the text, the Buddha primarily taught the sixteen techniques of mindfulness of the breath while sitting in meditation, without using the counting. Here, in order to avoid the usual repetition of Theravada sutra, probably suitable to the oral tradition of the past, those sixteen techniques for mindfulness taught by the Buddha directly to his follower *bhikkhus* (monks) can be summarized as follows:

1. Breathing in and out a long breath, I know that I am breathing in and out a long breath. As the “breathing in and out” is presented as “breathing”, the rest will become:
2. Breathing a short breath, I know that I am breathing a short breath.
3. Breathing and being aware of the body, I know that I am aware of the body.
4. Breathing and calming the body, I know that I am calming the body.
5. Breathing and feeling joyful, I know that I am feeling joyful.
6. Breathing and feeling happy, I know that I am feeling happy.
7. Breathing, I am aware of my mental formations.

³⁰⁰ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Master Tăng Hội: First Zen Teacher in Vietnam and China*, p. 88; and also Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, pp. 307-308.

³⁰¹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves, Journals 1962-1966*, pp. 39, 85 ; and *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, p. 22.

8. Breathing, I calm my mental formations.
9. Breathing, I am aware of my mind.
10. Breathing, I make my mind happy.
11. Breathing, I concentrate my mind.
12. Breathing, I liberate my mind.
13. Breathing, I observe the impermanence of all dharma (phenomena).
14. Breathing, I observe the disappearance of desire.
15. Breathing, I observe the no-birth no-death nature of all phenomena.
16. Breathing, I observe letting go.³⁰²

Though the sequence seems to function to abide and settle the mind and then to eliminate mental defilements, Nhất Hạnh sees no need to practice each of these techniques in sequence. Rather, he advises practitioners to try and focus on the technique with which one is most comfortable, regardless of the given sequence. He notices that Tăng Hội even has them in a different order in his commentary of the *Anapanasati Sutra*. Though Tăng Hội insisted that his commentaries originated from the knowledge taught by his masters, it is unclear to which of the eighteen Buddhist schools in ancient India his version is linked. More than a hundred years after the final nirvana of the Buddha, those ancient Buddhist schools of Buddhism emerged, and each had its own canon. Nevertheless, his version shares fundamental similarities with that of the Pali canon. However, from the fourth technique onward, Tăng Hội has them in order differently with few variations of technique, as follows:

4. Breathing, I know that I am breathing a fine breath.
5. Breathing, I know that I am breathing a fast (coarse) breath.
6. Breathing, I know that I am breathing an unquickened breath.
7. Breathing and calming the feeling, I know that I am calming the feeling.
8. Breathing and not calming the feeling, one knows that one is not calming the feeling.
9. Breathing and feeling happy, one knows that one is happy.
10. Breathing and not feeling happy, one knows that one is not happy.
11. Breathing, one knows that all things are impermanent.
12. Breathing, one sees that nothing can be grasped hold of.

³⁰² See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Nhật Tụng Thiền Môn Năm 2000*, pp. 243-244; and *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, pp. 6-8; also see Nanamoli and Bodhi, “Ānāpānasati Sutta: Sutta 118,” *The Majjhima Nikaya*, pp. 943-944.

13. Breathing, one sees that there is no attachment in one's own mind.
14. Breathing, one knows that one is giving up one's own perceptions.
15. Breathing, one knows that one is giving up one's own idea of body and life span.
16. Breathing, one knows that one has not yet given up the idea of body and life span.³⁰³

Nhất Hạnh also acknowledges the differences and instructs that all the available techniques of breathing can be tried in order to discover the one that is best suited to an individual case. Nevertheless, Nhất Hạnh does not encourage pursuing the Four Meditative Stages mentioned by Tăng Hội. Rather, he turns to the *Anapanasati Sutra* to advise against the prevailing tendency of placing too much emphasis on them. In the text, the Buddha did not mention the four meditative stages. Due to the complete absence of teachings on the Four Meditative Stages in the *Anapanasati Sutra*, Nhất Hạnh asserts that not obtaining them is not a defect in Buddhist meditation, even though the Four Meditative Stages had been mentioned by the Buddha while he was still a *sramana*, a religious wanderer, practicing with other religious leaders of his time. After the Buddha had obtained them, however, he eventually moved on to other practices, including the severe ascetic practices which he also abandoned before his awakening because he recognized that those meditative stages would not bring him to liberation from suffering. Since the Buddha did not promote those meditative stages in his meditation presented by the *Anapanasati Sutra*, Nhất Hạnh suggests that those meditative stages are “not a necessity” for arriving at the ultimate fruit of Buddhist practice, “the Awakened Mind.”³⁰⁴ Rather, they are dispensable and should not be a cause to burden nor disturb the peace of the practitioners. With the guide of the *Anapanasati Sutra* in mind, Nhất Hạnh maintains that meditation students should not feel incompetent nor lose courage after practicing for many years without attaining the Four Meditative Stages.

Furthermore, Nhất Hạnh also adds that the *Satipatthāna Sutta* or *The Sutra on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness* is to be used together with the *Anapanasati Sutra*. This text is fundamental to both Theravada and Mahayana meditations. However, using this text as a meditative guide is not a novelty in the practice of meditation because this additional text is an extension of the *Anapanasati Sutra*. It clarifies and elaborates in details the four foundations of mindfulness, while the *Anapanasati Sutra* merely confirms that mindfulness of breathing will

³⁰³ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Master Tăng Hội: First Zen Teacher in Vietnam and China*, pp. 96-97; and also Lê Mạnh Thát, *Tổng Tập Văn Học Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, vol. 2, pp. 270, 321.

³⁰⁴ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, p. 37.

fulfill those four foundations of mindfulness. Therefore, these two Theravada texts are complementary to one another. As a result, by adding the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, Nhất Hạnh merely clarifies the *Anapanasati Sutra*. Moreover, this text does not mention the Four Meditations either. Thus, it fortifies Nhất Hạnh’s assertion that the Four Meditative Stages are “dispensable” in Buddhist meditations.³⁰⁵ Similarly, the practice of counting breath, the Four Formless Concentrations, and the Six Wondrous Dharma Doors mentioned by Tăng Hội are also dispensable, since they are completely absent in both the *Anapanasati Sutra* and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Even the *kasina*, the sign or the type of color discs representing the basic elements of earth, water, wind, and fire, and so forth, used in Theravada meditation discussed in the *Vimutti Magga* (Path of Liberation) by Upatissa and the *Visuddhi Magga* (Path of Purification) by Buddhaghosa beginning from the fourth and the fifth centuries CE respectively, is dispensable for the same reason.

Nevertheless, Nhất Hạnh did not speak of those as invalid or wrong methods. Rather, he maintains that those were incorporated and developed by the tradition at a later time in order to accommodate people of various capabilities in practicing Buddhist meditation. Even though Nhất Hạnh has experienced certain positive results of meditation without using those particular methods, he sees no practicality and wisdom in attempting to discard or to criticize them merely for being later developments. He even instructs the technique of counting breath when it is suitable to individuals. To his practitioners, he reminds them and even himself that “we need not to criticize them for being later teachings, certainly not before we have practiced and seen for ourselves if they work well.”³⁰⁶ His precaution appears to be well-founded because the Four Meditations are, in fact, not later teachings. Rather, they are also taught by the Buddha directly to his fellow monks in the Pali Tripitaka. It is practical that Nhất Hạnh has focused on the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* in order to offer transparently direct instructions to his Mindfulness Meditation. Unfortunately, he has not extended his guidance to the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, the *Sāmaññapala Sutta*, and several other sutras of the *Digha Nikāya* where the Four Meditations are extensively taught by the Buddha. Moreover, the Four Meditations are also mentioned in other Pali Suttas, including the

³⁰⁵ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, pp. 20, 36.

³⁰⁶ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, p. 34.

Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of the *Dīgha Nikāya* and the *Kandaraka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. Also, the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* even enumerates the Four Formless Concentrations.³⁰⁷

According to both the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha offers various contemplations concerning the body, the feelings, the mind, and the objects of the mind, known together as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. These are specific objects of contemplation, and they strikingly mark the distinction between Buddhist meditation and non-Buddhist meditations. Instead of following random thoughts and then getting distracted by them, Buddhist meditation instructs practitioners to focus precisely on any of these four foundations of mindfulness as the specific objects of meditation, and nothing else. In the contemplation concerning the body, the instructions extend to cover the sixteen techniques of mindfulness of breathing, the four postures (walking, standing, sitting, and lying down), the full awareness of daily activities, the foulness of the bodily parts, the four basic elements (earth, water, wind, and fire) which compose the body, and the decomposing corpse at the charnel ground. In contemplating on the feelings, the instructions require the precise recognition of any of the feelings which are pleasant, painful, or neither painful-nor-pleasant occurring in the body. In contemplating on the mind, the instructions require the exact awareness of whether the mind is affected or unaffected by lust, hate, or delusion, whether it is a contracted mind, distracted mind, exalted mind, unexalted mind, surpassed mind, unsurpassed mind, concentrated mind, unconcentrated mind, liberated mind, or unliberated mind. In contemplating on the objects of the mind, the instructions cover the five hindrances (sensual desires, ill-will, sloth-and-torpor, restlessness, and doubt), the five aggregates or *skandhas* (form, feeling, perception, karmic formation, and consciousness), and the seven factors of enlightenment (mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity). However, in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha went on giving an additional contemplation as an object of the mind, namely the Four Noble Truths, which include the truths of Suffering, Origin of Suffering, Cessation of Suffering, and the Path of Practice Leading to the Cessation of Suffering. Under the Path of Practice Leading to the Cessation of Suffering, known as the Noble Eightfold Path, which includes Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood,

³⁰⁷ See the “Mahāparinibbāna Sutta,” translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, pp. 270-271; and “Kandaraka Sutta,” translated by Nanamoli and Bodhi in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, p. 451.

Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, the Four Meditations (*dhyana* in Sanskrit or *jhāna* in Pali) are mentioned under Right Concentration, as follows:

And what, monks, is Right Concentration? Here, a monk, detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome mental states, enters and remains in the first *jhāna*, which is with thinking and pondering, born of detachment, filled with delight and joy. And with the subsiding of thinking and pondering, by gaining inner tranquility and oneness of mind, he enters and remains in the second *jhāna*, which is without thinking and pondering, born of concentration, filled with delight and joy. And with the fading away of delight, remaining imperturbable, mindful and clearly aware, he experiences in himself the joy of which the Noble Ones say: “Happy is he who dwells with equanimity and mindfulness,” he enters the third *jhāna*. And, having given up pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of former gladness and sadness, he enters and remains in the fourth *jhāna*, which is beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness. That is called Right Concentration. And that, monks, is called the Path of Practice Leading to the Cessation of Suffering.³⁰⁸

These Four Meditations, being mentioned under the Eightfold Path of the Four Noble Truths, are among the results of the abiding contemplations on the objects of the mind. Even the extraordinary mental powers associated with them are just the byproducts of meditation and should be treated with caution and detachment. Moreover, it is well known that these Four Meditations merely temporarily inhibit greed, anger, and delusion, also known as the three poisons - the primary causes of suffering, just as the stone is temporarily suppressing the grass, without eradicating it. Insight meditation or Vipassana meditation of the Theravada tradition is the next practice needed in order to completely eradicate those three poisons bringing the Buddhist state of Awakening or Enlightenment. Greed and anger are only eradicated at the level of Non-Returner, the third level of the Arhat path. Delusion, especially delusion about the substantiality of the Self is only eradicated at the level of Arhat. As a result, the Four Meditations are taught by the Buddha and can be treated as optional under the scheme of contemplation concerning the objects of the mind.

³⁰⁸ See “Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta: The greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness,” translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 349.

Nhất Hạnh also becomes cautious when he does not discover any *Simple Anapanasati Sutta* (An Ban Shou Yi Jing) while finding the *Greater Anapanasati Sutta* (Da An Bang Shou Yi Jing) in the Chinese Tripitaka (Taisho 602). From the generalization that a scripture entitled “Greater” is usually an expansion of “the original during the process of oral transmission or as it was being copied,” Nhất Hạnh suggests that a scripture without “the word *Greater* in the title is probably closer to the original words of the Buddha.”³⁰⁹ At first glance, the suggestion might sound quite logical. However, upon further examination of Buddhist scriptures, it only presents a part of the whole picture. As seen in the Pali Tripitaka, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* are both taught by the Buddha. Though the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* can be considered as an extension of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* by having the further teaching on The Four Noble Truths as a part of abiding contemplations of objects of the mind, the Pali tradition still maintains that both texts contain the original words of the Buddha. It may as well be the case that the Buddha repeated his discourses as needed throughout the years of his teaching career as a Buddha. Even Nhất Hạnh has admitted in the *Old Path of White Clouds* that the Buddha repeated his discourses on the *Anapanasati Sutta* and *The Sutra on Tending the Water Buffaloes* on various occasions. Furthermore, the scripture entitled “Greater” might not be an extension of the “Smaller” scriptures.

In the *Majjhima Nikāya* of the Pali Tripitaka, the *Cūḷarāhulovāda Sutta* (The Shorter Discourse of Advice to Rāhula) and the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta* (The Greater Discourse of Advice to Rāhula) are taught to Rāhula by the Buddha without one being an extension of the other. Though taking place at Savatthi in Jetavana Grove, the shorter sutta was taught to Rāhula when he was twenty-one years of age, while the greater sutta was taught when he was eighteen. In the greater sutta, the Buddha taught Rāhula chiefly about Vipassana meditation dealing with no-self, the five *skandhas*, and the four basic elements. Near the end of the discourse, he also elaborated on the practice of the Mindfulness of Breathing because Rāhula requested it after Sariputra had also advised him to do the practice. In the shorter sutta, the Buddha instructed different teachings to Rāhula. He taught Rāhula to apply the Three Marks of Existence, namely suffering, impermanence, and no-self, to the entire realm of sense perceptions and the associated mental processes. After liberating his mind from the taints, Rāhula obtained the final fruit of the path, becoming an Arhat at the end of the shorter sutta.

³⁰⁹ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, p. 17.

Again, from the Pali tradition, both discourses are the authoritative teachings of the Buddha, regardless of the words “Greater” or “Shorter” in their titles.

In the transmission of Buddhism, the Buddhist masters encounter not only the requirement to teach the correct and authentic teachings of the past but also the pressing demands to accommodate those teachings to the conditions of the present time. On one hand, one must adhere to the same original teachings in order to maintain the pristine integrity of the tradition. As a result, in this way one can be charged as being old-fashioned and obstinately conservative. On the other hand, one must vary or develop the teachings further in order to make them work for individuals under new conditions, in which even a few are completely unknowing of the past. Consequently, one is also not free from being charged for creating apocryphal and radical teachings in this case. These conflicting tendencies have continued for ages. Nhất Hạnh is practical in going back to the original texts of the Pali Tripitaka and also in suggesting that one should practice those teachings developed at the later time before attempting to criticize them because they are there for practice rather than for speculation. This can serve as a reminder for those who keep criticizing the later teachings as apocryphal without practicing them.

The Buddhists had even kept non-Buddhist texts from being destroyed and preserved them for future generations when those were compatible to Buddhist ideas of virtuous conduct and practices. If non-Buddhist texts were preserved and taught, like those of the Vedic tradition taught at Nalanda Monastery in ancient India or the *Tao Te Ching* (Book of Virtue) and other texts of Western religious tradition preserved from Tung Huang cave of China, then how much more should Buddhist teachings of the later time be tolerated by the Buddhists, especially when they positively served the people in improving their moral conduct and virtues? The Chinese Tripitaka even maintains a section for texts of doubtful origin, after the Buddhist efforts to catalogue and re-catalogue in order to screen out the non-Buddhist texts. The Buddhist spirit of openness to a variety of texts does not appear to be obsolete even in this technological age, since it is the same spirit which has been used for the preservation of texts in university libraries across the United States, making them excellent centers for modern education. Thus, in Buddhist practice, it is significant to restrain from criticizing sutras and their practices without both investigating and practicing them. Rather one should be open-

mindful and realize that those texts should be preserved as optional for future generations, especially when they have worked to improve the lives and moral conduct of the people.

Furthermore, in the transmission of Buddhism to a new culture, it is difficult to have innovation and creativity without making adjustments to the established teachings. In other words, it is impossible to make adaptations without developing new teachings and practices. Certainly, the practice of the Rose Ceremony, Hugging Meditation, Touching the Earth, and even the frequent sounding of the bells, known as the Bells of Mindfulness, periodically throughout the day in the monastery setting to remind people to be mindful, promoted by Nhất Hạnh, are later teachings that cannot be found in Buddhist texts. The Rose Ceremony, in which red and white roses are given to remind the Buddhists of their mothers who are either alive or deceased, has been accepted as a part of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition up to the present time. After 1962, when Nhất Hạnh introduced the roses to be used in the ceremony accompanied by his writing *A Rose for Your Pocket*, the ceremony has been welcomed and the roses have become the symbols of honoring parents during the Umlabana season, the Buddhist season of filial dedication in the lunar month of July. While living abroad, during the Umlabana season, the Vietnamese Buddhist communities continue this virtuous tradition by using the roses to make dedications to their parents. The Umlabana Ceremony with the filial love of Maudgalayana accompanied by the Rose Ceremony is still one of the most elaborate, solemn, and touching Vietnamese Buddhist events. In the Hugging Meditation, another innovative practice taught by Nhất Hạnh, one can hug a friend, a child, the parents, a partner, a departing friend, or even a tree. While being aware of one's own three in-and-out breaths, one recognizes a deep gratitude and happiness for being together. With this practice, people become mindful of their precious presence together, allowing them to reconnect their emotional gaps in order to dissolve individual isolation caused by misunderstanding. According to one disciple of Nhất Hạnh, it is truly "how revolutionary Thay (Nhất Hạnh, reverently referred to as a teacher in the tradition) was" when he once asked one of the nuns to say goodbye to one of the visiting monks by performing that Hugging Meditation which resulted in their clumsily bowing and hitting their shaven heads together.³¹⁰ Though performed in public, the Hugging Meditation was too novel a practice, even for monastic members. In Indian and Asian cultures, the Hugging Meditation

³¹⁰ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, p. 38. For Hugging Meditation and Touching the Earth, see also his *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*, pp. 7-8, 28-34, 203.

would seem difficult to grasp because hugging is normally viewed as a sensual contact. The practice is viewed with caution by Vietnamese Buddhists abroad. Even the senior members of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha abroad are not quite sanguine about it. Though interaction between genders is promoted in America, the close contact between genders called for by the Hugging Meditation has made the Vietnamese Buddhists even more cautious. Their former experiences in Vietnam during the actualization of Buddhism were vivid evidence. Many monks disrobed and returned to lay life after frequent contact with non-monastic members while joining the call for self-sufficient autonomy. Among the members of the leading Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in the United States, the Most Venerables Thích Đức-Niệm and Thích Thắng Hoan, are the only two left as monks from their monastic class of fifty-two monks.³¹¹ Without being critical, many of them look upon the innovative practice of the Hugging Meditation with reservations. Though being limited to the centers conducted by or affiliated with Nhất Hạnh, the practice of Hugging Meditation is claimed to have brought reconciliations to a number of families of retreatants, helping to recover their family harmony.

In another meditation called Touching the Earth, one is stretched out flat on the floor or the surface of the earth with the palms facing upward and becomes mindful of its supportive role of producing food, growing trees, providing minerals, and so forth to sustain one's own life. The youngsters participating in retreats at centers organized by Nhất Hạnh appear to be comfortable with the practice, especially when they are in open fields or on hillsides, which conveniently help them to realize and appreciate their intimate connection to nature. It is effective for those young retreatants to learn about and to care for their natural environment, including animals and other people, through the practice. However, it might seem too odd or even too romantic to the *sramanas* of ancient India, especially those of the ascetic traditions, to lie relaxing on the surface of the earth in beautiful weather or even to hug the earth, claiming meditation. A further example, the Bells of Mindfulness, is also an innovation. In Asian temples, the bell was only rung to signal certain serious religious events, not to remind people periodically that they should stop all of their activities and be mindful of their breaths. Gathas on driving the car, handling the telephone, or turning on the computer, are undoubtedly later teachings. These later teachings have worked at Buddhist centers directed by Nhất Hạnh and are still undergoing the test of time.

³¹¹ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Những Mùa Vu Lan* (The Umlabana Seasons), p. 250, and *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be A Perfect Spring), pp. 239-240.

In the meantime, knowing the origin and causes for such later teachings will allow one to trace back to the original teachings as needed

On the other hand, additional teachings that fail to work offer a lesson in making innovations and will be replaced by better ones. At one time, at the Plum Village, in order to promote the concept of the “Fourfold Buddhist Sangha,” which includes the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, Nhất Hạnh allowed a cooperative type of living. In this innovation, Western lay Buddhists of both genders lived together in one hamlet, while Asian lay Buddhists lived in another hamlet so that they could conveniently enjoy their respective cultural cuisines. There were no issues in the hamlet with the Asian Buddhists. However, there was a problem for the hamlet with the Western Buddhists. This way of living together by both genders had “brought about much suffering” because the Western lay Buddhists had neglected to observe the third mindfulness training concerning “mindful sexual relations.”³¹²

First, a cooperative type of living is an innovation against the rigid gender separation instituted by the Buddha who knew well that sexual desire, the most potent form of desires, was the cause of suffering. Greed for sex is never satiated. It causes suffering. In technical Buddhist terms, it is elucidated by the Noble Truth concerning the causes of suffering. It is difficult to be released from suffering by going after activities that will cause suffering. Second, the “third mindfulness training” is also an innovative name for the traditional third lay Buddhist precept concerning the restraint from the misuse of sex. The Western lay Buddhists did not like the threatening and restrictive connotation of the word “precept.”³¹³ As a result, they sought a more liberative concept by asking Nhất Hạnh to rename the precept that way. As mature Western adults, they were too confident about their sexual behavior. Perhaps, being too practical, those individuals have missed the didactic message concerning sexual attraction from the traditional Buddhist story concerning the beautiful daughters of Mara, who arrived to challenge the Buddha right before his enlightenment. One can always consult the instructions in the chapter of the *Surangama Sutra* concerning the fifty deviant states at the penetration of the five *skandhas* in

³¹²See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, p. 93.

³¹³ Offering reasons for the terms “the Five Mindfulness Trainings,” instead of “the Five Lay Buddhist Precepts,” Nhất Hạnh remarks: “Until recently I have used the term ‘precepts’ instead of ‘Mindfulness Trainings,’ but many Western friends told me that the word ‘precepts’ evokes in them a strong feeling of good and evil, that if they ‘break’ the precepts, they feel they have completely failed. Precepts are different from ‘commandments’ and ‘rules.’ They are insights born from mindful observation and direct experience of suffering. They are guidelines that help us train ourselves to live in a way that protects us and those around us.” See his *I Have Arrived, I Am Home*, p. 202.

order to realize the dangerous mask of sexual lust. Also, one can go to the most succinct and relevant warning concerning sexual attraction in chapter twenty-four of the *Sutra in Forty-Two Chapters*, which asserted that, “Of all longings and desires, there is none stronger than sex. Sex as a desire has no equal. If there were another one like sex, then no one under heaven would be able to attain the path of liberation.”³¹⁴ An accomplished Buddhist master like Śāntideva continued to remind himself to heed the advice of the Buddha, the “Medicine King” who was able to give instructions to alleviate suffering. In Sanskrit poetic verses, his useful reminders are as follows:

54. Even one frightened by a fleeting illness would not disregard the physician’s advice;
how much more so one afflicted by the four hundred and four diseases.
55. Of which just one can annihilate all people living in *Jambudvīpa* (this worldly realm) and for which a medicine is not found in any region.
56. If I disregard the counsel of the All-Curing Physician who removes every suffering,
shame on me, extremely deluded one am I!³¹⁵

Obtaining liberation from suffering is not easy because people, including Śāntideva, have the tendency to follow their lust and other non-virtuous desires instead of making a consistent effort to go against them. Indeed practitioners are entitled to their own decisions. Yet, when the inappropriate sexual activities of those who participated in that innovative “Fourfold Sangha” bore fruit, they soon appreciated the wisdom of the Buddha and of the generations of the past masters in maintaining the rigid gender line within the traditional Sangha. In Buddhism, one is responsible for one’s own intentional actions. Masking the negative intentions with positive, fashionable, noble, or lofty labels does not remove the karmic fruit of the intentional actions. It

³¹⁴ See Hsuan Hua, *The Sutra of Forty-Two Chapters Divulged by the Buddha*, p. 27; Ngô Duy Ban, tran, *Kinh Bốn Mươi Hai Chương, The Sutra of Forty-Two Sections & Kinh Di Giáo, The Buddha’s Last Bequest*, p. 30.

³¹⁵ See Śāntideva, *A Guide to The Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*, pp. 30-31. In Sanskrit, those verses are as follow:

Itvasvyādhibhīto ‘pi vaidvavākyaṃ na laṅghayet
Kimu vyādhisatairgrastascaturbhiśturuttaiḥ ||54||
Ekenāpi yataḥ sarve jambudvīpagatā narāḥ
Naśyanti yeṣāṃ bhaiṣjyaṃ sarvadikṣu na labhyate || 55||
Tatra sarvajñāvaidvasya sarvaśalyāpahāriṇaḥ
Vākyaṃullāṅghayāmi dhig māmatyantamohitam ||65||

See Parmananda Sharma, *Śāntideva’s Bodhicaryāvatāra*, pp. 61-62.

only hinders the progress. Rather, one should stay and enjoy the appropriate lay life if one is not ready to handle the monastic restrictions. No one is forced to join the Sangha.

In the Buddhist Sangha, celibate monks and nuns live separately as a model for spiritual seekers. Also, they have their heads shaven as a mark of the household renunciators, who no longer decorate or ornament their body, including their hair. In contrast, the lay Buddhists are not celibate and are not members of the Sangha. As householders, they do not want to totally commit themselves to monastic restrictions. Also, they still have to seek after their secular pursuits and enjoyments. They maintain their hair and ornament it in their various desirable styles. It is the same for their dress. Furthermore, the lay Buddhists practice according to their individual circumstance and ability. Likewise, they support the monks and nuns according to their individual capability. As Buddhist laity, they are entitled to have a normal family and sexual activities appropriate to their householder status, and to have children, of course. It is appropriate for Buddhist laity to have normal and healthy sexual relationships between legitimate partners of the family, but not with members of other families. Having illegitimate sexual relationships with members of other families will harm their own family as well as the families of others. That will be considered as a misuse of sex by the third lay precept.

Fortunately, the monastic members of the Plum Village were not involved in the incident. Otherwise, it would have easily made sensational headlines with an exciting and alarming catch, “A Sexual Scandal!” As a religious founder, the Buddha had been quite experienced with such matters. Occasionally, he was branded by his opponents of having had illicit sex with women who were ordered to frequent the monastery according to their ignoble schemes for the sole purpose of defaming the Buddha and his religious tradition. Not all who frequented the monasteries were Buddhists. Moreover, not all who took some Buddhist practices were Buddhists. At the Plum Village, Nhất Hạnh only learned about the incident four years later. As a result, he rearranged his center to same-gender living, having the males in one hamlet and the females in another one. Since then the center has functioned without similar problems. It was a lesson to learn in making innovations, especially the innovations concerning the Buddhist precepts. Also, it was a lesson in respecting the fundamental disciplinary practices of the tradition.

Another major reason for Nhất Hạnh to focus on teaching his mindfulness meditation to the American audience rather than other Vietnamese Zen practices is because there is no pressing

need for him to introduce Mahayana meditation using Mahayana texts. Even before the popularity of his mindfulness meditation in the West, Mahayana Meditation in the Vietnamese tradition and the first Vietnamese Buddhist temple in the United States had been established by Thích Thiên Ân when he came to America in the late 1960s.

Thích Thiên Ân and the Vietnamese Zen tradition.

In the United States, the Venerable Thích Thiên Ân (1926-1980) was known as a Ph.D. Buddhist Scholar, a world-renowned Zen Master from the Lâm Tế (Lin-chi) Lineage, and occasionally as the Supreme Patriarch of the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Los Angeles. Also, he founded the Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles and its affiliations, the International Buddhist Meditation Center and the University of Oriental Studies. Between 1966 and 1968, after arriving in America with an invitation to teach at the University of California, Los Angeles, as a visiting scholar, Master Thiên Ân introduced Vietnamese Buddhism to the American audience. After founding the first Vietnamese Buddhist temple in Los Angeles, he went on to establish the Buddhist Sangha for his American monastic members. It marked the beginning the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in the United States, with the Western Sangha, which is still functioning today.

Before arriving in America, Thiên Ân had been one of the prominent Buddhist monks in Vietnam. After his monastic training, including his bachelor's degree in Buddhist philosophy at the Buddhist Institute at Hue, he went to Japan for further Buddhist studies and earned his doctorate degree in Oriental Studies at Waseda University in Tokyo in 1964. Upon returning to Vietnam, he presided as the chairman of the Oriental Philosophy Department at the University of Saigon. Also, Thiên Ân, together with Nhất-Hạnh, helped to cofound Vạn Hạnh University in Saigon and served as its first Dean of the Faculty of Letters until 1966, when he left for UCLA on an invitation as a visiting scholar of languages and Oriental Philosophy. Similar to Nhất Hạnh, Thiên Ân had no intention of establishing the Vietnamese tradition of Buddhism in America. Rather, in 1967, he planned to return to Vietnam to continue the Buddhist tasks awaiting him there. However, Thiên Ân remained in the United States due to the sincere request from a group of his American students. They even came to him with the immigration papers in hand, filled them out, and pleaded with him to stay, arguing: "In Vietnam there are many capable

teachers of Buddhism, but here in America there are very few. If you return to Vietnam, who will teach us?”³¹⁶

Thiên Ân's decision to stay in America later turned out to be fortunate not only for his own safety, but also especially for the Vietnamese refugees who escaped to America after the Communists took over South Vietnam in April 1975. Thiên Ân became an important personage helping the American government to handle the massive resettlement program for the Southeast Asian refugees. In addition to providing all the Buddhist chaplains for most of the refugee resettlement camps in the country, his International Buddhist Meditation Center together with its American Buddhist devotees also sponsored many Vietnamese refugees. As more Vietnamese refugees, known as the Vietnamese boat people, poured in, his Vietnamese Buddhist Temple and Chùa A Di Đà (Amitabha Temple), established in 1975 and 1976 respectively, became almost like a headquarters for social services. Many capable Vietnamese monks and a few nuns, who were either finished with their studies outside of Vietnam or who had recently escaped from Vietnam, also came to join Thiên Ân, including Thích Thiện Thanh, Thích Mãn Giác, Thích Trí Chơn, Thích Tịnh Từ, Thích Tín Nghĩa, Thích Nguyên An, and Thích Nữ Chơn Niệm. They were frequently called on not only to serve as Buddhist chaplains in resettlement camps, but also to help the refugees to deal with the various tasks of their new lives in America. In the process, many Vietnamese refugees, who were suffering physically and mentally from suddenly being nationless and from being transported to a new land, had found an anchorage in Vietnamese Buddhism in order to live on. In this regard, Thiên Ân and the Vietnamese monks and nuns who joined him became “the only hope for the refugees, particularly the Buddhists.”³¹⁷

In its humble rented quarters in Hollywood, Thiên Ân had only a few books in his possession. Also, he frequently lived on quick meals of instant noodle packages at the beginning. Six months after it had begun, Thiên Ân was able to purchase more property and establish the International Buddhist Meditation Center in 1970. In addition to Sunday services and meditation classes, he also offered instructions in Asian languages plus Buddhist and Indian philosophy. In 1972, as interest in both Buddhist practices and philosophy grew rapidly, Thiên Ân invited other American scholars of similar interests to join together and formed the College of Oriental Studies in Los Angeles. Among the faculty members were Dr, Leo Pruden and

³¹⁶ See Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, p. 353; and Thích Mãn Giác, *In Memory of Ven. Dr. Thích Thiện Ân*, p. 45.

³¹⁷ Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, p. 355.

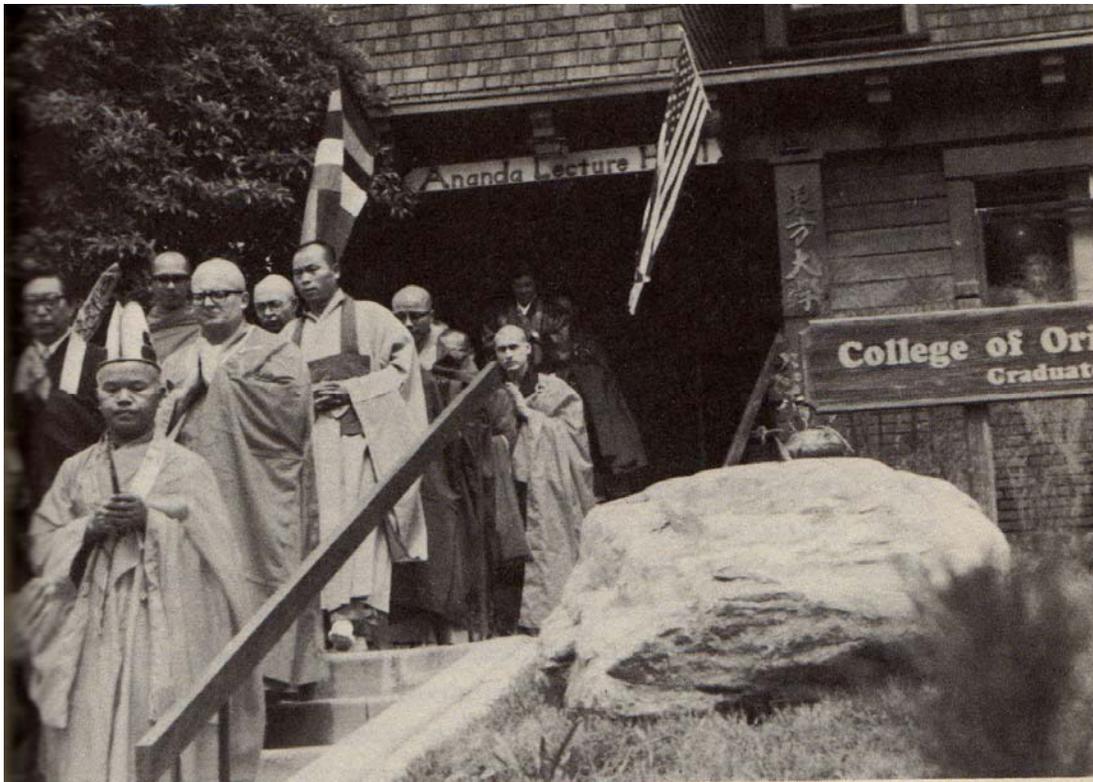


Figure 25. Thiên Ân leads the ordained monks and nuns at the College of Oriental Studies. Photo Thiên Ân



Figure 26. The International Buddhist Meditation Center. Photo Minh Huy and Phước Thiên.

Shinzen Young, who had studied Buddhism in Japan and had taught Buddhism together with other Theravada monks. Geshe Gyalten of the Gelugpa lineage taught Tibetan Buddhism plus the Tibetan language. Song Ryong Hearn, who was trained in Korea, taught Zen meditation. The College began to train its first group of graduate students in October 1973. In addition to providing academic studies in Buddhism, the missions of the university also covered Oriental philosophy, encompassing Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and other religions. Through these religious studies, they also taught Oriental languages, traditions, cultures, and literatures, aiming to bridge the cultural gap between East and West. The range of languages instructed by the university included English, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Sanskrit, Pali, Korean, Tibetan, and Thai.³¹⁸ By 1978, the College was granted university status and was in full operation, offering six degree tracks in Buddhist Philosophy, Buddhist History, Buddhist Literatures, Buddhism, Comparative Religion, and Language. For majors, it offered Tibetan Studies, Asian Studies, Indian Studies, Psychology Studies, and Zen Studies.

In order to facilitate teachings at the University of Oriental Studies, Thiên Ân designated the International Buddhist Meditation Center as a center for the study and practice of Zen, where special sessions of studies and practices were performed weekly and where dialogues and the interchange of ideas from other Meditation Centers in America and abroad were fostered. In the spirit of Zen, the center also organized community practices and hosted related religious musical performances, discussions, and conferences. Envisioning a quality repository of the Buddha Dharma in America, Thiên Ân established a research library of more than 10,000 books on Oriental studies, the largest of its kind at the time, and a collection of 212 types of journals on Buddhism and other religions. Also, as a vision for his research library, he aimed to publish its own specialized journal on Buddhist studies. In conjunction with the library, the Ananda Reading Room was established in order to host lectures, Oriental art exhibits, readings of Indian classical poetry, Japanese drama performances, and the showing of films on Asian cultures and festivities.

In 1979, in order to expand the curriculum of the University, Thiên Ân personally made two trips to Taiwan to invite Venerable Thích Đức-Niệm to join his team of faculty. Đức Niệm was another prominent Vietnamese monk who was ordained in Taiwan to teach and help the

³¹⁸ See Thích Tín Nghĩa, *Hiện Tình Phật Giáo Việt Nam (Vietnamese Buddhism at Present)*, p. 48; and Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, p. 354.

Vietnamese refugees after earning his Doctoral degree in Chinese Literature and Philosophy in 1978.³¹⁹ Joining Thiên Ân and other eminent Vietnamese masters in shouldering the task of conducting Buddhist education in the United States, Master Đức-Niệm arrived to accept the post of Vice President of the University of Oriental Studies in 1979. While making an effort to enhance the future growth of the University, Đức-Niệm even established the International Buddhist Monastic Institute for the primary purpose of training new generations of multi-national monastic members and Buddhist youths. This institute will be discussed in the following chapter as it has a significant role in serving the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha abroad after the time of Thiên Ân. Altogether, under the leadership of Thiên Ân, these centers aimed to make Buddhism a living tradition in the United States, contributing to the Mahayana path of obtaining enlightenment through the inward efforts of compassion and wisdom.

Also in 1979, within the same year, with the vision of establishing a high-quality Buddhist Sangha in America, both learned in philosophy and experienced in practice, Thiên Ân organized the High Ordination at the International Buddhist Meditation Center and presided as the supreme master of the ordination. In the three-month retreat before the ordination, he offered training in chanting rituals and ceremony, including the use of bells, drums, wooden fish, and other monastic instruments. For meditation, he required his candidates to practice meditation two or three times daily, so that when they became monks or nuns they could sit in meditation well. While the usual Buddhist trainees joined together at least twice a month to do 108 prostrations, the candidates for High Ordination performed those prostrations every day, doing at least 10,000 prostrations by the end of a retreat, before ordination.³²⁰ Other Saturday workshops on monastic training were also given. At the time, Buddhism was still new in America. Because of the lack of financial support, the temple could not support all of the Buddhist monks and nuns. In order to support themselves, many had to work outside the temple. As a result, Thiên Ân made modifications to the traditional rules, including the one for remaining on the temple grounds twenty-four hours a day during summer retreat. His monastic disciples, who include

³¹⁹ See *The Seeker's Glossaries of Buddhism*, p. 171; Thích Tín Nghĩa, *Hiện Tình Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, p. 58; and Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Tướng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức-Niệm (1937-2003)*, p. 5.

³²⁰ Thích, Thiên Ân, "Three-Month training Period: An Adaptation of An-cu to American Training," *The Present of Vietnamese Buddhists in America*, p. 8.



Figure 27. The Vietnamese Temple (Chùa Việt Nam). Photo Minh Huy and Phước Thiện.



Figure 28. Thiên Ân (center) and the Vietnamese monks, nuns, and Buddhist followers welcomed Đức Niệm, the one with the flowers, at Los Angeles Airport. Photo Đức Niệm.

Thích Ân Giáo, Thích Tánh Thiện, Thích Ân Huệ, Sarika Sharma, Anila Dharma, Karuna Dharma, still provide monastic services.³²¹

At the time, although Thiên Ân taught Zen meditation to an American audience, he did not focus on it as an achievement toward individual liberation in isolation and solitude. Also, he did not promote Zen as an instrument for social remedies. Rather, he concentrated on Zen as a method to direct and train the minds of the people leading to the recognition of and the confidence in their own capabilities to help themselves, unlocking the Buddha nature, the potential to enlightenment within their reach. While recognizing that Zen, one of the flowers of Japanese civilization, was in America and the West because of the great Japanese scholar D.T. Suzuki, Thiên Ân pointed out that the goal of Zen or Dhyana is the same everywhere, including China, Korea, and Vietnam, where the tradition of Buddhist meditation has flourished. Not only is Zen the method of meditation and contemplation and the method of keeping the mind calm and quiet, it is also “the method of self-realization and discovering that the true nature is, in fact, nothing less than the Buddha nature.”³²² Thiên Ân also explained that the potential to enlightenment within each individual is in fact a natural inheritance, not a theoretical postulation. Just like the historical Buddha, who had obtained enlightenment from practicing as a human being, every human being has the potential to become enlightened. That potential is the ultimate aim of all Buddhist teachings. Reminding the American audience of the significance of keeping that potential in mind was one thing that he asserted:

In my own experience, which includes training in Buddhist monastic and Zen temples from the time I was fourteen years old, all these different schools, sects, and methods led to the same goal: The discovery of one’s true nature, the attainment of enlightenment, and the realization of nirvana.³²³

Contemplation in order to unlock that Buddha nature, the potential to be enlightened, is the challenging reality of the Buddhist path. That nature is always there in each individual, but it is covered with sensual desires and attachments which conjure up unceasing thoughts of worry and happiness, of hatred and love, of friend and foe, and myriad other contradictory emotions. In Zen practice, contemplation is employed to clear out those inflicative thoughts, revealing the Buddha nature within. On the basis of the Buddha nature, Thiên Ân sees the contribution of

³²¹ See Thích Mãn Giác, *Cổ Hòa Thượng Thích Thiên Ân*, p. 10.

³²² See Thích Thiên Ân, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 2.

³²³ See Thích Thiên Ân, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, pp. x-xi.

Buddhism to American culture: It is as an offering of an alternative to the American tendency to seek spiritual reality externally. In the West, as he has noted that most of the religions have placed “a supreme God above man and then ask that he prays to God and worship him,” Thiên Ân sees the implication that “reality is to be sought externally.” On the contrary, Thiên Ân perceives that Zen offers another path to reality, an internal spiritual path to the enlightened nature, the spiritual reality of the Buddhist path. From the Zen perspective, “reality is to be gotten hold of, not externally, but inwardly.”³²⁴

Whether or not Buddhism is accepted and practiced, human beings are always confronting their conflicting thoughts which unceasingly trouble them. It is a fact, and American people are not excluded. It is also the fact that people, including Americans, want to liberate themselves from those conflicting thoughts. With the liberation from those unruly thoughts, all of the mental emotions are pacified, and peace is the result, with the clarity of the mind or wisdom obtained. Instead of presenting the concept of meditation as a way to seek personal peace through abstract contemplation, Thiên Ân introduces Zen meditation to the American public as a way to train the mind in dealing with those raging thoughts for the purpose of obtaining wisdom. The Buddhist efforts of dealing with those conflicting thoughts become both a challenging practice and a noble task of mental training for all, including those who might be too practical to think that Buddhist practice is just some religious nonsense. This fresh vision of Zen practice in Buddhist temples has helped to correct misconceptions about the pessimistic, fatalistic, and morally passive outlook given to Buddhism. It has not only lifted Buddhism out of the pessimistic dark shadow imposed on the tradition by Occidental imaginations, but it also gives Buddhism a much more active and appealing perception. Thiên Ân accomplished presenting this perspective by using the story of the son and his notebook. As presented by Thiên Ân, the son in the story is unhappy with his parents for their going to the temple to practice Buddhism. The son always criticizes religion and perceives Buddhist practices as just religious nonsense. His scientific, practical, and materialistic view of life is at odds with the temple rituals of chanting, meditating, and reciting activities. He wants his parents to stop going to the temple. Seeing that, his father agrees with the son that he will stop going to the temple if the son gets a small notebook with a pencil and honestly writes down all of his thoughts one hour

³²⁴ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 5.

a day and shows it to him after a week. The son happily agrees to it. Here, the compelling worth of mental training in Buddhism is better told by the story itself:

That night the son sat down at his desk and began to write. He wrote with completely honesty, not holding anything back. One moment, this thought came to his mind, and he wrote it down. The next moment, that thought came to his mind, and he wrote it down. He wrote down all of his thoughts and dreams and fantasies, all of his desires and regrets and fears and memories. Thus, he continued one hour each night for three nights. Then, on the third night, as he lay on his bed, curiosity began to grow in him. He started to wonder what he had written in the past few days. His curiosity grew stronger and stronger until he could not sleep, but jumped up and began to read. As he read through his notebook, a burning sense of shame overwhelmed him. He felt a pain gnaw at his heart as he poured through the pages he had written. He thought of his mother and his father and their love for him, and all of this provoked in him a disgust for his inward state of being, the state which he had candidly revealed in the pages of his notebook. Too ashamed to show the book to anyone, he threw it into the fire and watched over it until it was all consumed. Then he went to see his father.³²⁵

At the conclusion of the story, not only does the son reconcile with his father, he also asks to go to the temple in order to do the practices which he realizes are methods of self-reflection for the purpose of purifying negative thoughts rather than just some religious nonsense. Until then, the son did not know much about himself. Zen meditation, as demonstrated by Thiên Ân, is active enough to meet the challenge of the scientific mind. He points out that unlike science, Zen is not concerned with the factual knowledge of the external world. Also, unlike Western theistic religions, Zen is not preoccupied with the knowledge of God. Rather, Zen is concerned with knowing oneself: “Ever present, and yet so far away; so close at hand, and yet so elusive; so familiar, and yet so poorly understood.”³²⁶ On this basis, Zen champions self-knowledge as a distinguishing mark of human existence. Here, Thiên Ân sees the concurrence of Zen teaching with the great value of the Western philosophical teachings of Socrates in proposing, “Know thyself.” Moreover, as a systematic method of investigating and training the mind through actual

³²⁵ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, pp. 78-79.

³²⁶ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 73.

practices, Zen can be compatible with scientific discipline. Even in philosophy, it is profound enough to meet the demands of scientific intellects.

Living in America during the late 1960s, Thiên Ân not only witnessed the intellectual revolt and disenchantment of the hippie era, he also recognized the mental turmoil simmering beneath the surface of materialistic life. While Western intellects were worrying that scientific pursuits aiming to master the external world had made individuals into Frankensteins and called for a return to nature, including the native Indian ways, Thiên Ân anticipated a need for people to master their minds instead. According to him, people had become nervous and worried because they had given external things the liberty to dominate them at all times. They needed to return to inward investigation for a more balanced life. As they mastered their own minds, being at peace in any place and at any time, then nothing could bother them. Again, Thiên Ân believed that Zen meditation could make a relevant contribution with its inward reflection for the purpose of eradicating mental afflictions, saying:

Western man is always busy, always active, his whole attention riveted outward upon the task of conquering and mastering the external world. Zen meditation helps him free his mind from this excessive occupation with outward things and lets him enjoy the true rest and quiet which come from within.³²⁷

Thiên Ân also recognized the intensification of the isolation between men and nature caused by the eighteenth century Cartesian mentality, “I think, therefore I am.” The dictum entails the discrimination between what is mine or self and what is not mine or others’. As discrimination is intensified, the isolation between self and others is also deepened. It is the same for the isolation between men and their nature. Thiên Ân points out that in Buddhism, the mind creates discrimination due to personal experiences and biases. One perceives the external world through that discriminative mind, and in turn it becomes more colored by one’s own perceptions. In *Yogachara*, the School of Mind Only, this discriminative mind is called the *mana-vijana*, or the defiled mind. The *mana-vijana*, or *mana*, processes the sense-data collected through the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and thinking), just like the programmer of a computer system. After processing the sense-data, the *mana* sends them to be stored in the Store-House of

³²⁷ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 9.

Consciousness, the *alaya-vijana*, which functions like an invisible hard-disk of the computer.³²⁸ The information deposited in the Store House of Consciousness can be retrieved, again through the *mana-vijana*, when needed. Similarly, an individual discriminates between self and others in the very same manner. With all of the data collected from personal experiences and stored in the Store-House of Consciousness, the *mana* retrieves relevant data to make comparisons with new experiences. Through these comparisons, the *mana* gives a kind of discrimination to thinking after considering all of the pros and cons of similar experiences of the past. This discrimination tells the mind to love or hate, to like or dislike, to retreat or advance, to be favorable or unfavorable, and other judgments in terms of dualities.

From this perspective, looking at Descartes and his contemplation on a piece of burning wax, one can see that the defiled *mana* has retrieved all of the past experiences of the wax and any possible similarities to the burning wax. Therefore, Descartes can compare them in order to think that the burning wax is still a piece of wax, though it has undergone various changes while burning. Then, eventually, as the similar experiences concerning the wax in the mental storage become exhausted, the defiled *mana* tells Descartes that the piece of wax no longer looks like the wax at that particular instance of burning. It is his defiled *mana* that dictates Descartes' thinking to perceive in terms of mine and not mine, "I think, therefore I am." With the Buddhist understanding concerning the workings of the mind, Zen strives to regulate the *mana* and to establish an awareness concerning the mental discriminations, returning to the perception before the working and interfering of the discriminative *mana*. As a result, the duality of perceiving sense data is eliminated. In this capacity, Thiên Ân asserts that Zen meditation brings non-discrimination through pacifying the mind where one can see without duality. The view without duality generates a feeling which teaches that there is no separation between oneself and others. Thus, in order to help shatter the isolation between men and nature, Thiên Ân offers a modified versions of the Cartesian dictum as, "I am aware, therefore I am," or, "I feel, therefore I am."³²⁹

In practice Thiên Ân returns to the history of Zen Buddhism, beginning with the Buddha for instructional inspirations. Undoubtedly, the Buddha himself obtained enlightenment through meditation. Also, Thiên Ân acknowledged that the Buddha abandoned outward yogic meditation

³²⁸ The computer analogy is used by Venerable Thích Thắng Hoan, a prominent Vietnamese Buddhist master in Yogachara, when he taught to the monks at the International Buddhist Monastic Institute (Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế) in North Hills, California, in 1997. See also, Thích Thắng Hoan, *Khảo Nghiệm Duy Thức Học*, p. 69.

³²⁹ See Thích Thiên Ân, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 151.

and extreme ascetic practices after six years. Likewise, Thiên Ân teaches standard sitting meditation at his medication center, while maintaining that Zen should aim for neither abstract contemplation nor extremities in practice. He also notes that the Buddha embarked on an inward contemplation for forty-nine days until enlightenment, as a mark for the origination of Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism, as an heir to the tradition, is the continuum of that path of enlightenment by striving to gain wisdom through inward contemplation. However, there are other preparations for this path. Among them, Thiên Ân chose to highlight compassion, an important and indispensable component of Mahayana Buddhism. His specific choice has an implication relevant to its time. According to him, great compassion is needed in order to overcome all obstacles on the path. He points out that giving up a little ease and comfort to practice Zen, or leaving home to take on the monastic life of a Zen monk or nun, may not be difficult. Nevertheless, it is difficult for people in prominent social positions like kings, princes, presidents, or governors, to give up everything for the happiness and welfare of others, instead of one's own happiness. Perhaps, it is the most difficult task in the world. He highlights that Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha, found "a boundless sympathy with the sufferings of others and the determination to find a way out" that all could tread.³³⁰

In America, during the 1960s onward, people have sought after all the materialistic comforts of life. All scientific and technological advancements have focused on serving that gratification. Motivated people aimed to bring whatever conveniences they could produce into existence. Providing various comforts has been a remarkable achievement of science in the West. Nevertheless, people have grown to be dependent on those comforts. They become strongly attached to their comforts, nurturing an obsession with comforts and also an obsession with the body, the object of those comforts. These obsessions give rise to discontentment and dissatisfaction as time and circumstances change, as shown during the hippy era, the time when Thiên Ân introduced Zen Buddhism. In Buddhism, a life of attachment is still a suffering life. It is still samsara, where life ends up with death and its accompanied sufferings. Nevertheless, people continue to look forward to dwelling more comfortably and more enjoyably in life in materialistic ways. Instead of introducing Zen Buddhism as another new ingredient for sailing comfortably through samsara, Thiên Ân presents it as a challenge, contributing to the more healthy redirection of the individual and materialistic trend of his time, namely Buddhism as an

³³⁰ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 4.

abandoning of materialistic individual gratification and as a compassionate quest to benefit others. Also, he reminds them of the radical impermanence of life by illuminating the familiar saying of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, “Nobody can step into the river twice.” At the same time, he instructs people to live fully in the present and asserts that according to Zen Buddhism they “should not be too strongly attached to life,” if they do not want to find themselves “buffeted against the sharp rocks of change.”³³¹ Though understanding that people have their own bodies and their own lives to take care of, Thiên Ân encourages them to look beyond the focus of individuality. He maintains that personal responsibilities should not prevent them from living in harmony with one another and in helping each other according to their best abilities. Without ever claiming to be socially engaged, Thiên Ân insists that Zen Buddhism should never be taken to imply that people have to shut themselves off from communion with other human beings, or “to become isolated in a cage or cell.” Rather he envisions that it should be “a new way of relating to others, a way imbued with compassion and love.”³³²

Furthermore, in order to address the problems of the followers of the hippy generation, who had lost their direction and sought quick gratification through LSD as well as antisocial activities and unruliness, Thiên Ân highlights Buddhism as a path of constant self-effort. Instead of being vocal against drug abuses and about health problems associated with drug users, he enables them to shatter their own illusions by simply confirming that it is not a spiritual enlightenment that they are experiencing. True wisdom is far from the crazy wisdom found in Jack Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*. The imaginative aura concerning an alternate consciousness through psychedelic drugs is fast to evaporate when meeting his confirmation:

In this country there are many young people who use drugs, and some claim to have undergone a kind of transcendental experience through drugs which they identify with enlightenment. If drugs are taken, the person may have some unusual experiences, but that is not enlightenment.³³³

For those who are still hanging on the futile hope that those drugs might serve as certain speedy aids to enlightenment, Thiên Ân goes further to insist that Zen Buddhism does not promise any shortcuts. Momentarily, their shortcuts may bring some immediate gratification. However, they do not produce a permanent beneficial effect in the life of a person. Again, his experience as a

³³¹ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 106.

³³² See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 7.

³³³ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 47.

renowned Zen master illustrates that Zen requires constant self-effort with daily discipline. Rather than shortcuts, it requires one to practice and to advance gradually step by step without giving up. Again, Thiên Ân resorts to the Buddha for validation. From an ordinary human being, the Buddha only became enlightened by eliminating all misdeeds and cultivating all good together with the unceasing practice of purifying his mind. Even the Buddha himself had instructed that this be the method not only of the historical Buddha but of all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. Rather than any shortcuts, Thiên Ân gives them the Buddhist reality of the “practicing sitting” meditation demonstrated by the Buddha under the Bodhi tree for forty-nine days. He says, “The most effective way of keeping the mind pure is by sitting in meditation.”³³⁴ At the center of Thiên Ân’s Zen one can experience standard sitting meditation, beginning with proper posture. The instructions are not only succinct but also transparent for dealing precisely with each part of the body, from the hands to the legs, without neglecting what to do with the eyes and the tongue. Without any twilight notes in the language, they make quite an appeal to the practical mind, as follows:

Once the body is erect, the hands are placed on the lap, the left hand on the right palm; both hands rest near the lower abdomen. The two thumbs should be joined at the top, making an empty circle. This circle represents the moon, the symbol of emptiness. The circle signifies that during meditation while the hands are empty, the mind is also empty. Nothing is held in the hands, nothing is held in the mind. The mind is kept empty. A meditator does not think about the past and the future, does not worry about the external world, but just sits in meditation, at one with himself here and now. If meditating alone, the eyes may be kept partially open, looking downwards at a distance about three feet. If practiced in a group, it is better to close the eyes to avoid distraction. The tongue should be touching the upper part of the mouth to avoid excessive salivation.³³⁵

With the proper posture and mindset fully established, the instructions go on to the crucial component of sitting meditation, which is the counting of breath to train the mind. Again, Thiên Ân is extremely clear and concise in his instructions, saying:

To regulate the mind, the first and most effective method is awareness of breathing.

Breathing in the Zen tradition differs from yogic breathing, where the meditator breathes

³³⁴ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 70.

³³⁵ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, pp. 12-13.

deeply and retains the air for a long period of time. In Zen it is natural. The sitter just breathes in and out lightly and naturally, but remains aware of his breathing. He does not allow the mind to wander here and there. He ties it down to the here and now of present existence. When he finishes one cycle of inhalation and exhalation, as he finishes breathing he counts one; when he finishes the second cycle, he counts two, and so on, up to ten. Then he counts backwards from ten down to one. Just counting and breathing—there is nothing more.³³⁶

Though counting of the breath sounds simple, it is very difficult to practice, due to the usual tendency of the mind to drift and jump from one thought after another. Thiên Ân also notes the common problems of miscounting the breath and the drifting of the mind. Addressing the problems, he even offers his best advice, namely, letting go all of extraneous thoughts and bringing attention back to the breathing.

Though resorting to the history of the Buddha for inspiration and validation on meditative method, Thiên Ân does not promote the exact transplant of the classical Indian model of meditation into the land of America. Acknowledging the busy and frenetic life of the modern age, he is cautious of just replicating Buddhist practice in the new land. In order to make preparations for the adaptation of the technique, Thiên Ân begins by drawing a distinction between Indian meditation and its counterpart of meditation in Eastern Asian countries. Thiên Ân points out that in ancient India, meditation always involves sitting in meditation, either in the full-lotus or half-lotus posture. According to that tradition when one is doing something else, then that person is not in meditation. The classical Indian way of meditation has been the pattern of practice used by Bodhidharma and many of the early patriarchs who devoted themselves to meditation most of the time every day. It also appears to be carried on by most Buddhist monks in the Theravada tradition who devote their time largely to chanting, meditation, and related religious practice, rather than do other things. However, Thiên Ân sees that the tradition had undergone adaptations in eastern Asia where a more busy monastic lifestyle was prevailing. The most illustrative evidence is in China, during the time when Hui-Neng was a disciple of the Fifth Patriarch and did not have the time to sit in meditation at all. Rather than surrendering himself completely to monastic tasks of cleaning and cooking to support his five-hundred fellow monks to the point of abandoning meditative practices, Hui-Neng had striven to

³³⁶ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, pp. 13-14.

meditate while performing those tasks. Though such a practice was not the traditional sitting meditation, Hui-Neng could manage mindfulness while working and was able to bring his mind into the state of meditation. Due to the practice, Hui-Neng had attained a deeper realization than any of his fellow disciples. Hui-Neng even became the Sixth Patriarch as his realization was certified by the Fifth Patriarch. His method became known as meditation in action, an alternative to sitting meditation when one does not have the luxury to sit in meditation at length.

From his years of studying in Japan, Thiên Ân recognizes that the Zen masters in China and Japan have always emphasized that method of meditation in action, the fusion of meditation and realization with daily activities in practice. As a result, the Zen Buddhists in those countries do not only sit in meditation. They practice and apply Zen in everyday life as a tradition. Thiên Ân anticipates the feasibility of the practice in the busy American life, admitting that “meditation should be practiced not only while sitting but also while engaged in work and activity.”³³⁷ Also, he turns to the Vietnamese Zen tradition and singles out the Zen Master Phù Vân, who was renowned for his instruction on practicing Buddhism in every aspect of life. Even King Trần Thái Tông (1218-1277) of Vietnam, who was flooded with most of the complicated affairs of the nation, could also practice and become an enlightened Zen master after receiving the instruction from Master Phù Vân. Though being insightful, the words of Master Phù Vân are brief, instructing that “Buddha is not in the mountain. Rather, Buddha is in everything. If your mind is calm and pure, you can realize Buddha anywhere.”³³⁸ Enlightenment is independent of outside locations and circumstances. Rather, it depends on when one’s own mind is calm and pure. As long as the mind is kept calm and pure, the experience of enlightenment is a reality. Fusing these traditions together, Thiên Ân develops a workable meditation, adapting well to the ongoing busy work schedule of American life. At work, at school, at the office, or at the job, meditation can be practiced. One can extend the practice of meditation to cover the activities of standing, walking, studying, writing, typing, driving, and so on. Even when facing problems, meditation can also be practiced. As the teaching provides, it is a training of the mind to be calm and pure through the mindfulness of actions: “If we keep our mind under control, if we can realize the meaning of what we are doing, if we can *be* what we *do*, that is meditation.”³³⁹ With

³³⁷ See Thích Thiên Ân, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 35.

³³⁸ See Thích Thiên Ân, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 38; also his *Buddhism and Zen In Vietnam*, p. 207; and Thích Thanh Từ, *Thiền Sư Việt Nam*, p. 239.

³³⁹ See Thích Thiên Ân, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 38.

this innovation in meditation, his American audience can practice meditation both at home and at work, in addition to practicing in the standard sitting meditation at the Zen Buddhist centers.

Another important innovation in the practice of Zen meditation introduced by Thiên Ân is making use of the meditative facet of Pure Land Buddhism. With the unification of Zen and Pure Land in Vietnamese Buddhism as the foundation, Thiên Ân has made Pure Land practice an alternative in meditation. D.T. Suzuki and some scholars have treated Pure Land Buddhism as the reliance on “other power.”³⁴⁰ As a result, they alienated themselves from the practice, disregarding it as authentic Zen, the quest for “self power.” Though constantly advocating self-effort in Zen, Thiên Ân chooses not to follow their trend. On the contrary, he even brings Pure Land practice into his Zen center as legitimate Zen meditation. One can comfortably meditate using the practice of *buddhasmṛti*, the contemplation or recollection on the Buddha. Contrary to the misconception that recollection on the Buddha can only be practiced by reciting the name Amitabha Buddha, it can also be done by visualization, the toughest and most challenging Pure Land practice to be performed. The result appears not much different from the Tibetan practice of *Phowa*, in which an accomplished practitioner is able to control and project his or her own consciousness directly onto the Pure Land of Amitābha through visualizing the subtle channels and reciting the mantra “Om Amitabha Deva Sri.” The recollection of the Buddha through visualization is instructed in detail by *The Sutra on Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life* of the Pure Land Tradition.³⁴¹ Accomplishing this practice of *buddhasmṛti* through visualization, one is able to control and project one’s own consciousness directly onto the Pure Land for rebirth. Similar to contemplation in Zen meditation, this particular contemplation leads to the same meditative concentration or *samadhi*. Instead of performing Pure Land practice by vocally invoking the power of Amitabha Buddha, one can focus on the *buddhasmṛti* or contemplation on the Buddha to calm and purify one’s own mind until reaching *samadhi* or concentration. The recollection of the Buddha through visualization is instructed in detail in the eighth contemplation of *The Sutra on Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life* of the Pure Land Tradition. In Pure Land practice the technical term for this particular concentration is “One Mind Samadhi,” the stage where one-pointedness of mind is reached, just as in Zen meditation.

³⁴⁰ See D.T. Suzuki, *Buddha of Infinite Light*, p. 56.

³⁴¹ See Hsiao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutra*, p. 332. Thích Thiên Tâm, *Kinh A-Di Đà và Kinh Quán Vô Lượng Thọ*, p. 60.

In regard to calming and purifying the mind, the practice is “legitimate” Zen.³⁴² This Zen feature of *buddhasmṛti* instructed by Pure Land texts offers an even more effective way of meditation for individuals endowed with visual inclination. Thiên Ân carries it out at his Zen center as the Recollection of the Buddha or the method of inwardly visualizing an image of the Buddha.³⁴³ The practice is smoothly incorporated as a part of Zen meditation, with visualization as an additional technique. Rather than meditating facing the wall or on the breath with the eyes partially open, one closes the eyes while sitting in proper posture, trying to bring into mind the image of a Buddha for visualization. Keeping that image and making it vivid in the mind’s eye while keeping out interference, one visualizes the image as if seeing a physical object with open eyes. One can open the eyes to look at the physical image of the Buddha in order to retain a clear image of the Buddha if needed and then close the eyes again, returning to inward visualization of the mental image. At the beginning, one sees the distinction between the object and the subject of meditation. However, as one is able to develop this mediation further, both the individual and the Buddha, as the subject and the object of meditation, disappear, leaving only oneness. That is the stage of “One Mind Samadhi” resulting from the calm mind during this particular inward contemplation and visualization.

Moreover, the misconception about Amitabha Buddha as “other power” stems from the Western tendency of perceiving the Buddha to be a type of religious redeemer or savior. Also, it is caused by misconstruing the Pure Land to be a type of heaven where people go to be saved and to live for eternity. Thiên Ân only speaks of Amitabha Buddha as “other power” to the extent that the Buddha is like a Zen master who offers his help by showing the way. In this context, Thiên Ân appreciates the need of “other power” just like the need of “the constant prodding” of the Zen master. Moreover, he asserts that without it, “how many people would reach *satori* [meditative insight]?”³⁴⁴ Otherwise, he maintains that one must work and practice the teachings of one’s own efforts. This reliance on “self power” is always needed in Pure Land practice as well as in other Buddhist practices. In this context, it is even imperative to have a union of “other power” and “self power.” Furthermore Thiên Ân explains that the Pure Land is not an eternal heaven as people might have thought. It is merely “a temporary abode where the

³⁴² See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, pp. 126, 130.

³⁴³ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 50.

³⁴⁴ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 127.

most favorable conditions for self-cultivation have been set up and secured.”³⁴⁵ Even for those who seek rebirth there, it is a place for continuing Buddhist practice, rather than a place to be saved. They can advance better and without backslides due to suitable conditions for other Buddhist practices made available to practitioners there.

In addition to the Zen tradition, the Vietnamese Buddhists have a strong tradition of Pure Land Buddhism back in Vietnam as well as now in America. It is not always the case that they want to take an easy ride by using “other power” in place of “self power.” On the contrary, the Pure Land practice allows them the best venue to exert their self power: they are urged to practice as best as they can on their own, either singly or in a group; they are not asked to make a personal commitment to or to constantly rely on a master; they are at liberty to make adjustments to suit their daily activities; and they are entitled to combine the practice with other Buddhist practices as they deem beneficial. Moreover, they have lived and learned to embrace the concept of impermanence taught by the tradition. Instead of being obsessed about this life and becoming attached to it, they have learned to be content enough to make the best out of their human birth in order to get over it while making an effort to seek a way out of *samsara*. With their constant efforts, they understand that they cannot always sail smoothly and safely through *samsara*. They have witnessed the devastations of wars in Vietnam, including the latest Vietnam War. The history of the country is ridden with wars since the time of the Chinese Han occupations during the first century B.C. to the French colonization and the American involvement. Life has been torn to pieces and shattered into fragments, despite their positive efforts. Even Buddhist principles have been used numerous times by the past Buddhist masters to prevent war and to heal the raging suffering caused by war. Life in Vietnam had been “a lotus in a sea of fire” as reflected by the Vietnamese Zen masters of the Trần Dynasty (1225-1398) during the war against the Mongolian invasion in the thirteenth century. Life in Vietnam continued to be *Lotus in a Sea of Fire* during the Vietnam War, as Nhất Hạnh has given the world a glimpse of it. The Vietnamese people have experienced life in *samsara* as living in “a burning house,” as put by *The Lotus Sutra*. While living actively and productively, they want to seek a way out of that burning house and the Pure Land practice offers them the most definite and practical path. Even the common people can practice it anytime and anywhere. In addition, the Pure Land practice has been potent enough to help pacify the emotional tragedies caused by war, bringing relief to

³⁴⁵ See Thich Thien An, *Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice*, p. 128.

the people. The practice has been soothing enough to help heal the grave sufferings concerning millions of Vietnamese casualties during war and the tragic dying on the open sea while escaping for freedom. One can observe those effects through Pure Land chants and recitations in action at monastic settings and beyond. Perhaps, only in the context of the emotional crisis during September 11, 2001, when the Twin Buildings of the World Trade Center were under terrorist attacks, could American people share a sympathetic comprehension concerning the real impermanence of life and perhaps could understand the concept of Pure Land practice coming across as a relief. For the Vietnamese Buddhists in America, the incident has been another reality of life in *samsara* as living in “the burning house” and an opportunity for them to experience the worth of their own Pure Land practices.

The weekend after September 11, after picking me up at the Newark Airport, which appeared to be unusually vacant, the Vietnamese Buddhists at Tường Vân Buddhist Center in Jersey City, New Jersey, told me about the incident because many of them were working in New York City at the time, including some who were working in a building across the street from the side of the World Trade Center on that particularly tragic day. In their conversations, all of the adult members, who have seriously performed the Pure Land practices, commented on the reality of impermanence, mentioning the parable of “the burning house.” Regardless of city life being interrupted due to temporary business closings and other related disruptions, they did not feel distress nor worry as they thought they could have. They even mentioned that they could remain calm despite all of the emotional news broadcasting continuously on various types of broadcasting media, especially on television. At their Buddhist center, they joined together, organizing the Pure Land chanting vigil for peace every night after the incident. They even asked me to conduct a chanting vigil in dedication to the victims of the terrorist attack. On one Saturday, they took me to pay a visit to the site at the World Trade Center. The impact of the collapsed buildings were still lingering with the rising smoke columns inside the protective chainlink fence dotted with flowers, American flags, and letters dedicated to the victims. In the late afternoon, they took me to Hoboken Park, where the city had granted us permission to have a chanting vigil and had been kind enough to provide a few police officers for security. Here and there in the park, scattered with candles and remains of other prayer vigils, city people were sitting in groups or in solitude, looking solemnly at the site of the World Trade Center of New York City across the river. Most of the Buddhists from the center had managed to be there

including their young members. Holding in their folded hands the beautiful marigold flowers freshly cut from the garden of a dedicated Buddhist family, the Buddhists, young and old, followed the chanting of the *Great Compassion Mantra* together with the Pure Land gathas for generating peace and for the dedication of merits and the *Heart Sutra*. Casting the marigold flowers into the flowing current of the river with a vivid vision of the rising smoke from the World Trade Center lingering on top of the high-rises across the New Jersey river and with the rhythmic recitation invoking the compassionate Amitābha Buddha, they concentrated on the wish that the victims would be liberated from sufferings, reaching their best peaceful realms and attaining their long life as being suggested by the Vietnamese name of the marigold flower, “hoa vạn thọ” or the flower of ten thousand years of longevity. For years afterward, the Vietnamese Buddhists there still recalled how peaceful they had felt during the chanting vigil. They even recorded the event onto videos and DVDs and gave them as gifts to others who visited the temple. In this regard, the Vietnamese Buddhists recognize the peaceful and practical worth of Pure Land practice. In war, it is not always easy to sit and meditate while the surrounding is shaking from bombardments and shattered by bullets. However, under such conditions, one can always continue reciting and thinking of the Buddha as needed. It is certainly practical that the common Vietnamese people can think of the Buddha without the need of being too highly intellectual. Also, it is highly practical because one can always practice independently at one’s own pace and effort, as permitted by individual circumstance.

By making adaptations to infuse Pure Land into Zen practice, Thiên Ân has continued the Vietnamese tradition of unifying the Dharma. In the context of making religious transition, he has not only helped to bring more workable Buddhist practices to American Buddhist followers, but also assisted the Vietnamese Buddhist followers in deepening their traditional practices. As a result, both groups can practice together comfortably and confidently under the Zen Buddhist center as one unified tradition.

In 1978, in order to make Buddhism a living tradition in America in the future, Thiên Ân established the Congregation of Vietnamese Buddhists in the United States, unifying all Vietnamese Buddhist masters in America. Also, he made various plans to accommodate more extensive Buddhist activities in the direction of promoting cultural interactions and diversity. First of all, for a more efficient facility, he planned to have a grand Buddhist monastery including a sizable International Zen Meditation Center in a more natural setting and with more

parking spaces so everyone could conveniently enjoy practicing. At the place, he also envisioned a great Buddha monument symbolizing the Oriental spirit in America and intended to become a scenic Buddhist park. Also, he hoped to establish a Buddhist research institution at the international level so that other Buddhist institutes worldwide could join together for common Buddhist goals. Lastly, he was eager to start a Buddhist training institution for monastic members of various nationalities from both East and West, envisioning that each member can pursue their individual Buddhist interest. In a second plan, he intended to establish a publishing house where Buddhist masters and scholars around the world could work together for the purposes of studying, commenting, editing, translating, and printing Buddhist texts from various languages and traditions. In a third plan concerning the construction of the Buddhist monument, he looked forward to building a version of the Mahabodhi Temple, including the artistic depictions of the Buddha's major activities and final Nirvana. In a fourth plan concerning Vietnamese culture, he spoken of a Vietnamese research society covering Vietnamese history, Buddhist literatures, Vietnamese Buddhist history, traditional Vietnamese arts, and so forth. He envisioned that the Vietnamese writers scattering around the globe could be joined together to study and preserve the Vietnamese culture.

The work on the great Buddhist monastery began in the early months of 1980, after Thiên Ân purchased 80 acres of mountainous land in Lancaster, Palmdale, California. He even planted a Bodhi tree there and had a temporary hermitage there. However, it was regretful that Thiên Ân became ill and passed away so soon near the end of the same year, before any of his plans could materialize. His functions were divided into three: Venerable Thích Mãn Giác succeeded Thiên Ân as the head of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha and the Vietnamese Temple; Bhiksuni Karuna Dharma, one his American disciples became the abbess in charge of the International Buddhist Meditation Center; and Dr. Leo Prudent was elected as the President of the University of Oriental Studies.³⁴⁶ A few years later, under the new management, the University of Oriental Studies was closed and Dr. Leo Prudent resigned from his post while other faculty members scattered and many Vietnamese masters went on to manage their local Buddhist activities. Meanwhile, the International Buddhist Meditation Center, under the management of the abbess Karuna Dharma, ceased to conduct ceremonies for the Vietnamese community since the passing away of master Thiên Ân. Karuna Dharma even disclosed that “only a few mantras in

³⁴⁶See Leo Pruden, "Eulogy", in Thích Mãn Giác, *In Memory of Ven. Dr. Thích Thiện Ân*, p. 16.

Vietnamese are now chanted,³⁴⁷ though some short mantras and *gāthās* in Vietnamese are chanted in some ceremonies by the Sangha members of the center. The remaining chants are performed in English while rites are slightly adjusted to accommodate the Western Sangha. The International Buddhist Meditation Center has made an effort to gear toward the needs of American Buddhists, offering High Ordination in 2000 and 2004 to monks and nuns. Regardless of changes, the Vietnamese Temple and the International Buddhist Meditation Center have continued their operations to the present time.

Thus, Vietnamese Buddhism had taken roots in the United States before the arrival of the Vietnamese refugees in 1975. Nhất Hạnh and Thiên Ân were both pioneers in introducing the practices of tradition to the American audience during the early 1960s. In addition to benefiting Americans in their spiritual pursuit, their Buddhist practices influenced American thinking concerning individuality. Seeking individual peace and happiness through spiritual cultivation is not isolated from being compassionately concerned and bringing happiness to others. Nhất Hạnh managed the task by introducing his Engaged Buddhism and mindfulness meditation. Thiên Ân accomplished the purpose by teaching the unified method of inward contemplation and Pure Land Buddhism. Both have made certain adjustments to the Buddhist teachings to accommodate the American lifestyles. Some of those are still undergoing the test of time. Nevertheless, their selective Buddhist practices were not the only practices of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. A more complete Buddhist practice of the tradition would be carried out in the period after 1975, when more eminent Vietnamese Buddhist masters came with a variety of traditional Buddhist teachings. A fuller manifestation of the tradition will be explored in the next chapter, which focuses on the efforts of establishing Vietnamese Buddhist centers by Buddhist monks and nuns, and even by the laity, who arrived as refugees.

³⁴⁷See Le Huu Do, *Sounds of the Bamboo Forest: Buddhist Churches of America in the Vietnamese Tradition*, p. 83.

CHAPTER 4

REVITALIZATION IN DIASPORA

Looking back from 2005, it has been thirty years since the diaspora of the Vietnamese after the fall of Saigon in 1975. It is a long time for the Vietnamese, including the Vietnamese Buddhists, to spend their lives as refugees in America. In this chapter, I will reflect on the various efforts of the Vietnamese Buddhists to build their Buddhist centers and highlight their adjustments to American life. Regardless of various obstacles, the tradition is flourishing.

The general American public might have been unaware, but the Vietnamese refugees held a different perception about their status as refugees. The Vietnamese refugees opposed Communism and were forced to escape from Vietnam. They saw themselves as *người tỵ nạn*, or the people who avoided the crisis that had been created by Communism. As a result, they sought to be received and protected by a government that similarly opposed Communism. Nevertheless, their perception did not include discarding traditional Vietnamese values, including the Buddhist values, a part of their motivations for escaping. Rather, they looked forward to maintaining the old way of life elsewhere under a government that would permit similar freedom. Thus, making adaptations or assimilations into American culture was not the priority for the Vietnamese refugees. Rather, they sought to reconstruct their respected values and hoped to establish these traditions in a more tolerant setting, a pattern seen even during their time in refugee camps in Southeast Asia.³⁴⁸ Settling in the United States where religious freedom is protected by the law of the land, indeed the Vietnamese Buddhists have continued that pattern.

After thirty years of living in the United States, the Vietnamese Buddhist refugees have their hope established through the revitalization of Vietnamese Buddhism. After the first Buddhist center established by Master Thiên-Ân in Los Angeles in 1970, came the nearby Vietnamese Temple in 1975, also by Thiên Ân. This was the first Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in America catering to the pressing need of the newly arrived Vietnamese refugees. Afterward, many other Buddhist centers in cities with a large Vietnamese community have been established. My data indicate that the number of Buddhist centers constantly increases up to the present time, as in Figures 29 and 30. Coming to the United States nearly empty-handed, yet the Vietnamese

³⁴⁸ See Linda Hitchcox, *Vietnamese Refugees in Southeast Asian Camps*, p.5.

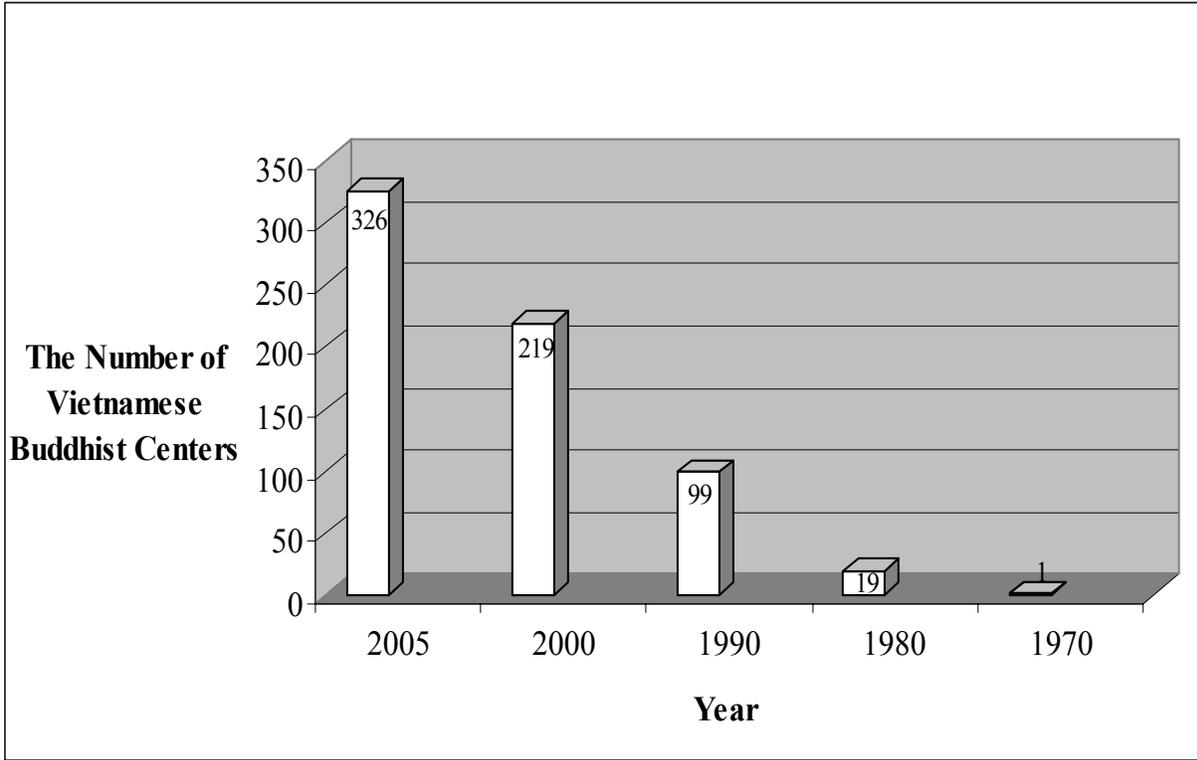


Figure 29. The number of Vietnamese Buddhist centers in the U.S. from 1970 to 2005.

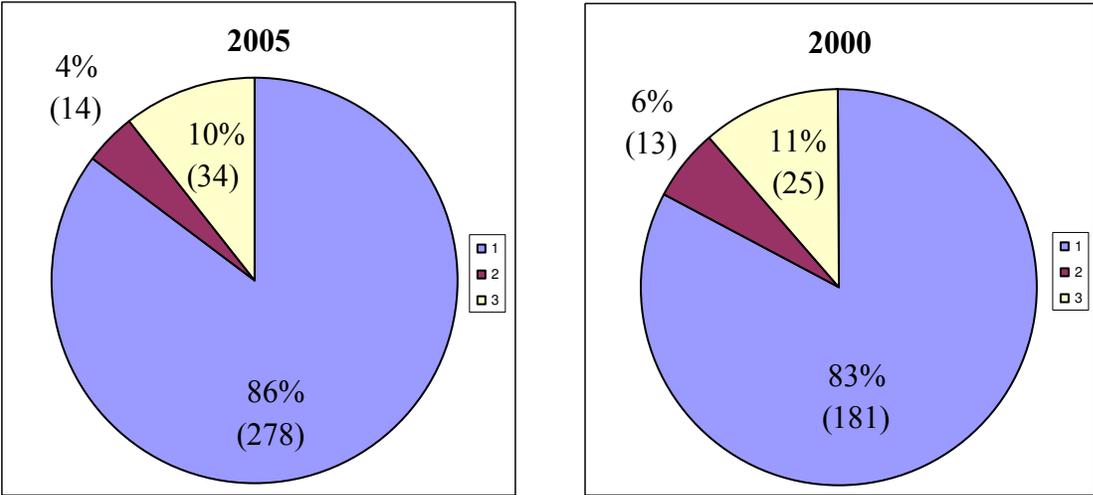


Figure 30. The percentage of the three main groups of Vietnamese Buddhist centers in the U.S.: (1) the Mahayana, (2) the Theravada, and (3) the Mendicant sect and other eclectic groups.

refugees have managed to form their Buddhist centers as soon as they become capable. After the first center in 1970, came nineteen Buddhist centers by 1980. Ten years later, in 1990, the number of centers grew to 99.³⁴⁹ In the next decade, by 2000, it increased to 219 centers. Just five years later, by 2005, the number expanded to 326 centers, with the Mahayana centers as the majority. This steady growth indicates a vigorous revitalization of the tradition in diaspora.

The Vietnamese Buddhists have revised their tradition in America within three decades. An unceasing effort has gone into establishing their Buddhist centers. Nevertheless, the prevalent situation indicates two trends of establishment, namely the monastic and the lay centers. These two trends will be addressed in this chapter. In the former, the monastic Buddhist members establish centers in order to continue the monastic trainings and to provide guidance to the laity. In the latter, the Buddhist laity also forms centers on its own in order to serve its spiritual needs and to practice being capable. The lay centers are at liberty to make affiliations to other centers for mutual support and to invite their spiritual leaders. In America, religious freedom is guaranteed by the Constitution. This legacy of religious liberty reaches back to the movements of Protestantism and Puritanism in England when Henry VIII (r.1509-1547) began to break away from the papal control and the established Church of England in 1534. It is further marked by “the classic instance in America of congregational Separatism” of the early pilgrims who had consciously severed their connection to the Church of England by sailing to America on the *Mayflower* for religious liberty.³⁵⁰ After arriving at the Plymouth colony in America in 1620, the early pilgrims began their own churches, which were lay centers built upon their principal of religious independence. Since then, the lay religious centers in America have been legally protected by the law of the land from being taken over by clergy members sent by the established Church of England and even by Rome. Thus, it is not uncommon in America for a religious center to be established as a non-profit organization by a group of individuals. Enjoying this religious liberty, the Buddhist laity has established lay Buddhist centers in addition to supporting the monastic centers. Together, monastic and lay centers proliferate as the Buddhists become more financially stable. In 2005, with 114 centers, California ranked as the leading state in terms of Vietnamese Buddhist centers. Texas was second with 28 centers. Florida followed with 12 centers, as shown in Figures 31 and 32.

³⁴⁹ See Le Huu Do, *Sounds of the Bamboo Forest: Buddhist Churches of America in the Vietnamese Tradition*, p. 6.

³⁵⁰ See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 138.

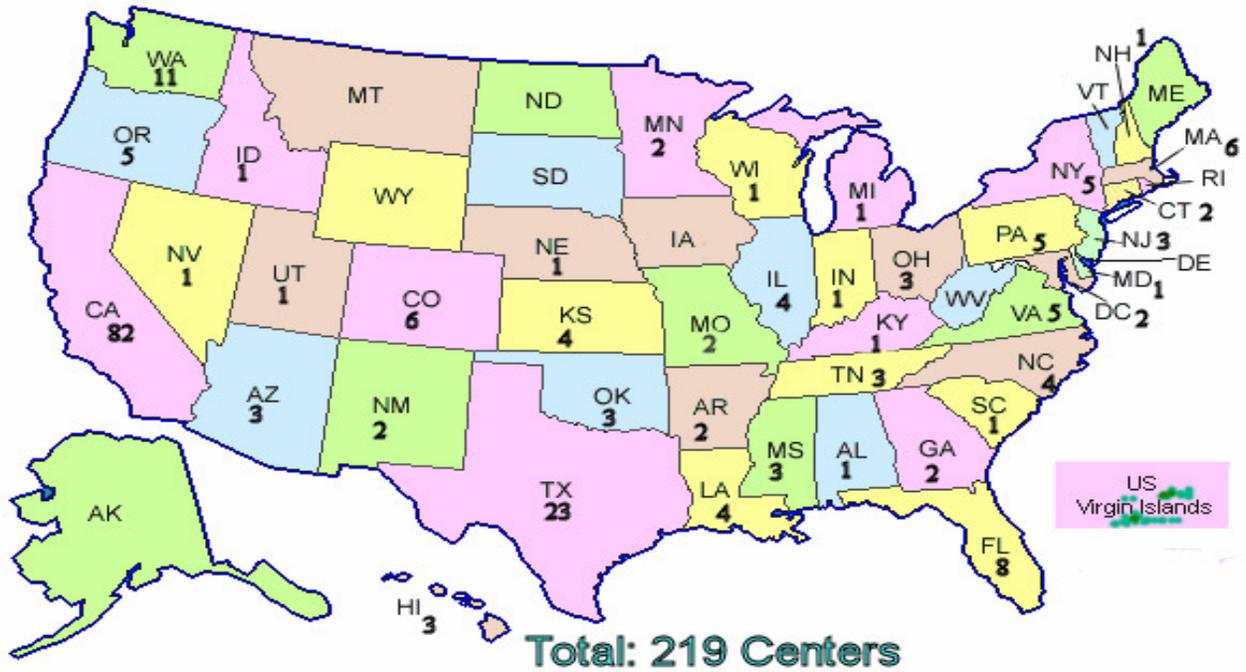


Figure 31. The number of Vietnamese Buddhist centers in each state in the U.S. in 2000.

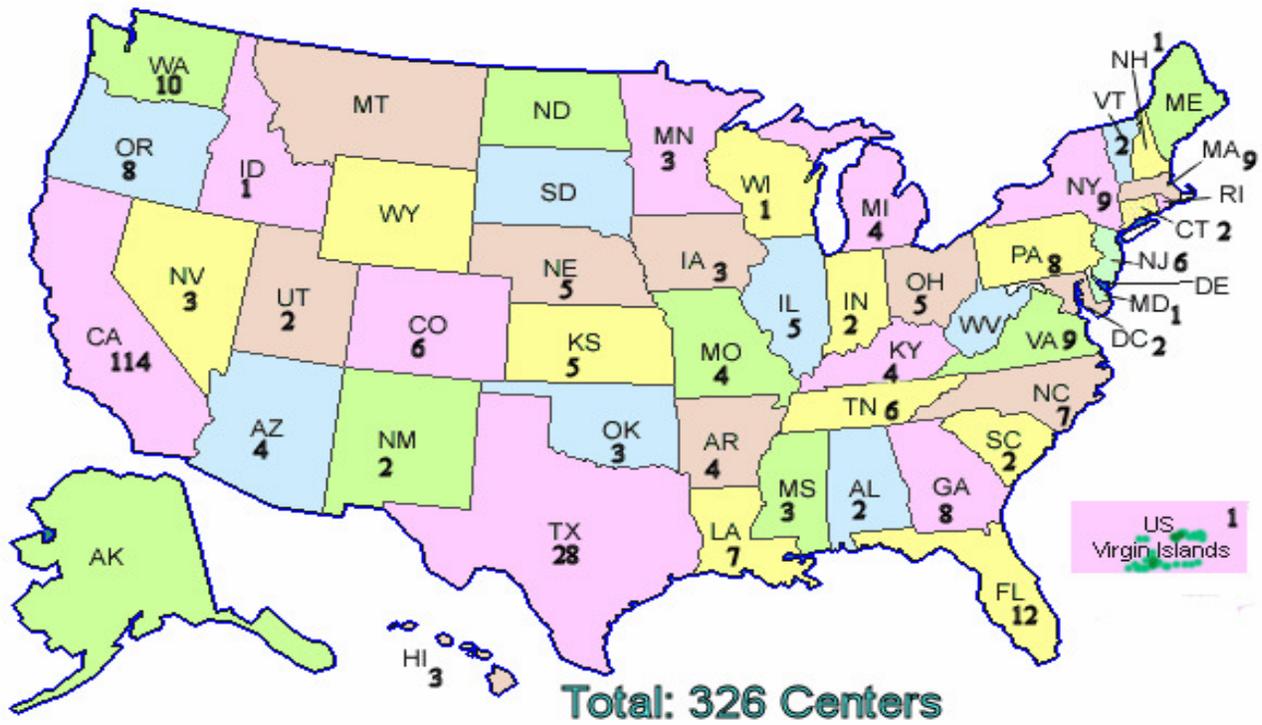


Figure 32. The number of Vietnamese Buddhist centers in each state in the U.S. in 2005.

From 2000 to 2005, the states of South Dakota, North Dakota, West Virginia, Minnesota, and Wyoming, having the lowest of population of Vietnamese, ranging from below 600 down to 100,³⁵¹ show no Buddhist centers. On the other hand, the states of California and Texas, which have the largest Vietnamese populations of 447,032 and 134,961 respectively, maintain themselves as the first and second in having the highest number of Vietnamese Buddhist centers. In 2005, Florida became the third leading state with Buddhist centers. As of 2000, Florida, with a Vietnamese population of 33,190, was the sixth populous “Vietnamese” state, following Washington, Virginia, and Massachusetts. However, in 2006, the Vietnamese also joined a wave of immigration to Florida, namely 1,890 people per day. They have made Orlando a distinctive destination for the Vietnamese, as in the following report:

So, who are all these people flooding into Florida? Some groups stand out for their distinctiveness: Finns moving into Lake Worth, Nigerians into Tallahassee, Vietnamese into Orange County, and Russians into Broward....And while a Hindu temple in southwest Broward or a mosque in Central Florida signals a diffusion of sources, the nations that contribute the largest numbers to Florida’s growth are all from this hemisphere - in descending order, Cuba, Mexico, Haiti, Columbia and Jamaica.³⁵²

The immigration of the Vietnamese to Florida has made the Pine Hills area of Orlando the most populous area of Vietnamese in the local region. Also, it has contributed to the recent growth of the bustling Vietnamese business centers within the four-mile radius surrounding the intersection of Highway 50 (Colonial Drive) and Mill Avenue. From 2000 to 2005, three new Buddhist centers have been built in Orlando to serve the needs of the swelling Vietnamese population. Though Florida ranks third in the number of its Buddhist centers, Florida is first in the number of Buddhist statues gracing its public roads. Believe it or not, St. Augustine, Florida is also the oldest city with Buddhist statues gracing the public street, in addition to being famed as the oldest city in the U.S. Since 1945, two awesome artistic bronze statues of the Buddhist Dharma Protector, which were brought from Japan, have guarded the entrance of Ripley’s Believe It or Not Museum, located on a busy main street that goes through the center of St. Augustine. These statues continue to guard the entrance, attracting visitors to Ripley’s Believe It or Not Museum, as shown in Figures 33 and 34 on the following page.

³⁵¹ According to the 2000 U.S. Census State Population Data, out of a total of 1,122,528 Vietnamese living in the U.S., South Dakota has 574 Vietnamese, North Dakota 478, West Virginia 379, Montana 199, and Wyoming 100.

³⁵² See Mike Vogel “The Mega-Trends: Good Migrations.” *Florida Trend*, April 2006, p. 26.



Figure 33. The first Buddhist statues gracing a public road are at Ripley's Believe It or Not in St. Augustine (Florida), the oldest city in the United States. Photo Phú Lê.



Figure 34. A closer look at the Dharma Protectors at the entrance of Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum. Photo Phú Lê.

The connection between the number of the Vietnamese Buddhist centers and the Vietnamese population within each state indicates that Vietnamese Buddhist centers have been continuously built to serve the Vietnamese communities in America where there is a large enough Vietnamese population. Working together, the Vietnamese refugees have rebuilt and revived Vietnamese Buddhism in diaspora. Within just five years, from 2000 to 2005, 107 new Vietnamese Buddhist centers were established in the United States, a 49-percent increase in comparison to the 219 centers in 2000, and regardless of the fact that a few recently built centers might not have even been recorded.

This steady growth of Vietnamese Buddhist centers in America has not been without difficulties. Some of them might have seemed to be insurmountable at first. Nevertheless, they have been handled and overcome at the end. The success of the Vietnamese Buddhist centers was humble in terms of financial values. Indeed, it was inconceivable for the Vietnamese Buddhists to have a campaign of \$600,000 for library expansion or a campaign of \$900,000 for classroom additions, as did the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Massachusetts,³⁵³ or other higher capital campaigns successfully managed by various university foundations across the United States. Furthermore, it was beyond their dreams to have more than twenty-five million dollars to build a monastery like the Shi Lai Temple, founded by Chinese Buddhists in 1978, in Hacienda Heights, outside of Los Angeles, or to have nearly 160 million dollars to complete the 2006 reconstruction of the 18th-century baroque Church of Our Lady in Germany, which was leveled by Allied bombings in February, 1945.³⁵⁴ Also, it was difficult for them to imagine that they could afford to replace a \$500,000 pipe organ, as they did in the case of the Methodist Church in downtown Tallahassee.³⁵⁵ In general, the total value of an individual Vietnamese Buddhist center was nowhere close to the financial worth of that particular pipe organ. While their Buddhist efforts would not be reflected in terms of financial success, they would provide valuable insights into the revitalization and the adaptation the tradition to American life. Each

³⁵³ See Barre Center For Buddhist Studies, *Building a Better Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, Capital Campaign 2006-2007*, p. 3; and *2007 Course Catalog*, p. 6.

³⁵⁴ See Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, p. 272; and Andrew Curry, "Crowning Glory," *Smithsonian*, March 2006, p. 92.

³⁵⁵ In 1999, though the Community Outreach Program organized by the International Student and Scholar Living Center at Florida State University, I was invited to give a presentation on Vietnamese Culture to a senior group at the United Methodist Church in Tallahassee. One of their leading members, who was a retired professor from FSU, kindly gave me a tour around their beautiful church. While clarifying the cost of the new organ, he also explained about the pipes of the old organ, which had been packed as a donation to another needy church. In this case, it was impressive that a religious center was able to grow and to support other centers.

center has its own story to be reported, including its achievements and its obstacles. Forming a Buddhist center in America is not easy. It takes the unceasing efforts of a whole generation of dedicated Vietnamese Buddhist masters and committed Buddhist laity. Rather than attempting to generalize about so many ephemeral centers, I shall document the establishment of three Buddhist centers as exemplars of where the most available public information has been gathered. The first two are monastic centers, while the last is a lay center. Various sources of available public information concerning these centers provide a more complete picture concerning the efforts of adapting and revitalizing Vietnamese Buddhism in America. The first center is the International Buddhist Monastic Institute, popularly known as Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, in San Fernando Valley, California. Since its establishment in 1981, the center has become one of the leading Vietnamese monasteries where new generations of monks and nuns are trained under a well-structured monastic program organized by a prominent master respected in both monastic and secular education. The center has also housed one of the highest offices of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America, where many important Buddhist conferences have taken place. The original master, Thích Đức Niệm, passed away in 2003. Now his young disciple monks are managing the center. The second center is the Temple of Perfect Virtue of San Jose, California, the first Vietnamese Buddhist nunnery built in the United States. The establishment of the center provides another version of the monastic center, namely a Buddhist temple founded and managed by a leading Buddhist nun. The center provides a monastic model for training nuns in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. In addition, it aims to preserve the Vietnamese Buddhist culture while rendering services to the local Vietnamese Buddhists. The founding abbess, Thích Nữ Đàm Lưu, passed away in 1999, leaving some extensions of the building project to be done. Now, her nun disciples are managing the center. The third is the Temple of Pure Heart, a small center established in 2003, in Nashville, Tennessee, to serve the spiritual needs of the local Buddhists. The center is managed by a Board of Directors comprised of dedicated lay Buddhists and has a prominent Buddhist master as the spiritual leader, who is also well-educated in secular learning and well-known for having established more than thirty lay Buddhist centers in the United States. The center has a long history of struggle to overcome difficulties. Some of their dedicated lay leaders even passed away before seeing the small Buddhist temple of their vision. Each center has its own visions and serves different Buddhist functions. Yet, all have struggled to overcome difficulties, proving

valuable experience to the process of rebuilding and strengthening Vietnamese Buddhism in America.

1. International Buddhist Monastic Institute, San Fernando Valley.

The International Buddhist Monastic Institute (henceforth the Institute) or Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, was established by the Most Venerable Dr. Thích Đức Niệm (1937-2003). It began at the University of Oriental Studies in Los Angeles, in 1979, as Master Đức Niệm came to America to join Master Thiên Ân. After the passing away of Master Thiên Ân, in June 1981, the Institute was relocated to Sepulveda, or the present North Hills, in the San Fernando Valley region, about a twenty-minute drive north of Los Angeles, California. The center originated from the vision to preserve and transmit the Buddha Dharma in the United States by training future monastic members, by reprinting and publishing Vietnamese Buddhist texts, and by providing guidance and practice to the Buddhist laity. This vision set the center apart from other Buddhist centers. Rather than an ordinary Buddhist temple, it was an institution for training monastic members, modeled after the famous Buddhist institutions in South Vietnam before the diaspora, especially that of Phật Học Đường Ấn Quang in Saigon, where Đức-Niệm was one of the recognizable Dharma masters originally trained under the contemporary eminent masters, including Thiện Hòa, Thiện Hoa, Trí Quang, Trí Thủ, Trí Hữu, etc.³⁵⁶ With the traditional model, the Institute became famous for training monks and nuns in a vigorous and traditional discipline. In conjunction with the University of Oriental Studies, the Institute intended to provide monastic training programs leading to degrees in Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral studies within four, two, and three years, respectively. A glimpse into the training program of the Institute indicated a systematic and well-integrated educational plan in Buddhist studies.

I. The Bachelor's program in Buddhist studies in four years offered the major courses on the early history of Buddhism, as follows:

1. In the first year, the students would be introduced to the proper disciplinary conduct of the Institute, library studies, the foundational Indian philosophies and ideologies up to the history of Buddha and his thoughts, with English and Chinese as required languages.

³⁵⁶ See Thích Thiện Hoa, *50 Năm Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo Việt Nam* (50 Years of Revitalizing Vietnamese Buddhism), pp. 72, 78.



Figure 35. The International Buddhist Monastic Institute (Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế), 2007.



Figure 36. The Library of the Institute, with different sets of Tripitaka. Photos Minh Huy.

from the time of the Buddha, the fundamental tenets of the *Āgama* (the Mahayana equivalent to the Theravada *Nikāya* collections), the *Abhidharma* on the differentiation of philosophical schools.

2. In the second year, students would learn Indian history including the history of Indian Buddhism, Indian philosophy, the cultural history of India, the fundamental tenets of the *Surangama Sutra* and the *Vijñapti-mātrata*, Indian meditation, with English and Chinese as required languages, along with Pali and Sanskrit.

3. In the third year, students would embark on studying Chinese history, including Buddhist history, philosophy, cultural and art history; Buddhist discipline or Vinaya; Chinese Buddhist schools; the principles of Chinese meditation; the tenets of the Abhidharma Kośa; the principles of Southern Buddhism (Theravada); methodology in Dharma discourses; with English and Chinese as requirements along with Pali and Sanskrit.

4. In the fourth year, students would advance to studying the world history of Buddhism; the fundamental teachings of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*; the tenets of Buddhism in Vietnam, Japan, and Tibet; Buddhist organizational management; Buddhism and world cultures; and language programs similar to those in the previous years.

II. The Master's program in Buddhist studies in two years consists of the following:

1. In the first year, students would study more deeply the fundamental teachings of the *Āgama*, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Nirvana Sutra*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*, the *Vaipūlya Sutras*, and so forth. Also, they would learn further about the tenets of Buddhist meditation in India, China, Japan, and so forth, as well as the history of world Buddhism, methodology on Dharma discourses, and a language program similar to those of the previous years.

2. In the second year, students would explore further into teachings of the *Vinaya*, including the *Satyasiddhi-śāstra*, the *Mahayana Awakening of Faith*, the *Mahayana Saṃparigraha-śāstra*, the *Yogacārabhūmi*, the *Vinaya*; comparative religions; comparative philosophies, including Eastern-Western cultures and Eastern-Western thoughts; Buddhist organizational managements; methodology in Dharma discourses; Buddhist anthropological studies; and a similar language program.

III. The Doctoral Program in Buddhist Studies in three years consists of the following courses:

1. In the first year, students would learn about various Indian philosophical schools, Indian Buddhist philosophy, Indian history, Buddhism and social civilizations of humanity, and continue with a similar language program as in previous years.
2. In the second year, students would cover Chinese Buddhism and philosophy, including the formation of Chinese Buddhist schools and their fundamental tenets. Also, they would focus on studying Chinese Buddhism under the following dynasties:
 - (a) Han (14-221 C.E.), Wei (220-266 C.E.), and Chin (265-420 C.E.);
 - (b) During the North and South division (420-589) and Sui (589-618 C.E.);
 - (c) T'ang (618-907 C.E.) and Sung (960-1127);
 - (d) Yuan (1280-1368 C.E.) and the Republic of China.

Also, they would be instructed further into the Zen and Pure Land schools of China and Japan, the foundational tenets of Vietnamese Buddhism, Buddhism and the cultural politics of humanity, the foundational tenets of Southern Buddhism, world history of Buddhism, Buddhist organizational management, and methodology on Dharma discourses.

3. In the third year, students would concentrate on translation and writing, completing the doctoral dissertation.³⁵⁷

The program was tentative. It was expected to be adjusted to circumstances as time went on in order to better accommodate the needs of monastic students. Nevertheless, it served well as the guiding light to the Institute. The original vision to provide monastic education to monks and nuns of all nationalities was upheld, as being suggested by the name of the Institute, the International Buddhist Monastic Institute.

The establishment of the center as the International Buddhist Monastic Institute was remotely a rosy path, regardless of the excellent qualifications in both monastic training and secular education of the founding master, Venerable Thích Đức-Niệm. As previously mentioned, Master Đức Niệm came to the United States in 1979 by the invitations of Master Thiên Ân, who visited to Taiwan twice to make his personal invitations.³⁵⁸ Đức Niệm came with the intention of helping to alleviate the crisis confronting the Vietnamese refugees who had

³⁵⁷ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế* (The International Buddhist Monastic Institute), Số. 8, 1984, pp. 68-75. See also the first issue of the same chronicle published in 1980.

³⁵⁸ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be A Perfect Spring), p. 215.

begun to escape the communists of Vietnam and arrive in America in big waves. Concerned for the welfare of his Vietnamese people, he abandoned the bright future opening up to him in Taiwan after earning his Doctoral Degree in Chinese Philosophy and Literature in 1978 at the prestigious National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei.³⁵⁹ He was the first monk and the first foreigner to earn that type of doctoral degree in Taiwan. Taiwanese television even interviewed and broadcast his doctoral accomplishment on its national news. The Chinese Buddhist Sangha members shared the proud accomplishment of a monastic member and offered their compliments by bestowing several gifts on him, including a beautiful gilded standing statue of Amitābha Buddha about half the size of a normal person, which he still had on an altar in his room at the center. They even published his dissertation and formed a scholarship to inspire and support poor students. Teaching positions in the Taiwanese universities were opening to him. Nevertheless, to the disappointment of his fellow Chinese Buddhists and supporters in Taiwan, he left to join his fellow Vietnamese monks led by Thiên Ân in America.

While staying at the University of Oriental Studies, in addition to sharing the burden with Thiên Ân by accepting the post of vice-president of the university, Đức Niệm also established the International Buddhist Training Institute on August 24, 1979. It was an initial step to fulfilling his vision of training Buddhist monks and nuns for future Buddhism. Originally, the Institute began with an office at 920 S. New Hampshire Avenue, which was also the small room of the University of Oriental Studies assigned to him. His equipment for printing books was set up in the garage of the building. Regardless of the limitations of facilities, he was determined to press on with his plan despite the fact that his monastic colleagues thought that his vision was unattainable. After learning that \$250 was all that Đức Niệm had left to start up the Institute for training monks and publishing Buddhist texts in America, one even told him that his money was just enough to take the monks out twice to eat at a Chinese restaurant in downtown Los Angeles. Nevertheless, the Institute manifested itself and carried out its intended functions. The sole supply of Buddhist texts to all the Vietnamese Buddhist centers abroad, including those in the United States and those at refugee camps in various Southeast Asian countries between 1979 and

³⁵⁹ His Doctoral Dissertation concerning the Chinese Literature and Vietnamese Literature during the Lý Dynasty written in Chinese can be located electronically at Cornell University under Duc-Niem, Thich (Hu Xuanming Zhuan). *Zhongguo wen yue yu Yenan Li chao wen xue zhi yan jiu* (A Comparative Study of the Literature of the Ly Dynasty of Vietnam to the Chinese Literature), 1978.

1983, came from his humble publishing house.³⁶⁰ Đức Niệm even exchanged the extra robes to other Buddhist monks in order get extra cash to fund the publishing. The initial difficulties were just the beginning.

In 1981, a few months after the passing away of Thiên Ân in late 1980, when the University of Oriental Studies was settled under the new management, it was a shock to Đức Niệm when he received a court warrant ordering him to vacate his room within twenty-four hours. Regrettably, the personal invitations from Thiên Ân served as an honorable trust between Vietnamese Buddhist monks, but were a contrast in the American legal system. The American abbess Dharma Karuna, who succeeded Thiên Ân as the one in charge of the power of the center, knew the incident well. At midnight, Đức Niệm and his Vietnamese Buddhist fellows rushed out his printing equipment together with his belongings. While the female Buddhists devotees were in tears, gathering the lighter belongings of the Institute, the male Buddhists carried the statue of the Buddha from the office in the University of Oriental Studies in their own arms and made it out before midnight. They never returned. Rather, they sought for a temporary location. During my visit to the Institute in the early 1990s, a few elder female lay Buddhists or *Upasikas*, including the respected *Upasikas* Bôn Thiện and Diệu Hải, the latter now still alive in Santa Ana, still occasionally mentioned that day of relocation when they sentimentally talked about the hardship encountered by the Master. In late March 1982, Đức Niệm borrowed loans from the bank to purchase a house at 9250 Columbus Avenue, in a residential area right next to Sepulveda Junior High School. Located at the corner of Columbus Avenue and Tupper Avenue, the property was a block away from Sepulveda Avenue, one of the busy roads in the San Fernando Valley, Northern Los Angeles. The small four-bedroom house was converted into a Buddhist center with a compact main sanctuary that could hold a maximum of three dozen people. For larger Buddhist events, the master had to rent the auditorium of the high school located on the other side of Tupper Avenue. Some in the neighborhood did not wait long to complain after seeing crowds of Asians coming for weekend religious functions after parking their cars alongside the roads around the area. By then the neighborhood was far from the populated Vietnamese community and was still quite rural, as in the following photo. The location was remote, so that within the first year it was a blessing to have a crowd of sixty Buddhists

³⁶⁰ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Tướng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), pp. 111, 152.



Figure 37. The International Buddhist Monastic Institute at the beginning in 1982.



Figure 38. The International Buddhist Monastic Institute in 1991, after the first renovation.
Photos the Institute.

participating during the major events organized by the center, including the Buddha Birthday or the Ullambana, the Buddhist day to commemorate the parents. Moreover, the site was still rural, so that the former owner still had fences for rabbits and other domestic animals on the property. Even until 1991, one of the neighbors on the other side of the cement-block fence still had a horse on her property. Regardless of the remote location, this became the Buddhist center for Master Đức Niệm and opened a new chapter for the Institute, again not without serious difficulties lying ahead.

Keeping his vision of training a new generation of monastic members, Master Đức Niệm pressed on with his Buddhist activities, especially giving Dharma lectures to various Buddhist groups across the United States and abroad in order to enhance the understanding and practices of the Vietnamese Buddhists. Among those groups, Quang Minh Temple of Chicago, Illinois, and Tam Bảo Temple of Fresno, California, have remained under his direct affiliation until the present time. At the Institute, in addition to maintaining his individual schedule of waking up at 4:30 a.m. and never going to bed before 1:00 a.m. to work on translating and writing Buddhist texts, Đức Niệm kept his regular activities of instructing Han, the scriptural language, and offered teachings on major Buddhist texts to the Vietnamese Buddhists. Also, he promoted pure monastic conducts by upholding the following guidelines as *Regulations of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute*:

1. All Buddhist clergy students of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute (hereinafter referred to as “INSTITUTE”) shall absolutely live in accordance with the teachings set forth in the Six Points of Harmony.³⁶¹
2. All Buddhist clergy students shall live a humble life, in harmony with one another, strictly observing the prescribed schedule, i.e. eating hour, sleeping hour, religious practice hour, studying hour, and working hour.
3. All Buddhist clergy students may receive, from the Institute, the necessities needed for their daily life, depending upon the capacity, situation of the Institute, without making any conditional requests.

³⁶¹ The Six Points of Harmony are the followings: (1) the harmony of the body in living together; (2) the harmony of speech without argumentation; (3) the harmony of the mind including openness without jealousy, conflict, or hatred; (4) the harmony of views including sharing and tolerating other views; (5) the harmony of discipline including observing monastic conducts together; and (6) the harmony of benefits, including sharing them together. See also, Thích Đức Niệm, *Phật Pháp Yếu Nghĩa* (The Essential Meanings of The Buddha Dharma), p. 21.

4. All Buddhist clergy students of the Institute shall, on any religious assignment to any area, fulfill their duties to the best of their abilities, without excusing themselves on any grounds whatsoever in order to return to the Institute, without the consent and approval of the Institute's Board of Directors. The Institute shall deny all responsibilities to any Buddhist clergy student who, at his/ her own will, quits the Institute and settles elsewhere.

5. All Buddhist clergy students shall absolutely comply with the regulations of the Institute. In case of violation of the rules set forth hereabove, and if the interested party is found not to sincerely repent, or is found to purposely damage the good name of the Institute, he/ she shall be subject to separation, expulsion, or excommunication.³⁶²

Gradually, his unceasing efforts were recognized. Many leading Vietnamese Buddhist Masters joined him in teaching the young monks and nuns. At present, the most Venerables Thích Thắng Hoan from Louisiana and Thích Tín Nghĩa, the abbot of Từ Đàm Hải Ngoại (the Temple of The Compassionate Cloud Abroad), Texas, are among those who still frequently visit the Institute to assist the young monks since the passing away of the founding Master. Within a year of its establishment, many young Vietnamese chose to join the Institution, including about a dozen of them who were embarking on training for noviceship. The traditional Buddhist values of a standard Vietnamese training monastery came alive again at the Institute. The monastic members woke up at 5:30 in the morning and got ready for the chanting session in which the *Surangama Mantra* was fully recited together with *The Great Compassion Mantra* and ten other small mantras, as always in the tradition. An adjustment on the time to start the day at the Institute had been made. Rather than waking up at 4:30 a.m. as it was in Vietnam traditionally, they arose at 5:30 a.m. due to the busy schedule of the young monks and nuns who were still attending local public high schools or universities. At the Institute, just as at traditional monastic training institutions in Vietnam, the Buddhist Vinaya text was also recited in the morning, namely *The Essential Discipline for Daily Use*.³⁶³ The instructions from the text are essential to the life of both monks and nuns. In order to generate respect and harmony in the monastic setting as well as presenting the monastics as decent members of the Sangha to the public, they

³⁶² See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Phật Giáo Thống Nhất* (The Unified Buddhism) No. 5, 1989, p. 159-160.

³⁶³ See Thích Trí Quang, "Tỳ Ni Nhật Dụng Thiết Yếu [The Essential Discipline for Daily Use]," *Luật Sa Di, Sa Di Ni*, p. 976. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Nhất Hạnh had chanted this manual as a novice and later developed his *gāthās* for meditation from this text.

precisely offer the monastic etiquettes concerning standing, walking, sitting, talking, eating, cleansing, entering the lecture hall, sitting in meditation, behaving toward their monastic elders and others including the laity, and so forth. Meditation alone would not make one a monastic member though it is an important practice in the Buddhist tradition. Rather, getting ordained and observing the precepts prescribed by the Vinaya made one a monastic member in the Buddhist tradition. The significance of this particular Vinaya text can be observed from the fact that it was recited every other day, in alternation with the *Surangama Mantra*. Both of these main Buddhist texts for morning recitation should be memorized and recited by heart because they would be tested by the Buddhist preceptors during the High Ordination.³⁶⁴ After finishing the morning chanting section the novice monks and nuns went about cleansing up the monastery according to their assigned duties. Occasionally, Master Đức Niệm even joined his disciple monks to stuff and move the trash cans, getting them ready to be picked up by the truck from the local waste management company. Afterward, those who were attending secular education got ready for their classes. Returning from public schools, they went on performing their assigned tasks. At meal time, the monks took turns cooking in the kitchen to serve the whole monastery, especially when the nun who managed the office work remained as the only female in resident after 1990. Through cooking, as a part of the training, monks learned to manage various tasks in the monastic kitchen and appreciated the efforts of making their own meals. Also, relying on their own cooking became a practicality in an American setting, where help with the tasks in the kitchen from the laity was only available during the weekend. At 8:00 p.m., they joined together at the main sanctuary again to chant the *Amitābha Sutra* or the chapter “Universal Gate” of the *Lotus Sutra* concerning Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who is the embodiment of compassion. Also, these two texts were alternately chanted every other day. At 9:00 in the evening, they attended the classes taught by the master. At the conclusion of the day, after the ringing of the bell at 10 o’clock, the monks and nuns retired to their quarters to spend a quiet night or to practice and study as much as they could. Those without the need to stay up late, especially the young trainees, went to sleep early, so that they would be able to get up early the next day. Otherwise, they would be sleepy while chanting in the early morning, as revealed in the following passage:

³⁶⁴ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be A Perfect Spring), p. 185.

The young monks got up for the early morning chanting section. Nodding and nodding they recited the *Surangama Mantra* missing words here and there, messing up the chanting rhythm regardless of the effort of the Novice Minh Đ., who has tried various ways to strike the wooden fish, making an effort to maintain the normal chanting pace. Getting upset, the Novice threw the wooden handle for inviting the bell down to where they were sitting. The young monks were startled. Getting scared and stopping their nodding, they chanted shakily and noisily. That morning, we told one another about the incident of the night. Everyone cracked up with laughter.³⁶⁵

At the weekend, a slightly different and busier routine was applied. During the morning session on Saturday, after a short chanting section with the *Heart Sutra* as the main text, they prepared and delivered their Dharma talk in front of the master and their fellow monks and nuns, a great practice for giving a Buddhist discourse in front of the general public. At night, they learned the major Mahayana Buddhist teachings together with the scriptural language, through reading, translating, and explaining the *Lotus Sutra* written in classical Chinese Han, word by word, under the attentive guidance of the master. At 5:30 a.m. every Sunday morning, they arose and got ready by six o'clock at the main sanctuary to lead the Buddhist laity who came to join them in making 108 prostrations while reciting the 108 names of the Buddhas for repentance. At eight o'clock, the master delivered his teachings to the Buddhist devotees who came for the repenting section.³⁶⁶ Afterward, the monastic meal led by the ceremonial food offering began at eleven o'clock and concluded with a section of walking and Buddha recitation. Being a Mahayana Buddhist center, only vegetarian meals were served at the Institute. There was no eating after the hour. At two o'clock in the afternoon, monks and nuns performed the chanting services followed by a Dharma discourse to the public at the main sanctuary. As the laity left for the day after the Sunday services, the monastic members got to do their laundry and spend the time on their own. During these early years, the lack of financial funds led to a shortage of food. It was not unusual that some of the elder members among them even went to school without lunch. They had rice gruel (porridge) numerous times instead of cooked rice, the regular Vietnamese staple food. Though hard to imagine, it happened in America at the time.

³⁶⁵ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Tướng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), p. 147.

³⁶⁶ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Phật Giáo Thống Nhất* (The Unified Buddhism), Số. 5, 1989, p. 161.

Regardless of the vigorous training schedule coupled with the shortage of basic food supplies, the novices stood firmly on their ground to embark on their monastic duties.

Committed to his vision, Master Đức Niệm organized a High Ordination to bestow Buddhist precepts on monks and nuns within a year, in 1983, as soon as he could manage. The historical Vietnamese Buddhist High Ordination took place on September 2, 3, and 4, the three days of the first weekend of September 1983. This was the first full scale traditional High Ordination by the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha abroad since 1975. All of the virtuous and eminent Vietnamese Buddhist Masters living abroad were invited and joyfully joined in to preside over the ordination, including those from Australia, Canada, and European countries. As a sincere dedication to the elder virtuous Master Thích Thiện Hòa, who was revered by him during his years in monastic training at Ân Quang Buddhist Institute in Saigon, Đức Niệm honored the ordination after his Master, namely the Thiện Hòa High Ordination. The elder Master Thiện Hòa was nationally recognized for his pure conduct. As a result, he was nominated to be the director of Ân Quang Temple and also the national Vice-General Superintendent of the Sangha. While still alive, the elder Master Thiện Hòa (1907-1978) was able to invite the eminent Buddhist masters at Liên Hải Buddhist Institution, the Sùng Đức Buddhist Institution, and the Ân Quang Buddhist Institution to join together to form the Nam-Việt Buddhist Institution housed at Ân Quang Temple. This unified Buddhist institution produced many eminent masters including Venerables Huyền Vi, Thiền Định, Đức Niệm, Thắng Hoan, and so on, who were leading the Thiện Hòa High Ordination. In America, even though he was able to organize the Ordination, Master Đức-Niệm invited other masters to be the highest leading preceptors, namely the most Venerable Dr. Thích Huyền Vi from France, who completed his doctoral education at Magadhi University in India, and the most Venerable Thích Thiền Định, who was the abbot of Pháp Hoa Temple in France,³⁶⁷ rather than putting himself in the position. It was his bodily Dharma, a type of lesson without using words, on *anatman* (selflessness) and non-competitiveness. He often told them not to seek to win positions in the Sangha, which is certainly not a place to compete for position, title, or fame of any type. As inspiration, he even cited the words of the Buddha in verse 201 of the *Dharmapada*, as follows:

Victory gives rise to hate,
Those defeated lie in pain,

³⁶⁷ See Kim Đạt, *Đại Giới Đàn Thiện Hòa* (The Thiện Hòa High Ordination), pp. 49, 57, 60.

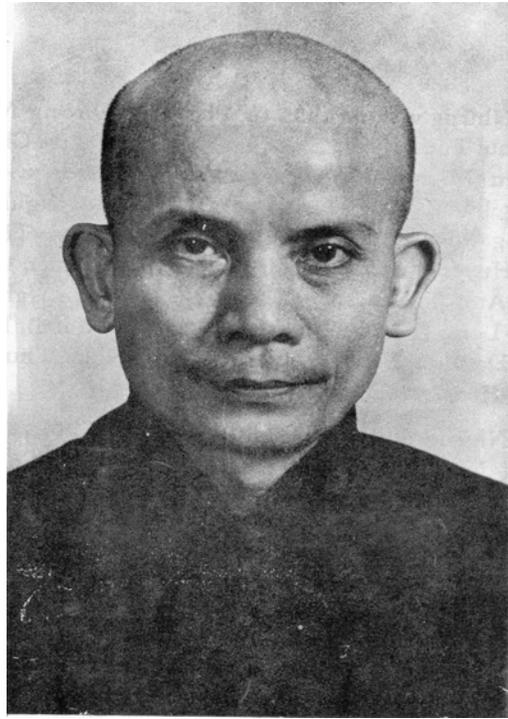


Figure 39. An Quang Temple in Saigon and its Ven. Abbot Thích Thiện Hòa.

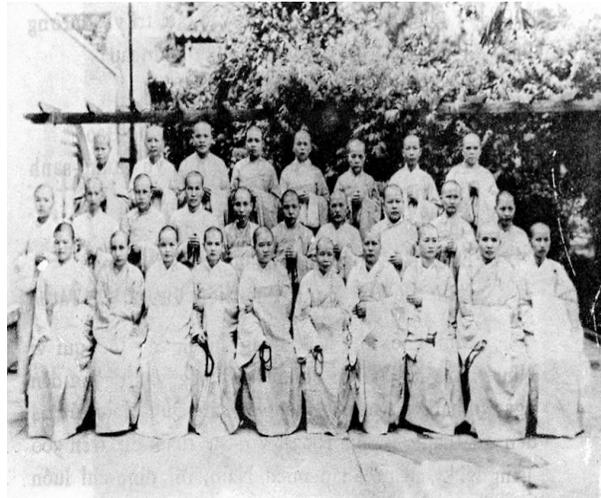


Figure 40. The 1957 Abbot-Abbess classes of monks at Pháp Hội Temple and nuns at Dược Sư Temple, under the traditional monastic training of the An Quang Institution. Photos Thiện Hòa.

Happily rest the Peaceful
Surrendering victory-defeat.³⁶⁸

He only accepted the position after getting the nomination by the Sangha and always reminded his disciples to do so, including the humble words in replying to the nomination of the Sangha, “If the great Sangha members have agreed to entrust me with the task while knowing well my limitations. I accept it and I shall try my best. Please also grant your blessings and support me to overcome my shortcomings.”³⁶⁹ He also said similar humble words publicly in 1992, when he accepted the nomination from the Sangha to hold one of the highest positions, the Chief Representative of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America, and even when he concluded its First Great Conference, in which almost 300 Buddhist monks and nuns and thousands of visitors participated at the Institution during the three days of the second weekend in October 1996.³⁷⁰ Living non-competitively in order to enhance the harmony in the Sangha was indeed promoted at the Thiện Hòa High Ordination.

Furthermore, the most Venerable Dr. Thích Mãn Giác, who earned his doctoral degree in philosophy in Japan in 1966, and became the abbot of the Vietnamese Temple in Los Angeles after master Thiên Ân, also got an invitation to be the Witness Master of the ordination and joyfully joined in to recite the *Incense Offering Gāthā* to open the ordination ceremony.³⁷¹ Present were the delegations led by the Venerable Nuns Thích Nữ Diệu Từ of Diệu Quang Temple in Sacramento, Thích Nữ Chơn Niệm of A Di Đà Temple in Los Angeles, and Thích Nữ Như Thông and Thích Nữ Như Hòa of Dược Sư Temple in Santa Ana, together with about a dozen other Vietnamese Buddhist delegations that arrived to pay homage to the Great Sangha and support the ordination. Among them, the most Venerable Nun Thích Nữ Đàm Lựu, who was the abbess of Đức Viên Temple (the Temple of Perfecting Virtue), the first Vietnamese Buddhist nunnery in San Jose, arrived with her delegation of twenty Buddhist nuns. Đàm Lựu made her the following compliment after paying homage to the Great Sangha, saying:

Confronting this materialistic life, it is amazing that the Great Sangha is able to organize this exceedingly dignified High Ordination. In addition, there are quite a number of

³⁶⁸ See Weragoda Sarada, Maha Thero, *Treasury of Truth: The Illustrated Dhammapada*, p. 430.

³⁶⁹ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Đại Nguyện Bồ Tát* (The Great Bodhisattva Vows), and also Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Tưởng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), pp. 176, 186.

³⁷⁰ See Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất Hải Ngoại Tại Hoa Kỳ, *Kỷ Yếu Đại Hội Khoáng Đại Kỳ I*, pp.15, 285.

³⁷¹ See Kim Đạt, *Đại Giới Đàn Thiện Hòa* (The Thiện Hòa High Ordination), pp. 49, 55.

candidates who have proper practice and substantial training. We are extremely joyful to witness such a serious dedication to the Vinaya, so that the new shoots will grow at the fading of the old bamboos. We don't know what more to compliment, except paying homage and attending the High Ordination.³⁷²

Moreover, Dr. Leo M. Prudent, the elected president of the University of Oriental Studies after Master Thiên Ân, also received an invitation and attended the ordination with his delegation including Ven. Lokananda, Ven. Thích Ân Huệ (Dr. Claude T. Ware), and Ven. Dr. Thích Ân Túc. It was encouraging to have the solidarity of the American Buddhists, both monastic and laity. Since Master Đức Niệm had moved to establish his Institute, Dr. Prudent also came for visits and even attended the Buddhist ceremonies there several times. He was very supportive of Minh-Đức, a young novice who was awarded as the valedictorian among the candidates of the Thiện Hòa High Ordination. He maintained a good relationship with Master Đức Niệm and his disciples, especially with Minh Đức. Later on, when he traveled to China after resigning from his post at the University of Oriental studies, he still sent postcards containing pictures of Buddhist monasteries that he visited to Minh-Đức, as to encourage the novice to practice. During the ordination, in recognition of the efforts to train a new generation of monastic members from Master Đức Niệm, Dr. Leo Prudent offered his sincere remarks, saying:

On this special occasion, please allow me to have a few words of remark concerning Venerable Dr. Thích Đức Niệm. Venerable Đức Niệm has recognized the value of Buddhism and the task of transmitting the Dharma. He has devoted all his time and efforts to train the young monks and nuns who shall be the supporting pillars for future Buddhism. He has published hundreds of valuable Buddhist books for distribution, far and wide. As a part of his practices, he has traveled across the country to propagate the Dharma. Today, he embarks on the task of organizing the High Ordination, inviting all of the eminent venerables to congregate for the purpose of establishing the ordination in order to transmit the Vinaya. I believe that he has done a fantastic job regardless of the difficulties created by circumstances and other limitations. In this respect, I have never seen a second person in America who can do so.³⁷³

³⁷² See Kim Đạt, *Đại Giới Đàn Thiện Hòa* (The Thiện Hòa High Ordination), p. 34.

³⁷³ See Kim Đạt, *Đại Giới Đàn Thiện Hòa* (The Thiện Hòa High Ordination), pp. 49, 55.

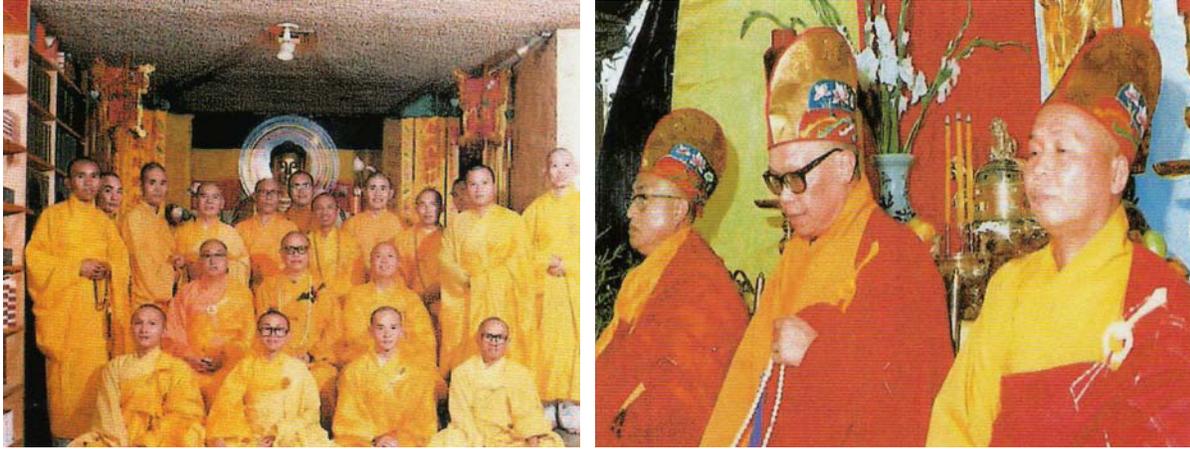


Figure 41. The Masters and the Three Leading Preceptors at the Thiện Hòa High Ordination.



Figure 42. The ceremonial procession of the Thiện Hòa High Ordination at the Institute in 1983.

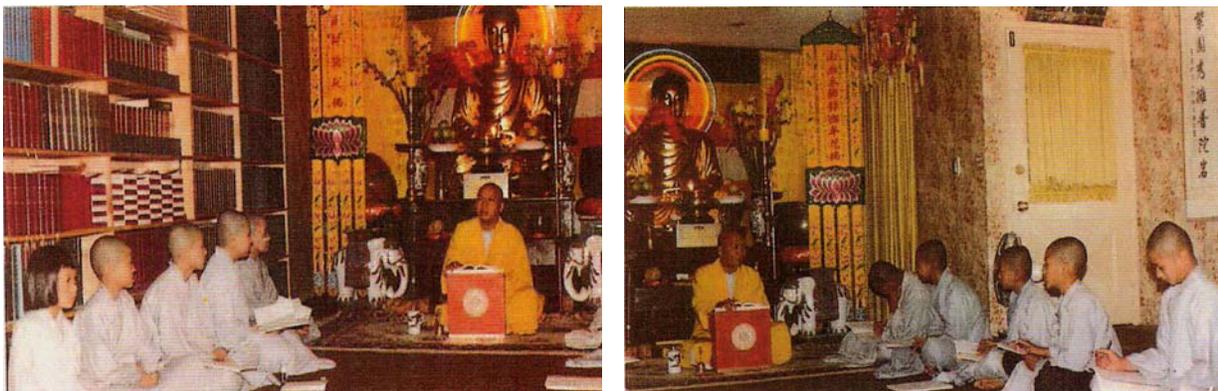


Figure 43. Master Đức Niệm trains the new generations of nuns and monks at the International Buddhist Monastic Institute. Photos the Institute.

The Thiện Hòa High Ordination was a success with the participation of more than twenty leading Vietnamese Buddhist masters, many monks and nuns, and hundreds of lay Buddhist devotees. All candidates passed the tests conducted orally by the Leading Preceptors of the ordination. As a result, their qualifications concerning the fundamental Buddhist sutras, including all the mantras for chanting, and the Vinaya texts pertaining to their monastic levels, were certified. The bestowing of monastic precepts was granted by the three Leading Preceptors and the seven Witness Preceptors. In the end, three *Bhikṣus* (monks), eleven male and female novices or *Śrāmaṇeras and Śrāmaṇerikas*, one probationary or *Śikṣamānā*, and twenty-one aspirant Bodhisattvas were bestowed with the appropriate monastic Buddhist precepts. Many popular Vietnamese newspapers in Southern California, including *Tuần Báo Người Việt* (The Vietnamese Weekly), *Tuần Báo Người Việt Tự Do* (The Free Vietnamese Weekly), *Tập San Chánh Đạo* (The Noble Dharma Chronicle), and *Báo Ngày Nay* (Today Newspaper), announced their positive reports. All of them saw the Thiện Hòa High Ordination as a hopeful sign for the revitalization of Vietnamese Buddhism abroad as well as an inspiration for Buddhism in Vietnam under the communists.³⁷⁴ Soon the news concerning the Thiện Hòa High Ordination reached Vietnam, where such monastic activities were prohibited. Many letters of congratulations arrived. The most Venerable Thích Thiện Siêu, an elder master and also the abbot of Từ Đàm Temple in Huế, the center for the Unification of Vietnamese Buddhism during the 1950s, also sent his compliments, saying: “All of *Thầy* (the Masters) have left [the country]. Regardless of life abroad where materialistic attractions are entrenched (pervasive), you are still able to organize High Ordination and are still able to print Buddhist texts. That is what I cannot even imagine. I can only bring my pure mind to pay compliment and praise.”³⁷⁵ It was touching to hear from Venerable Thích Chân Thường, the abbot of Quán Âm Temple in France. On June 27, 1983, still sick after being hospitalized and uncertain about the timely recovery of his health, he wrote a letter to Master Đức Niệm on the occasion of the ordination, praising him for thinking about future sentient beings by establishing the Institute and by training a new generation of monks and nuns, so that the Dharma could be preserved in the future. He commented that the ordination was of great merit to the suffering of beings drifting in samsara and joyfully praised the deed with sincerity. He even offered one thousand dollars to the fund for publishing

³⁷⁴ See Kim Đạt, *Đại Giới Đàn Thiện Hòa* (The Thiện Hòa High Ordination), p. 43.

³⁷⁵ See Kim Đạt, *Đại Giới Đàn Thiện Hòa* (The Thiện Hòa High Ordination), p. 32.

Buddhist texts. Especially, he sent a copy of the *Surangama Mantra* in Siddham script, a type of ornamental Sanskrit, to the Institute on the occasion, so that “the Buddhists can have a vision of it and can pay homage to it.”³⁷⁶ Since then, this Vietnamese version of the *Surangama Mantra* in Siddham script has always graced the eastern wall of the main sanctuary of Institute. Also, it was reprinted by the Institute for use in Buddhist temples everywhere. In my translation of the *Surangama Mantra*, from another Siddham version, this Vietnamese version became extremely useful for the purpose of tracking down and reestablishing certain original Sanskrit writings.

In addition to training monastic members, the Institute was also committed to its vision of preserving Vietnamese Buddhist texts by reprinting and publishing them. Getting contributions to publish Buddhist books was never a simple task. However, the list of books published by the Institute kept expanding year after year due to the unwavering commitment of Đức Niệm. In addition to the various chronicles published bimonthly since 1980, by 2003 the list of Buddhist books published by the Institute expanded to 235 texts from the humble beginning lists of 24 texts in 1981 and 53 in 1983, at the time of the ordination, as in Figure 44 on the following page. In general, five thousand copies were printed for each text on the list. Together, more than a million copies of Buddhist texts have been printed. The unceasing efforts of the Master in printing texts can be appreciated by the grand total figure. The Institute even managed to publish a beautiful set of large-size color paintings in the Indian style, which depicted the life history of the Buddha with captions in both English and Vietnamese. Many Buddhist centers lined them up on their walls, so that the life of the founder of Buddhism could be conveniently conveyed to people of all ages. Moreover, the Vietnamese Buddhists could expand their practice and knowledge by getting various sutras, dictionaries, short stories, commentaries, translations, and bilingual texts for the youths and others on Buddhism, published by the Institute. Among the books published by the Institute, seventeen of them were authorized by Đức Niệm. He even had the sutras for daily chanting translated into modern Vietnamese so that the Buddhists could understand them without the need of knowing classical Chinese. Regardless of his busy schedule of teaching the disciples, giving dharma discourses to the public, or tending his garden, he still managed to have Buddhist texts translated and written continuously. During the 1990s, boxes of Vietnamese Buddhist texts were shipped to the Vietnamese refugee camps as gifts. They were also sent as gifts to various major universities in the United States, including Stanford

³⁷⁶ See Kim Đạt, *Đại Giới Đàn Thiện Hòa* (The Thiện Hòa High Ordination), p. 85.

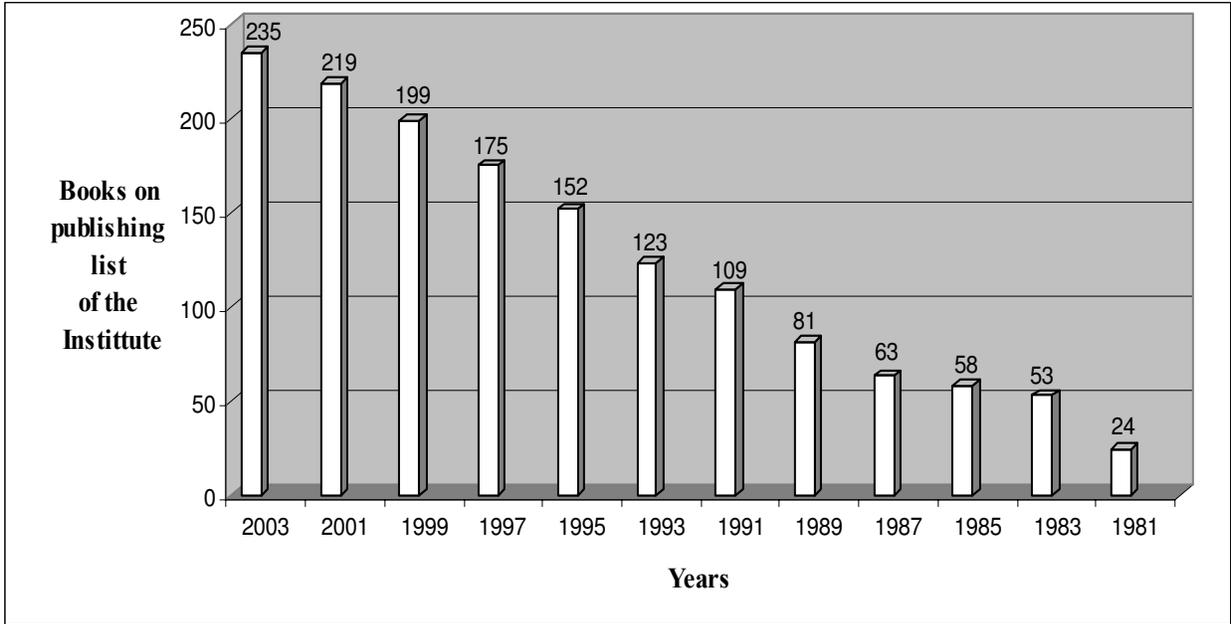


Figure 44. The number of Buddhist texts published by the Institute from 1981 to 2003.



Figure 45. The books published by the International Buddhist Monastic Institute. The *Surangama Mantra* is near the ceiling. Photo: Minh Huy and Phước Thiện.

University, the University of California at Berkeley, and Cornell University. They were even donated to temples across Vietnam in large quantities, including ten thousand Lotus *Sutras*, five thousand sets of *The Popular Buddhist Studies*, five thousand *Bhaiṣajyaguru Sutras*, five thousand *Liang King's Repentant texts*, five thousand *Water Repentant texts*, five thousand *Earthstorage Bodhisattva Sutras*, and so on.³⁷⁷ However, looking back on the earlier years of the activities of Master Đức Niệm in publishing Buddhist texts, it has not been a smooth path.

At one point near the beginning, Đức Niệm tried to encourage the Buddhists to make contributions in order to print the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, one of the crown jewels of Mahayana Buddhism, but he met no success as the months dragged on. One Sunday, the Buddhists came to the center and were surprised to see the big statue of the Buddha in the main hall gone missing, the one they had helped the master carry out of the original center in Los Angeles. Rather, they saw a small unrefined Buddha statue in the Western style frequently sold in the nurseries. Not daring to approach the master for an inquiry, they curiously asked the novices and learned that the beautiful gilded statue had been shift to a newly built temple in the northern states, the Liên Hoa Temple in Canada to be exact, as told by the most Venerable Tín Nghĩa, the present abbot of Từ Đàm Temple Abroad in Fort Worth-Dallas, Texas, who was there packing the particular statue at the time.³⁷⁸ Later, the master announced that he had invited the Buddha to go away to deliver Dharma discourses. Staying at the Institute, the statue of the Buddha only benefited the local Vietnamese Buddhists who visited the center. Nevertheless, the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, printed from the money received from selling the statue of the Buddha, would be read by many Vietnamese Buddhists across the United States and even in other countries and would benefit them far and wide. The statue of the Buddha was originally his anyway, one of the graduation gifts bestowed upon him by the Chinese Buddhist Sangha in Taiwan. The news spread rapidly, and Master Đức Niệm became known as the monk who sold the Buddha statue. He nevertheless had the deepest respect of many Buddhists who recognized his determination to publish Buddhist texts. In another case, the master got \$1,800 to print more books by selling a car donated to him. When the Buddhist laity joined together to raise the money for the car, the Master told them not to worry because the Buddhist texts would be his vehicle. In another unique instance concerning paying for the bills of his Nalanda Publishing House, the Master saw almost no hope. The bills

³⁷⁷ See *Tưởng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), p. 194.

³⁷⁸ See *Tưởng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of the Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), p. 154.

had been stacking up, and the bank was ready to take over the publishing house. Nevertheless, seeing the Master in a financial crisis, one of his Chinese Buddhists from Taiwan, who accidentally stopped by on a trip to visit relatives in America, handed him all of his money for the trip and returned to Taiwan. The Master got \$5,000 to pay off his debt, and the kind support of his Chinese disciple from Taiwan remained in his heart and in his teachings to the Vietnamese disciples. During the early 1980s, California was in an economic recession and the Master had a hard time to meet his monthly mortgage bills, not to mention that he had to borrow loans to cover the cost of the High Ordination. The Master even commented jokingly about being in debt during his Dharma discourses. In Vietnam, it would be a shock to hear that a Buddhist Master was deeply in debt. Nevertheless, he added that in the United States of America, no one would be qualified as Americans if they had no debt from the bank. It was not always a rosy path in practicing the Bodhisattva vows. Nevertheless, those typical cases served as evidence for the difficulties encountered by the master in getting the needed financial funds to fulfill his vision of reprinting and publishing Buddhist texts in order to revitalize and promote Vietnamese Buddhism.

With more monks to train after the ordination and with more books to print, Đức Niệm had more tasks to manage. Some of the male novices had been sleeping in sleeping bags on the plywood covering the floor of the garage. As the house next door on Columbus Avenue was put up for sale, he looked forward to buying it for further training activities. That opened up new difficulties on top of the complaints from the neighbors concerning the crowds of people and cars during the weekends at the Institute. The members of the Board of Directors, who had been living in the United States longer and were assumed to know the local regulations more than the old Master, did not share his vision. Instead of supporting him, they isolated him by signing off all together with their dignity fortified by proper suit-and-tie behavior, and by withdrawing themselves from the Board of Directors. According to them, it was an impossibility to make changes in the local zoning, while the Master could not afford more than the cheap house to begin with. Certainly, Đức Niệm would have selected a property in the area with commercial zoning for his center if he had had the money originally. In addition, he did not want to move again. He did not want another disaster. The old Master pressed on with his vision of making a better place for monks and nuns to live and learn in. Consequently, the next four bedroom house was bought in 1985, and the Master kept reminding the disciples that the Institute was built by the

humble contributions of common Buddhist laity, who should be received and treated with full dignity and respect. The young monks moved to the bedrooms in that newly obtained building together with their Master, who occupied its leaking garage so that the his disciple nuns could have more rooms in the recently renovated building containing the enlarged main hall. By 1991, the Master was still residing and doing his translations in that garage as usual and had recycled paint buckets ready to capture the water leaking down from the rains. His battles with the leaking garage only ended in 1994, when he got the permit from the city to renovate it into a two-floor building. The difficulties raged each time the Master and his followers went to the local hearings in order to get permission to renovate the buildings. His hair turned white, and he came down with diabetes as he tried to get the case. The Sri Lankan Buddhist masters recommended a professional lawyer to him when they saw his weariness coupled with the desperation in his expression as he was attending their Buddhist ceremony. He followed through with the proper petitions to get a zoning ordinance changed as instructed by a lawyer. After getting the original house renovated, in late 1986, he added the lecture hall which also housed the library and other multiple purposes. Yet, the cementblock wall standing between the two houses was not allowed to come down until 1992, and the monks had to walk around to come in to the other sides. Later, the Master also had some Sri Lanka *Bhantes* (Masters) stay at the Institute, which was a convenient distance to their classes at Northridge University. In harmony, they joined the Vietnamese monks in leading morning chanting sessions and even in eating vegetarian meals. Anyway, most of the walls between the houses in the neighborhood came down during the tragic Northridge earthquake in 1995, while those similar walls surrounding the Institute remained standing by themselves. One of the walls eventually came down when the Master bought the adjacent house located on the side of Tupper Avenue. It was put up for sale by the bank due to the bankruptcy of the owner during the real estate crisis in California in 1996. At the time, the owner of the third house from the center on the same side of Columbus Avenue also wanted to sell his house to the master. Nevertheless, having neither financial funds nor wishing to expand further, Đức Niệm declined the offer. With a total of four normal lots of land large enough for the required parking lots, he made petitions to expand the main hall by reconstructing the whole main building. Again, the master and his Buddhist laity went to local hearings to settle with the same few complainants in the neighborhood. At one point, the local hearing was rescheduled because the Vietnamese in the neighborhood signed the petition on both sides. They

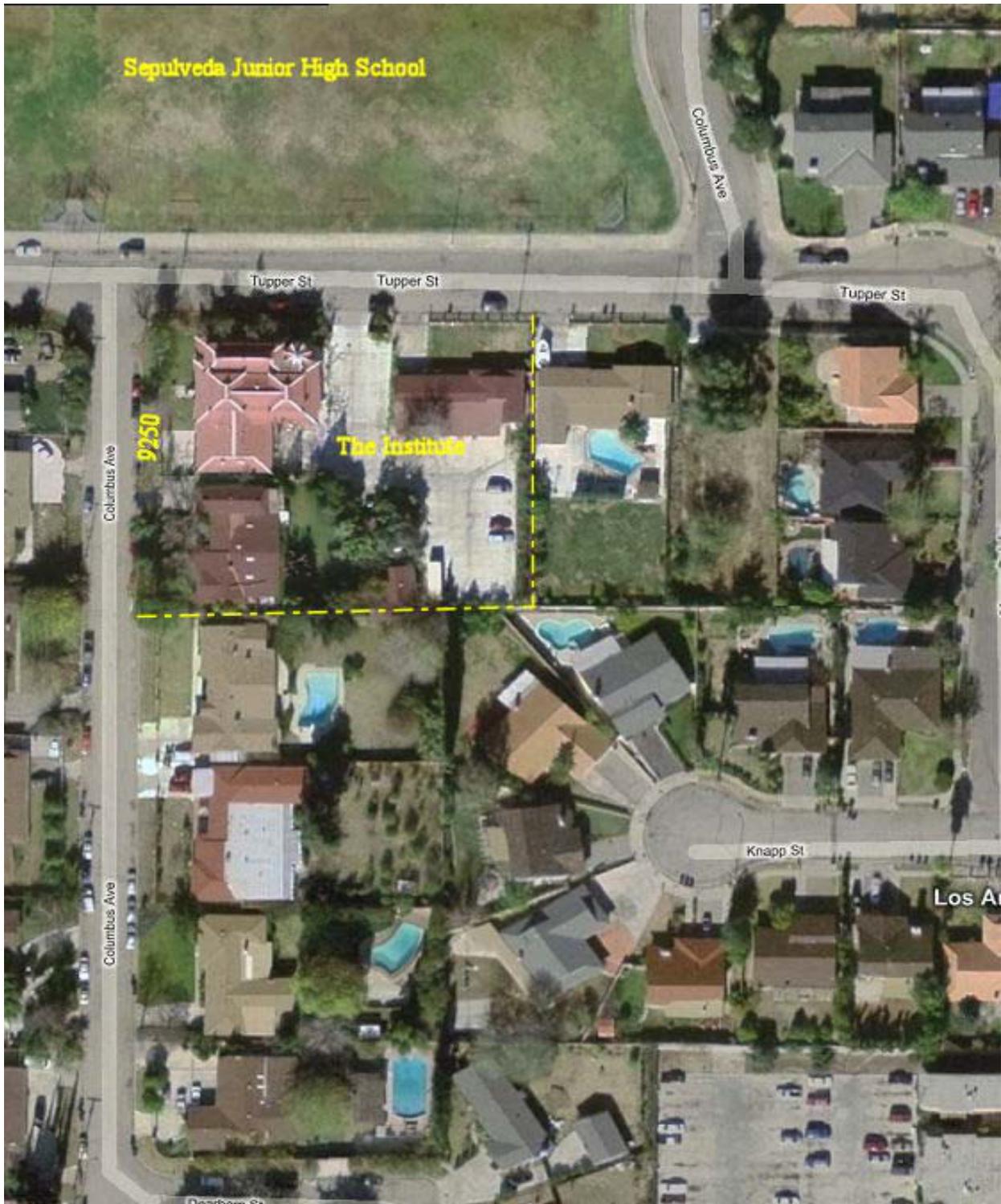


Figure 44. The International Buddhist Monastic Institute, an aerial view.

misunderstood English and signed the petitions in order to prevent the Institute from being closed down. The Master passed away in 2003, about two years after the construction of the building were completed. The Institute was permitted to be used temporarily. At present, all of the procedures are handling by the young monks, who make various efforts to learn the legal codes and to get all of the requirements approved according to the city building codes. They are making the final steps to complete the vision of the late Master Đức Niệm concerning establishing a Buddhist Institution in the United States of America.

In Vietnam in the past, having a Buddhist temple built in a location was the source of exceeding joy and happiness, an extremely merry event to the people at the locality. In the United States, that is no longer the case, however. Vietnamese refugees frequently encounter difficulties in building Buddhist centers in the United States. According to my data, the Vietnamese Buddhists bought various types of properties to convert into their Buddhist centers, including residential homes, bakeries, car dealerships, childcare centers, churches, gym centers, horse ranches, kindergarten schools, land, laundries, libraries, museums, nurseries, trailers, and even burned and abandoned buildings. Those were inexpensive properties that they could afford. Out of 109 Buddhist centers under research, 43 of them were converted from residential homes, from which 26 of them reported to have problems and complaints from the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the data does not mean that the rest of the centers converted from residential houses have no problems. In general, Buddhists do not like to report about those past difficulties with their neighbors. Rather, they quietly tried to overcome the difficulties in order to live in harmony with their neighbors. Those difficulties, however, surfaced through the experiences of Master Đức Niệm, who did not have the fortune of meeting the more understanding and tolerant Americans. Though having managed to establish his own center and having helped several groups of Buddhist refugees living across the states to build their own centers, he saw the weighty burden in the process, as in his remark:

But, building a temple here is a whole troublesome difficulty. One has to receive all types of complications concerning the law, the financial problem, and the human resource. In this land, building a temple is entering the world of being timid, of getting worried from being brought to court and hearings, of being reported, and of getting

irritation and even hatred from the people who are living locally in the vicinity. As a result, sometimes the temple dare not operate publicly. The life of a temple is too fragile, just as fragile as the refugee life in another land.³⁷⁹

It was sad. Also, it was a waste of money and time for a monk like Master Đức Niệm, who would rather sit meditating, reading Buddhist scriptures, planting flowers, or trimming trees to beautify the garden, instead of being forced to go through the legal processes. Nevertheless, it was a reality for a life-long struggle to build a Vietnamese Buddhist temple in America.

While struggling to establish his Buddhist Institute, Đức Niệm also joined other Vietnamese Masters to form the unified Buddhist organizations in order to strengthen Buddhist Sangha abroad and to support Buddhism in Vietnam. In his perspective, the unification of Buddhist masters abroad into a Sangha would be essential for the survival and the positive growth of Vietnamese Buddhism in America. First of all, an individual monk alone, despite his accomplishments in practice and his having excellent facilities, does not constitute a Sangha. By being a monk, he is considered as a member of the Sangha. Nevertheless, by himself alone, he does not have a Sangha. Rather, four monks or more, who are living in harmony, constitute the Buddhist Sangha officially, just like the first official Sangha established by the Buddha when he taught his first lesson concerning the Four Noble Truths at Sarnath, Varanasi, to the five ascetic companions led by Kauṇḍinya. By then, four of five monks joined together in harmony as a Sangha to study under the Buddha, while the fifth of those five went to collect alms for all of them. Thus, it is always the tradition that monks join together to form the Sangha for practice and mutual support. In Vietnam, Đức Niệm had been benefited by living and being trained under other eminent Vietnamese masters in the Buddhist Sangha. In America, he sought to form the Sangha again for similar benefits. Nevertheless, Đức Niệm also recognized the individual components cherished and advocated by each center because of the locality of origin. While inviting other masters to join together as a Sangha, he respected the traditional practices and rituals conducted at individual centers. Those were left as individual matters of each center. Also, the financial and legal management remained as individual responsibilities for each center, which knew them best. In keeping with the tradition of the Sangha, the monastic members should respectfully and mutually join together in spirit and in future aims. Unification would

³⁷⁹ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Những Mùa Vu Lan* (The Ullambana Seasons), pp. 156-157.

bring mutual supports that were difficult to achieve by isolated centers. Also, it would increase the strength in propagating the proper Buddhist teachings in both spiritual cultivation and monastic ritual. More importantly, it was the tradition of the Buddhist Sangha and the way of Buddhist survival according to the instructions of living in harmony, specifically the six points of harmony, encouraged by the Buddha.³⁸⁰ For those who are familiar with the last teachings of the Buddha, the assembling of monks in mutual respect and harmony was among the seven essential ingredients for the prosperity without decline of the Sangha after the departure of the Buddha. They were specific instructions to prevent the destruction of the Buddhist tradition especially taught by the Buddha when he was about to pass away into the final nirvana. In the “Mahāparinibbāna Sutta or the Great Passing: The Buddha’s last Days” of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, those instructions appear as follow:

As long as the monks hold regular and frequent assemblies, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. As long as they meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. As long as they do not authorize what has not been authorized already, and do not abolish what has been authorized by the rules of training.... As long as they honor, respect, revere, and salute the elders of long standing who are long ordained, fathers, and leaders of the order.... As long as they do not fall prey to desires which arise in them and lead to rebirth.... As long as they are devoted to forest lodgings.... As long as they preserved their personal mindfulness, so that in future the good among their companions will come to them, and those who have already come will feel at ease with them.... As long as the monks hold to these seven things and are seen to do so, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.³⁸¹

As a result, on April 1, 1988, Đức Niệm joined forty other venerable monks and nuns from thirty-six Buddhist delegations across the states and Canada together with more than 500 Buddhist laity to establish the Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất tại Hoa Kỳ or the Union of Vietnamese Buddhist Churches of the United States of America. The temporary office of the organization located at the Vietnamese Buddhist Temple, 12292 Magnolia Street, Garden Grove, Orange County, California. In addition to providing the more conducive conditions for

³⁸⁰ See Thích Đức Niệm, “Tiếng Gọi Hợp Đoàn” (A Call for Unification), *Phật-Giáo Thống-Nhất*, Số 1, p. 17.

³⁸¹ See Maurice Walshe, “Mahāparinibbāna Sutta or the Great Passing: The Buddha’s Last Days.” *The Long Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 233.

cultivation, studies, and spiritual liberation, the organization also embarked on the urgent task of supporting the Sangha in Vietnam, which had been under stern repressions by the communist authority since 1975. As a unified organization, the members of the organization launched various campaigns to appeal to the United Nations, the Commission on Human Rights, and the leaders in the United States and other democratic nations in order to release the Buddhist dignitaries and political dissidents who had been imprisoned by the communist authorities in Vietnam. A high point among their campaigns was the release of Reverends Thích Tuệ Sỹ and Thích Trí Siêu, who were among the respectable scholarly monks of Vietnam. The impressive and valuable historical research concerning Vietnamese Buddhism published after the year of 2000 by Thích Trí Siêu or Lê Mạnh Thát is the most indispensable resource for my second chapter on the Buddhist practice of ancient Vietnam. By then, the communist authority of Vietnam had imposed death sentences after jailing those two scholarly monks. Fortunately, from the campaign launched by the unified Vietnamese Sangha abroad, leaders from various international Human Rights organizations and democratic countries sent diplomatic protests against the sentences and even pressured the communist authorities. Consequently, the death sentence imposed on those two scholarly Buddhist monks was commuted to a release at the end.³⁸² In addition, the organization of the unified Buddhist Sangha abroad set a priority in seeking international intervention for the purpose of granting further asylum and protection to the Vietnamese refugees from the refugee camps in Southeast Asian countries.

A few years later, in the last weekend of September 1992, for the further unification of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha in America, Đức Niệm, who was the executive President of the Union of Vietnamese Buddhist Churches of the United States of America, and others masters also merged with members of other Vietnamese Buddhist organizations to form The Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America after the urgent call of the General Supervisor of the Sangha in Vietnam, Master Thích Đôn Hậu. In Vietnam, Master Đôn Hậu passed away in Thiên Mục Pagoda, Huế. His last message was for the unification of the Buddhist Sangha abroad,³⁸³ since the Buddhist Sangha in Vietnam had been under stern

³⁸² See Định Hương, “Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Thống Nhất Tại Hoa Kỳ Với Cuộc Vận Động Hủy Bỏ Án Tử Hình Của Hai Đại Đức Thích Tuệ Sỹ và Thích Trí Siêu” (The Union of Vietnamese Buddhist Churches of the United States of America and Its Campaign to Discard the Death Sentences Imposed on the Two Reverends, Thích Tuệ Sỹ and Thích Trí Siêu), *Phật-Giáo Thống-Nhất*, Số 3, Xuân 1988, pp. 16-23.

³⁸³ See Thích Đôn Hậu, Thông điệp của Xứ Lý Viện Tăng Thống Thân Gởi Chư Hòa Thượng, Thượng Tọa, Đại Đức, Tăng Ni và Đồng Bào Phật Tử Việt Nam ở Hải ngoại” (Letter Cordially Sent from the Acting Supervisor of

repression since the communists came into power in 1975, as in the previous discussion. With eighty-six delegations comprised of 266 participants, including sixty-five monks and eleven nuns from the United States, Europe, Australia, Canada, and Japan, the establishment of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America was the accumulation of the Buddhist Sangha activities in diaspora. Afterward, other similar Unified Buddhist organizations were established in Europe and Australia. Vietnamese Buddhist Masters from various countries outside of Vietnam began to travel out of their local countries more often in order to join together to share their Buddhist practices and monastic programs and to support Buddhism in Vietnam. This began the systematic effort to strengthen Vietnamese Buddhism abroad.

At the establishment of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America, Đức Niệm was nominated to become the President of the Representative Office. Venerable Thích Hộ Giác, the leading master of Vietnamese Theravada Buddhism abroad, was nominated to be the president of the Executive Office. As a result, the Institute became one of the highest offices of the newly unified Buddhist organization, where the unification of the Vietnamese Buddhists abroad was promoted through exemplary virtual practices and Buddhist policies. Through the unwavering efforts of Đức Niệm, the Institute successfully hosted a series of significant events, including the funeral ceremony of the General Supervisor of the Sangha Thích Đôn Hậu in 1992, the bestowal of the Official Seals to the High Dignitaries of the Sangha in 1992, the Grand Nomination Ceremony to the Most Venerables in 1992, the Second Grand Quadrennial Conference of the organization in 1996, the Eighth Grand Conference of the Unified Buddhist Churches of Vietnam in 1999, the Twenty-Second Anniversary after the Seventh conference at Ân Quang, Saigon in 1997, and so forth. With sincerity and humbleness, Đức Niệm continued to host Buddhist events and strived to manage other tasks entrusted to him by the unified Vietnamese Sangha, including those in which he would have to accommodate about a thousand participants or more. Even after the death of Đức Niệm in 2003, his support to the unified Buddhist Sangha was still maintained by the Institute. The total sum of \$49,119 offered by the Buddhist followers to Master Đức Niệm during the

the Sangha to the Most Venerables, Venerables, Reverends, Monks and Nuns, and the Vietnamese Buddhists Abroad). *Phật Giáo Việt Nam Biến Cố và Tư Liệu: Hai Mươi Năm Trong Chế Độ Cộng Sản (1975-1995)* (The Incidents and Documentations of Vietnamese Buddhism: Twenty Years under the Communist Regime), p. 115.



Figure 47. The 1996 Grand Quadrennial Buddhist Conference hosted by the Institute.



Figure 48. The international spirit is always promoted by Master Đức Niệm and his Institute.
Photos the Institute.

funeral ceremony, was again offered to the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America,³⁸⁴ which was always in need of funds to facilitate its general Buddhist functions. Regardless of the limitations of the facilities, the hospitality and harmony promoted by Đức Niệm and his Institute were among the reasons for the members of the Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha to keep returning for significant Buddhist events.

Furthermore, Đức Niệm also promoted the unification of the Sangha through publications. He stopped the quarterly chronicles of the Institute in order to relocate the funds to publish the chronicle of the new Unified Buddhist organization, the Phật Giáo Hải Ngoại (Buddhism Abroad), which came out three times a year with 5,000 copies for each issue and was free of charge. For six years, from 1994 to 2000, Đức Niệm took the burden of funding the total of nineteen issues of the chronicle for the Unified Buddhist organization. A few dedicated Buddhist masters and followers also made limited contributions according to their ability. Nevertheless, the total financial burden was on Đức Niệm. Also, the technical burden of publishing the Chronicle was on him and his Institute, including typing, editing, layout, make-up, printing, packaging, transporting, and mailing the Chronicles. Altogether, at the end, the total cost exceeded \$200,000. At peak time, the disciple monks and a nun at his Institute had even skipped their chanting sections and stayed up late into the night to get the Chronicle ready for mailing. Instead of receiving compliments for his dedication to making the publication free of charge, Đức Niệm got criticism from readers several times on trivial matters of the publication, including a few misspellings and word usage. Nevertheless, he was determined to press on with the task of promoting the unification of the Sangha. However, no one was able to handle the task when Đức Niệm handed the responsibilities back to the organization because of his illness and aging. Soon afterward, the chronicle stopped circulating. Đức Niệm had tried what he could to support the unified organization of the Sangha.

³⁸⁴ As a sign of deep respect to the departed master, this is the largest funeral ceremony in the history of the Vietnamese community in America since 1975. In addition to almost thirty monastic disciples of master Đức Niệm, more than 250 leading Buddhist masters from various Buddhist organizations, monks and nuns in the U.S., European countries, and Australia, and Taiwan, together with thousands of Buddhist laity, came to pay their last tributes to the respected venerable. On Saturday, March 29, 2003, the Institute was overcrowded with Buddhist laity. During the procession to the crematory site at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in distant Glendale more than 150 cars also joined in, in addition to the vehicles reserved for the Sangha and the buses reserved for the Buddhist laity. See *Tưởng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), pp. 258, 316.

Several Vietnamese Buddhists do not know much about the past struggles of the master to keep his vision. Yet, they know his Buddhist practices through his lively discourses. In addition to training monastic members and printing Buddhist texts, Master Đức Niệm also helped revitalize Vietnamese Buddhism by promoting Vietnamese Zen and Pure Land practices in combination. For Zen practice, his method can be traced back to the practices of inward contemplation emphasized by the Zen master Hương Hải, one of the eminent Masters in the revitalization of the Trúc Lâm Zen lineage of Vietnam during the seventeenth century. He repeatedly advised the Buddhists to employ the following practice of inward reflection taught by Master Hương Hải:

Revert the hearing to contemplate in each and everyday
It is excellent to ponder, contemplate, and reflect again and again.
Do not seek after intellectual knowledge in a dream,
Then, once can confront one's own master.³⁸⁵

This was a lesson taught to King Lê Dụ Tôn of Vietnam, concerning seeing one's own nature (svabhāva). The textual foundation of the practice can be traced all the way back to the method of inward contemplation (listen-contemplate-cultivate), a perfect penetration proposed by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the *Surangama Sutra*.³⁸⁶ Inward meditation is one among the many Buddhist methods of purifying the mind. The Buddhists practice meditation in order to see their original nature, which is devoid of duality. Nevertheless, the mind has the tendency to make discriminations, dragging itself into the boundless ocean of dual thoughts, including the pairs of love and hate, good and bad, sacred and profane, hot and cold, winning and losing, and so forth. As the mind becomes attached to those dualities through mental discrimination, one will chase after the external objects, being enslaved by the three poisons of greed, anger, and delusion caused by those external objects themselves. As a result, one is caused to suffer by the changes of external objects which are impermanent in themselves. In the process, one also neglects to monitor oneself inwardly. This on-going mental activity disturbs and clouds the mind, preventing it from meeting and seeing its original nature. According to Đức Niệm, Master Hương Hải has instructed the King “to monitor his thinking and actions daily” so that he will “not be attached to external objects,” including “the attempt to expand the intellectual objects” of

³⁸⁵ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be a Perfect Spring), pp. 191, 193, 255; *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 97; and his Dharma discourse on cassette, *Đàm Đạo* (Dharma Discussion).

³⁸⁶ See Thích Chơn Giám, *Kinh Thủ Lăng Nghiêm* (The Surangama Sutra), p. 373.

his aims, and will be able to truly realize their impermanence.³⁸⁷ Seeing through impermanence is penetrating through mental delusion which clouds the mind. By detaching from that delusion, the defiled mind as well as defiled thinking will be ended. That is recognizing one's own nature. Having recognized one's own nature is seeing one's own Buddha.

As a result, regardless of their intellectual and scholarly background, Đức Niệm advises the Buddhists not to study Buddhism in order to satisfy their intellectual pursuits, to impress others, or to receive their praising approvals. Those will not liberate them from delusion. They bring no real benefits to the agent, just like a soup spoon that conveys the delicious soup to the mouths of others without ever letting the agent actually taste the soup itself.³⁸⁸ Rather, he instructs them to regulate the actions of the body, speech, and mind, as the essential task of mental cultivation in Buddhist meditation. He emphasizes that to practice Buddhist meditation is serious mental cultivation. It aims to turn negative habits into positive ones; a daily practice intended to cultivate virtuous habits and to transform oneself into a Buddha, an enlightened human being without the three poisons. In order to implement such mental cultivation, Đức Niệm insists that the key is mindfulness. Paying attention to daily activities right in this very life is the practice. Mindfulness is knowing what one is doing, as highlighted by Đức Niệm:

Reading a book, and knowing that you are reading; watering the flowers, and knowing that you are watering flowers; chanting sutra and reciting the Buddha name, and knowing that you are chanting and reciting the Buddha name; talking to others, and knowing that you are talking. That is making a conscious effort to bring contemplation into the real activities of life. Physical and mental activities are included in the practice.³⁸⁹

His further advice for the monastic members is memorizing the *Essential Discipline for Daily Use*,³⁹⁰ which he requires his disciples to chant every other day in the morning chanting section at the Institute. According to him, the particular Vinaya text is the essential instruction on regulating the body, speech, and mind in daily life. It teaches monastic members on how to do and act properly and mindfully around the Buddhist monastic settings, from the time of waking up in early morning to the time of retiring to bed in late evening. As a part of monastic training,

³⁸⁷ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be a Perfect Spring), p. 191.

³⁸⁸ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Người Muôn Thuở* (A Person of Eternity), p. 63.

³⁸⁹ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be a Perfect Spring), p. 185.

³⁹⁰ See Thích Trí Quang, “Tỳ Ni Nhật Dụng Thiết Yếu [The Essential Discipline for Daily Use],” *Luật Sa Di, Sa Di Ni*, p. 976. As previously discussed, Nhất Hạnh had chanted this manual of the Vinaya in his youth as a novice and later developed his *gāthās* for meditation from this text.

he spends the first year teaching the text to the new-coming novices. As a routine, Đức Niệm reads to them out loud word by word from Han, the classical Chinese scriptural language. Then he provides explanations while translating them into Vietnamese. He even points out that the particular Vinaya text had been drawn from the *Avantamsaka Sutra*,³⁹¹ the crown jewel of Mahayana Buddhist sutra that he had devoted himself to print first in his early monastic activity of republishing Buddhist texts in America. Moreover, for a common practice of meditation to his disciples, he leaves a simple practice in connection to the *gāthā* taught by Hương Hải, as in the following instructions:

Every night before going to sleep, you should sit up and quietly reflect on your thinking and activities during the day. From that you will recognize the positive and negative deeds in order to further regulate your body and mind, advancing yourself on Buddhist path. Otherwise, you have let the days and months pass by uselessly, wasting your life as a household renouncer.³⁹²

The method of reflecting before sleeping is practical as well. Everyone can do it as a routine mediation according to individual circumstances if one is too busy to sit and meditate during the day. Certainly, the practice is not for the monastics alone. During his public Dharma discourses, Đức Niệm frequently gives the same advice to the Buddhist laity. That has always been his own meditative practice before sleeping.

Master Đức Niệm also notices the recent trend of mediation in the American settings, including in certain groups within the Vietnamese community. Meditation or Zen is known as *Thiền* in Vietnamese. Though encouraging the Buddhists to practice Buddhism, including meditation, Đức Niệm is not so sanguine about making meditation a trendy passion, especially when the practitioners do not have a real understanding about the type of meditation that they are going after.³⁹³ He is concerned for the Buddhists, especial the youths, who go to meditation for the mere sake of trendy appeal due the label of “Zen” or “Meditation.” In order to enhance their fundamental knowledge concerning the tradition, Đức Niệm presents the essential of meditation as well as the decisive conditions in practice of the Mahayana meditation. He illuminates that the aim of meditation or Zen is reverting the light of reflection onto one’s own mind in order to

³⁹¹ This origin from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* mentioned by the late Venerable Thích Đức Niệm can be traced by seeing Thích Trí Tịnh, *Kinh Hoa Nghiêm* (Avatamsaka Sutra), vol. 2, pp. 152-177; Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*, pp. 312-329.

³⁹² See Thích Đức Niệm, *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be a Perfect Spring), p. 258.

³⁹³ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 92.

monitor it for the purpose of purifying defilements, which are essentially greed, anger, and delusion, known popularly as the three poisons.³⁹⁴ Undoubtedly, the final aim is wisdom. Nevertheless, wisdom does not come by recapitulating wise sayings picked up from reading texts. Rather, as a fundamental structure in all Buddhist practices, wisdom must come from *śila* (virtuous conducts) and *samadhi* (concentration). These are indispensable conditions for meditation. Virtuous conducts eliminate disturbing thoughts and are extremely essential to calming the mind during meditation in which one focuses on individual breathing in order to enhance concentration. With a calm mind, concentration increases and allows the resting of the mind, unwavering on a single point, to take place. This highly concentrated stage of mind is known as the single pointedness of mind, in which the mind is successfully trained to rest at a chosen point without moving. No longer being disturbed by the interference of thoughts as in a normal mental process, the mind at one-pointedness will enable one to see clearly and will radiate with wisdom. There should be no seeking of external wisdom in meditation, as emphasized by Đức Niệm. Wisdom must come from inside, through inward meditation, not from other beings.³⁹⁵ As evidence, Đức Niệm even reminds the Buddhists of the renowned words of the Zen master Phù Vân to King Trần Thái Tông (1218-1277) of Vietnam. The king escaped the palace at night and climbed the mountainous path to the hermitage of Master Phù Vân in order to seek the enlightened teaching of the Buddha. Having instructed the king to return, Phù Vân advised him by saying that “There is no Buddha in the mountain. The Buddha is in the mind.”³⁹⁶ Again, the basic steps for practice go back to the foundation of listening for, contemplating, and cultivating the inward contemplation proposed by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the *Surangama Sutra*. Before practicing, one needs to listen in order to learn about the whole tradition. The foundational sutras, the lineage, the history of the Buddhist masters, and the virtuous conduct of the master who is conducting the method, are essential to learn. After gathering the details and instructions from listening, one needs to contemplate on them in order to find the best suit practice, the distinctions between Buddhist meditation and non-Buddhist meditation, and to avoid the pitfalls on the path. Again, Đức Niệm advises practitioners to consult the *Surangama Sutra* for the possible pitfalls listed by the texts and for

³⁹⁴ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 99; and *Người Muôn Thuở* (A Person of Eternity), p. 55.

³⁹⁵ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 101.

³⁹⁶ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 100.

the problems of being obsessed by the label of “making innovations to suit the time,” to alter the sutras and revise the Vinaya for self-aggrandizing purposes.³⁹⁷ Afterward, one can then cultivate of the path by embarking on the best practice of meditation suitable to individual circumstances.

Furthermore, Đức Niệm also has concerns for the frenetic life in American society. Of course, he recognizes the impressive contributions of scientific achievements in terms of bringing material benefits and comforts to individuals. Nevertheless, he believes that science alone is incomplete in fulfilling human happiness. Science should not be viewed as a new omnipotent God rewarding a happy life, as some might have come to believe. Once in a while, he told the monks and nuns at the center that even his elder master Thích Thiện Hòa, the National Vice Superintendent of the Sangha, did not even have all of the conveniences present at the Institute including hot and cold running water, a refrigerator, or a color television set, not to mention a computer, the latest wonder of scientific technology. Yet, he reminded them that those scientific wonders were just skillful means and their misuse could create problems in life in addition to their materialistic benefits. In reality, the more science has progressed, the more frenetic the mental life of the people has become, not to mention frequent threats caused by scientific tests and developments, including radiation, contamination, and other destructive weapons. Also, the more the materialistic indulgence, the further the spiritual and ethical decline of pursuits. Đức Niệm saw the imbalance between materialistic and spiritual life as the major cause for the unsettled life in America. He believed that Buddhism, including the compassion and wisdom obtained from meditation and other practices, could help to regenerate the balance. He suggested that only when science was motivated “by the Buddhist spirit of compassion and wisdom,” then the hope to live truly peacefully and happily could become a reality.³⁹⁸ In other words, with such Buddhist motivations in harmony with scientific progress, a more peaceful and happy life would be obtained. The peaceful vision of the Buddhist tradition has also been an inspiration for Đức Niệm to dedicate his life to the purpose of promoting Buddhism.

While his primary concern is the perpetuation of Vietnamese Buddhism in a safe atmosphere, Đức Niệm is not unaware of pressures on Buddhism and on the Buddhist people from their American surroundings. Though believing that Buddhism could make a contribution to enhance the spiritual life of American people, Đức Niệm indicated no wish to impose the

³⁹⁷ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 95; and *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be a Perfect Spring), pp. 197, 231.

³⁹⁸ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Người Muôn Thuở* (A Person of Eternity), p. 148.

tradition on the people. Never in his mind was Buddhism a missionary religion, as he constantly reminded the Buddhists in his public Dharma discourses and writings, saying:

The tradition of the Buddhists is the tradition of bringing peace and happiness to sentient beings. Absolutely, they do not aim to conquer by force, by inflicting suffering, by suppression, or by war upon others for the purpose of propagating Buddhism.³⁹⁹

In addition to meditation, Đức Niệm also promotes Pure Land practice at the Institute. He practices and teaches Pure Land Buddhism in combination with Zen, just like the Buddhist masters of Vietnam in the past. At the Institute, he continues to reprint all of the excellent Vietnamese Buddhist texts on Pure Land Buddhism, especially those written by master Thích Thiên Tâm, who had been well known as a contemporary leading figure in promoting Pure Land Buddhism in Vietnam. He even has the *Niệm Phật Thập Yếu*, or the *Ten Essentials of Buddha Recitation*, written by Thiên Tâm published in English after supporting its translation. It is an excellent manual to the practice of Buddha recitation. In addition to categorizing various methods of recitation and visualizations, the texts even enumerate ten different ways of using the *mala*, or rosary beads, in order to assist one in being mindful of the recitation. Later on, Đức Niệm reprints several editions of the text under the English title *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith* for free distribution as Dharma gifts. Đức Niệm makes an effort to promote Pure Land Buddhism because it is practical for all. The Pure Land practice has been among the most popular ways *Buddhānusmṛti-samadhi*, a highly concentrative stage of mind known as Buddha-recitation samadhi, in which one also attains the single-pointedness of mind. Practitioners can cultivate it naturally in the four positions, namely standing, walking, sitting, and lying, at any time, and at any place.⁴⁰⁰ Personally, Đức Niệm had learned the practice in his early monastic career from the foundational Pure Land sutras, namely, the *Amitābha Sūtra*, *The Longer Amitabha Sutra* (the *Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra*), and the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*. Also, he had seen that the practice was praised in the *Surangama Sutra*, when Mahāsathāmaprāpta Bodhisattva reported about his practice of perfect penetration employing Buddha recitation.⁴⁰¹

Nevertheless, Đức Niệm made the practice his routine after listening to the last brief advice of Master Thiện Hòa before boarding a flight to Taiwan in order to study. Before his

³⁹⁹ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Người Muôn Thuở* (A Person of Eternity), p. 111.

⁴⁰⁰ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 260.

⁴⁰¹ See Thích Chơn Giám, *Kinh Thủ Lăng Nghiêm* (The Surangama Sutra), p. 367.

departure, the elder master tapped on his shoulder, saying: “Thầy (Master) Đức Niệm should always remember to keep the Vinaya, maintaining the purification of your three karmic entrances [body, speech, and mind], and strive to recite the Buddha name regardless of the circumstances.” That advice summed up all the essential Buddhist practices needed for a monk. Moreover, while living abroad in Taiwan, Đức Niệm occasionally received letters from the elder Master reminding him not to neglect the basic practice, saying, “regardless of your busy load of study or whatever the circumstances, every night, before going to sleep, remember to sit quietly to recite *The Great Compassion Mantra*, *The Heart Sutra*, and the Buddha name.”⁴⁰² Seeing the worth of the practice from his master, Thiện Hòa, who had dedicated all his life to Pure Land practice in addition to training monastic members, Master Đức Niệm practiced Buddha recitation every night together with inward contemplation before going to sleep. In the past, he had personally witnessed many Buddhists, both monastic and laity, who accomplished the practice to the level of knowing their date of passing away in advance. Also, he had visited other eminent and virtuous Buddhist masters in Taiwan while living there and recognized the eminence of the practice among them. Recently, he also got the descriptive account of Master Thích Hành Trụ, one of the contemporary eminent masters in Vietnam, who had gone out of his quiet retreat in order to visit several leading masters for the last time before passing away in 1985.⁴⁰³ Occasionally, Đức Niệm mentioned to his disciples that even in the present Fourteenth Dalai Lama thought highly of the practice. During the early 1980s, upon a visit to the University of Oriental Studies, while sitting on the stage together with Master Đức Niệm and other Vietnamese Masters, where he was bestowed an honorary doctoral degree by Master Thiện Ân, the Dalai Lama was asked by some laity to recommend a practical Buddhist method. Instead of answering, he asked the Vietnamese about their Buddhist practice. After learning that they have been practicing Pure Land Buddhism, reciting the name of Amitābha Buddha as a major part, the Dalai Lama told the Vietnamese Buddhist audience that Buddha recitation in an excellent practice, he felt no further need to recommend them other Tibetan Buddhist practices.

For individual practice of Buddha recitation, Đức Niệm recommends the recitation of Nam Mô A Di Đà Phật, the Vietnamese way for saying Namo Amitābha Buddha, broken down in single syllables, while visualizing that the in-and-out breath that appears like a vivid white silk

⁴⁰² See Thích Đức Niệm, *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be a Perfect Spring), pp.190, 256; and *Người Muôn Thuở* (A Person of Eternity), p. 153.

⁴⁰³ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 268.

ribbon. Breathing in, one recites “Nam Mô A,” and breathing out, one continues with “Di Đà Phật.” This is recitation performed by the mind rather than by the mouth (speech). From his experience, the regularity of in-and-out breathing coupled with one recitation prevents the practitioner from becoming exhausted from trying to do several recitations in a single breath. Also, it is a good way to avoid losing the counting. Furthermore, the visualization helps to keep the mind on focus, preventing the mind from drifting away by interferential thoughts. In order to enhance concentration if the previous method of recitation does not work, Đức Niệm proposes that one can also visualize the image of the Buddha until the mind is calm without disturbing thoughts. Furthermore, as another alternative for reaching the one-pointedness of mind, one can also revert to the normal recitation of the Buddha name, reciting out loud with or without using a *mala* (rosary beads). The immediate and verifiable benefit of the method is sleeping peacefully without nightmares while getting content and happy feelings throughout the rest.⁴⁰⁴ As group practice at the Institute during Sunday, instead of the twenty-four-hour retreats, called the Uposatha, Đức Niệm organizes half-day Pure Land retreats, called “Pure Land Karmic Cultivation.” This is performed once a month in order to help the laity who would otherwise be unable to remain at the Institute for the whole twenty-four hours. In this particular Pure Land retreat, in addition to the usual practice of sitting in meditation, the practitioners sit and recite the Buddha name quietly in alternation with chanting the Buddha name in normal rhythmic chanting voices. Also, reciting while walking in circumambulation around the statue of the Buddha in the main sanctuary is also used in alternation with sitting. Before noon, practitioners get ready for the ceremonial meals, including offering food and eating in quietude. After finishing eating, they stand up and walk in a single or double line toward the main sanctuary again, reciting the Buddha name along the walking steps. After circumambulating around the main sanctuary three rounds, they recite *The Heart Sutra* and the mantra for gaining rebirth in the Western Pure Land. The retreat ends with the usual three refuges and the dedication of merits to all sentient beings.

Though making various efforts to promote Zen and Pure Land practice in writings, Đức Niệm has never claimed to have created anything new at his Institute. On the contrary, he saw himself carrying on the Vietnamese tradition of fusing Zen and Pure Land practice passed down by the masters before him. He demonstrates no inclinations to invent any Dharma versions in his own name. Rather, in his texts, he insists that he is just following and repeating the words of the

⁴⁰⁴ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Cho Trọn Mùa Xuân* (Let It Be a Perfect Spring), pp.188-189.

Buddha, the Unsurpassed Medicine King, and of the virtuous masters of the past.⁴⁰⁵ People need medicine to cure their physical ailments. Likewise, they need the Buddha Dharma to alleviate their mental afflictions. Though believing that writing books is among the good ways to cultivate positive karmic seeds by helping others to practice, he keeps advising his disciples to avoid the pitfalls of those who are too obsessive of creating evolutionary changes for self-promoting purposes. Rather than attempting to impress people with lofty philosophy and to attract their curiosity, he presents his works as a skillful means, hoping to help others to liberate themselves from samsara, the life full of suffering in the vast transmigration of birth and death. Buddhist teaching and practice are methods to liberate people from samsara rather than enhance individual attachments to samsara. Đức Niệm dedicates his life to propagate Buddhism for this very purpose. Even when he is very sick in the last few years near the end of his life, he still writes a letter in July 15, 1995 to support master Thích Tịnh Hạnh, who begins to launch the massive project of the translating and printing the Vietnamese Buddhist Tripitaka in Taiwan in 1994. The project has gained support from more than a hundred eminent Buddhist intellectuals from Vietnam, including the Venerables Thích Phổ Huệ, Thích Quảng Độ, Thích Đồng Minh, Thích Tuệ Sĩ, Trí Siêu (Lê Mạnh Thát), and many others. By 2003, out of the total of 500 volumes, they have together translated, edited, and printed 220 volumes of 1000 pages each. The work continues and is in need of financial funds. Not only does master Đức Niệm support Master Tịnh Hạnh spiritually, he joins other Vietnamese monks in the United States and abroad to send final contributions to the project, seeing it as a part of the Buddhist duties to his people. Promoting the Dharma in order to benefit people was a priority in his vision. Also, he believes that benefiting Buddhism is benefiting the Vietnamese culture, as in his remarks:

Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Japan, and Korea all have the Tripitaka in their own language. Why is that? While Vietnam keeps praising itself for having a 4000-year culture, for having the presence of Buddhism for more than 2000 years, and for having the Buddha Dharma permeate the heart of the Vietnamese population, and for having excellently competent intellects in both monastic and secular realms, then why do we not have the Tripitaka in the Vietnamese language until now? How many have thought about

⁴⁰⁵ See Thích Đức Niệm, *Pháp Ngữ Lục* (A Collection of Dharma Discourses), p. 3; *Kinh A-Nan Vấn Phật Cát Hung* (Ananda Asks the Buddha on the Auspicious and the Inauspicious), p. 6.

this issue? Or are they merely concerned about building grandeur temples with great Buddha statues while hosting just a withering contents?⁴⁰⁶

His vision is always preserving and transmitting the Buddha Dharma for the benefit of sentient beings, including the Vietnamese people. Building a Buddhist center is important, and it is difficult to do so. Nevertheless, a Buddhist center without real Buddhist instructions and practices is meaningless.

2. Temple of Perfect Virtue, San Jose.

The Temple of Perfect Virtue (Chùa Đức Viên) was established in San Jose, California in 1983 by the Venerable Nun Thích Nữ Đàm Lữ (1933-1999), a Vietnamese leading senior Buddhist nun. The Temple of Perfect Virtue exemplifies itself as another version of the monastic center due to the fact that it was built by a Buddhist nun and was intended to be a nunnery. In addition to training new generations of Vietnamese Buddhist nuns in the United States and offering Buddhist services to the local Vietnamese, the vision of the Temple of Perfect Virtue, under the leadership of Ven. Đàm Lữ, extends to cover the propagation of proper Buddhism understanding, the promotion of Pure Land Buddhism, and the preservation of the Vietnamese culture through teaching Vietnamese to the youths. Similar to the International Buddhist Monastic Institute, the Temple of Perfect Virtute managed to achieve its vision in the lifetime of its founder with great efforts and not without difficulties, of course.

In contrast to the elegant and spacious temple with a traditional curved roof of the Vietnamese Buddhist style at the present time, the Temple of Perfect Virtue began humbly in 1980 with a small old house located at 2003 Evelyn Avenue, in the city of San Jose. Master Đàm Lữ bought the house a year after she was sponsored from the refugee camp in Malaysia to the United States in 1979 by the Venerable Thích Thanh Cát, the abbot of Giác Minh Temple in the city of East Palo Alto, California. Soon, she moved on assignment by Master Thanh Cát for the purpose of establishing her own Buddhist center. Looking forward to achieving her vision of

⁴⁰⁶ See Thích Tịnh Hạnh, *Công Trình: Phiên Dịch Đại Tang Kinh Thành Chữ Việt* (The Project: Translating the Tripitaka into the Vietnamese Language), pp. 9-10.



Figure 49. The Temple of Perfect Virtue (Chùa Đức Viên) newly built in 1999.



Figure 50. The Temple of Perfect Virtue, an aerial view.

establishing a nunnery, she worked hard to raise funds for the center and was able to obtain a larger lot of land right at the corner between McLaughlin Avenue and Tully Road in 1985. Gaining further support from both the monastic and laity, Đàm Lữ bought the next lot in 1986, making altogether a total of 9,000 square feet of land, large enough for a temple symbolically representing both her vision and her Vietnamese cultural tradition of an almost five-thousand-year legacy. With the proper acreage of land, the master plan for the building was drawn in 1991, followed by the constructing period lasting for four years, until the finalization and then the opening of the center in 1995.

The spectacular progress of the center was not without obstacles. More funds were still needed for the nuns' quarters, the guest building, and the kitchen and dining hall to be built. On top of that, Đàm Lữ had to donate a strip of land in the back of the property to the city in order to make way for a group of houses in a nearby neighborhood. This particular zoning requirement from the zoning board of the city had to be met, or the case would not be settled. Đàm Lữ was obligated to meet the zoning requirement regardless of the fact that she herself had spent ten years recycling newspapers, cardboard, and bottles from the dumpsters around the city to collect funds to buy the land to build the temple of her vision. She started her recycling campaign in 1984, collecting the money penny by penny, not for lofty environmental concerns, but rather for the general financial need of building a Buddhist center.⁴⁰⁷ Many Buddhist laity joined her, including children, while many others thought of her aim of getting enough funds to build a temple as untenable or even inconceivable. Nevertheless, the image of Đàm Lữ and her nuns picking newspapers and cardboard from the dumpsters and loading them in their old van became a familiar scene in the public's eye around the city as the years went by. In the end, about 30 percent of the \$ 400,000 down payment for the project came from her recycling campaign.⁴⁰⁸ Together with three thousand local Buddhist supporters, Đàm Lữ raised sufficient funds not only to buy the land and build her temple, but also to be able to donate the strip of land to settle the case with her neighbors and the requirements of the city. At present, the Temple of Perfect Virtue stands elegantly and dignifiedly as a Buddhist center in traditional Vietnamese style with an ornamented curved roof, halfway hidden among the trees. It looks amazingly beautiful,

⁴⁰⁷ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), pp. 87,133.

⁴⁰⁸ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 23.



Figure 51. The new Main Hall of the Temple of Perfect Virtue.

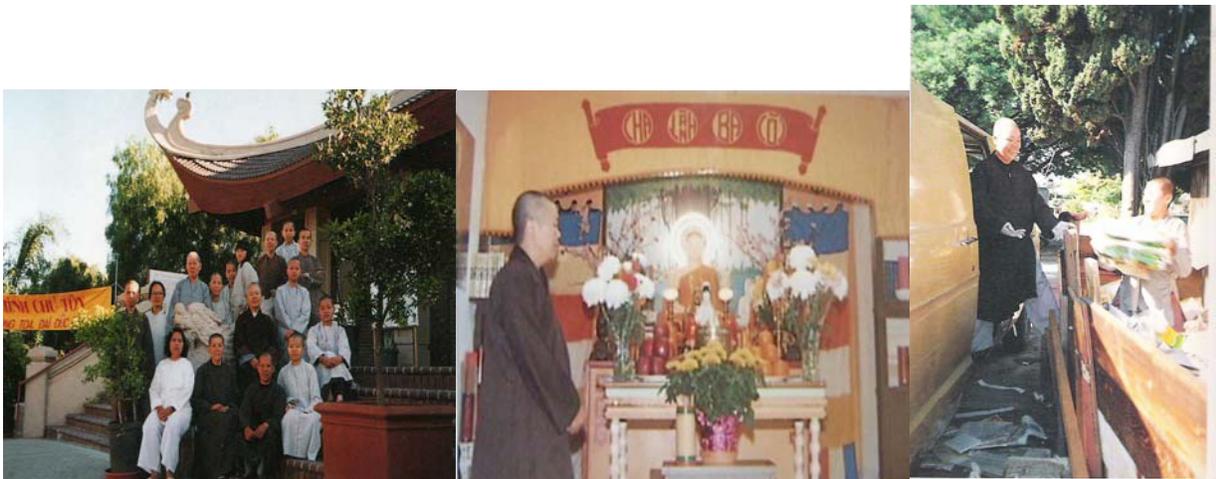


Figure 52. Đàm Lựu seen in her various roles: dignified Master, humble initiator, and active recycling motivator. Photos Đức Viên Temple.

despite its seemingly heavy look due to the low roof. The disproportionally low roof is not a genuine part of the plan envisioned by Đàm Lữ. Rather, it came from the city. It was the zoning regulation of the city that the roof of the building could not exceed a certain height. Of course, the height of the building was another obstacle that Đàm Lữ had to overcome. Establishing a Buddhist center was never an easy task for Đàm Lữ, a refugee and a Buddhist nun, who arrived in the United States from the refugee camp in Malaysia with only twenty dollars to begin with. Yet, Đàm Lữ managed to construct the temple of her vision, leaving a legacy of Vietnamese Buddhist nuns in America for the future generations. Another glimpse of Temple of Perfect Virtue and the activities of Đàm Lữ are provided in the following photos.

Along with making the impressive efforts to get her Buddhist center built, master Đàm Lữ also carried out her vision of training nuns. By 1986, eighteen young Vietnamese women had joined her as nuns. With her lifelong effort she was able to train a total of 23 disciple nuns. Among those, twelve of them resided as resident nuns, taking care of the center after her passing away. As of 2006, the number of nuns had increased to eighteen in residence at the Temple of Perfect Virtue, keeping the tradition alive. Being monastic members of a nunnery in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, the nuns follow the regular routine of waking up and getting ready at 5:30 a.m. That starts the day with the following schedule:

From Monday to Friday

a. Morning:

- 5:30-7:00 The morning chanting session.
- 9:30-11:00 Making prostrations and chanting sutra.

b. Afternoon:

- 3:00-4:00 A chanting session
- 5:30-6:30 The afternoon chanting session
- 7:00-8:00 The session of reciting mantras and Buddha name.

Afterward, the activities for the day are concluded. On Saturday, after the regular morning chanting session, the nuns at the Temple of Perfect Virtue follow almost a similar schedule and chant *The Lotus Sutra* rather than their the usual sutras. On Sunday, they have an additional chanting of *The Lotus Sutra* at 10 o'clock in the morning. In the afternoon, after the session of reciting the Buddha name at 2 o'clock, they have a section of Dharma discourse to the public. In recent years, the nuns have even added an English session of Dharma discourse to offer

Buddhism more extensively to both Vietnamese and American audiences. On Sunday, the monastic activities are concluded earlier than usual, around 5:30 p.m., after the chanting session beginning at 4 o'clock. Regardless of the extremely tiring schedule, they also organize a Buddhist Studies class for the youths on Saturday from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., in order to popularize Buddhism among them. Furthermore, for the purpose of introducing the Buddhist laity to the monastic life and encouraging them to join the monastery, they also conduct a session for practicing as householder renouncers on Monday between 7:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

In order to guide the nunnery of her vision, Đàm Lự offered a comprehensive program of pure conducts. In the past, Đàm Lự herself had been well trained in the Vinaya tradition in her monastic career beginning with her Master, the Elder Venerable Nun Đàm Soạn, who had been the abbess of several temples in North Vietnam, including the Cự Đà Temple as well as the director of the Van Ho Buddhist School where nuns could receive a formal Buddhist education. Her training in the Vinaya progressed as she accompanied Master Đàm Soạn who was invited to Saigon to become the abbess of Dược Sư temple in 1952. At the time, during the period of Buddhist revival in South Vietnam, Dược Sư Temple joined together with several other temples in Saigon under the unified umbrella of Phật Học Đường Nam-Việt (the Nam-Việt Buddhist Studies Institution) directed by Thiện Hòa. In 1952, Dược Sư Temple was selected to become the center for training Buddhist nuns, running parallel with the Buddhist institution for training monks located at Ấn Quang Temple.⁴⁰⁹ Living among the Buddhist nuns at the national center for training Buddhist nuns, Đàm Lự recognized the essential of disciplinary rules in the life of the center, namely promoting harmony and improving Buddhist practices. Thus, in the 1980s when it came to her own Buddhist center in San Jose, she had similar disciplinary rules laid out very clearly. The rules were extremely practical to the monastic members who were living together in a community. Again, they were intended to generate monastic harmony and to improve the practice of the monastic community as a whole, as seen in the following:

⁴⁰⁹ See Thích Thiện Hoa, *50 Năm Chấn Hưng Phật Giáo* (50 Years of Revitalize Buddhism), p. 70; and Thích Minh Đức, "Đàm Lự: An Eminent Vietnamese Buddhist Nun," *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lự* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lự), p. 139. It should be noted that Đức Niệm, the founder of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute, had been a teacher, instructing Vietnamese Buddhist history to the nuns at this Dược Sư Temple before going to study in Taiwan. Also see *Tướng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), p. 165.



Figure 53. The Abbess of Dược Sư Temple, Ven. Nun Đàm Soạn, with her nun attendants.



Figure 54. The 1956 Nun Class at Dược Sư Temple, Saigon, Vietnam.

1. Each and everyone should live according to the Vinaya, including respect, harmony, and toleration, for the joy of the study and practice of the Dharma together. Do not discriminate nor make personal favor, faction, division, hatred, and conflict between each other, which lead to the decline of the Bodhisattva vows that are difficult to meet again in eons. Everyone should live with the thought concerning the practice of “entering the Tathagata home, wearing the Tathagata robe, and sitting on the Tathagata throne,” in order to repay the profound deeds of the Three Jewels.

2. Everyone should take the Vinaya and the regulations as the teacher and handle the monastic affairs logically and reasonably. Do not become selfish and obstinate. Everyone should respect each other and should develop the strong aspiration to fully accomplish the assigned duties.

3. Everyone should always keep strongly the Bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment), performing the task with a faithful mind so that the three Jewels shall witness the merits.

4. Avoid the desires, attractions, jealousies, and slanders, while trying to eradicate the negative karma and secular defilements.

5. Eliminate vanity and arrogance. Do not promote yourself as talented while looking down at others as lowly and unequal. In order to make progress in cultivation, everyone should pay attention even to the minor tasks. Every task aims at cultivating virtuous karmic seeds. In order to advance your practice and to generate positive karmic connections to help liberate others, do not ignore the task, thinking that it is too minor a merit or too insignificant for your position or for you to lower yourself to harmonize with others.

6. Recognize the true values of your individual personality, activities, and interactions. Good/ bad and right/ wrong are merely individual inclinations and perceptions.

7. Everyone should learn from the better ones and try to assist the lesser ones. Please do not ignore or avoid the deluded ones who are entrenched in fame and competition.

8. May the whole Great Assembly practice whole-heartedly, contemplating and regulating individual thinking in every minute in order to avoid being drifted away from the righteous Dharma to the point of being unable to discard confusion and delusion.

9. It is difficult to keep the mind solidly determined. Therefore,

-Everyone has to have a direction and determination in order to advance for the purpose of liberation, regardless of this body and regardless of the objects of the self, employing this mind and vow to seek the lofty aim of becoming Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

-Seeing your negative deeds will enable one to reach for the positive ones. Due to seeing people laughing at you, you recognize your own misdeeds; do not be afraid of people laughing at you. That is self-reflection.

10. Cultivate the aspiration to reach further and to establish your vow. In your vow, only go gradually for the obtainable ones, day by day, rather than the grander ones, and then leave them unaccomplished, e.g. making a vow to share the sadness and happiness with everyone or to recite the Buddha name 10 times in happy or sad moment. Gradually, you shall become the child of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas.

11. We have to try to shed the garment of anger, delusion, arrogance, and vanity, while making an effort to form the dress of selflessness, caring for others, learning from others, and associating with others. If we refuse to wear the new dress and keep attached to the old garment, then we have not lived up to our original vow, the intention to renounce the householder life.

12. We have to keep in mind that birth and death are the important matters. Impermanence comes at any time. Everyone has to practice diligently and to recite the Buddha name with a single mind.

13. In life, if every day we constantly reflect on the matters manifested against our wishes, we will easily recognize them without suffering when they come.

14. In helping people, we have to support them to the end. Do not abandon your good intentions upon encountering difficulties or conflicts due to individual perspectives.

15. Everyday, you should reflect to see how much your mind has been purified while doing the work. From there, you vow to maintain your clarity upon confronting objects in the future, so that you can benefit sentient beings.

16. There should be no phrases of command in your speech and no poisons in the contents, so that the Great Assembly can be at peace and be happy.

17. Do not command and order people. Rather, you should use harmonious and kind speech, inviting everyone to join together to do the work.

18. By frequently contemplating on life, you shall have the skillful means to help yourself overcome fear and suffering.⁴¹⁰

Those guides of pure conduct are taught to the nuns when they enter the nunnery as novices. They are essential to the life of a monastic member, who is expected to show proper monastic manners. As a reminder, they get repeated occasionally during the learning sections of the nuns. In addition to those guidelines, the center also teaches the Bhiksuni Vinaya, the Monastic rules for Buddhist nuns. Since the nuns together with the monk are representatives of the Buddhist tradition, they must know how to act according to the Vinaya. The nuns have their own Vinaya while the monks have theirs. As a part of training for her ordained nuns at the temple, Đàm Lữ taught them the Bhiksuni Vinaya every weekday. For those with a keen focus on the Vinaya, Đàm Lữ was a great resource because the Vinaya was her monastic expertise. She dedicated her life to promote the Vinaya. Her intention was clearly indicated in the name of her center, the Temple of Perfect Virtue. In addition to devoting her effort to instruct the new nuns the monastic manners in details, Đàm Lữ also spent hours to clarify the technical concept of opening, pardoning, keeping, and violating, in dealing with each of the Vinaya rules for nuns. Her meticulous instructions would enable the nuns to properly determine when a rule was open for adjustments and exceptions, when it allowed pardoning, when it was kept rigidly as a rule, and when it was a violation of a rule. Đàm Lữ understood that knowing the instructions alone was just a part of monastic training. Occasionally, disharmony among her disciple nuns occurred, as a natural and ubiquitous phenomenon of living together. That was where the practical application of the Vinaya was stressed as another significant part of monastic training. The nuns themselves had to apply those instructions in their daily life, including interactions between their monastic members, so that they could experience harmonious monastic living and could accomplish the monastic purposes of representing the tradition. As a result, Đàm Lữ requested that the nuns had to bring the Vinaya into their daily life, saying:

You all should bring yourself to look at your own mistakes, so that you can learn the goodness of others. You have to monitor you body and mind every minute and even second in order avoid causing problems to others. Where did you throw your axe last week? Were you able to keep you speech pure? Is there anyone who says something that upsets their sisters? ... I am not asking you to report everything. Nevertheless, I want to

⁴¹⁰ *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 85-86.

remind you that you learn the Vinaya and manners in order to practice in your daily life. Without living according to the spirit of the Vinaya, we are not different from the secular people, since we merely differ from them by the look of shaven head and square dress [the monastic robe].⁴¹¹

In addition to asking her disciple nuns to bring the Vinaya learning into life, Đàm Lữ also demonstrated it through her own daily activities. Her cultivation of the Vinaya culminated in her selflessness. If she made a mistake, even a minor one, she would make repentance upon getting a reminder from others. In an occasion when it was cold, she put on a coat over her brown monastic robe. A Chinese nun told her that the monastic robe was beautiful and asked her the reason why she, “the Venerable Master,” took the coat to cover it.⁴¹² Without any clarification, Đàm Lữ folded her hands together and asked for pardon. Also, she thanked the young nun for reminding her. After taking the coat off, she never covered her monastic robe again with any other coat, regardless of the cold weather.

At the nunnery under the guidance of Đàm Lữ, the instructions on the Vinaya to the nuns did not end in traditional notes where the monastic learning was isolated from secular learning. Rather, issues from secular education were brought up and thoroughly dealt with, especially when they came into conflict with the monastic values. Here in the American setting, one of the recurring issues is gender equality. Individuals of both genders, male and female, are expected to be treated equally. The idea evolved out of the new feminist consciousness which arose from the women’s moment in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is fortified by modern feminist criticism, which is political and has been used to empower women in various social realms. Also, it has partnership with Marxism criticism and Freudian psycho-analytic criticism.⁴¹³ Based upon this idea of equality, the social status of women in the United States has been positively improved. In contrast to women of old-time America, women can now vote, attend universities that used to be for men only, and receive the same payment as men doing the same job. They can even play men’s sports and can run for the highest political office in the nation. As it progresses, the status of women continues to be elevated in America. Nevertheless, this idea of gender equality appears to conflict with the particular values upheld by the Vinaya for nuns, namely the Eight Special Rules.

⁴¹¹ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 123.

⁴¹² See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 101.

⁴¹³ For more discussion on Feminist Criticism see Sanford Srenlicht, *Chaim Potok: A Critical Companion*, p. 122.

In the Eight Special Rules of the Vinaya, nuns are treated differently from monks. According to those monastic rules, ordained nuns have to pay proper respect to ordained monks. They cannot enter a retreat in a forest where there are no monks around and cannot criticize monks in public, and so forth.⁴¹⁴ Without realizing that women are free to enter and to leave the Sangha and without knowing that the Buddha had accepted female prostitutes into the Sangha and elevated them to admirable and respected positions, unimaginable even to the most astounding promoters of gender equality today, a number of individuals have isolated these Special Rules out of the Bhiksuni Vinaya text and vocally voiced their own gender interpretation. Some believe that the nuns have been mistreated in the Buddhist Sangha, while others think of those rules as proper measures necessary for celibate monks and nuns living in proximity. In her nunnery, Đàm Lữ also dealt with the very issue when it was brought up by her nun disciples who went outside to study at public universities. Nevertheless, she was not easily shaken by emotional impulses and by sentimental words. She stood unwavering on holding a different perspective on the issue. Her Buddhist values concerning the gender issue were also different. Her monastic logic was also different. Nevertheless, they worked. Đàm Lữ never saw herself as being mistreated by monks in the Sangha. Instead of having any restrictions from monks, she had their support. Moreover, she was at liberty to practice, to teach Buddhist discourses, and to manage her monastic career at the Temple of Perfect Virtue. Also, she was free to establish and run her own nunnery. Those have always been the tradition for the Buddhist nuns. Her disciple nuns were truly grateful for her expertise in the Vinaya matters as well as her skill in settling their wavering minds. After her passing away, they kept remembering the helpful words of their Master. They even published them so that others including monks, nuns, Buddhist laity, and even the non-Buddhists, can share and appreciate her wisdom. A part of Đàm Lữ's remarks on the issue goes as in the following account illuminated by her own nun disciples:

She patiently listens to the complaints originating from the discriminative minds of her disciples and skillfully brings them back to contemplating on their own minds. Upon learning that certain nuns have written a letter seeking the Great Sangha to “untie the nuns from the Eight Special Rules,” she does not hesitate to reply that “There is no one who ties us down. Why need to untie?” Her disciple nuns do not give up, arguing, “The

⁴¹⁴ See T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, *Vinaya Texts*, Part III, p. 322-234.

Buddha nature is uniformly equaled in all, why do we have to pay respect to the monks? Together with her serious glance, she scolds them, saying “Do you practice for yourselves or for those venerable monks (quý Thầy)? For me, practicing the Eight Special Rules is purifying my own egocentric view. Only, *anatman*, selflessness, will bring all of you closer to the destination of enlightenment and liberation.”⁴¹⁵

That is not the end of it. Others might assume that Đàm Lữ was too entrenched in the traditional view concerning women or too weak as a woman to protest that glaring gender issue. A similar case has been brought up by some of Đàm Lữ’s disciples. However, the old Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ was not weak at all. Rather, she positioned herself astoundingly powerfully. She viewed her chosen path to be exceedingly powerful far beyond ordinary thinking. With her words of deliberation, she helped her disciples leap another step forward on their monastic careers, seeing themselves as confident as the monks on the path. She pointed out that by becoming Buddhist nuns women had gained more respect and prominent social status than those of ordinary women in secular life. Her perspective has been treasured as a guiding light for her disciple nuns, even after her passing away. It is summed up in the account retold by another group of her nuns, who had come to study the Vinaya with her while being disciples of a well-known monk from Kim Sơn monastery in northern San Francisco, as follows:

We are common women, who are fortunate to share the roles of the household renunciators in order to build the foundation for our liberation due to the strong determination to lead the life of a household renouncer of Mahaprajapati. All of you have to treasure your original vow of leading the life as a household renouncer. Our nuns must study, respect, and practice the Eight Special Rules and other precepts that the Buddha had cherished and clearly instructed. The Eight Special Rules and the Bhiksuni Vinaya are principles to protect the safety, the development of wisdom, the compassion, and the beautifully bright human behavior of the female practicing in the Buddhist tradition, rather than rules to fetter, to burden, to subjugate, or to suppress from the monks. You all should remember and think carefully about this so that you can bring yourselves to study and practice joyfully, to study and to practice peacefully, and to study and practice happily. You should not use your shallow intellect to analyze and to reason in order to diminish the sublime qualities of the Eight Special Rules and the Vinaya of the Bhiksunis among the

⁴¹⁵ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 70.

household renouncers. From receiving and practicing the Eight Special Rules and the fundamental Vinaya, all of you will become kindly virtuous human beings, great mothers, masters of human beings and of the gods, the Bodhisattvas, and the Buddhas, who have the complete wisdom and compassion to help liberating the suffering life.

Therefore, we are no longer the weak females of ordinary sentiment, are we?”⁴¹⁶

Buddhist monks, who knew master Đàm Lữ well by her virtues, also praised her. They respected her sincerely. Among them, Venerable Thích Minh Đạt, the abbot of Quang Nghiêm Temple, which was a center for training monks and nuns in northern California, also had deep respect for Đàm Lữ. Minh Đạt recounted that regardless of the years in summer retreat of the monks after High Ordination, the elder Master Đàm Lữ always addressed them as Master, while referring to herself as “*con*” which means your daughter or son depending on the gender of the speaker. She always conducts herself properly according to the Vinaya. Occasionally, when the younger monks referred to themselves as “*con*” in conversations with her, Đàm Lữ corrected them saying that they should not speak that way because it would be improper according to the Dharma. Rather than having her self-respect diminished, her superb conduct concerning the Vinaya won her the admiration of several the eminent Vietnamese monks, who all put away their local temple affairs to attend her funeral. Among them, Đức Niệm of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute also joined other eminent masters at her funeral, regardless of the fact that he was sick and had to take his medication along with him. Nhất Hạnh also praised her for her virtue and determination, which had led her to support Nhất Hạnh in bestowing the monastic precept to the nuns at the three consecutive High Ordinations organized by him, namely the High Ordinations of Cam Lộ (Sweet Dew), Hương Tích (Fragrant Source), and Nén Ngọc (Jewel Candle). While Đàm Lữ saw Nhất Hạnh as the “Mother Âu-Cơ,” who has a hundred monastic children, he respectfully praised the Elder Nun Master as the mother of all his monastic disciples, both monks and nuns.⁴¹⁷ Occasionally, some, especially those who have neglected to look into the Vinaya concerning how a monk should act toward nuns and other women, might get emotional upon reading the rule that nuns have to pay proper respect to monks. Nevertheless, monks were expected to be virtuous and humble in the occasion. Mutual respect between Buddhist monks and nuns was always expected, as it was seen when Minh Đạt, the Abbot of the

⁴¹⁶ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 117.

⁴¹⁷ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 91.

Quang Nghiêm center for training monks and nuns, praised Đàm Lữ publicly in front of the Great Assembly of monastic and laity, saying:

I truly respect the Elder Nun Master (Sư Bà) and I have never dared to receive the full homage that she has personally bestowed on me, unless when I am sitting in the crowd of the Great Sangha assembly of monks.”⁴¹⁸

Promoting the Vinaya to transmit the nun lineage in Buddhism was a focus for Đàm Lữ in carrying out her vision of a nunnery in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. Nevertheless, the Vinaya was not the only monastic teaching promoted by Đàm Lữ. In the course of training, Đàm Lữ also allowed her disciples to learn the teachings from various Buddhist traditions as well as the secular subjects taught at public educational institutions. Without attaching to her personal practice, she praised nuns who looked forward to studying other Buddhist traditions and joyfully sent them to study at centers conducted by those respective traditions.⁴¹⁹ Feeling that the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, which is predominantly Mahayana, needed a broader scope on Theravada Buddhism, she added a stronger Theravada focus into the curriculum of her training center. Moreover, she especially encouraged them to study more deeply into Theravada Buddhism. She even sent her nun disciples abroad to other Buddhist centers to study, including those in Thailand, Myanmar, and Taiwan.

Đàm Lữ even invited eminent Buddhist masters from Vietnam to give Dharma discourses at her center. To those masters with substantial practice, she opened her invitation so that they could bring benefits the Buddhists, both in knowledge and in practice. At certain points in time, such invitations had caused some tensions, but she had managed to resolve them at the end. Regardless of the difficulties, she was determined to keep up with the vision of introducing a variety of Buddhist teachings to her center. Her unflinching invitation to the Most Venerable Thích Thanh Từ of Vietnam regardless of political pressure was a perfect example for the case. In 1994, she invited Thanh Từ of Vietnam, who was on his Dharma trip to the United States, to give his teachings at her center. She saw the valuable spiritual insights from the fifty-year experience in meditation of the master as a great asset to the Buddhist community in her locality. Master Thanh Từ was a well-known Zen master in Vietnam. He was also a contemporary of Nhất Hạnh. Thanh Từ was there with Nhất Hạnh and others at Phương Bối, the wild and

⁴¹⁸ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 95.

⁴¹⁹ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 69.

enchanted forest region in Đà Lạt, in 1962, when Nhất Hạnh and his group were composing ideas for his Engaged Buddhism. Nevertheless, Thanh Từ had his own meditative aim. In his own hut, he was seeking his suitable method of meditation. After Nhất Hạnh had left to go abroad, Thanh Từ returned to Phú Lâm, Saigon, abandoning the site eventually when it became unsafe. Also, Thanh Từ was a monastic friend to whom Nhất Hạnh wrote letters describing his personal experience of gaining meditative insight.⁴²⁰ Thanh Từ continued with his own meditative practice and was able to gain insights which enabled him to penetrate and to shed light on various *koans* used by Buddhist masters of the past. He became renowned in meditation. He went on teaching Zen using Mahayana sutras as a guide. His Zen method was recognizing defilements through inward contemplation. As a defiled thought was recognized as defilement, the mind would naturally detach itself from that defiled thought, making it disappear. In order to use the Mahayana Sutras to support his meditation, Thanh Từ translated and explained them in lectures. His texts and lectures have been widely circulated, both within Vietnam and abroad, due to his simple language and clarity. Gradually, during the 1990s, Thanh Từ was allowed by the government of Vietnam to go around the country to teach Buddhism. He even went to northern Vietnam, helping to revive the Trúc Lâm Zen lineage. Many people came to him for his Zen practice, including a number of those who were visiting home from abroad. His Buddhist centers grew in many provinces across the country. His popularity spread far and wide. As a result, Thanh Từ got invitations to go abroad, including America, to give Dharma lectures. In 1994, when Thanh Từ came to America on his Dharma visit, Đàm Lưu took the opportunity to invite him to her center.

While Đàm Lưu focused on the benefits brought to the Buddhists from the Dharma lectures of Thanh Từ, she seemed to overlook the political implication of having a monk who was allowed to go abroad by the Communist government. On the one hand, it was impossible to go abroad from Vietnam without the permission of the Communist government, unless one escaped as refugee. On the other hand, it was also impossible to prevent the local Vietnamese refugees from getting suspicious that Thanh Từ had been sent abroad under some communist pretexts, just because not just anyone could travel out of Vietnam. As a result, a group of about thirty local Vietnamese, who were anti-communists and not members of the temple, flocked to her center to protest. It created a dramatic commotion outside of the temple fence. There were

⁴²⁰ See Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves*, p 39.

even threats and the calling of names. Fortunately, Đàm Lựu handled the situation well by remaining calm and compassionate, keeping the inside of the fence as peaceful as possible. Unflinching in her determination, she said:

As Buddhists, we need to have the courage to do what we believe to be right in accordance with the Vinaya and for the benefit of many. Thích Thanh Từ, with his fifty years of meditation practice, has many spiritual insights to teach us. I believe that our Buddhist community will learn a lot from his teachings, and, therefore, we should go ahead with our plan. I am taking full responsibility for this. I am not fearful of any threats or pressure from outside. What concerns me most is whether or not I could leave this world with a smile knowing that I have tried my best to do all the things I could to benefit others. I do not want to leave this world with regrets because, out of fear for my safety, I did not do the right things that I was supposed to do.⁴²¹

When Đàm Lựu talked about acting in accordance with the Vinaya, she was referring to a Bodhisattva precept, in which a follower of the Bodhisattva path must show respect for the Dharma and must attend the Dharma lectures or invite the virtuous Dharma master to give lectures, upon knowing that he was within 40 miles of the vicinity.⁴²² Abiding to the teaching of the Vinaya, Đàm Lựu pressed on with the invitation and Master Thanh Từ was there giving Dharma lectures, while the protesting was going on outside for a few days. Rather than being intimidated or irritated by the crowd of protesters, she had compassion for them. When the cold and heavy rains came down, Đàm Lựu asked her nuns to open the gate of the temple for the protesters to get in. As they got inside for shelter, she even had hot tea and lunches for them as well as others. That ended the protest and some came to her with their apologies. In the context of the incident, Đàm Lựu had her reasons according to the Buddhist Vinaya. Yet, the protesters also had their constitutional right to stage a demonstration. The United States is a democratic country that allowed freedom of expression. On the one hand, the government of United States of America had its own right to grant Thanh Từ the permission to enter America, regardless of its own economic sanctions on Vietnam. On the other hand, the Vietnamese Americans also had the right to make petitions and to protest against the American government for allowing a person

⁴²¹ Thích Minh Đức, “Dam Luu: an Eminent Vietnamese Buddhist Nun,” *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lựu* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lựu), p. 150.

⁴²² See Thích Đức Niệm, *Tại Gia Bồ Tát Giới* (The Household Bodhisattva Precepts), p. 25. See also *Brahma Net Sutra* (Moral code of the Bodhisattvas), p. 19.

from a communist country to enter America, if they wanted to do so. Nevertheless, since 2000, after the United States had lifted the economic embargo in 1994 and had normalized its relationship with Vietnam, Thanh Từ has not only visited the United States a few more times, but has also sent many monks and nuns here to establish their own Zen centers. By 2007, in the United States alone, there were eight Zen centers established and directed by Thanh Từ or by his monks and nuns sent from Vietnam. For Đàm Lữ, she continued to invite other monks of her choice from Vietnam, and even from other countries to visit her temple for Dharma lectures until her passing away in 1999. Her effort of providing a variety learning opportunities to her disciples has produced many good Dharma teachers. Several of her nuns are now serving as Dharma teachers across different states. A few are even teaching in France at the Plum Village, headed by Nhất Hạnh.

In addition to the monastic focus on Vinaya, Đàm Lữ practiced Pure Land Buddhism as her main cultivation. Even at the end of her life, Đàm Lữ still maintained her concentrated effort on reciting the Buddha name and on vowing to attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha according to the three foundational texts of the tradition, namely the *Amitābha Sūtra*, *The Longer Amitābha Sutra* (the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*), and *the Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*. The method of reciting the Buddha name had long been her practice, since Đàm Lữ had personally witnessed the expected results of the method from her own master, the Elder Master Đàm Soạn, who attained peace and clarity at death, including knowing her day of passing away well in advance through the practice.⁴²³ She established her temple with the vision that it would become a place where the recitation of the Buddha name resounded, just as in the temples of the Pure Land masters in the past. Her vision manifested itself through the focus on Pure Land Buddhism indicated by the set up of the main sanctuary. Rather than installing a statue of Śakyamuni Buddha as the central image, she had the statue of Amitābha Buddha flanked by Mahāsathāmaprāpta Bodhisattva and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Together, those three figures are three sage figures of the Western Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha. In addition to having the regular sections of chanting *Amitābha Sutra* and Buddha recitation at that main sanctuary, Đàm Lữ also organized several Pure Land retreats for her followers. Among them, the most intensive one was the Pure Land cultivating section in nine days. In this special retreat, practitioners made prostrations while reciting Amitābha's name for nine days. The

⁴²³ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lữ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lữ), p. 127.

primary aim was cultivating in preparation for gaining rebirths among the nine grades of lotus of the Pure Land as instructed by the major Pure Land Sutras.⁴²⁴ Personally, Đàm Lự herself even made prostrations at each word in the *Amitābha Sutra* in order to consolidate her firm faith in practicing Pure Land Buddhism. Her recitation method was simple, namely reciting without interruptions, not only by the mind, but also by the body. In addition, she believed that the practice should be performed in advance, before getting too old and too sick. Practicing regularly while still healthy would form a good habit. Otherwise, one could not fully concentrate on reciting the Buddha name when one became too sick and exhausted.

In order to promote Pure Land Buddhism, Đàm Lự recommended the Buddhist laity to focus on the *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith* (Niệm Phật Thập Yếu), *The Pure-Land Letters* (Lá Thư Tịnh Độ), *The Returning Path to the Land of Bliss* (Đường Về Cực Lạc), *The Native Land of Bliss* (Quê Hương Cực Lạc), *the Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* (Kinh Quán Vô Lượng Thọ), and so forth, as the main texts. These were popular Vietnamese texts on Pure Land Buddhism. They have been reprinted several times by Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, the International Monastic Buddhist Institute, due to their excellent qualities concerning Pure Land Buddhism. Most of them were authorized by Venerable Thích Thiền Tâm, who had been renowned in Pure Land Buddhism in contemporary Vietnam. In order to promote Pure Land practice further, Đàm Lự also printed some of those Pure Land texts as gifts to people throughout her life. For the purpose of making the practice lively, she frequently invited monks to her center to give Dharma discourses on Pure Land practice. For those who were too busy to attend those Dharma lectures, she even made copies of cassette tapes on Pure Land Buddhism to donate to them. In addition, she also made images of Amitābha Buddha as gifts. On the back of the image, she printed the following instructions:

Constantly keep the mind calm.

Constantly cultivate oneself and benefit others.

Constantly giving,

Constantly being patient.⁴²⁵

They were her reminders concerning Pure Land cultivation. The image was also accompanied by a small pocket-size note called “Niệm Phật Công Cứ” or the *Meritorious Record of*

⁴²⁴ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lự* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lự), p. 126.

⁴²⁵ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lự* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lự), p. 125.

Recitations. This was a popular tool used in Pure Land practice, aiming to help the practitioners to keep track of their recitations. It was convenient because people could easily carry it almost everywhere at anytime because of its small size. Also, it motivated people to practice by showing them the total number of recitations they had accomplished each day.

Đàm Lữ was also keen on preserving the Vietnamese culture. It was a part of her secular education in sociology. When she was in Vietnam, Đàm Lữ was among the generation of nuns who was allowed to obtain a secular education outside of the monastery. In 1964, when she was sent abroad to West Germany for higher education, she concentrated her studies on sociology, hoping to provide social services to the Vietnamese who were suffering from the results of war. After graduating in the field of sociology in 1969, she returned to Vietnam and worked as the director of the Lumbini Orphanage (Cô Nhi Viện Lâm Tỳ Ni) in Saigon until the orphanage was closed down by the communist regime in 1975. Nevertheless, Đàm Lữ's experience in social services came in handy after she escaped Vietnam and got settled with her own Buddhist center, in San Jose, in 1980.

From frequent contact with people who came to the Temple of Perfect Virtue with their family issues, Đàm Lữ recognized that many family conflicts had roots in problems related to the young Vietnamese who could not communicate with their relatives in Vietnamese. Also, she noticed that many young Vietnamese spoke English to each other rather than Vietnamese. They even spoke English to their parents and other elders in the family who did not understand much of it. Đàm Lữ recognized that miscommunication had made the youths feel isolated and rejected. While growing distant to their families due to the lack of communication, they picked up some aspects of American culture from their peers. Some of those were not always in accord with their culture. As a result, their newly adopted manners frequently brought them into conflicts with other members in the family. They were unhappy. Their parents and elders were also unhappy. The elder Vietnamese were alarmed that their children were assimilating too fast into American culture. They became worried about the Vietnamese children losing their cultural roots. The Vietnamese parents did not know that it had been a general trend for the second generation of the immigrants to make adjustments, including the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish immigrants in the United States in the past. Will Herberg, a scholar in American religion and social religious trends, illuminated this particular religious phenomenon in his observations. He remarked:

In revolting against the immigrant heritage, and in the process of establishing their independence and adjusting themselves to their new environment, they tended to cast off their religious identification. To them religion, along with the language of the home, seemed to be a part and parcel of the immigrant baggage of foreignness they were so eager to abandon. To the dismay of their parents, and to the distaste of better acculturated Americans, many of the second generation tended to draw away from the religion of their fathers, and from religion altogether. Some, indeed, became consciously, even bitterly, religionless. It was a strange and self-defeating way of accommodating themselves to American life, but they did not know it.⁴²⁶

For help, the Vietnamese parents turned to their spiritual master, who was no other than Đàm Lộ, the abbess at the Temple of Perfect Virtue. Đàm Lộ ended up with a social challenge that extended beyond her regular monastic duty of providing for spiritual needs. Nevertheless, this was where her expertise in social services accumulated from years of studying in Germany and of running the orphanage in Vietnam came in handy.

In order to help those Vietnamese, Đàm Lộ stepped in to shoulder their burdens and tried to bridge the generation gap for the purpose of restoring the harmony of their families. On the one hand, she advised the parents to learn basic English, so that they could at least understand their own children. They needed to be able to communicate with their own children. Especially, they should know what their children were doing. Communication was the key. Being able to communicate with their children would make life much easier for them. On the other hand, she began to establish a Vietnamese class in her temple in order to help the youths to learn Vietnamese. However, getting the children to the class was another dilemma. It was not easy to get all of them to attend the class regularly. In addition, several the parents had problems picking up their children on time. Several of them were busy working even during the weekend, while a number of them were still lagging behind in being punctual. In general, they were refugees and needed to work to sustain their families. As a result, only four students showed up in the first few weeks of class.⁴²⁷ It was a disappointment. Nevertheless, Đàm Lộ had come up with a genuine solution, namely providing free lunches for them and hosting them at the temple

⁴²⁶ See Will Herberg, *Protestant – Catholic – Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, p. 19; and Stuart Chandler, “Chinese Buddhism in America,” in *The Face of Buddhism in America*, Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka eds., pp. 22-23.

⁴²⁷ See *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lộ* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lộ), p. 145.

grounds until their parents could pick them up after work or after their daily chores. Without a compassionate heart, this would have been extremely difficult to do. Yet, Đàm Lữ had managed to tackle the challenge. She and her volunteers ended up cooking for the children. In her effort to help the parents resolve the conflicts caused by the generation gap, Đàm Lữ had not only given time, but she had also taken on the burden of cooking for them, a dedication beyond her busy monastic schedule. Nevertheless, it worked. The children stayed at the temple to learn Vietnamese. The number of them kept growing and growing. By then, Đàm Lữ encountered the problem of keeping a big crowd of young children after classes. She ended up organizing them into groups, just like those of the Young Buddhist Groups in Vietnam, so that they would be able to keep watch over each other while playing orderly and peacefully on the temple grounds until their parents could pick them up. That established the legacy for the Young Buddhist Group of the Temple of Perfect Virtue. Their number neared 200 before 1984. Not only could they speak Vietnamese, they also became very well-behaved children, who were proud of their Vietnamese heritage. The conflicts between generations were gradually resolved and family harmony was restored. The local Vietnamese were truly indebted to Đàm Lữ for her unprecedented dedication in preserving their Vietnamese cultural heritage.

Within her lifetime, Đàm Lữ achieved her vision of using her Buddhist center to preserve the Vietnamese culture in America. With her steady support, the Vietnamese language school expanded to many classes as the years went by. Moreover, her compassion and especially her personal cooking skills were retained in the hearts of the Vietnamese youths. Even though they have grown up and have gotten jobs elsewhere far away, and even though the Elder Venerable Nun has passed away, several of them continue to come back and support the Temple of Perfect Virtue. Meanwhile, the number of young students at Đức Viên (Perfect Virtue) Vietnamese Language School has grown year by year, as has the number of volunteer teachers. As reported by the volunteer staff at the Đức Viên Vietnamese Language School, there were 387 young students in 2005 and 415 in 2006. Now, in 2007, the total number of students attending the twenty-two Vietnamese classes is 464.⁴²⁸ While the extra task of teaching the Vietnamese language to the youths is not necessarily included in the monastic training of a Buddhist nunnery, it fulfills the vision of promoting the Vietnamese culture originally established by Master Nun Đàm Lữ and contributes to the legacy of keeping the Vietnamese language and culture alive.

⁴²⁸ Trường Việt Ngữ Đức Viên, *Kết Quả Học Tập-Học Kỳ I (2006-2007)*, p. 1.



Figure 55. Awards to students at the Perfect Virtue Language School. Photos Chùa Đức Viên.



Figure 56. Teachers and students at the Perfect Virtue (Đức Viên) Language School.

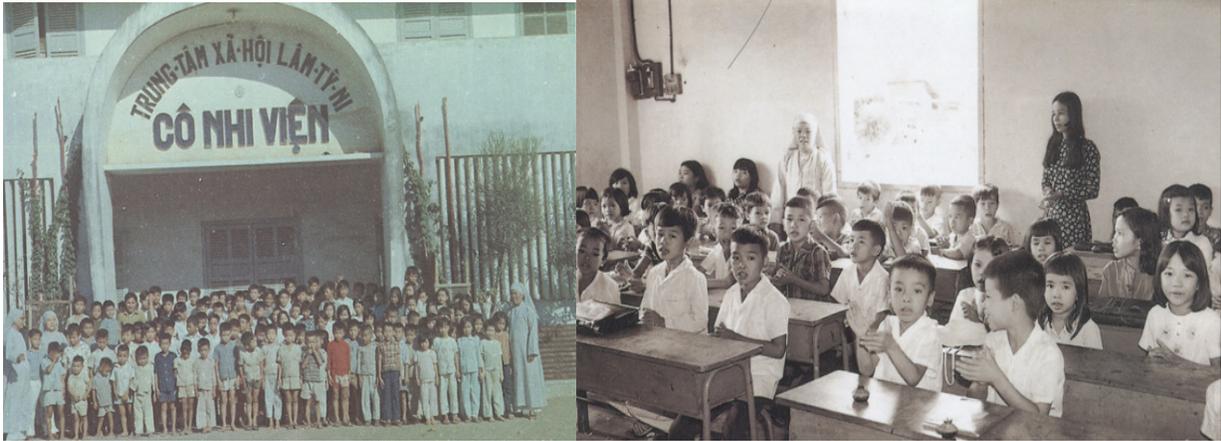


Figure 57. Đàm Lựu together with the orphans at the Lumbini Orphanage and a typical class.

3. Temple of Pure Heart, Nashville.

The Temple of Pure Heart (Chùa Tịnh Tâm), is a lay Buddhist center located at 867 Summerly Drive, Nashville, Tennessee. This was the first Buddhist temple in Nashville. The center was officially opened to the public in 2003. Nevertheless, its origins began two decades ago in 1987. It took the local Buddhists sixteen years to make their Buddhist center a reality. Originally, the building was a three-bedroom ranch-style house with a basement. At present, the center still retains the original ranch-style look. Nevertheless, the inside has been renovated to make room for a Buddhist center. Regardless of the humble appearance of the site, the local Buddhists saw the lasting worth of the center as the fulfillment of their simple vision, namely providing Buddhist practices and services to the local Buddhists. Before the existence of the temple, the Buddhists had to drive for hours to visit other Buddhist centers in distant cities. The closest one was Phở Đà Temple in Memphis, about a four-hour drive from Nashville. Some even drove all the way to Atlanta, Georgia, in order to visit a Buddhist temple during the weekend. Wishing to have a local temple, they consulted the Most Venerable Thích Trí Chơn, who was the spiritual leader of Phở Đà Temple, and were encouraged to form their own Buddhist group. Under the spiritual guidance of master Trí Chơn, a small group of about a dozen Buddhists joined together to form the Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Nashville in 1987. That began an almost two-decade effort to get the Temple of Pure Heart established. Also, a tough and occasionally tearful path lay ahead that challenged the Buddhists and their spiritual leader to overcome in order to get the Buddhist center of their vision.

The beginning of the Temple of Pure Heart was ordinary and humble, just like the usual beginnings of about three dozen Buddhist centers founded under the spiritual guidance of Master Trí Chơn. Without a permanent location to begin with, the local Buddhists had to organize a movable center, moving from house to house for their weekly chanting and other Buddhist activities. In that movable center, the picture of the Buddha used as a makeshift altar was also carried around from one house to another. Most of the time, the local Buddhists took turns sharing their living rooms with fellow members for weekly services. The chanting was a simple Pure Land session and others, copied out directly from the *Nghi Thức Tụng Niệm: Thống Nhất* or The Buddhist Liturgies: Uniform.⁴²⁹ The text was standardized for chanting and authorized by

⁴²⁹ Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Nghi Thức Tụng Niệm: Thống Nhất*, (The Buddhist Liturgies: Uniform), pp. 3-24.

the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam before 1975. It has been republished for use in Buddhist temples abroad by the International Buddhist Monastic Institute, in California. The section on Pure Land chanting begins with the *Great Compassion Mantra*. Then it is followed by the recitation of the Buddha name, chanting the name of Amitābha Buddha and making homage to the sage figures of the Pure Land. It ends with the *Heart Sutra*, followed by the usual three Buddhist refugees and the dedication of merits. The text also added further instructions for conducting funeral services, including the mantras for karmic purification and for obtaining rebirth in the Land of Bliss of Amitābha Buddha. Using the textual instructions and the guide taught by Master Trí Chon, the local Buddhists organized a group of reciting assistants to help conduct the funeral rite in case of an emergency. According to their limited capacity, they tried their best to support each other, especially those who needed the services. That won the hearts of the local Buddhists and eventually bonded them into a solid group. For their primary aim of having a Buddhist temple established, they also followed the advice of Trí Chon to have a special chanting section as a dedication toward that ultimate aim. In that particular chanting section, in addition to the usual daily Pure Land chanting, they chanted the *Lotus Sutra*, especially chapter twenty-five, *The Universal Gate*, on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the embodiment of Compassion who looks down upon the suffering cries of others sentient beings. For important Buddhist events like Vietnamese New Year, Buddha Birthday, or Ullambana, in order to accommodate a larger crowd, the Buddhists rented out a local place suitable for the occasion or used a spacious living room of a Buddhist member as it became available. Having the support of a reputed and reliable Buddhist Master like Trí Chon, they began to raise funds for their center while continuing to look out for their permanent center.

In December 1998, the Buddhist group in Nashville put \$500 as a down payment and bought a residential two-bedroom house on Mimosa Drive, Nashville, as a temporary location. More than a year later, in 2000, the center was closed when the county received complaints from the neighbors. Around the same time, their dedicated leader, *Upasaka* Nguyễn Đức (Võ Văn Kiêu), passed away. Unfortunately, he departed without seeing the real manifestation of his Buddhist center, the fruit of his efforts. In the early 1970s, Nguyễn Đức came to the United States to study. He eventually earned his Ph. D. and remained to teach in the Department of Agricultural Science at Tennessee State University after 1975. Though inexperienced in Buddhism and ill due to kidney failure, he accepted to be the president of the group after being

entreated by others. Seeing the need to have a center for Buddhist activities in Nashville motivated him to do whatever he could in his capacity to achieve that purpose. Today, long after his demise, the local Buddhists still remember him for his dedication and his humbleness, especially when he remarked that, unlike other members, he did not know much about Buddhism, but that he would try to learn more as the group progressed under the instructions of a virtuous spiritual leader like Venerable Thích Trí Chơn. It was quite a crisis for the group when they lost both their dedicated leader and their temporary center on Mimosa Drive.

Without a center, the group accepted an oral invitation to use a warehouse offered by a Vietnamese business individual who had also lent occasional support to the group. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese Buddhists in Nashville then encountered a greater crisis by doing so. A few months later, after the warehouse had been renovated for the purpose, the business owner told Master Trí Chơn and the Board of Directors in front of about fifty other Buddhists that the place would no longer be available for their use. To Master Trí Chơn, he gave some unpleasant reasons. Then he told the group that those who followed the Master would not be welcomed at his place. He gave the Buddhists the option of staying with his center or moving out. He even scheduled their moving out at 9 o'clock in the morning on December 23, 2001, and within "a duration" that needed "to be limited to no more than three hours." He clarified his unusual condition by saying that he had to pay an employee to open the office in order to accommodate their moving. Some decided to stay, while the majority including the whole Board of Directors left. Losing some members, the group carried their portable Buddha out of the place and never returned. Nevertheless, they were determined to get their own center established. They went on looking for a property suitable for their center while their movable Buddha ended up staying at the home of Upasaka Đồng Phúc, a dedicated Buddhist, for almost a year, until they bought the property on Summerly Drive for their center in August 2002.

Learning from their past mistakes concerning local zoning, the Buddhists in Nashville chose their new center where a special use for a church was permitted by the county. This time they spotted a house located at the corner of Summerly Drive and Charlotte Pike. The site was ideal for their center. While Charlotte Pike was one of the parkways with heavy traffic, Summerly Drive led into the quieter residential neighborhood, which was also conducive to the



Figure 58. The Temple of Pure Heart (Chùa Tịnh Tâm) in Nashville. Photo Diệu Bảo.



Figure 59. An aerial view of the Temple of Pure Heart in Nashville.

quietude sought after by a Buddhist center. The building was actually a house for the pastor of the adjacent church. Since the church had gone under a new ownership, the pastor's house was no longer in use. It was being rented out after having been put up for sale. The Buddhist members were very pleased and decided to purchase the site. With those suitable conditions, they held high hopes for their future center. Nevertheless, a major difficulty was awaiting them down the road, namely a protest from the neighbors, a frequent issue for establishing a Buddhist center.

Hearing that a Buddhist group was about to move into the neighborhood, the local residents rallied to get a petition signed by 173 neighbors against the center. At the local hearing, they maintained that they did not want the Buddhist church "to grow" and "to infiltrate" their neighborhood. Sarah Boyd, the president of the 125-member neighborhood association, was quite clear on her reason for not wanting the group to infiltrate her area by suggesting that "if this property is approved, is there anything to stop them from buying the next piece of property and the next, until they own the whole neighborhood?"⁴³⁰ Some also pointed out that their neighborhood already had a church. They believed that the new Buddhist church would be a further intensification, which would have an affect on their "quality of life" and would "lower the value of [their] properties." They opposed the loud noise, especially the sound of the drum that they had once heard from a Laotian Buddhist Temple in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, during their visit to that center for the purpose of gathering evidence in preparation for the zoning hearing. According to them, the buffer zone would not be sufficient to protect them from the noise. Also, they were concerned about the heavy traffic created by the twenty-five members of the Buddhist congregation. According to one of them, the traffic had been "horrible," including "three or four wrecks a week," just right on the other side of Charlotte Pike. Another gentleman was concerned about the fire hazard of having twenty-five people jammed into a residential dwelling. He even pointed out that he always had a problem of accommodating a much smaller group of guests in his house. While uncertain about who the Buddhists were and about what they would be doing, another gentleman from the neighborhood warned that if the Vietnamese Buddhists were the group that would be "coming to the neighborhood and causing troubles," the neighborhood would not be a place for them, because they were "getting into the wrong

⁴³⁰ See Anita Wadhvani, "Vietnamese Church Gets OK Despite Opposition: Zoning Change Granted for West Nashville Site," *The Tennessean*, May 17, 2002.

neighborhood.” For the most part, the local residents already knew that this particular Vietnamese group had been turned down twice. Nevertheless, they insisted that the group needed to find another place more appropriate for their expected growth.

The Vietnamese Buddhist group led by their Treasurer, *Upasika* Diêu Bảo (Châu Nguyễn), struggled to win their case by maintaining that they had also been living in the area. Personally, Diêu Bảo has been living in the area for more than eighteen years. She and her elder sister, who was also a member of the Buddhist group, were among a few educated Vietnamese women who won scholarships to study in the United States during the late 1960s. She studied at the University of Hawaii on an American scholarship of the East-West Center and earned her Master of Arts in Linguistics in 1971. She also earned her second Master in Business Administration at Tennessee State University in 2002 and continued to work for the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority since then. According to her, the area of West Nashville was her second hometown, after her own hometown in Vietnam. Thus, she, like the other sixty percent of the Vietnamese Buddhist members who were living in the area, also wished to have a Vietnamese Buddhist center close to where she was living. She said:

We live in this area and we want to have a church in this area. Both sides of Charlotte Avenue have churches of different denominations and we just want to have a church for ourselves.⁴³¹

Her words appeared to be in harmony with one of the American proudest tunes that people might have occasionally forgotten, namely “This land is your land. This land is my land....This land was made for you and me.” Furthermore, Diêu Bảo saw no reasons that having the Buddhist center at the site would lower the quality of life. Rather, she and the Buddhists believed that it would enhance the quality of life because having the Buddhist church at the corner of Summerly Drive and Charlotte Pike should not be more dangerous and unsafe than having a liquor store and a gun store, which were already standing in a building across Charlotte Pike, directly opposite the site for the Buddhist center. Also, it was a humiliation to her Vietnamese identity when she heard that a Vietnamese group would lower the quality of life by

⁴³¹ See Anita Wadhvani, “Plan for Vietnamese Church Opposed: Foes want to keep West Nashville Neighborhood as it is,” *The Tennessean*, May 16, 2002, p. 9.



Figure 60. The old house before being converted into the Temple of Pure Heart.
Photo Diệu Bảo.



Figure 61. The Temple of Pure Heart with its Main Hall renovated from the living room.
Photo Diệu Bảo.

their moving into the area. On one hand, most of the local Buddhist members were in their 50s and knew how to live in order and with dignity. In addition to being decent and efficient at their jobs at various locations in West Nashville, they could certainly manage the quality of their homes quite appropriately and successfully. On the other hand, they saw that the house at the site for their future center was one that needed to be improved in quality. That particular house on 1.038 acres of land had already been in shabby condition and was put up for sale “as is” at the price of \$154,000. Bushes had been growing wild here and there around its edge and on the lawn, which appeared to be infrequently cared for. Furthermore, rather than thinking that having more churches was an issue, the Buddhists believed that having more churches should not be a problem as long as those churches would be operated according to the law of the land instead of making violations. The Minister of the adjacent church also saw no issue in having another church. He had even written a document to allow the group to use the parking lots of his church. The members of the Nashville Symphony and Nashville Opera also had no problems with having another church and offered their support by organizing an opera concert at the Greater Nashville Unitarian Universal Congregation in Bellevue, a suburb of Nashville, in order to benefit the Vietnamese Buddhist church.⁴³² Concerning the issue of the future growth of the group, Diêu Bảo also hoped that her group would grow as the neighborhood had thought. Nevertheless, she was concerned about the shrinking membership among the older members and worried about the young generation of Vietnamese who would be attracted to the more exciting things of materialistic life rather than praying and meditation. On the whole, the Vietnamese Buddhists hoped that the Buddhist church would attract the Vietnamese youths into living with healthier behavior rather than seeing them grow up attracted to gangsters or other unvirtuous activities that would sooner or later become a burden for the authorities in particular and for the whole of society in general. Concerning the purported drumming, Bahr Weiss, a Vanderbilt professor and a member who has embraced Buddhism, pointed out the difference between a Vietnamese Buddhist temple and others by clarifying that they used no drums. He even added that there would be no playing of drums either during the day or at night.

The zoning officials saw no relevant oppositions concerning the county regulation on special use of the site. They recognized that the Buddhist group had met all the criteria for

⁴³² See Nancy Deville, “Davidson News Notes: Symphony, Opera Concert to Aid Buddhist Church,” *The Tennessean-Davidson A.M.*, Tuesday, June 3, 2003.

special use. They pointed out that the hearing was neither about the growth of the Buddhist church nor about fire hazards. Rather than being concerned with future growth, they were dealing with an application for a 25-member congregation. On one hand, as pointed out by the zoning officials, it did not mean that the group could not have more participants at the site. On the other hand, the neighbors could always be out with their video cameras ready to capture a large crowd gathering at the site. Anyway, the zoning officials assured the neighbors that any expansion of the center would have to come before them again. In the end, they voted unanimously to grant the Buddhist group their request.

After purchasing the property by borrowing a mortgage loan from a bank, the Buddhist group moved on October 2002, and then pressed on to tackle the task of constructing the appropriate parking lots and planting tree to make the buffer zone as stipulated by the zoning requirements. In April 2003, the city granted the group the permit to operate the center. The Buddhists in Nashville were joyful to have their center officially and legally established. Nevertheless, while the center was working on stabilizing its activities, the Buddhists came to realize that they would need to have a resident monk, a missing part of their original vision of establishing the center. That need emerged and became urgent as *Upasaka* *Đông Phúc*, one of the most active and dedicated Buddhist member, who had been taking care of the maintenance of the center, suddenly passed way in September 2003, after a week of hospitalization. Again, the group turned to their spiritual leader, Master Trí Chon, for a solution to their crisis.

For a lay center, like the Temple of Pure Heart, the role of a spiritual leader, like Master Trí Chon, is crucial. He is the only source of trust that can bind the Buddhists living scattered here and there in the local region into a cohesive group. Even though the financial matters of the center are managed by the Board of Directors comprised of local Buddhists, the role of a virtuous spiritual master is decisive. People only support the center when they have confidence in the Buddhist monk who is the spiritual leader. Practically, people do not entertain the thought of having their hard-earned money going to waste or going into the wrong hands. The spiritual leader is the source of paramount trust and confidence. Serving in his capacity as a spiritual leader, Master Trí Chon was a qualified candidate. With his unceasing dedication, Trí Chon had traveled across the states to help the Buddhists to build their centers so that they could practice without losing their cultural roots. His main vision was to keep the Buddhist faith alive among the Vietnamese Buddhists through building lay centers. In order to help the Vietnamese

Buddhists, he frequently made his visits using Greyhound buses, just to save the money of the costly airplane tickets. It was not an easy task. Also it was unprecedented. In some remote regions, many Buddhists were very happy to see him because they had never met a Buddhist monk since their arrival in America. As a result, Master Trí Chon was well respected as the “The Bus Monk,”⁴³³ the first and only Buddhist monk who had frequently toured on Greyhound buses to help the Buddhist during the revitalization of Vietnamese Buddhism in America after 1975. For years since the early 1980s, Trí Chon has gone on bus tours across the states, even to remote regions where pockets of Vietnamese refugee were scattered and trying to make a living. He went by Greyhound bus, on multiple-month tickets, which were the most inexpensive and efficient way for stopping at any city he so wished to visit. Meals on the road were also a frequent problem for the Buddhist monk. Nevertheless, Trí Chon, who was in his mid-fifties, had overcome it without any complaints. Eating only vegetarian food, which was not offered at the fast-food restaurants where the buses made their stops, master Trí Chon had frequently sustained himself with milk and potato chips.

His meals improved somewhat during the mid-1990s, when the chains of fast-food restaurants across the United States began to offer vegetarian hamburgers. In addition, the climate changes coupled with the long and arduous trips by bus also posed a challenge. During the months of January and February, around the time of the Vietnamese New Year, he continued to visit northern states. Traveling on the road day after day on buses, he frequently braced himself against the gusty winds and the falling snow which covered endless vacant fields without houses stretching for miles and miles. Sitting for hours at various stations in order to change buses was his routine. Sometimes, while bracing himself against the bitterly cold wind and the freezing snow storms, he got very sick on the bus and even thought that he would never make it back to California, where he had his office. Nevertheless, Trí Chon pressed on with his vision of promoting Buddhism through establishing lay centers.

In addition to overcoming those natural obstacles to reach the Buddhists, Trí Chon also managed to bring Buddhist teachings to the Vietnamese through publications. He had always carried Buddhist texts with him on the bus and made his translations there. It was a part of his vision to promote Buddhism by helping the Vietnamese Buddhists to understand the fundamental teachings of the Buddha through his writing. Up to 2001, he had translated nine Buddhist Texts

⁴³³ See Anita Wadhvani, “Vietnamese Celebrate Without Ill ‘Bus Monk,’” *The Tennessean*. June 8, 2002. p. 3B.

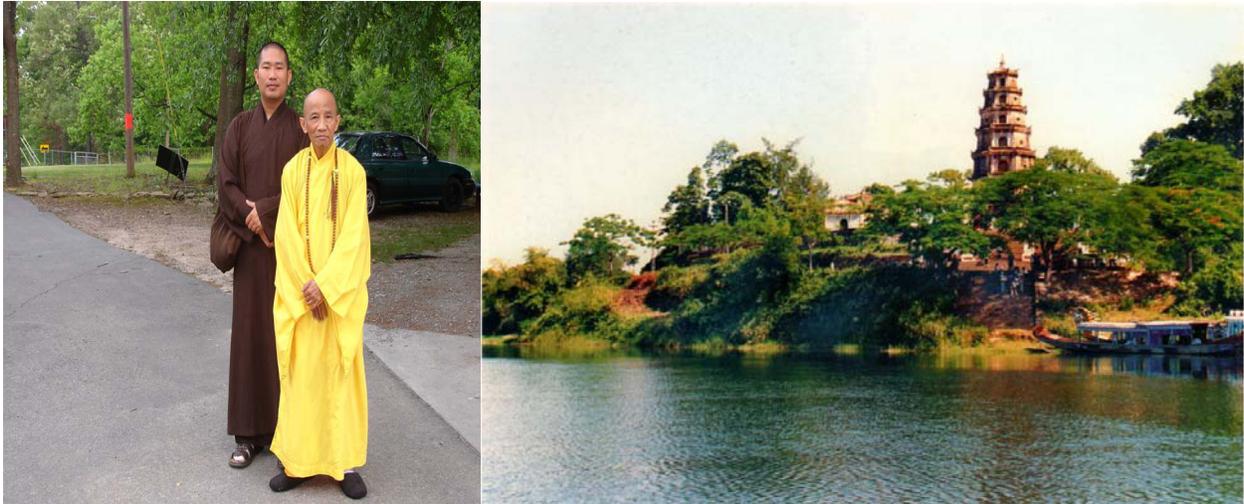


Figure 62. Ven. Trí Chơn with a visiting monk from India and a glimpse of Thiên Mụ Pagoda, his root temple in Huế, Vietnam. Photos Lê Bích Sơn and Hà Xuân Liêm.



Figure 63. The typical routes taken by Ven. Trí Chơn in his Dharma tour using Greyhound buses to reach 36 Buddhist centers in 55 days, from August 20 to October 13, 1998 (after flying out of Los Angeles to New Orleans).

and published them bilingually, in both Vietnamese and English. In addition, he also wrote articles for several Vietnamese Buddhist newspapers and chronicles in America and even abroad while on his bus tours. Several Buddhists learned and came to respect Master Trí Chơn through reading those articles. Initially, through reading that news, the Buddhists in Nashville learned that Trí Chơn had come by bus to help the Phổ Đà Temple of Memphis. Later on, some of them, especially *Upasaka* Đồng Phúc, even volunteered to pick him up at the Greyhound bus station and drive him to his local destinations for Buddhist services and activities. Upon gaining the approval of Trí Chơn, the Buddhists in Nashville began to organize their own group in 1987. With the virtue and credibility behind the official endorsement of Master Trí Chơn, the group began their fund-raising activities. Seeing the reliability of the group led by a trusted Master like Trí Chơn, people began to make contributions to help establish the center.

In addition to recognizing the dedication of Trí Chơn to the Buddhist course, the Vietnamese Buddhists also knew the credibility of Trí Chơn through his monastic career and education, extending far back into the past, before he was sponsored to the United States in September 1977 by Venerable Thích Thiên Ân.⁴³⁴ Originally, Master Trí Chơn was a disciple of Thích Đôn Hậu (1905-1992), the National General Superintendent of the Sangha, at Thiên Mụ Pagoda, the renowned temple in Hue, Vietnam. He was sent by the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam to study in Thailand in 1965 and then India in 1966. In addition to French, which he had learned in Vietnam, he also studied Pali and English while living in India. He earned his Palyacharya in 1968 and his Bachelor's Degree in English in 1971 at the Sanskrit University Visvavidyalaya at Dharbhanga and at Magadha University, Bihar, respectively. After twelve years of studying in India he earned his Doctoral Degree in Buddhist Philosophy at Nalanda University, Bihar.⁴³⁵ His personal research at the major sacred Buddhist sites during the summer months after school had brought him a wealth of knowledge concerning those major Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India. During the early 1980s, his slide shows using the impressive photo collection concerning the major Buddhist pilgrimage sites greatly inspired the Buddhist faith. They were the "hit" shows of his Buddhist lectures, even in Australia and New Zealand, where he was invited to conduct teachings. Also, they prepared Buddhists for pilgrimages to those

⁴³⁴See Thích Trí Chơn, "Những Năm Chung Sống Hoạt Động Phật Sự Với Cố Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm" (The Years of Living and Performing Buddhist Activities Together with the Late Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm) in Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Tưởng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), p. 101.

⁴³⁵ See Thích Trí Chơn, *Lòng Thương Yêu Sự Sống: The love of Life*, p. 207.

sacred sites, which would become available in the early 1990s onward, when the Buddhist monks began to organize pilgrimages to India.

In 1985, Trí Chon returned to the United States and joined the Board of Directors of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute, in Sepulveda, California. His office was there at the Institute. Nevertheless, due to his vision of helping the Vietnamese Buddhists establish their Buddhist centers, he was on the road most of the time. Rather than giving time to help train the new generation of monks and nuns, he dedicated his life to building Buddhist centers, helping to rekindle the Buddhist faith among the refugees scattered in remote regions across the states. By the time Trí Chon was making an effort to help the Buddhist community in Nashville establish its own center, he had already been able to establish thirty centers in the Eastern part of the United States. A part of his dedication and hard work in helping the small groups of Buddhists scattered across the states is portrayed in the following report in *The Tennessean* newspaper:

Until he grew ill, the Bus Monk – his actual name is Thich Trí Chon – would fly to the South four times a year and hop on a Greyhound bus. He'd spend a month visiting 30 small congregations without a monk of their own, like Nashville's, to observe special holidays. This is the first such holiday that the Venerable Trí Chon, 70, will be absent since he first became the Bus Monk 15 years ago. So, the 25-member Nashville congregation has teamed up with an even smaller congregation in Knoxville to fly in the young Rev. Thich Minh Quang, a doctoral student at Florida State University, Tallahassee, in Florida. The Florida monk will visit both cities to lead the services honoring the birthday of the founder of the Buddhist faith.⁴³⁶

As of 2007, Trí Chon had established 37 Buddhist centers under his spiritual guidance. As the number of Buddhist centers under his guidance expanded, Trí Chon needed to invite other Buddhist masters to share the burdens of conducting Buddhist teachings and services at those places. In addition to inviting Minh Quang, as mentioned in the article in *The Tennessean*, he also solicited the help of other Vietnamese Buddhist Masters, including Thich Tín Nghĩa, who was the Abbot of Từ Đàm Hải Ngoại in Dallas-Forth Worth, Texas; Thich Trí Lăng, who was the abbot of Thich Ca-Đa Bảo Temple in San Jose, California; and many other Vietnamese venerables whom he knew well from being dedicated members of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America. For years, those masters lent their

⁴³⁶ See Anita Wadhvani, "Vietnamese Celebrate Without Ill 'Bus Monk,'" *The Tennessean*, June 8, 2002, p. 3B.

support to Trí Chon in helping him to establish those Buddhist centers. Nevertheless, those Vietnamese Venerables could only provide limited support to those centers because they also had responsibilities to other centers, including their own centers and those of their individual affiliations. There were not enough capable Buddhist monks to manage all of those centers.

By the early 2000s, Trí Chon had already sensed the crisis when the Buddhist group of the Temple of Pure Heart presented him their pressing need of having a resident monk. Gradually, other centers of his also saw the need of having a resident monk after they were fully established. It was quite a dilemma, since virtuous monastic members, monks or nuns, could not just be found. Rather, they needed to be trained carefully and thoroughly. Also, the training of a monastic member in the Buddhist tradition could take a decade or more. According to the monastic Vinaya, the first five years of monastic training should be devoted to monastic precepts and Buddhist etiquettes, and then the subsequent five years would be for training in the various teachings of the Buddhist Dharma, including meditation. Unfortunately, by devoting himself to establishing lay centers, Master Trí Chon had not paid much attention to training monks and nuns. Monastic training was not a part of his vision. As a result, he has confronted the reality that he has no disciples to continue the task after him. It was difficult to find those whom Trí Chon could confidently trust with the responsibilities, especially when he had never had the opportunity to give them personal training in order to know those individuals well.

As a solution, Trí Chon extended his invitations in order to bring other monastic members to become short-term resident monks at his centers. Since 1990, the religious visa program has allowed churches, synagogues, and mosques in the United States to hire qualified non-U.S. citizens to fulfill religious functions. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Trí Chon began to sponsor a number of monks and nuns from Vietnam, who were permitted to enter America as religious workers under visas issued by the government of the United States. A few of them came after studying higher education at various universities in India and Taiwan. However, their number was quite limited because of the restrictions set by the U.S. government, especially after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, when some radical Islamic groups were linked to the incident. The quota for Buddhist religious workers to the United States was not the majority. Rather, the majority of the quota was the Catholic Religious workers, whom

the spokesman of the Catholic dioceses admitted to having “used the visa frequently.”⁴³⁷ Among the total of 22,362 religious workers (R-1) admitted to the United States in 2005, only 96 (including Buddhist religious workers) or a tiny fraction of one percent came from Vietnam.⁴³⁸ Unfortunately, this total figure will continue to fluctuate. For security reasons, the number of religious workers will be reduced in the future. It will be more likely the case after the report of the U. S. Department of Homeland Security found an overall fraud rate of 33 percent for religious workers in 2006.⁴³⁹ It means a fraud for every three applicants. Recently, a proposal for increasing restrictions on religious worker visas is pending in the government in summer 2007. Collectively, the new restrictions will have a negative effect on the number of religious workers to the US, including those from Vietnam. Thus, it is not feasible in Trí Chon’s case to depend on the trickling and unstable supply of monks and nuns who come as religious workers from Vietnam.

In the meantime, the temporary solution of inviting monks and nuns by Trí Chon seemed to work for a while, at first. Nevertheless, his short-term solution ended up with a more complex problem, namely the uncertainty of whether or not the resident monk or nun would stay and would work in harmony with the local Buddhist members. A visiting monk or nun usually did not want to be just a temporary resident monk. While performing Buddhist services and conducting practices, he or she also wanted to direct the center in the manner that he or she deemed most efficient and most appropriate. With a group of supporters, he or she either moved on to establish his or her own center or began to reorganize the center under his or her direction. In the process of reorganizing, he or she came into certain conflicts with the Boards of Directors that had been managing the functions of the centers. In the worst scenario, the members of center could be split into two factions or more and the whole center weakened. Then Trí Chon would be needed again to restore the harmony of the center. This was nearly the dramatic case for the Temple of Pure Heart when the Buddhists eventually sponsored a monk who had been studying in India to be their temporary resident monk in August 2005. During the time of their recent bi-annual voting for the new Board of Directors in 2007, a group, including those who

⁴³⁷ See The Associated Press, *Fraud? Religious-Worker Visa Checked*, Saturday, April 21, 2007, p. 1; and Mimi Hall, “Fraud Found in Religious Worker Visas,” *USA Today*, May 2, 2007, p.1.

⁴³⁸ Kelly Jeffreys, “U.S. Legal Permanent Resident: 2006,” *Annual Flow Report*, March 2007, p. 2; and Homeland Security, “Nonimmigrant Supplemental Table 2. Nonimmigrant Admissions (I-94 Only) by Class of Admission and Country of Residence: Fiscal Year 2005,” *Yearbook of Immigrant Statistics*, p. 1

⁴³⁹ See U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: Office of Fraud Detection and National Security Religious Worker Benefit Fraud Assessment Summary*, July 2006, p. 3.

were not members of the center, proposed to dissolve the Board of Directors and to hand over the directorship to the resident monk. Their aim was to be promoted as the members of the new Board of Directors under the leadership of the resident monk. They created quite a disruption. Nevertheless, their scheme did not work. The majority of the members and their spiritual director, Master Trí Chơn, agreed to retain the former Board of Directors. Also, according to their bylaws, no votes were allowed for attendees who were not members. A lay religious center, including their regulations on voting, is protected by law in the United States. In addition, as permitted by law, those who intentionally and vocally disrupt the voting process would be eliminated after three official warnings. In the end, the resident monk also confirmed his role as temporary resident monk. When his term at the center came to completion, he was rotated to other centers to continue his usual assignments in conducting teaching and services. A similar uncertainty concerning the reliability of having a short-term resident monk can be observed at other centers under the spiritual guidance of Master Trí Chơn. In the case of Trường Vân Buddhist Center in New Jersey, the resident monk, who was sponsored from Vietnam in 2005, left within four months to join a fellow monk in a southern state. In another case, at Viên Thông Buddhist Center, in Atlanta, Georgia, the resident monk, who came from studying in Taiwan after getting sponsored by the center in 2004, left within a year and moved to Florida to establish his own center. It is also the case for Tây Phương Temple, in Gainesville, Georgia. The resident nun, who arrived in 2004 from Taiwan through the sponsorship of another Buddhist center in a northeastern state, left the center to pursue her own educational plan after a year. In the meantime, the Buddhist members at the Temple of Pure Heart in Nashville are still grappling with the difficult issue of having a resident monk, while their spiritual leader, Trí Chơn is modifying his strategies for inviting resident monks and nuns.

After three decades in America, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha with both monks and nuns has reestablished Vietnamese Buddhism abroad. Buddhist monks and nuns continue to train the monastic members in the traditional way in order to preserve the tradition. Joining together, monks, nuns, and the Buddhist laity press on to strengthen Buddhism by supporting each other in practice and in establishing Buddhist centers. It has been quite an accomplishment. Yet, they continue to struggle to manage their Buddhist centers and to adjust to life in America.

CHAPTER 5

ASSIMILATION, ADAPTATION, PILGRIMAGES, AND INTERACTIONS.

Vietnamese Buddhism has flourished among the Vietnamese communities in America from 1992 to present. Because of the unwavering efforts of the Buddhist monks, nuns, and laity, Vietnamese Buddhist centers steadily emerged in every state of America, including Hawaii where there were sizable Vietnamese Buddhist communities. The establishment of Buddhist centers required various adjustments. Adjusting to the rules and regulations required by the local authorities, discussed in previous chapter, was not all. It was only a part of the external adaptations made by the tradition in order to get the Buddhist centers established. Internally, other adjustments were also made to accommodate Buddhist practices and activities to life in America. The religious symbols of the tradition, especially the Buddhist swastika and the Buddhist statues have undergone certain adjustments to suite the local expectations. The roles and activities of the Buddhist temple are also modified in order to accommodate the lay practice. Those internal adaptations are essential to the successful functioning and the survival of the Buddhist centers. They will be the focus of this chapter.

Adaptations in Religious Symbol.

The traditional role of the Vietnamese Buddhist temples has been as religious centers, which serve the spiritual needs of the Vietnamese Buddhists. The temples were always recognized to be a place for chanting sutras, practicing Buddhism, studying the Dharma, and making dedications to their deceased ancestors. However, in America, they also function as cultural centers where the Vietnamese language is taught to youths and various types of cultural activities, including Vietnamese musical performances and Vietnamese vegetarian cooking sessions, are made available to people of all ages. According to my data, all of the Buddhist centers celebrate at least four of the following events, namely *Tết* or the Lunar New Year, the Buddha's Birthday, the Ullambana day of dedicating to the parents, and Avalokiteśvara day. Among those the celebration of *Tết* is the most popular for both Buddhists and Non-Buddhists alike. Ubiquitously, the Vietnamese Buddhist temples continue to be the focus points for making

visits during *Tết*, the traditional Vietnamese New Year. Certain relevant religious aspects of those popular Buddhist events will be integrated into the following discussions to illuminate the assimilation and adaptation of Vietnamese Buddhist centers.

An observable adaptation made by the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition was the decision of not displaying the Buddhist swastika as a symbol for the Buddhist temple. Without being requested by the local authorities and residents, all the Vietnamese Buddhists consciously chose not to install the Buddhist swastika (*śrivatsalakṣana* in Sanskrit), an auspicious symbol of the tradition. Undoubtedly, the Buddhist swastika prominently arose from the top of numerous Buddhist temples in Vietnam and in other Buddhist countries. It was a common sight to Buddhist temples. Also, the Buddhist swastika was made to appear on the chest of the statues of the Buddha, because it represents one the eighty auspicious marks possessed by a Buddha. According to the tradition, only the Buddha and the Mahabodhisattvas have those eighty auspicious marks (*aśītyanuvyañjanani*) on their body. Also the Buddhist Wheel Turning monarchs possessed thirty-two of those auspicious marks of superiority.⁴⁴⁰ The Buddhist swastika was an indication of the uncountable good deeds accumulated by a Buddha from his past lives. As a distinctive mark, the arms of the Buddhist swastika turn counter clockwise. At present the artistically beautiful pattern of the Buddhist swastika is still seen intricately engraved on the ancient remains of Dhamekh Stupa,⁴⁴¹ which commands the focal point of the Deer Park, Saranath, Varanasi, India, where in the past the Buddha taught his first lesson on the Four Noble Truths and thereby set the Wheel of the Dharma in motion the first time.

The Indian traditions, including Brahmanism and Jainism, however, had the arms of the swastika turn either clockwise or counterclockwise with an aim to portray the auspiciousness and noble Aryan qualities. At present, even the Hindus maintain the practice. Unfortunately, the auspicious meaning of the Indian swastika was marred in the West when Adolph Hitler of Germany picked and used it to advance the fascist claim of the Nazis. Under Hitler, the Indian swastika became the Nazi's symbol of the superior Aryan race associated with the belief system of Social Darwinism and "Racial Hygiene." From Social Darwinism, Hitler got the scientific authority to tribalism which amounted to the concept of the survival of the fittest. From Racial

⁴⁴⁰ See Thích Minh Cảnh, *Tự Điển Phật Học Huệ Quang* (The Huệ-Quang Dictionary of Buddhist Studies), vol. 1, pp. 618-620; Thích Đức Niệm, *Kinh Kim Cang Giảng Lục* (The Diamond Sutra: An Explanation), p. 312; Thích Thiên Tâm, *Kinh Đại Thông Phương Quảng Sam Hối Diệt Tội Trang Nghiêm Thành Phật*, pp. 124-129.

⁴⁴¹ See Thích Minh Cảnh, *Tự Điển Phật Học Huệ Quang* (The Huệ-Quang Dictionary of Buddhist Studies), vol. 10, p. 8930; Wasti Mitra, *Walking With the Buddha: Buddhist Pilgrimages in India*, pp. 98-99.

Hygiene, Hitler conceived a movement to improve and protect the gene pool of his race from others, whom he considered inferior. The tragic consequence of his ideology was the Nazi Holocaust which deliberately and horribly brought to death some six million Jews in Germany and European countries during World War II and also the final demise of his fascist German empire.⁴⁴² Though the Nazi swastika was distinctive from the Buddhist Swastika by its clockwise arms, the common public in the United States generally do not realize this fine distinction.

Nevertheless, the leading Vietnamese Buddhist monks were sensitive to the pain endured by the Jewish communities in diaspora, especial the Jewish communities in America. Also, they were grateful for the kind support of various Jewish American organizations in campaigning for the asylum of the Vietnamese refugees to the United States since the fall of Saigon in 1975. Back then, the American public was tired of the Vietnam War and was looking forward to its closing chapter. The extra burden of receiving the Vietnamese refugees after the war was not quite welcomed by certain groups, as evident in the public remark made by the Former Representative of California Burt Talcott:

Damn it, we have too many Orientals already. If they all gravitate to California, the tax and welfare rolls will get overburdened and we already have our share of illegal aliens.⁴⁴³

Yet, the Jewish American communities and other conscious American groups were sensitive enough to stretch out their kind arms to those Vietnamese refugees who were fleeing in panic. Out of gratefulness and respect to the Jewish Americans, especially of the sensitivity to the pain endured by the Jews in diaspora, the leading Vietnamese Buddhist masters consciously ignored the display of the Buddhist swastika. Instead, they had the Buddhist Dharma Wheel, another popular Buddhist symbol as replacement. Master Đức Niệm of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute designed a beautiful Dharma Wheel which emerged from the flames of wisdom and installed it on the top of his temple to start with. From the artistic hands of Upasaka Minh Viên, also known as the Elder Uncle Khoát, an excellent Vietnamese carpenter and a former owner of a large furniture company escaped from Lao, the Dharma Wheel was spectacularly carved out from hardest available Oakwood and pained in reddish crimson color. On top of the Buddhist center, the finished Dharma Wheel glowed in a golden hue every

⁴⁴² See Joseph E. Persico, *Nuremberg: Infamy on Trail*, pp. 437, 441; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 245; and Jonathan Glovers, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 317, 321-322.

⁴⁴³ William T. Liu, *Transition to Nowhere: Vietnamese Refugees in America*, p. 63.



Figure 64. The Dharma Wheel on top of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute. Photo Minh Huy and Phước Thiên.



Figure 65. A pattern of the Buddhist swastika on the ancient Dhamekh Stupa in Sarnath. Photo Minh Quang.

morning as the sun beams of the dawn shone on it. It worked perfectly without any issues from both the Vietnamese and the local communities. At present, the aluminum replica of the same Dharma Wheel is still gracing the highest point on the roof of the Institute, even after several renovations.

The sensitivity of the Vietnamese Buddhist masters in adapting the Buddhist symbol was worth while for peaceful living in America. Around 1990, a new Chinese Buddhist temple recently opened in San Fernando Valley near a predominant Jewish community had their newly installed metal fence blown up at night by explosion. The Buddhist swastikas as a decorative pattern on the fence were the cause of the incident. *The Los Angeles Times* issued a clarification concerning the distinction between the Buddhist swastika and the Nazi swastika afterward. However, it would have been less problematic if the particular Chinese Buddhist temple was sensitive enough to learn about the public reactions to the swastika in the local context in advance. During the Summer of 1997, when I first came to Florida State University as a doctoral student in American Literature, I visited an introductory class on world religions taught by Dr. Kathleen M. Erndl. The students were excited and had several questions to a guest lecturer who was also an actual Buddhist monk like me. Their first question was precisely about the swastika, because my monastic bag had a Buddhist swastika embroidered on it. The students were relieved when they found out the difference in both symbolic appearance and in meanings between the Buddhist swastika and the Nazi swastika. In my explanation, I also mentioned that incident concerning the swastika at the Chinese Buddhist temple in Los Angeles. A year later, after my trip to visit the sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India, I got a monastic bag in similar color and style embroidered with the monogram of the Kālacakra called the All-Powerful Ten. It was a gift to me from other Buddhist monks in India. Afterward, as I walked around the campus with it, several students kept complimenting on how beautiful it was. Some even asked me where they could get it!

Before the emergence of the Nazi Germany, the Japanese Buddhists in the West Coast had already displayed the Buddhist swastika at their temples. It appeared on temple designs, art work and crests, like it had in Japan and other Buddhist countries. An original building of the Buddhist Church of Oakland, California, started in 1901, had the Buddhist swastikas installed on its roof end tiles and entrance. However, during the prewar years from 1930 to 1939, confronting the ever-rising tensions after the emergence of Nazi Germany, the Japanese

American Buddhists no longer felt that the symbol was appropriate. One day in 1938, long before the interment of 110,000 of the people of Japanese ancestry, including children and women, in the ten camps set away from the West Coast of the United States in the 1942, the young members of the Japanese Buddhist temple in Oakland actually climbed onto the roof and removed the symbols and tiles from the building.⁴⁴⁴ It would be unfortunate if the Buddhist swastikas were still remaining on the roof of the temples when the Japanese Americans were rounded up to be interned in prison camps. The safety and survival of those temples could not be guaranteed when people acted emotionally against the swastika.

Indeed, the particular adaptation of the Dharma Wheel in place of the Buddhist swastika had brought peace between the Vietnamese Buddhist communities and other local communities. On the one hand, the Vietnamese Buddhists were conscious enough, even to the point of immolating themselves, to resist the ignoble intention of removing the Buddhist flag, a Buddhist symbol, by the pro-Catholic Diem regime in 1963. On the other hand, they were sensitive enough to the grave suffering of the Jewish community, which held no negative intention toward the Buddhist symbol of the swastika, and decided not to have it publicly displayed in America and abroad. One day, as the Jewish Americans have more opportunity to tour Asian Buddhist countries, they shall realize the meaning of the Buddhist swastika and recognize the supportive intention of the Buddhists all along. Certainly, they shall gradually see the appropriate values of the Buddhist swastika beyond the Nazi swastika.

The Vietnamese Buddhist centers, however, maintain their Buddhist images, including those of the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, and Arhats. Among them, the statues of Śakyamuni Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism, are the central figures of the main sanctuary. Usually, the statues of the Bodhisattvas are also installed in pair to flank the Buddha. The most popular bodhisattvas of those pairs are Avalokiteśvara and Kṛitigrābha or Samantabhādra and Mañjuśrī. In general the Bodhisattva on the left of the Buddha symbolizes compassion and the one on his right wisdom. According to the tradition, the Buddhist followers need the perfection of wisdom and compassion in order to become Buddhas. Those statues are the vivid and constant reminders of those essential requirements for Buddhahood. Understanding the relevant

⁴⁴⁴ See Brian Nagata, *History of the Buddhist Church of Oakland (Kansha: In Gratitude...our First 100 Years)*, p. 6; and Masao Kodani, "The History of the Buddhist Churches of America: Problems of Propagation and Projections for the Future," *Hou-u: Dharma Rain*, p. 5. For a chronology of the internment of the people of Japanese ancestry see Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston & James D. Houston, *Farewell To Manzanar*, pp. xi-xii.

meanings of the Buddhist statues, the American neighbors around the Buddhist centers see “no reason to be fearful of them,” as being assured by an article in the Religion section of *The Tallahassee Democrat* in August 2004.⁴⁴⁵ The Religion section of the newspaper even covered its front page with three large friendly photos of a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist centers a demonstration. The calm, peaceful, and friendly atmosphere were the pervasive theme in the photos. The first photo captured the peaceful Buddhist nuns walking in meditation with their serene monastery appear in the background. The second photo posed a friendly sharing of flowers with warm smiles between the rural Texan neighbors – Mrs. Annette Lewis, a neighbor to the Zen center, and a resident nun of that Zen center managed by Vietnamese Buddhist nuns. The last photo portrayed a common sitting image of the Buddha in calm meditation pose installed in the Main Sanctuary of the center. People are always welcomed to the Buddhist centers to look around and to enjoy the peaceful scenery, as long as they do not intentionally show disrespects to the Buddha statues venerated by the tradition.

In addition to those main Buddhist statues, the images of Amitābha Buddha are also added to the central figures for the Pure Land Buddhist centers. Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsathāmaprāpta often flank as his attendants. These are central figures for Pure Land visualization and inspiration. Rather than having no idea about where one will go, these leading Pure Land figures offer, a least, a vivid vision of the land where the followers aim to attain rebirth. It would be difficult to go to a place about where one has no ideas. For the Buddhist statues to be displayed outside, Maitreya Bodhisattva and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are most frequently seen. According to the Buddhist tradition Maitreya is a future Buddha who has several manifestations. The Vietnamese Buddhist centers have Maitreya in a form of a big belly and happy smiling Buddha – a symbolic representation of detachment as one of his manifestation in China. Sometimes, Maitreya is surrounding and bothering by six kids. Still, he smiles happily. Symbolically, Maitreya is detached beyond the disturbance of ordinary senses, namely the eye, ear, nose, taste (tongue), feeling, and thinking (mind). My American students have a good laugh when I tell them jokingly that they can also touch his belly a little bit for good luck, just like when they rub the big belly of the nearly identical statue of the Chinese God of Wealth greeting them at the entrance of the Chinese restaurants.

⁴⁴⁵ See Tim Madigan, “Zen, Texas When Buddhist Build as temple, Far East Meets the Rural West,” *The Tallahassee Democrat, Religion*, Saturday, August 28, 2004, pp. 1D-2D.

For the outside statues, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, is the most popular one. He is the embodiment of unconditioned compassion, the one who looks down onto the suffering sound of the world of suffering as designated by his Sanskrit name. In East Asia, he has been portrayed in female form precisely because of his bondless compassion and his several manifestations in female forms to help others. As a result, Avalokiteśvara becomes regarded as the Goddess of Mercy by many. The Vietnamese Buddhists have the Sanskrit name of Avalokiteśvara translated as *Quán* (Contemplate) *Thế* (The World) *Âm* (the Sound). In common usage, they call her briefly as “Quán Âm.” In general, Quán Âm is dressed in a symbolically flowing white heavenly garment, with a pure vase of morning dew as nectar on her left hand and a branch of bamboo in her right hand. Symbolically, the sweet dew, as a type of water, can quench thirst and extinguish fire, just as compassion can remove suffering and put out the raging fire of anger. In order to use compassion in the ordinary world pervaded with conflicts and struggles, patience is needed as a skillful means. Without patience to overcome the obstacles, it is easy to abandon compassion. In this way, the Vietnamese bamboo symbolically represents the resilient power of patience. The small type of the Vietnamese bamboos, called *Trúc*, can withstand even the powerful hurricane and rarely get destroyed. With a small bamboo branch, one can dip into the pure vase of sweet morning dew and draw them out for use. Similarly, with the resilient power of patience one can effectively implement compassion to extinguish the fire of anger and help to eradicate suffering. Understanding these Buddhist symbolic representations enhance Buddhist practice. Also, it gives insight to ancient Buddhist literature. The Vietnamese Buddhists across the states profoundly appreciate the symbolic representation of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the Vietnamese context when I apply it in my Dharma talks to unlock the Buddhist meanings of one of the famous poetic verse concerning the renowned Thiên Mụ Pagoda in Hue. The Vietnamese people love the particular poem and writers keep citing it to illuminate the beauty of Vietnam, including Vietnamese temples. In Vietnamese, the verse is rhythmic and short, as follows:

Gió đưa cành trúc la đà,
Tiếng chuông Thiên Mụ, canh gà Thọ Xương.

Literally, it can be translated as:

The wind sways the hanging bamboo branch,
The sound from the Thiên Mụ bell, [on] the watch of the rooster [at] Thọ Xương.

Indeed, Thiên Mụ Temple is nationally famous for its beauty. Its dignified pagoda of Phước Duyên rises up in the sky among the trees, especially among the soft swaying bamboos with their branches bending along the shore of the Perfume River of Huế. Also, it charmingly casts a shadow on the reflectively calm and peaceful flowing water of the river. In the remote past, the Perfume River was famed for its fragrant water as it wended and murmured through the tropical forest before reaching the royal capital of Huế. Now, the water is still nice and sweet dependent on the season of the year. Cast in special copper alloys, the morning bell of Thiên Mụ Pagoda is renowned for its stretching low vibration sounds that sooth the hearts of the people and calm their unsettling minds. Rather than striking the morning bell continuously in short and rapid intervals like an alarming signal in crisis situation, the temple bell is struck relaxingly at distant intervals, which allow each sound to vibrate in mid-air for nearly four minutes or longer and to dissipate into the void before the coming of the next one. The unique charm of the low vibration sounds of the great morning bell of Thiên Mu Pagoda pervade the peaceful atmosphere and can be heard for miles. The local Vietnamese in Huế love to sit in their chairs in the refreshing breezes from the cool Perfume River and to listen to the soothing sounds of that bell in the full-moon night, whenever they have the time after finishing up their day of hard work.

Twice a day, the morning bell of the Buddhist temple is sounded, once at break of the dawn when the roosters crow and another at dusk when the night falls. According to the Buddhist gāthā in the *Essential Discipline for Daily Use* employed by all standard Buddhist monasteries, the sound of the temple bell awakes people in the morning and recalls them to the revert to contemplate on liberation as the day is running out at dusk:

May the sound of the bell penetrate deeply into the cosmos!

In even the darkest iron cells, may it be heard by all!

The hearing and its objects tranquilize and purify, reaching perfect penetration.

May all beings attain noble enlightenment!⁴⁴⁶

Unknown to many non-local people, Thọ Xương is the name of the village on the other shore across the Perfume River, directly opposite the front of Thiên Mụ Pagoda. Many are mystified by the exact meaning of the name Thọ Xương and hesitated at its literary implication. The name

⁴⁴⁶ See Thích Trí Quang, “Tỳ Ni Nhật Dụng Thiết Yếu [The Essential Discipline for Daily Use],” *Luật Sa Di, Sa Di Ni*, p. 976.

is further convoluted when one attempt to decode the meaning of each word in the name of the village.

Nevertheless, the verse conceals the essential meaning of Mahayana Buddhism, namely the practice of compassion and wisdom in combination for enlightenment. Applying the Buddhist symbols concerning Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the pure vase containing the sweet morning dews of compassion is identified with the fragrant water of the Perfume River. The bamboo branch of patience manifests itself in the resilient bamboos swaying relaxingly in the wind at the temple's shore along the Perfume River. Combining compassion and patience in practice, the Buddhist followers will be able to extinguish the fire of anger and to eventually hear the sound of the wakening bell or will attain awakening, just like the attainment of the historical Buddha at the breaking of dawn, when the roosters began to crow. Then, they will obtain the perfection of wisdom, reach the other shore, and transcend the *samsaric* ocean of birth and death, as suggested by the location of Thọ Xương village across the Perfume River. As a result, the poetic verse turns out to be a Buddhist gāthā. It instructs the Buddhist followers to adopt the practice of compassion in combination with patience proposed by Quán Âm in order to withstand the turbulent wind of life and to obtain enlightenment for the purpose of reaching the other shore of liberation. In diaspora, the Vietnamese Buddhists truly appreciate the Buddhist heritage and identity through the poetic verse conveyed by the national Buddhist temple, the Thiên Mụ Pagoda.

Quán Âm is the most revered wish grantor of the tradition, as previously discussed in the *Great Compassion Mantra*. Quán Âm is extremely popular in the Vietnamese communities abroad because the Vietnamese “Boat People” had found solace in her during their perilous escapes. Rather than having Dipamkara Buddha as the protector from the sea voyages like the Indian seafarers of the ancient time, the Vietnamese Buddhist refugees called on Quán Âm Bodhisattva as they came to face danger on the open sea. Chapter twenty-five of the *Lotus Sutra* is fully dedicated to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, “The Perceiver of the World’s Sound.” In addition to the various compassionate practices and vows performed by Quán Âm, the *Lotus Sutra* instructed that she will also look after the sounds of those who are suffering at sea. The chapter has the following lines:

If you should be cast adrift on the vast ocean,
Menace by serpents [dragons], fish, and various demons,

Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds,
And the billows and waves cannot drown you.⁴⁴⁷

The particular teaching has worked for the Buddhist refugees. Numerous incidents relating to the miraculous power of assistance from Quán Âm have been recounted by the Vietnamese Buddhist refugees who survived the escapes.⁴⁴⁸ As one of the “Boat People,” I also relied on the blessing of Quán Âm on my escape. It was miraculous that my small wooden boat had survived the rough stormy sea and landed on the shore of Malaysia after four days and nights. The boat, loaded with thirty two people, was small, about thirty feet in length. It was nothing in comparison to the huge waves of the ocean which continuously surged up like the multiple endless ranges of gigantic mountains. At one moment, the boat was on the crest of the wave, I could see the deep valleys of dark water of either side. The next moment, the boat was at the trop of the wave. Then, at the bottom of the valley, I saw two gigantic mountain ranges of water, with the height exceeding the height of the thirty-two-storey capital building in Tallahassee, on either sides of the boat. We drifted along the mountains and valleys of sea water. All of us and the wooden boat could vanish without a trace. Fortunately and miraculously, we survived and reached the shore entrusting our fates to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Also, a school of dolphins suddenly appeared and led us toward the land in the last afternoon when we lost direction after the rough weather abated. Most fortunate was our not being captured and attacked by the Thai pirates, which were lurking in the region. Two smaller boats which landed there in the morning were badly attacked. All were robbed and their women, young and old, were raped by the pirates, while their boat was towed by the big pirate ship around the region of the sea for a whole day. In the American expression, I can say that we were kissing the ground when we landed in Terengganu near the border between Malaysia and Thailand. As refugees, we were transported to the temporary camp in Pulau Bidong Island. All the Buddhists in the boat, including the whole family of the Buddhist boat owner, went to pay homage to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva at the humble Buddhist temple in the camp first thing upon arrival. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the Vietnamese Buddhist refugees have reverently dedicated a statue of Quán Âm at their Buddhist centers in the United States.

⁴⁴⁷ See Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, p. 304; Thích Trí Tịnh, *Kinh Pháp Hoa* (The Lotus Sutra), p. 600.

⁴⁴⁸ For an example, see the accounts published by Thích Tịnh Từ, *Quán Âm Bồ Tát* (Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva), pp. 1-42. Also, see the record of the Dhrama talk of Thích Đức Niệm, *Niềm Tin Quán Thế Âm Nhiệm Mầu* (The Faith in the Miraculous Avalokiteśvara), cassette.

To the Vietnamese Buddhists, Quán Âm continues to be an unending source of compassionate and auspicious blessing. They celebrate the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's days more than once a year for those relevant reasons. During the ceremony on the Avalokiteśvara day, the *Great Compassion Mantra* is always recited. The chapter on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the *Lotus Sutra* is also chanted a day in advance or whenever the time is permitted. According to my data, 73 Vietnamese Buddhist centers out of the total of 101 centers under research, or roughly 73 percent, have at least an outdoor statue of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Nearly all of them have statues or images of Quán Âm inside their centers. A few Vietnamese Buddhist centers in the Theravada tradition in Texas also have statues of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

Visiting Mahayana Buddhist temples, one should not be surprised to see the statues of the Arhats, the great disciples of the Buddha are also enshrined along the walls of the main hall. Similarly, the Tibetan Buddhist Temples display those Arhats on their beautiful thangkas around the main sanctuary of their centers. Certain individuals presume that Mahayana Buddhists look down on Theravada Buddhism by calling it the Smaller Vehicle or Hinayana. This has been politicized out of proportion since the colonial time and has confused many. At first glance, it seems highly abnormal that one should claim oneself to be practicing the Small Vehicle in comparison to the Great Vehicle. However, upon looking further beyond the application of the terms in politic, they are ordinary terms for making categorical distinctions, just like the term "Undergraduate" and "Graduate" used daily in the universities. As a categorical term, graduate student is not a term to use for the purpose of looking down on the undergrad students. In the university, it is unheard of that students are denigrated because they called themselves undergrads. In contrast, they are proud to announce to others that they are undergraduate students at the universities, including Florida State University. It is likewise for the terms Mahayana and Hinayana. In Vietnam, both Buddhist traditions have coexisted. In an effort to circumvent the unhealthy secular politic, the more neutral terms have been used, namely Northern Buddhism and Southern Buddhism, respectively. In America, the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition still maintains these terms.

The Mahayana Buddhist followers do not follow the Theravada aims of attaining individual liberation while neglecting to remain in the world of suffering to help sentient beings. Yet, they are never instructed to disparage Theravada teachings. Rather, they have to learn the

Theravada teachings as a foundation and ought to respect all the Arhats, the enlightened figures of Theravada Buddhism. The Mahayana Tripitaka still has the whole collection of Theravada teachings. While the Theravada Buddhists do not place a focus on various images of the Arhats, the Mahayana Buddhists continue to make and enshrine the statues of the Arhats in their temples. Also, they sincerely pay homage to them and the bodhisattvas for their dedications in preserving and promoting the Buddhism.

The Buddhists do not have problems with paying homage to those statues. A number of American students in my class, *The Buddhist Tradition* that I have taught consecutively for three years at Florida State University, and a few of my graduate colleagues in the Department of Religion, have questioned me about what seems to be the worshiping of icons when they see so many statues in Buddhism. According to their Christian tradition, they have been instructed not to worship icons. Nevertheless, they come to a release, when they learn that the Buddhists are just doing the salutations to their flags. Otherwise, many Americans would commit the act of worshiping icons when they sincerely saluted and sang the National Anthem to the American flag, not to mention the colorful marching bands, the gun fires, and the cannon shots in dedication to that flag during certain significant national ceremonies. No one is consciously worshiping a piece of flying cloth. Rather, one is aiming to the serious meanings behind that flag, including the noble intentions of those who had shed the blood and dedicated their life to protect it. The students get further relief when they watch the video *Footprints of the Buddha*. The late Bhante Balangoda Ananda Maitreya (1896-1998) of Sri Lanka explained to the British narrator that if people did get stuck to the images, then they had a problem to solve themselves.

The Buddhists do not have a tradition of destroying religious images or icons from other traditions. If one does not need to use an icon, then let others, who can benefit from it, use it. The world would be more monotonous and less artistic if everyone became like the particular Islamic army which destroyed Nalanda Monastery together with its Buddhist images when they invaded India or like the Taliban who recently destroyed the Bamiyan Buddha statues of their great Indian ancestors in 2001. The world would not be in peace, if people of certain religions used similar religious claims to go around and destroy the religious symbols of others. At present, even Muslim communities in America have to deal with religious symbols in the wake of September eleventh. They will share a better life in peace with their American neighbors,

when their religious symbols, including the veils worn by their female followers, are better understood and respected.

Adaptations in the Major Roles and Activities of the Temple.

In the United States, with the rise of science within twentieth century, people tend to insist on seeing more logical and rational activities at a religious center. As the same time, they expect less of the mystical and superstitious elements. The Buddhist tradition was able to present itself as a qualified candidate for such scientific expectation through Zen. Various Zen practices in controlling the mind have been noted for being rational, logical, and practical. As a result, there is a tendency to show the Buddhist centers in that scientific mode. Nevertheless, the Buddhist tradition has other practices beside Zen. Many other Buddhist practices, especially Tantric and yogic practices do have rituals that are highly mystical and are beyond normal rationality. Yet, Tantric Buddhism, specifically Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism with its elaborated rituals, is also widely accepted in the United States. Tibetan Buddhist centers are growing in number in America and even in European countries.

Indeed, being practical, commonsensical, and logical, do not make a religious tradition. Rather, they make science. This distinction between religion and science is recognized by Louis Hunter when he addressed certain Western efforts to promote Buddhism in Hawaii in that scientific direction before World War II. He remarked that “But few persons have ever been drawn to a religion only on the basis of its simple, common sense and its full accordance with modern science.”⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, people come to a Buddhist center for various activities and reasons, just like those of the followers in other religious traditions. Thus, Buddhist centers have to accommodate those needs within their role. Restricting the role of a Buddhist center to the mere scientific mode or other trendy and fashionable modes of the time only present a limited vision of the tradition and it is not my intention. Rather, I will report the roles of the Vietnamese Buddhist centers in transition as they occur in America, a new religious landscape to the tradition. Also the adaptations of those roles and their underlying motives, drawn from both Buddhist texts and from the local circumstances, are provided to illuminate the process of assimilation into the American life.

⁴⁴⁹ See Louise H. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii: Its Impact on a Yankee Community*, p. 154.

In the United States, the Vietnamese Buddhist center strives to maintain its traditional role as a center for practice. The Buddhist monastic members administer their monastic practices and duties at their centers. Also, as usual, the Buddhist laity come to those centers to practice and support according to their individual capabilities. The monks and nuns perform their monastic task at the centers without extra problems. They, including the abbot, took care of all the manual tasks of the center during the whole week when the Buddhist laity are not there. In addition to organizing and maintaining the physical up keeping, they cook, cleanse, remove garbage, tend the garden, mow the lawns, and even clean the public toilets of the centers. In Vietnam, many of those tasks were managed by a team of volunteer Buddhist laity.

Regardless of the busy routine, the monastic members make continuous efforts to maintain their practices, the essential reason for them to leave home to join the monastic life. However, the Buddhist laity encounter difficulties in joining the center to practice. Having a car as a means of fast transportation is a novel style of living to the Vietnamese. Nevertheless, having a car does not always help the Buddhist laity in attending their practice sessions in the United States. In general, the drive to a Buddhist centers is distant because only a few centers exist. The Buddhist laity do not normally come to the temple on weekdays because they have to work at their jobs. Rather, they come during the weekends when they are off from work. Also, they are too busy to attend the traditional night chanting session during the full moon day. Attending religious centers during the weekend is typically an American phenomenon that the Buddhist tradition has to adjust to. In Vietnam, the Buddhists laity could conveniently get to the temples to join the monastics in the evening chanting session after finishing their work and their dinners. Local Buddhist temples were available. However, under the communists, such an activity of temple going was drastically reduced because of political suspicions and restrictions.

Therefore, in the United States, the Buddhist services and practices intended to accommodate the laity must be performed during the weekend. The time should be feasible for them to get to the center and the practices have to be suitable. Rather than practicing once or twice a month during the night session of the full-moon day or the first day of the lunar month, the Buddhist laity practice three or four times a month during the weekends. Also, Buddhist monks are at their liberty to deliver Buddhist discourses without the need to adhere to any political restrictions. Four times every month, the Dharma lectures to the Buddhist laity add up to be far more than the regular way of teaching Buddhism under the restrictions of the

Communist regime in Vietnam. Those, who are able to attend those sessions more regularly, benefit themselves more.

It is not a simple task to set a time for practice that will work for all the laity. Traditionally, the Buddhist monks woke up at 4:30 in the early morning for meditation and chanting. This period of the night was the best time for calming the mind because there was no distraction from noises. Getting up that early was the real work of the monastic. It required constant effort to get up that early every morning. It marked the distinction from the monastic life and the secular life. Monks could not indulge in sleeping late. Rather, they had to follow that strict schedule since the time of their novice training. According to the disciplinary rules for the novices, as a part of their training, they had to reduce their sleep and get up before their masters. Getting up early would eliminate the five defections caused by the indulgence in sleep, namely (1) seeing bad dreams, (2) irritating the supporting deities, (3) blocking the mind from penetrating the Dharma, (4) being unaware of the rising sun, and (5) discharging impurities from the body.⁴⁵⁰

Instead of sleeping throughout the night as secular people generally do, the monks have to use the time of the night to practice as much as they can. Even before departing into final nirvana, in his last bequest, the Buddha continued to remind his disciple monks to reduce their sleep and to practice more:

Oh bhiksus, by day you should practice good Dharma and not allow yourselves to waste time. In the early evening and late night do not cease to make an effort, while in the middle of the night you should chant the sutras to make yourselves better informed. Do not allow yourselves to pass your lives vainly and fruitlessly on account of sleep. You should envisage the world as being consumed by the fire of impermanence and quickly determine to save yourselves from it. Do not indulge in sleep and relaxation.⁴⁵¹

Not only in words, but also in deeds, the Buddha inspired his monks to reduce their sleep and get up early for practices. The monks always get inspiration to arise early by the routine of the Buddha. Instead of sleeping eight hours a night according to the modern scientific standard, the Buddha regularly worked to help his disciples and others throughout the night and only slept for one hour a night. He spent the first watch of the night from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

⁴⁵⁰ See Thích Hành Trụ, *Sa Di Luật Giải* (Sramanera Vinaya- An Explanation), p. 193.

⁴⁵¹ See Thích Trí Quang. “*Kính Phụng Kinh Di Giáo* (Reverently Observe the Buddha’s Last Bequest),” *Luật Sa Di Sa Di Ni*, p. 1383, Thích Hoàn Quan, *Kinh Di Giáo*(The Buddha’s Last Bequest), pp. 46-47.

instructing his disciple monks. He continued to teach during the second watch of the night from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. His audiences however were not ordinary human beings. Rather they were the celestial beings, including the Devas and Brahmas who were invisible to physical eye. Many of the teachings of the Buddha to those celestial beings were retained in the *Samyutta Nikāya*. During the third watch of the night, his routine was as follows:

1. From 2:00 a.m. to 6 a.m. the Buddha focused on his own activities.
2. From 2:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m. he paced up and down as his mild physical exercise.
3. From 3:00 a.m. to 4: 00 a.m. he mindfully slept, lying on his right side.
4. From 4: 00a.m. to 5:00 a.m. he entered the Arhat stage and experienced *nirvana* bliss.

Afterward, in the early morning from 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. the Buddha entered the concentration of great compassion and radiated loving-kindness toward all being and softened their hearts. Also he surveyed the world in order to see those who he could help and then went to render spiritual assistance to them on his now accord.⁴⁵²

Instead of getting up early, the Buddhist laity in the United States tend to get up even later during the weekend. Getting up early to attend the practice session in early Sunday morning is a struggle for many of them. Thus, at Buddhist centers managed by the laity, their session usually begin at 11:00 a.m. or after. However, at monastic centers the time is set at 6:00 a.m., as seen at Quang Minh Temple in Chicago, Từ Đàm Hải Ngoại in Texas, and Phật Học Viên Quốc Tế in California and many others. This time means that the monks have to get up at 5:30 a.m. Having the morning session at 6:00 a.m. is already a modification to the traditional time of getting up at 4:30 a.m. In the case of Quang Minh Temple in Chicago, at first, a number of Buddhists suggested to the abbot that it was too early because they were still tired from working the day before. The abbot Master rescheduled it to 6:30 a.m. and those individuals still did not show up after a few weeks. They came late and asked the Master to set it at 7:00 a.m. because they were still exhausted from the day before. After a while, those individuals still did not show up. The Master realized that the early time was not their real problem. Rather, their lack of determination was. Consequently, the Master reversed the time back to 6:00 a.m. and it is kept until the present day.

Certain individuals have been thinking that getting up early is easier for monks because they do not have to work. This mode of thinking is deeply rooted in the Marxist idea concerning

⁴⁵² See Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, p. 127.

the economic motives underlying the actions and from their own romantic version of monastic life. This brings another point of adaptation considered by the monastic. Should monks take a job? Some had done so on their own accord. Traditionally, in the Indian *sramana* tradition, monks should take a job because working that way was the mark of the household life. Being monks, they were household renouncers and had to give up any household activities, including cooking. They renounced all of their household wealth and even their secular names. Otherwise, the Buddha, as Prince Siddhartha, could conveniently have a hut built near the royal palace by King Suddhodana and daily rations of food brought to him by the little Rahula, his son. However, the Buddha had not attained enlightenment that romantic way. Rather, he left everything behind, including his throne. His motive was certainly not an economic one as the Marxist followers could have imagined. As in a Western fable, a poor farmer made the mistake of assuming that the king ate only bacon and beans, for which the particular farmer was always longing.

In ancient Vietnam, an adaptation was already made to the Buddhist *sramana* tradition. A number of temples had gotten lands grant from the kings and many monks did work as farmers and cultivated their own rice. The Vietnamese accepted that adaptation because it worked while they gradually familiarized themselves with making offering to Buddhist monks. In 1950, when Master Thích Tô Liên visited India and Ceylon for the international Buddhist conference, he deeply realized that adaptation to the traditional Buddhism. After seeing all of the vast land around the undeveloped Buddhist pilgrimage site of Sarnath, Master Tô Liên wondered how monks would get to eat without farming. He told the local masters that they could cultivate rice on those vacant fields which would certainly produce an excellent harvest to support the temple. To his surprise, the Sri Lankan Buddhist Masters told him that farming is not the task of the Buddhist monks. Rather, that was the way of living of the householders. The Sri Lankan Venerables even added, “We left home to seek the Dharma rather than to pursue farming,” and “without practicing the virtuous Dharma, we shall not have the merit to keep our farming products either.”⁴⁵³ Master Tô Liên learned more of the traditional Buddhist expectation when a common local vender on the side of the road declined to take the money from his group after they bought some refreshments. To his surprise, the poor vender preferred to take the merits,

⁴⁵³ See Thích Tô Liên, *Ký Sự Phái Đoàn Phật Giáo Việt Nam Đi Ấn Độ và Tích Lan: Cuộc Hội-Nghị Phật Giáo Thế Giới tại Colombo từ Ngày 25-5 đến 8-6-1950* (A Report from The Vietnamese Buddhist Delegation to India and Sri Lanka: The International Buddhist Conference at Colombo from May 25 to June 8, 1950), p. 68.

saying “the Venerable monks are the sons of the Buddha. The Buddha will pay for the drinks of his sons.”⁴⁵⁴ Indeed, even at present time in India, the *sadhus* or the Hindu religious wanderers still see no noble religious inspirations in the idea of themselves getting a job.

Even though working as farmers had never prevented monks from getting up early for chanting. It had brought a number of disasters to the Buddhist tradition. Buddhist monks had been charged as landowners and wealth accumulators by others, especially by authorities who disliked Buddhism. Occasionally, temples were confiscated, monastic valuables were looted, and monks were executed or forced out. One does not need to look far into the remote past for an exemplary case. It was vividly portrayed when Thích Quảng Độ lamented the murdered of his beloved master. His master was attacked, shot, and killed horribly by the communists for those economic reasons. Following the utopian Marxist idea, the communists valued labor and strongly praised the working class. They even have those working values symbolized as a hammer and a sickle on their communist flag. The communists were fond of charging the Buddhist monks for doing no work. Yet, to monks who worked, the communists relentlessly denounced them as the feudalist wealth accumulators or even capitalists. It was not difficult for the communists to demonize them as fake monks who merely tried to accumulate wealth in the monastic cloaks. Furthermore, the communists took opportunities to label monks as selling religion as a commodity to make their living. History keeps repeating as one takes time to glance over the Buddhist persecutions of the past in Vietnam and even in China.

Several Buddhist masters are well aware of the implication of monks taking a job and of its connection to the Marxist politic.⁴⁵⁵ Marxism, like other political ideologies, might bring temporary solutions to certain social maladies, but not spiritual liberation. The world has

⁴⁵⁴ See Thích Tố Liên, *Ký Sự Phái Đoàn Phật Giáo Việt Nam Đi Ấn Độ và Tích Lan: Cuộc Hội-Nghị Phật Giáo Thế Giới tại Colombo từ Ngày 25-5 đến 8-6-1950* (A Report from The Vietnamese Buddhist Delegation to India and Sri Lanka: The International Buddhist Conference at Colombo from May 25 to June 8, 1950), p. 190.

⁴⁵⁵ Karl Marx, the figurehead of the Marxist Criticism, was a German-born philosopher who wrote together with Friedrich Engels *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 and *Das Kapital* in three volumes from 1867 to 1894. He attempted to explain literature in the economic and social roots of the time. He opposed the ruling class because he saw that the capitalist owners were reluctant to share the economic fruits with the working classes. Thus, Marx proposed an inevitable class struggle to reach a just society, where social wealth is redistributed to laboring people and their families. Marxist theory concerning the economic motives for social activities became the ideology for the political movements of socialism and communism. It had helped to prevent the rich and the capitalists from taking advantage of the poor and working class without giving their fair shares. Karl Marx, however, did not anticipate the social tragedy and dangerous retaliations when the laboring classes became the new tyrannous ruling class. Economic concern was not the sole motive underlying human actions. Social equalities and the alleviation of poverty expected by Marx remained as unattainable dreams in the socialist and communist countries. For further discussion on the Marxist criticism see Sanford Sternlicht, *Chaim Potok: A Critical Companion*, pp. 82-83.

witnessed the come and go of various political theories and the disastrous pain of those who was drowning in them. Monks, especially those who have an educational degree, have no problems getting a qualified job and supporting themselves. However, seeking a secular job for individual benefits is not a monastic assignment of a monk. Also, it takes time away from monastic practice and from the dedication to support the laity. Individual monks who see the need to take a job can do so at the cost of their individual practices and of the dedication to the laity. Certainly, the Buddhist laity is at liberty to withhold their respect upon witnessing a Buddhist monk busying at his job instead of supporting those who come to the centers with their needs. At certain lay Buddhist centers in the United States, to which I have conducted teaching, the laity had already refused to accept monastic members who engaged themselves with secular jobs for economic motives. In addition, people, who insists on having monks take a job, would have no qualms of turning around and charging monks for failing to follow the instructions of the Buddha.

For a leading master of a traditional monastic training institute like Đức Niệm, he would prefer his disciple monks to disrobe and return to the lay life if they took a job for economic motives. The Buddha made it clear in his last bequest:

O Bhiksus, after my Final Nirvana you should revere and honor the precepts of the *Pratimokṣa* [sublime liberation]. Treat them as a beacon to one in darkness or a treasure to a poor person. You should know that they are your great master. If I am still in the world, it is no difference. If you would maintain in purity the Precepts, you should not give yourselves over buying, selling or bartering. You should not covet fields or buildings, nor accumulate servants, attendance or animals. You should distance yourselves from those as if avoiding the fire pits. You should not cut down grass or trees; neither break new soil nor plough the earth. Nor may you concoct medicines, practice divination or sorcery according to the position of the stars, cast horoscopes, predicting weathers, reckon days of good fortune. All of these are improper for you.⁴⁵⁶

Đức Niệm assured his monastic disciples that they would never lack of basic food if they sincerely practiced and kept the *sila*, the virtue pertained to the practice of the Buddhist moral conducts. Without *sila*, no merits are accumulated. Keeping the *sila* is cultivating wholesome

⁴⁵⁶ See Thích Trí Quang. “Kính Phụng Kinh Di Giáo (Reverently Observe the Buddha’s Last Bequest),” *Luật Sa Di Sa Di Ni*, pp. 1376-1377; Thích Hoàn Quan, *Kinh Di Giáo*(The Buddha’s Last Bequest), p. 20.

deeds, “the sources of all merits,” and “the solid and chief dwelling” for monks.⁴⁵⁷ As long as he was still able to manage his Institute, Đức Niệm insisted that he would provide his disciple monks and nuns with their need for sustenance, so that nobody would have to take a secular job.

Also Đức Niệm had the Mahayana teaching of the Buddha in the *Lotus Sutra* as confirmation. The *Lotus Sutra* emphasizes that all sentient beings had the Buddha nature, the potential to be enlightened possessed by themselves. Those who promoted the teaching were on the Bodhisattva path of Mahayana Buddhism. They followed the instructions of the Buddha to inspire and help Buddhist followers to develop that potential of enlightenment. In practice, their role model was not a disciple named Seeker of Fame (Maitreya in one former life), who was “forever occupied with lazy and sloth” together with the insatiable greediness “for fame and profit.” Rather, it was the Dharma teacher named Wondrous Radiance (Manjuśrī in one former life), who “honored and upheld the Buddha’s storehouse of the Dharma.”⁴⁵⁸ The Buddha promised them that with diligent practices they would never lack basic sustenance for survival, even after long his final Nirvana. The Buddha announced:

If after I have entered extinction
There are those who can expound this sutra,
I will send four kinds of believers, magically conjures,
monks and nuns,
and men and women of pure faith,
To offer alms to the teachers of the Law.⁴⁵⁹

As a result, Đức Niệm advised his monastic disciples against the political tendency to incite them to take a secular job, especially when it is under economic motives.

In the United States, people also have a tradition of valuing labor. In general, American people are trained to take pride in working. Working, including working under the New Deal designed by President Roosevelt, had brought America out of the depression during the 1930s. With the tradition being productive, Americans have a hard time dealing with doing nothing. At least, they have to do something or try to figure out something to do. However, working covers more than physical work alone. It also includes mental work. In terms of mental work, decent

⁴⁵⁷ See Thích Trí Quang. “Kính Phụng Kinh Di Giáo (Reverently Observe the Buddha’s Last Bequest),” *Luật Sa Di Sa Di Ni*, p. 1379; Thích Hoàn Quan, *Kinh Di Giáo* (The Buddha’s Last Bequest), p. 29.

⁴⁵⁸ See Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, pp. 20-21; Thích Trí Tịnh, *Kinh Pháp Hoa* (The Lotus Sutra), pp. 57-58.

⁴⁵⁹ See Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, p. 168; Thích Trí Tịnh, *Kinh Pháp Hoa* (The Lotus Sutra), p. 333.

monks do work and work constantly. Buddhist monks have to constantly regulate their thinking as a part of the monastic job descriptions. In the Buddhist technical term it is mindfulness. As previously discussed, the tradition even had Four Foundations of Mindfulness for monastic members to tackle, namely, the body, the feeling, the mind, and the objects of the mind.

Those who adopt the Marxist politic and assume that the monks do no work can come to a Buddhist temple and try it for a day, twenty-four hours. In the simplest form it is called the Eight-Precept retreat or *Uposatha* which literally means entering the monastery to stay. I have conducted this retreat at various centers in Eastern part of the United States from Chicago and New Hampshire to Texas and Florida. From my experience, only a few committed Buddhist laity can seriously repeat the practice.

The practice of the Eight-Precept retreat in America is also where adaptations are quite observable. While most of the available Buddhist texts in English tends to stress that the lay Buddhists had no specific practices besides making merit, this is not a correct presentation of lay practice in the Buddhist tradition. The lay Buddhists do have their special practice specifically taught by the Buddha, and that is precisely the Eight-Precept Retreat or the *Uposatha*. Literally, *Uposatha* means entering to stay. It is an entry to the monastic life for the lay Buddhists. The Buddha specifically made the practice as a preparation for the laity to become monks and nuns, either in this life or in a future life. In addition, cultivating merits is a foundation of Buddhist path and should not be taken lightly. Even monks and nuns have to cultivate merits through virtuous conducts. In order to become a Buddha, one has to accomplish the two perfections, namely the perfection of merit and the perfection of wisdom. Nevertheless, the Buddha was quite sensitive to the burden of secular work managed by the laity. As a result, he made the practice optional. Rather than making it a requisite, the Buddha allowed the Buddhist laity the liberty to embark on the practice, as being permitted by their individual capability and circumstance. The relevant instructions of the Buddha concerning the Eight-Precept retreat are preserved in the *Muluposatha Sutta*, the *Uposatha Sutta* and the *Visakhuposatha Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikāya* of the Pali Tripitaka.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁶⁰ See Nanavara, Thera, and Bhikkhu Kantasilo, *Uposatha Sutta: The Uposatha Observance*, pp. 1-3, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Muluposatha Sutta: The Roots of the Uposatha*, pp. 1-7; and Khantipalo Bhikkhu, *Visakhuposatha Sutta: Discourse to Visakha on the Uposatha with the Eight Practices*, pp. 1-6. Also, see E. M. Hare, "Chapter V – The Observance Day," *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya)*, vol. IV, pp. 170-175.

Traditionally, during the time of the Buddha, every first day and the full-moon day of the lunar month, monks and nuns gathered in their respective Sangha to recite the monastic disciplinary rules, the Vinaya, and to confess their breaches. In addition to their usual monastic practices, the monastic members also organized the Eight-Precept retreat for the laity. In the retreat, the laity stayed in the boundary of the monastery for a whole day, twenty-four hours, and observed the eight monastic precepts and performed various monastic practices, including eating only one meal, as monks and nuns did. In addition to the five lay precepts of restraining from taking life, stealing, sexual activities,⁴⁶¹ lying, and taking intoxicant, they take three additional precepts, namely avoiding ornaments and entertainment, luxurious beds, and eating after noon time. In poetic verses of the *Anguttara-Nikāya*, the precepts are summed up as follows:

Kill not, nor take what is not given thee,
Speak never a lie, nor drink strong drink, eschew
Ungodly living, sinful intercourse,
At night eat not, nor at unfitting times,
Restrain from garlands and the use of scents
And make thy bed upon the grass-strewn ground.
Indeed this eightfold is the Observance called,
Taught by the Awake , who to ill's end has gone.⁴⁶²

During the retreat, the lay Buddhists joined monks and nuns to meditate, to listen to the Dharma discourse of the Buddha, to study other Buddhist teachings, and to perform the basic tasks for the up keeping of the monastery. The wealthy merchant Sudatta (Anāthapiṇḍika) of Śrāvastī, and his son, Kāla, were well known for taking the Eight-Precept retreat. Sudatta was a devout Buddhist who covered the ground with gold in order to purchase the famous Jetavana Park to offer to the Buddha and his Sangha. Kāla was, however, concerned about the huge spending of his father on the Sangha and was not in high opinion about the Buddha. As an expedient means to bring his Kāla to the Buddhist path, Sudatta hired him to attend the Eight-Precept retreat in his place. Kāla eventually attained the level of Stream Entry and became a dedicated Buddhist *Upasaka* after listening to the teachings of the Buddha during the retreats.

⁴⁶¹ For the retreat, because of the monastic nature of celibacy, the third lay precept of refraining from the misuse of sex becomes avoiding all sexual activities.

⁴⁶² See E. M. Hare, "The Observances (in detail)," *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya)*, vol. IV, p. 173.

The Buddha praised Kāla after the retreat as to encourage him on the right path. His gāthā of praising Kāla remained in the *Dharmapada*, verse 178, as follow:

Than over the earth sole sovereignty,
Than going unto heaven,
Than lordship over the entire world:
Better the Stream-Winner's Fruit.⁴⁶³

Furthermore, Viśākhā, one of the chief lay women supporters of the Buddha in Śrāvasti, who attained the Stream Entry level at the young age of seven, was prominent in observing the Eight-Precept retreat. The *Visakhuposatha Sutta* was a direct teaching of the Buddha to Viśākhā on the practice of the Eight-Precept retreat. In addition to her generous donations and her construction of the Great Eastern Monastery for the Sangha in Śrāvasti, Viśākhā encouraged her relatives to join the Sangha for the particular retreat. Not only herself, all of the female members in her family, young and old, practiced the retreat. They learned from the Buddha about the vast storage of karmic benefits for practicing the retreat for just a single day and night. Among those benefits, one could attain a long life-span in the heavenly realms of five celestial years, to even a thousand, two thousand, four thousand, eight thousand celestial years, in different heavenly realms, where a day is equaled to fifty years, a hundred years, two hundred years, four hundred years, and eight hundred years on earth, respectively. One could also reap the benefit of the highest life-span of sixteen thousand celestial years in the Brahma Heaven, as in the following passage:

Monks, each sixteen hundred years of mankind is but a single night and day to the devas who have the power over others' creation, their month has thirty of those nights, their year twelve months. The life-span of those devas consists of sixteen thousand celestial years, each equal to that year. This, is certain, monks, that when woman or man keep the Observance day with the eight qualifications, they may arise, on the breaking up of the body after death, among the retinue of devas who have power over others' creations.⁴⁶⁴

During one of the retreats, Viśākhā learned from the five hundred women that they embarked on the retreat for various aims. The old ladies hoped to gain the riches and glories of the celestial

⁴⁶³ See Weragoda Sarada Maha Thero, *Treasury of Truth: Illustrated Dhammapada*, p. 380; and Narada, *Kinh Pháp Cú* (The Dharmapada), p. 178.

⁴⁶⁴ See E. M. Hare, "The Observances (in detail)," *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya)*, vol. IV, pp. 173.

beings. The middle-aged ladies intended to avoid sharing the same roof with the mistresses of their respective husbands. The young married ladies aimed to have their first born to be a son. The young unmarried ladies wished to marry good husbands. Viśākhā reported to the Buddha and asked him to clarify the reason why those ladies were different in their aims. As a clarification, the Buddha reminded them about aiming to get out of samsara, the life of suffering, instead. Concentrating on that aim would help to release them from the worldly distractions. The particular instruction of the Buddha to Viśākhā is still preserved in verse 135 of the *Dharmapada*, as follows:

As with force the cowherd drive
Their cattle to out to graze,
Like this, decay and death drive out,
The life from beings all.⁴⁶⁵

Of course, the Buddha differentiated about the positive karmic rewards in heavenly realms and also the horrific punishments of hellish realms, in several instances. However, he did not entice people to go to heavens. Rather, he praised the human realm, the best realm to practice Buddhism in order to get out of samsara. The practice of the Eight-Precept retreat would generate a vast store of merits. However, it aimed to train the Buddhist laity for monastic life, the Buddhist path to end suffering and to escapes from samsara, the circle of birth and death.

Since then, practicing the Eight-Precept retreat has been a normal practice for the Buddhist laity. The Vietnamese Buddhists kept the tradition of going to monasteries on the first day and the full moon day of the month for the retreat. The formality for practicing the retreat was published in full detail in the first of the twelve volumes of *The Popular Buddhist Studies (Phật Học Phổ Thông)*.⁴⁶⁶ With the instructions available, the Buddhist laity were encouraged to embark on the practice as capable. Also, they could always perform the practice at home when they were competent in disciplining themselves. Again, it was up to the individual Buddhist followers. However, the Buddhists generally preferred to practice at the monastic setting, where they got direct experience of the monastic life and had fewer distractions from soft beds and available meals, entertainments, and other conveniences at home. Also, they got more inspiration and benefited from practicing in groups at the monastery.

⁴⁶⁵ See Weragoda Sarada Maha Thero, *Treasury of Truth: Illustrated Dhammapada*, p. 288; and Narada, *Kinh Pháp Cú (The Dharmapada)*, p. 143.

⁴⁶⁶ See Thích Thiện Hoa, *Phật Học Phổ Thông*, vol. 1, pp. 157-195

Though the eight precepts of the retreat remain unaltered in American setting, the time for the retreat had been varied. The lay Buddhists have different work schedules, even during the weekend. Normally, the retreat begins at six o'clock on Friday evening and end at six o'clock on Saturday evening. This will give them enough time to rest overnight at home and to return to the center to join the usual services on Sunday. Nevertheless, several lay Buddhists are unable to stay on the premises of the monastery for the full twenty-four hours. Thus, sometimes the retreat was limited to only twelve hours. In this case, the leading monk has to announce in the main sanctuary, under the witness of the Buddha statue that the retreatants only take the precepts for twelve hours instead of twenty-four hours. Otherwise, the leading master would bear the serious karmic consequence of knowingly breaking the Vinaya rules. According to my experience conducting the retreat in various states in the Eastern part of the United States, the majority of the lay Buddhists are comfortable with the retreat in twelve hours. Another workable way to adjust is having only those who can attend the retreat for the full twenty-four hours officially take the precepts, while others can join in without taking the official vows. In this way, they can leave the premises without breaking the precepts of the retreat. Secular conversations or frolic speaking, which are improper to monastic life, are not allowed during the retreat. Cellular phones are also turn off for the whole duration. Only in case of natural disasters or dangerous conditions can retreatants leave the premises.

For the standard retreat of twenty-four hours, the day is divided into six main sessions with a vigorous schedule. The practices are intensive. The monastic activities of chanting, attending Dharma discourses, meditating, making prostrations, and walking meditation, and recitation of Buddha name continue one after another, with a ten-minute break after each session. At noon, the retreatants have a meal in proper quietude with full monastic ceremony. Again, unnecessary conversations are avoided during meal time. Waking in meditation and circumambulation around the main sanctuary follow right after the meal. Afterward, the retreatants have an hour for noon break and for a brief napping. The Dharma discourse increases to three or four times in a retreat specifically for the benefit of the retreatants. Within those sessions, the Buddhist laity learn from the master how to walk in meditation, to make prostration, and to sit in meditation in the proper monastic ways. There are specific instructions to each, so that one can perform them without getting tired, numbing, or wearing oneself out before

completing the session. The more skillful and experienced the masters, the better the retreatants will learn.

One of those sessions for Dharma discourse can be an open discussion for all. The Buddhist laity tend to feel more comfortable to ask questions about practice and related Buddhist issues during this section of discussion, especially when it is allotted near the end of the night, just before the last session in sitting meditation. The lay Buddhists usually bring their own sleeping bags with them during the retreat. With the male and female in separate sections, they all share the floors and the available spaces, since many centers are still not financially successful to have good facilities. Yet, during the session of opening discussion, the Vietnamese Buddhist laity do not talk or complain about their physical feelings of discomfort. In general, they understand and sympathize with the efforts made by the master of the center. They are grateful to have a Buddhist center for the whole Vietnamese community in the locality. Thus, they take the opportunity to more deeply learn the Buddhist teaching and the instructions on practice, which they did not have during the communist regime. In America, the weekend during Thanksgiving is one of the favorable times for the Eight-Precept retreat. Usually, it is a long holiday when the Vietnamese have more time off from work. Also, it is an appropriate time to dedicate the fruits of the retreat as offering thanks to the country that has hosted the Buddhists.

One of my most memorable incidents connected to the Eight-Precept retreat occurred during the Thanksgiving of 2001. At the Thanh Tịnh Temple, in Rochester, New York, it was Autumn by the time of the Thanksgiving and leaves were falling every where. The practices went well until it rained because the water was leaking down from the roof. During the break, the male Buddhists climb up and discovered that the falling leaves were the culprits. The dead leaves clogged the drainages and caused the water to overflow on the roof. With brooms and rakes, the male Buddhists furiously cleared out the dead leaves on the roof. They all resumed the practice afterward. A year later, we learned that the neighbors were curious about us, the Buddhists, climbing up the roof and chasing away the witches during that rainy day of Thanksgiving! The neighbors also had a good laugh when they found out the real reason from the Vietnamese Buddhists. Now the roof is renovated and the Buddhists can practice the Eight-Precepts retreat without interruptions from the leaking water.

Of course Vietnamese Buddhist centers have practices that aim to transcend the physical realms. Notable among them are the use of Buddhist mantras. Dealing with spiritual

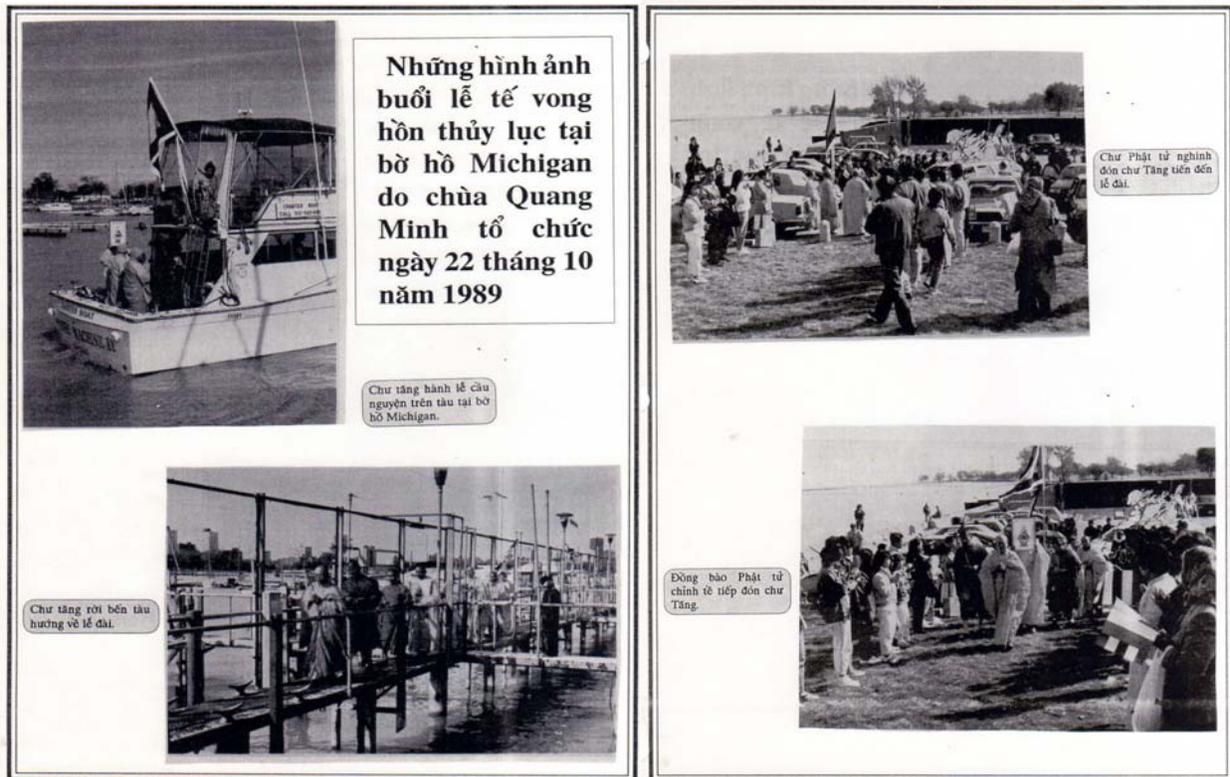
transformation, mantra is powerful. Nevertheless, one should not be mystified and hysterical about the use of mantra. Virtuous Buddhist monks publicly employ mantras to generate conducive effects for practice and to benefit people. One of the most exemplary cases is the Water and Land Liberation Incantation performed by Quang Minh Temple in Chicago, Illinois, on October 22, 1989. The site for the incantation was not at the temple premise. Rather, it took place on the sandy bank of Lake Michigan, a swimming site at the public beach.⁴⁶⁷ At the particular site, every year, a person had accidentally drown and died while swimming. The local public had tried all means of warning and safeguards, but the drowning happened every year at the same beach. Instead of having the normal monthly Eight-Precepts retreat to benefit themselves, the Buddhists sponsored the incantation for help solve the problem that had burdened the public.

The Buddhist Masters were invited by the Buddhists at Quang Minh Temple to help rectify the problem. When event met public approval, *The Chicago Tribune* also sent a reporter. Eight leading Vietnamese Buddhist masters, including Thích Đức Niệm and Thích Tín Nghĩa, flew into Chicago to perform the tantric ceremony. A motor boat was hired to ride the masters out into the water to lead the spirits of the deceased back to the location of the ceremony on land. As a focal point on the boat, they set up an image of Kṣitigarbha, the Earth-Store Bodhisattva, who vowed to even enter into the realm of hell beings to liberate them. A special yogic flag was also installed to guide the spirits of the deceased. In elaborate yogic robes and hats, the leading Masters headed out into the water. Tantric recitations and yogic mudras (hand gestures) were performed together in full scale. The Buddhist followers and spectators joined in when further chanting and mantra recitation were performed on land, right on the public beach. The photos of the event, as published by the temple's chronicle, are in the following page. Since then, the recurrent drowning at the beach site stopped and Quang Minh Temple was in very good term with the local people. Afterward, Quang Minh Temple returned to its usual Eight-Precept retreat. Sharing the vigorous monastic schedule during the Eight-Precept retreat, the lay Buddhists come to understand and appreciate the dedication of the Buddhist masters to the Buddhist course. They witness themselves that the monastic members shoulder extra burdens to prepare for the successful and effective retreats. As a result, the lay Buddhists recognize the real value of the Sangha as one of the three Buddhist jewels and will be inspired to emulate the monastic

⁴⁶⁷ See Chùa Quang Minh, *Tập San Ảnh Đạo*, số 4, Xuân Canh Ngọ (1990), p. 57.



Figure 66. Quang Minh Temple, Chicago.



Trang 57

Trang 58

Figure 67. The Water and Land Incantation performed on October 22, 1989, by the Vietnamese Buddhist Venerables to bring peace and auspicious protection to the public beach at Lake Michigan. Photos taken from the *Ánh Đạo Chronicle* published by Quang Minh Temple.

life. From experiencing the vigorous schedule of the monastic in mental cultivation, the lay Buddhists will be able to reduce certain romantic versions about monastic living and practice, including the recent political ideas concerning the sedative influence of religion conjured up by the Marxist followers. During the time of the Buddha, King Ajataśatru had already come to the Buddha with the question why wandering ascetics, including Buddhist monks, would deserve respect when he and his people had to earn their respects through their working skills and services. As a king, he was seriously concerned about the fruits of homeless life, an issue which is still relevant to our present society concerning the real worth of religion.

When being pressed by the Buddha, King Ajataśatru admitted that not only had he asked the Buddha, also he had already questioned six other prominent religious leaders of his time, including Makkhali Gosala, Purana Kassapa, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccayana, Sanjaya Betthaputra, and Nigantha Nātaputra. However, King Ajataśatru also said that he got no direct answers from them. Some even evaded the question. King Ajataśatru supported all religious ascetics in his kingdom by making offerings and providing their sustenance and wanted to have an answer. Coming to see the Buddha he wanted to hear about the reward, visible here and now, as a fruit of the homeless life.

Understanding the disappointment of the King, the Buddha jovially told him that escaping slavery, of man's obligations, from farming labor, from household tasks, and from steward services while receiving offerings, even from King Ajataśatru himself, as he admitted, were the visible here and now fruits of those who had shaved their heads and followed the homeless life. In actuality, even at present, many still assume a similar idea that those are the fruits of Buddhist homeless life. Indeed, the issue concerning the worth of religion had already confused the people, including King Ajataśatru, of almost three thousand years ago. It kept emerging as a social issue throughout the history of mankind. It remains an issue for many in our present time. And the same issue is anticipated for many in the future. Thus, it is worth while to explore in some relevant details concerning the value of religious practice in the Buddhist tradition as presented by its founder, the Buddha.

Realizing that the Buddha knew exactly his mental burdens, King Ajataśatru, asked for the "more excellent and perfect" than those fruits of homeless life. Only by then, the Buddha clarified the fruits of the Buddhist homeless life. From the words of the Buddha, monks indeed had their work. Nevertheless, it was not the physical household tasks and ordinary social

careers. Rather, it was the mental work of cultivating virtues and regulating the mind. It was vigorous mental cultivation and required unceasing lifetime efforts. Here comes the preliminary sum of work of a monk in the Buddhist tradition. Already, it has involved serious mental work and vigorous determination, as being presented by the Buddha:

He abandons his property, small or great, leaves his circle of relatives, small or great, shaves off his hair and beard, dons yellow robes and goes forth into the homeless life.

And after having gone forth, he dwells restrained by the restraint of the rules, persisting in right behaviors, seeing danger in a slightest faults, observing commitments he has taken on regarding body, deed and word, devoted to the skilled and purified life, perfected in morality, with the sense-door guarded, skilled in mindful awareness and content.⁴⁶⁸

Then the Buddha proceeded to clarify in detail the major work of the monks in the Buddhist tradition. According to the Buddha, a monk worked as a guardian of his sense-doors as a life-long career, in addition to his appearance as an wandering ascetic. A monk guarded his eye-faculty which could overwhelm him with major sights and characteristics which brought greed and sorrow and other evil unskilled states of mind. Likewise, the monks guarded the rest of his ears, nose, tongue, and body, and thinking from their respective sensory objects. As a result of developing sensory restraint, the monk obtained blameless bliss, as a fruit of his homeless life.

A monk in the Buddhist tradition worked further to accomplish mindfulness and clear awareness. The monastic task of a monk turned out not as romantic as many might have thought. The work required persistent efforts, which are beyond the imagination of ordinary people. A monk had to be mindful of what he was doing. Rather than a few nominal activities of serene meditation as frequently witnessed by the public, a monk kept training himself to be mindful in his own private activities, including wearing robes, eating, drinking, chewing, bending, stretching, and speaking. He even worked on developing mindfulness while evacuating and urinating, as stated by the Buddha:

Here a monk act with clear awareness in going back and forth and back, in looking ahead or behind him, in bending and stretching, in wearing his outer and inner robe and carrying his bowl, in eating, drinking, chewing, and swallowing, in evacuating and

⁴⁶⁸ See Maurice Walshe, “Sāmaññaphala Sutta: The Fruits of the Homeless Life,” *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 99.

urinating, in walking, standing, sitting, lying down, in waking, in speaking and in keeping silent he acts with clear awareness.⁴⁶⁹

At the same time, the monk trained himself to be contented with the simple ascetic life, of having a few robes, of eating a meal a day, of solitary lodging in the woods under a forest tree, in a mountain cave or gorge, cemetery, or even charnel-ground with a heap of straw as his bed. A monk had to keep on with meditative concentration through this simple contentment.

With mindfulness and clear awareness, a monk proceeded to work in order to abandon greed and other worldly desires. Afterward, he extended his work to eradicate ill-will and hatred, so that the mind is liberated from them. Likewise, he worked to abandon the rest of the five mental hindrances, namely sloth-and-torpor, worry-and-flurry, and doubt, so that the mind would be completely liberated from them. As a result of his mental work, the monk experienced gladness, delight, tranquility, and joy. With the complete liberation from greediness, he became detached, tranquilized, filled with joy, and reached a meditative state called the First Meditation, as a more excellent and perfect fruit of the homeless life.

Similarly, the monk advanced to work on the subsiding of his thinking and pondering. Then he developed his tranquility further in order to reach the oneness of mind. At the point, he obtained the Second Meditation, as another fruit of the homeless life. Upon accomplishing the work of abandoning the delight born from tranquility, the monk obtained equanimity together with mindfulness. This was the attainment of the Third Meditation, another more advancing fruit of the homeless life. Devoting to concentration, the monk continued to work beyond the abandoning pleasure and pain, gladness and sadness. After working to penetrate pleasure and pain and to purify further by equanimity and mindfulness, the monk entered the Fourth Meditation, another more superior fruits of the homeless life.

The work of the monk and the fruit of his meditative work did not end there with the four meditative states. Rather, the monk had to continue to apply his mental concentration to penetrate the five *skandhas*, which encompassed the physical form and the mental part of one's own make-up. The form, including a human body was basically composed of the elements of earth, water, wind, and fire. The mental part consisted of feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness. As a result of working using insight meditation, he saw and penetrated the

⁴⁶⁹ See Maurice Walshe, "Sāmaññaphala Sutta: The Fruits of the Homeless Life," *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 101.

production of his body and mind as they were. Also, he could form a new manifestation and performed various miraculous tasks, as in the following passage:

And out of his body he produces another body, having form, mind-made, complete in all limbs and faculties ... he appears and disappears ... he walks on the water without breaking the surface he flies cross-legged through the sky like a bird with wings; he even touches and strokes with his hand the sun and the moon.”⁴⁷⁰

This is another even more superior fruit of the homeless life. Likewise, as the monk continued to apply his ear, nose and other sense-faculties toward the various supernatural powers, then he was able to hear and to smell penetratingly without obstructions. In addition to remembering his former lives, he obtained the karmic consequence of his actions as well as the actions from others, as a result of his unwavering work on his power of concentration. Most importantly, when the monk worked on applying and directing his mind toward the causes of suffering, he was able to penetrate the Four Noble Truths, as did the Buddha during his meditation under the Bodhi tree. Consequently, he knew clearly that his spiritual quest is accomplished and he was completely liberated from birth and rebirth. This final result of his mental work is the most excellent and perfect fruit of the homeless life, as being given by the Buddha himself, directly from his own practice:

He knows, “Birth is finished, the holy life has been led, done is what had to be done, there is nothing further here.” This, Sire, is a fruit of the homeless life, visible here and now, which is more excellent and perfect than the previous fruits. And, Sire, there is no fruit of the homeless life, visible here and now, that is more excellent and perfect than this.⁴⁷¹

In the past, King Ajataśatru satisfied with the various fruits of the homeless life in the Buddhist tradition presented by the Buddha. Instead of doubting the Buddha as an ally of his late father, King Bimbisāra, who was extremely supportive of the Buddha and whom was murdered by King Ajataśatru himself, King Ajataśatru joined the Buddhist tradition. Also he repented the murdering of his own father. Then, recognizing the worked and value of the Buddhist fruit of

⁴⁷⁰ See Maurice Walshe, “Sāmaññaphala Sutta: The Fruits of the Homeless Life,” *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 104.

⁴⁷¹ See Maurice Walshe, “Sāmaññaphala Sutta: The Fruits of the Homeless Life,” *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 108.

the homeless life, he no longer questioned “the lack of physical work” of the Buddhist monks. Rather, he followed his late father to make impressive offerings to support the Buddha and his Sangha. Even after the Buddha had entered his final nirvana, King Ajataśatru continued to make offerings to the Buddhist monks. Sponsoring the First Buddhist Council in order to preserve the teaching of the Buddha was one of his significant historical supports of the Buddhist tradition.

Unknown to many, Buddhist monks are not required to accept offerings which are offered in improper, unpleasant, and disrespectful manners or when the donators was irreverent of the Buddhist teachings. Of course, monks humbly went house to house of the people, regardless of castes, social status, religious beliefs, race, and genders, as a tradition. However, this does not means that monks had no dignity in their begging for alms. Rather, they could decline offerings made under ill manners. The Buddha himself had once walked out on his father, King Suddhodana, to beg on the street during his first returning visit to Kapilavastu. Likewise, his disciple monks had waked out from the palace of King Pasenadi of Kośāla and went to beg on the street, because the king neglected to show care and proper respect to them. The Buddha told the king, who came to complain about the waste of food, that his food had no care to them when the servants of the king carelessly gave the food to the monks. The Buddha proceeded to relate to the king the *Kesava Jataka*, in which he taught that “The best food is that which given in love.”⁴⁷² Many monks had been royal princes and wealthy Brahmins in their secular lives and they did not need to join the Buddhist Sangha for the purpose of begging for food in order to survive. As instructed by the Buddha, monks could even decline to sit down among a family whose members intentionally show a lack of respect and proper manners. The *Kula Sutta* or *The Discourse on The Family* was direct about it, as in the following passage:

Monks, if one has not already done so, it is not meet to visit a family possessing these nine qualities, nor is it meet to sit down among them, if one has visited them. What nine? They do not rise up pleasantly; nor greet one pleasantly; nor offer one a seat pleasantly; if they have one, they hide it; from plenty they give little; though they have choice food, they give course food; they give food without respect or care; they do not sit around to hear the dharma; they savor not the spoken word.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² See Edward B. Cowell, “No. 346: Kesava-Jātaka,” *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births*, p. 94.

⁴⁷³ See E. M. Hare, “The family.” *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya)*, vol. IV, pp. 258.

Thus, working in a secular job for economic motives is not the task of the Buddhist monks. One can return to the lay life for that. According to the tradition, not only do Buddhist monks deserve the offerings because of their respectable mental work in meditation, they can also reject offerings which are presented in irreverent manners. Monks are instructed to be humble. Yet, they are also taught to live with dignity. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks continue to maintain this tradition in the United States.

Interactions between the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition and others.

A notable Vietnamese Buddhist practice which continues to flourish in the United States without adaptation in principle is the Ullambana celebration. It is the traditional Mother's Day as well as the traditional Parent Day in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. Among the Buddhist celebration this is the most touching ceremony. The lay Buddhists, regardless of their busy schedule, drive to the local temples with their mothers almost every night to join the evening chanting session. In preparation for the celebration, the Vietnamese Buddhist centers usually organized the chanting of the Ullambana Sutra for a month in advance, during the seventh lunar month which is in August of the Western calendar. The sutra is short and usually last for an hour. Many Vietnamese Buddhist centers have published or reprinted their own copies of the sutra. In place of the normal Pure Land chanting session, the *Ullambana sutra* is chanted as a dedication to the mothers, who have given births and maternal care to all. The essential teaching of the sutra centers on the effort of Mahamaudgalyāyana in liberating his mother who was unfortunately born as a being in the realm of the hungry ghosts. Thinking about his mother and all of the loving care she had given him, Mahamaudgalyāyana, the foremost disciple in supernatural power, tried to relocate her after knowing that she had passed away. With his divine eyes, he found her in the lower realm of the hungry ghosts. Regardless of his supernatural power, he could not help to abate her suffering which was caused by the karmic retribution of her own negative intentions in the past. Failed in his various attempts, Maudgalyāyana consulted the Buddha for help. The Buddha instructed Maudgalyāyana to obtain the joined concentrative power of the virtuous Sangha in the ten directions instead.⁴⁷⁴ The proper time was the

⁴⁷⁴ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Kinh Vu Lan và Kinh Báo Ân Phụ Mẫu* (The Ullambana Sutra and The Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents), p. 7.

pravarana day which took place at the full-moon day of the seventh month. It was the confessional day at the end of the three-month-long Summer Retreat, when the members of the Sangha had just accomplished their intensive practices together with their accumulative merits.

Following the instructions of the Buddha, Mongollana prepared the great offering feast, with various basins filled with food in hundred of flavors and fruits in five colors. Also, he prepared the pure and precious sustenance for the members of the Sangha, including incense, oil, lamps, beds, and beddings. All offerings were placed in the Buddha hall or in the stupa. After the virtuous members of the Sangha had accepted the offerings, they joined together and recited the mantras with their concentrative minds.⁴⁷⁵ With their joined efforts, the members of the virtuous Sangha were able to reform the intention of his mothers and altered her future destiny. Their vast store of joined merits transferred her to a better realm of rebirth in a heaven. The Buddha taught that even the seven generations of the past parents would also be able to liberate from the lower realms of rebirth through this method of Ullambana dedication.

During the month of preparation for the Ullambana day, *The Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents* is also chanted every other night in alternation with the *Ullambana Sutra*. Again the emphasis is placed on the protective and caring role of the mother to her child, from the beginning of the pregnancy to the time of giving birth and then afterward, and even beyond the age of maturity. Calling for the deep respect to the maternal care of the mothers, the sutra insists that the sacrifice of a mother cannot be repaid by ordinary actions.⁴⁷⁶ The forming of the fetus during the tenth months of pregnancy was clearly described to illuminate the bitter burdens endured by the mother in order to protect her child. The details remain fairly accurate despite the ancient origin of the text:

The woman endures several hardships. In order to give birth to a child, she has ten months to bear the burden. In the first month of the pregnancy, the fetus appears like a dewdrop and [the mother] keeps guarding it from sudden evaporating. During the second month it congeals as milk curds. In the third month it is like coagulated lump of blood. During the fourth month, it begins to assume a slightly human form. In the fifth month, the five limbs appear distinctively. In the sixth month it develops the six sense faculties.

⁴⁷⁵ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Kinh Vu Lan và Kinh Báo Ân Phụ Mẫu* (The Ullambana Sutra and The Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents), p. 10.

⁴⁷⁶ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Kinh Vu Lan và Kinh Báo Ân Phụ Mẫu* (The Ullambana Sutra and The Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents), p. 23.

During the seventh month, it forms the complete set of bones and joints, together with eighty-four thousand hair pores. In the eighth month, it completely forms the intellect and internal organs. In the ninth month, it fully develops its size and shape. In the tenth month, it is the time for birth.⁴⁷⁷

Carrying the fetus is one burden. Giving birth is another burden. The sutra reminds the Buddhist followers that the life of the mother is in grave danger during birth. Again, the sutra insists on the deep respect to the maternal care of the mothers because she risks her life for her child:

Carrying for ten months, the mother gives birth to a child,
The hardship, a heavy lead on her shoulders,
Unable to eat and drink because of the fetus,
Haggard and exhausted, she becomes.
During birth, her life enters a dangerous bend.
After birth, she ends up soaking with blood,
As if, a slaughtering buffalo or a goat in drain.
Ten to one, her life is hanging on a thin thread.⁴⁷⁸

The sutra goes on with the boundless and unconditioned sacrifices of the parents, especially the mother, in rearing a child, in nursing it in sickness, in providing it with food, cloths, education and even finding a good suitor for their mature child. Yet, in several instances of actual life, the parents are left alone in their own age, without care. The Buddhist followers are reminded to return that loving care to their old parents, especially their mothers. Indeed, the mothers deserve to be recognized for their maternal care all along. According to the sutra, the proper way of repaying the deep kindness of the parents is replicating and spreading this sutra far and wide in all directions.⁴⁷⁹ The Buddhist implication of the instruction is that the more people learn about the kind deeds of the parents, especially the mother, from the teaching of the particular Buddhist sutra, the better and kinder treatments will be bestowed back onto them. Nobody would survive without the parents. Therefore, they deserve their special honors.

⁴⁷⁷ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Kinh Vu Lan và Kinh Báo Ân Phụ Mẫu* (The Ullambana Sutra and The Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents), p. 15.

⁴⁷⁸ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Kinh Vu Lan và Kinh Báo Ân Phụ Mẫu* (The Ullambana Sutra and The Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents), p. 17.

⁴⁷⁹ See Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, *Kinh Vu Lan và Kinh Báo Ân Phụ Mẫu* (The Ullambana Sutra and The Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents), p. 26.

Learning from the sutra, the Vietnamese Buddhists continue the tradition of celebrating the Ullambana day. At the Buddhist centers across the states, the Ullambana celebration is organized after the Buddhist monks and the nuns have completed their Summer Retreat. At the celebration, the roses in both red and white colors, introduced by Nhật Hạnh during the 1960s, continue to be given to the Buddhist followers. One, whose mother had passed away, gets a white rose. One, whose mother is still alive, gets a red one. The symbolic love of the mother's love is there with the roses, regardless of the color of red or white. Several female Buddhists dress up in beautiful traditional Vietnamese dresses, called "Áo dài" or the long dress when they come to the temple on that particular day. They even put on make up and ornament themselves on the occasion. That is their special day, the Mother's Day. In addition, they also dress up and join together for musical performances on stages. It is a time of festivity for Vietnamese Buddhist women. Many the young women have their time to be a little bit more showy during their musical performances. Several Buddhist songs relevant to the benevolence and the sacrifice of the mothers, including a few romantic and classic pieces, are performed in the makeshift stage out in the open door of the temple grounds. One of the most popular songs dedicated to the mothers is the *Lòng Mẹ* (The Mother's Heart),⁴⁸⁰ which evokes the eternal love and care of the mother in specific Vietnamese cultural details. In the song, the image of the Vietnamese mothers and the Motherland of Vietnam are culturally made vivid, as in the following poetic stanzas:

The mother's heart is vast like the Pacific Ocean, murmuring.

The mother's love streams like an eternal sweet spring.

The mother's words are soft like the rustling rice field at dust.

The moon cast the shadow of the lovely mother on the veranda singing a lullaby.

And, the song goes on repeating the stanza to praise the love of the mother:

The mother's heart pervades with loving care like the full-moon of Autumn,

The mother's love soothes the heart like the playful breeze on the lake surface,

The mother's lullabies linger softly like the pervasive kite-flute in the afternoon sky.

Sunny or rain, daily she rejoices the singing of her children.

The stanza ends with the eternal motherly love:

Whoever the wayfarers in distant places and without anywhere to turn,

⁴⁸⁰ *Lòng Mẹ* is written by Y Vân.

Whatever, the wind and rain of the day and month in the life of change,
The sun can fade, but the motherly love.
May one return under the shade of the kind mother!

Yet, in addition to serious moral Buddhist quests, the young women have their own fun by going to the Buddhist temple. They have their youthful songs and dances. Among those, the young women especially enjoy their romantic time by reenacting the song *Hôm Nay Em Đi Chùa Hương* (Today I Am Going to The Perfume Temple).⁴⁸¹ People have various reasons for going to the temples. In addition to the main reasons of getting the auspicious blessing of going to the Buddhist temple, they also look forward to meet Buddhist friends. In this context, the young Vietnamese women of the past were excited about seeing each other in their beautiful dresses while being noted admiringly by all of the young men, who were visiting the Buddha for various reasons, like everyone else. The Perfume Temple is located in the mountainous region of North Vietnam, away from the bustling city. The scenery is charming. One usually reaches it by rowboat. Rowing across the fields dotted with soaring green mountains which are surrounded by the winding rivers, the views are spectacular in all directions. The song goes jovial and happy as in the following stanzas:

Today, I am going to the Perfume Temple,
The grass and flower are still veiled in the fogs.
Waking up with Mom and Dad,
Combing my hair,⁴⁸² I check myself in the mirror.

It goes on with the usual concern of young women about their looks.

Swinging my small lock of hair,
My waist is fashioned with a pink silk stretch.
Silky trousers couples with new transparent outer dress,
A *quai thao* hat,⁴⁸³ I hold.

The song begins to show how admirable her looks are. It does not describe the young woman boating about her beautiful looks. Rather, it culturally portrays that even her parents are admiringly approval.

⁴⁸¹ The song *Hôm Nay Em Đi Chùa Hương* was written by Nguyễn Nhược Pháp.

⁴⁸² In the past the women generally wrapped their hair in a stretch of silky fabric and rolled it around their heads.

⁴⁸³ It is a type of flat palm hat with fringes. Like the Vietnamese conical hat (paddy hat), it also has a ribbon spanning across to hold it when it is put on the head. It was a popular type of hat for Vietnamese women in North Vietnam during the past.



Ban Hành đường chụp hình lưu niệm với ngài Viện chủ và Sư cô Trúc trì

Figure 68. The Buddhists at Từ Đàm Hải Ngoại, Texas, join the monk and nun for a Buddhist celebration. The female Buddhist are dressing in their traditional *Áo dài*. Photo Ven. Tín Nghĩa.



Figure 69: Musical performance in temple courtyard, the females hold their *Quai-thao* hats

Mommy smiles, “Daddy look!”
With the curling slippers,
My daughters is exceedingly charming,
When will she be married!

The stanzas proceed to reveal that many had already come to ask for her hand in marriage. Yet, her father told the match-makers that at fifteen she was still young. Nevertheless, she understood that he was waiting for a capable and valorous groom. Then romantically, the suitable candidate appears among the temple-goers on the rowboat. In addition to looking good, he is also an excellent poet. After recounting that her Mom strikes a casual conversation with the well-mannered candidate, the song relates that even her Dad has shown his approval.

The river flows with cloudy water.
Melodically, he recites a poem.
Daddy says that it is excellent,
I am listening, astounding!

Of course, the stanza reveals that she also likes him:

He comes from *Duc*.
Whenever I meet his glance,
Shying, I don't talk:
“Namo Amitabha!”

One has to be at the performance to enjoy the acting. Applauding and cheering especially from the women audiences resound. Also, they shower the young women on stage, including the main singers, with flowers saved after offerings to the Buddha. That is not the end of their joyful activities. The song skillfully portraying her happy feeling by reverting to the magnificent sceneries on the path to the temple. Of course, they look spectacular because she is happy.

Bubbling and rushing, the spring winds,
At the bottom of the green mountains.
With the distant bridge panning the stream,
Oh, the beautiful scene is nearly a picture.

Even when she climbs up the mountain path to reach the temple, the view becomes even more agreeable:



Figure 70. A scene of going to the Perfume Temple. Photo Doan Duc Minh.

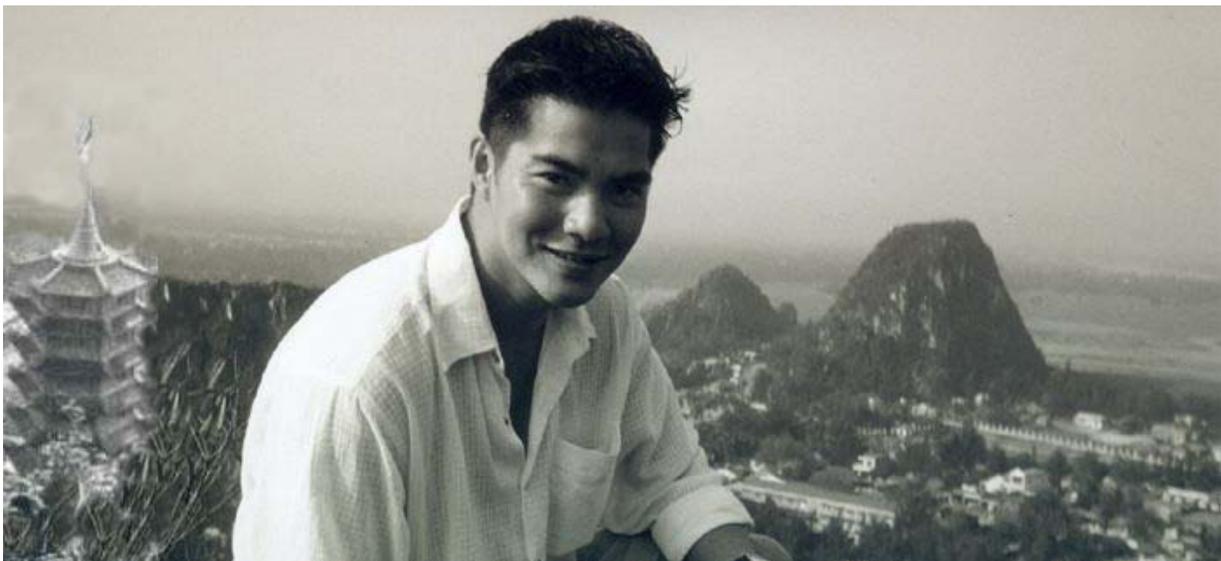


Figure 71. The temple goer continues to receive inspiration to climb up the mountains to visit the temples, even in the rain. Photo Jean Yves Vuong.

The path, the rocky cliff, in the cloud,
Vines of red, purple, and yellows flowers hang.
Concerning for Mom who get exhausted along the way,
Following to care for her, he walks behind.

The song maintains that even the young woman knows that she is romanticizing. Yet, it is life. And she is happy. Life is wonderful and exciting. The more she dreams, the more she will reflect. She can describe more of the beautiful sceneries, but she does want to overdo it. It is not good to have people laughing at her for being too romantic. Now, she comes to the temple and offers incenses to the Buddha for more serious motives:

Rising up, the smoke of the golden incenses,
Still dazing in the dream,
I pray to the Buddha and the Deities,
So that I will marry him.

The applauding from the audience is thundering again. Another shower of flowers descends on the young women on the stage. All are happy. It is the festivity. One can further witness the exciting performance in detail by visiting the Vietnamese Buddhist centers during the Ullambana season. That part of the Vietnamese culture is kept alive by the Buddhist tradition. The Vietnamese people also have fun by going to the Buddhist centers. Sitting meditation is not all that the Buddhist laity do in a normal Buddhist center, though every is free to follow that if they have enough incentives.

It is too simplistic to assume that the Buddhists have to be ascetics. Buddhist ascetic practices, including the practice of wearing drag picked out from the clothes which are used to wrap the dead body or to wipe up the women's blood after giving birth, were only for monks, not for nuns. Naturally, in the Indian past, people did not give compliments to the ascetic aspect of the nuns who would put on that filthy drag. Rather, they slandered how dirty and unkempt Buddhist nuns were. Also, they would have more to slander if nuns had to sleep in the woods or the cemetery by themselves as a part of the ascetic practice. The Buddha was thoughtful enough to not allow the Buddhist nuns to embark on such ascetic practices. For the lay Buddhists, they are not ascetics. They only practice the monastic way during the *Uposatha*, the Eight-Precept retreat. Otherwise, like other secular people, they have a very normal life. It should not be a

surprise to see Vietnamese Buddhist women dress up in the beautiful and stylistic *Áo dài* during those celebrations.

In addition to interact among themselves as seen during the Ullambana celebration, the Vietnamese laity also interact with other Buddhist communities. *Tết*, the Vietnamese New Year, is the occasion to celebrate prosperity and happiness. Thus, it is the time to share those positive life qualities with others. In the spirit of sharing, the Vietnamese Buddhists laity visit other Buddhist communities as a major part of the interaction. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks encourage and even organize the visits, so that the Buddhist laity will have the chance to learn and cultivate their merits. They charter busses, contact Buddhist temples, and get the traveling information ready.

During *Tết*, at their root temples, the Vietnamese join together for the special chanting session at twelve o'clock at midnight on the eve of the Vietnamese New Year. Then they listen to the special Dharma talk on the occasion of the New Year. Maitreya Bodhisattva is the central figure of the New Year celebration. His symbolic meanings of future enlightenment, detachment, rejoicing in virtuous actions, and happiness, are evoked. Usually, the masters remind the Buddhist laity to make a positive note for the new years and plan for future practice because impermanence will follow. Afterward, the Buddhist laity receive a flower or a fruit from the temples as auspicious blessing to signify the fruitful and prosperous New Year. Those are especially prepared for the Buddhist laity on the occasion of the New Year.

The next morning of the Vietnamese New Year, the Vietnamese Buddhist laity make pilgrimages to other Buddhist temples, including non-Vietnamese Buddhist temples. Otherwise, they will make their visits during the first weekend if the Vietnamese New Year does not fall on the days of the weekend. The number of the temples for visit is ten. Traditionally, it is auspicious to visit ten temples during *Tết*. The more temples that a Buddhist can visit and make offer, the more auspicious it will be. The Buddhists put on their new dresses to greet the New Year. Also they go to other temples with their new dress or their temple dresses for the laity. Of course, the New Year is the most appropriate occasion for the Vietnamese Buddhist women to dress up in their beautiful traditional *Áo dài*. At the Vietnamese Temples, traditional food is prepared to accommodate those pilgrims. The Vietnamese Buddhist temples do not charge people for meals at their celebrations and significant Buddhist events. Rather, food are prepared and offered for free. It is a good tradition to keep. Similar to others, the Buddhists are happy

when they are free from worrying about their empty stomachs. Also, many Vietnamese Buddhist centers, especially those in Santa Ana, California, where the largest Vietnamese Community locates, organize free musical performances during the New Year Eve. A large number of profession Vietnamese singers join in voluntarily to make their musical contributions.⁴⁸⁴ Occasionally, some of the profession singers also join the Buddhists on their New Year pilgrimages. Certainly, they are always loved for their lively entertainments.

A typical New Year pilgrimage to ten temples in the New Year of 2005, the Year of the Rooster, is presented as illustration. It took place on Sunday, February 13, 2005, beginning at Huệ Quang Temple in Santa Ana. Five full size buses were loaded with the Vietnamese Buddhist laity. Each bus has a guide who was in charged of informing people about the temples of their visit. Among then, Reverend Thích Tịnh Quả of Huệ Quang Temple led the pilgrimage. A newspaper journalist from the *Vietnamese Daily Newspaper* also joined the crown to make reports on the event. The Buddhist monk who organized the New Year pilgrimages constantly informed the Buddhists about the history and activities at the Buddhist centers that is about to be visited. Each center appears to be interesting in their individual ways as being lively described by the guiding monk.

1. **Huệ Quang Temple:** Happy New Year! The Year of the Rooster 2005! Thank you for supportive response to the call for the *Tết* pilgrimage of today. Please convey the New Year greeting from the Venerable Abbot Thích Minh Mẫn to all, wishing you a peaceful, healthy, and prosperous New Year. From here, at Huệ Quang Temple, we shall visit ten Buddhist temples and will be greeted with three pure vegetarian meals for the day.

2. **Pao Fa Temple.** The temple has been built by the Taiwanese Buddhists in the city of Irvine for nearly ten years. The cost of constructing the temple was twenty million dollars. The abbess of the Temple is The Venerable Nun Dharma Russiwn. The temple held high regards for the Vietnamese Buddhists. Every year they extend their invitation to all of us to visit their Buddha Hall as well as to share their morning temple tea and sweet. Please pay attention to the colossal statues of the Buddhas in the Main Sanctuary. They have been carved artistically from white marble and painted in golden ornament patterns. Next to the main hall is the Hall of The Medicine Buddha. This is the spot for those who want to receive his blessing on serious illness

⁴⁸⁴ See Đông Châu, “Little Saigon TV Mời Xem Truyền Hình Văn Nghệ Giao Thừa Sân Chùa: Niềm Hạnh Phúc Đêm Xuân” (Little Saigon TV Invites the Audiences to Watch the New Year Eve Televised Program of the Temple-Courtyard Musical Performance: The Happiness of the New Year’s Night), *Việt Báo*, Feb. 16, 2007, pp. 1-2.

and on better health, either for yourselves or for members of your family. Also, please get in line for entrance, men of the right and women of the left.

3. **Gotama Temple.** This is also known as Chùa Phật Tổ. After many years or renovation, the Venerable Abbot, Thích Thiện Long has just obtained permission from the city of Long Beach to operate the temple. Now the temple is open for visits from the Buddhists. It is extremely precious and kind, that master Thiện Long will offer us the meals for breakfast as his temple. I heard that it will be vegetarian imitated crab soup or imitated beef soup in Hue style. Hoping that all of you will enjoy them! We shall have fifty minutes there. After eating, please return to the bus right way in order to save time.

4. **Dharma Vijaya Vihara.** This is the Buddhist temple of the Sri Lanka in Los Angeles. Certainly, you still remember the Tsunami that occurred at 7:58 in the morning on December 26, 2004. We were all horrified to heard about the tragic Tsunami took place in the Indian Ocean and killed more than two hundred thousand people from Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. This is our opportunity to pay homage to the temple and to make donations to help those victims. I have been told that the Venerable Abbot, Walpola Piyananda, will return to Sri Lanka this weekend to bring relief, including financial and medical support. Please open you hearts and compassion to make donations to the victims in Sri Lanka.⁴⁸⁵ Your virtuous deeds will be witnessed and dedicated by the Buddha. This is also the meaning of our pilgrimage today.

5. **Wat Thai.** Next, our pilgrimage buses will stop at a famous temple of the Thai People in Los Angeles, the Wat Thai Temple. The special part of the temple is the statue of the Buddha pasted with gold leaves. Having a vision of the Buddha is our merit, as in a scriptural saying. Again, please note that Thai Temple also needs your compassionate support in helping

⁴⁸⁵ The Vietnamese Buddhists had joined in to support the Tsunami victims. They made various donations to their root temples which transferred them to other reliable relief organizations. The Vietnamese monks, nuns and Buddhist laity from the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America had contributed two million U.S. dollars to help the Tsunami victims in Sri Lanka, Thai Land, Indonesia, and other Asian countries. The members of the Buddhist delegation sent by the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America, personally visited Sri Lanka and Thailand. They distributed three hundred thousand U.S. dollars to help the victims on-site. The Buddhist Rev. Thích Quảng Định of Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế and Thích Nguyên Thảo, who sold his temple for \$405,000 to help the Tsunami Victims, also joined the delegation. See Yahoo News, *Buddhists sell Temple for Tsunami Victims*, Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2005, p. 1. Similar efforts were made by the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress to offer relieves to the Katrina Victims in New Orleans. Among the Vietnamese Buddhist centers of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress, Từ Đàm Hải Ngoại, in Dallas-Fort worth, lead by venerable Thích Tín Nghĩa, contributed \$41, 000; and Diệu Pháp Temple in Californima, contributed \$57,422. A Vietnamese Buddhist delegation also went onsite to offer relieves. See Chùa Diệu Pháp, *Tin Quyên Góp Giúp Đỡ Nạn Nhân Bão Lụt Katrina*, p. 1.

their victims of the tsunami in the Coastal Thai region. Please help those unfortunate victims and at the same time cultivate your own merit through your donations. In the courtyard of the Thai Temple, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals are sold. Thus, please return to the bus right away after getting your food, so that we do not have to go and find those who get lost! We have about forty minutes here. Thank you!

6. **Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế** (The International Buddhist Monastic Institute). Within the next ten minutes we will get there. This is a renowned center of Vietnamese Buddhism. After 1975, the Late Venerable Thích Đức Niệm established this center. And at this center, many virtuous and eminent monks and nuns have been trained. Among the monastic disciples of *Thầy* Đức Niệm, many were Americans. Today, *Thầy* Thích Minh Chí is managing the Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế.

7. **Phước Huệ Đạo Tràng** in El Monte City. This is a very beautiful and orderly monastery established by Venerable Thích Phước Bôn. We have good memory about the temple. This is the second time we have been invited to have lunch by *Thầy* Phước Bôn. Please note that, in addition to the delicious vegetarian food, the temple also has a variety of excellent puddings of different flavors. Please make financial support the Phước Huệ Đạo Tràng to help it flourish in the year of the Rooster, 2005. Also, I hope that all the Buddhists, especially *Thầy* Tịnh Quả, will satisfy with the luncheons provided by Phước Huệ Temple! Hopefully, we will have an hour for lunch before we continue our pilgrimage!

8. **Hsi Lai Temple**. We cannot skip the Hsi Lai Temple. It has several noticeable features. This grand temple is directed by a woman, venerable nun Miao Hsi. The word “Hsi Lai” means “coming to the West.” The Temple occupies fifteen acres of land, and was established in 1987, by The Venerable Master Hsing Yun, a leading Taiwanese Buddhist monk. The Master is also the founder of Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan. Formerly, his wish was to build a hundred temples around the globe. Today, he has accomplished his vision and also has 1,300 monks and nuns under his training. The Hsi Lai Temple has its architectural style similar to those of the royal Chinese. It has several compartments. The most noticeable one is the Main Sanctuary dedicated to the Buddhas in the ten directions and the beautiful lapis lazuli lamps. The Museum of the temple is spectacular. It has several antiques. Among them is the *Diamond sutra* inscribed on jade and ivory. Some of those are in very tiny characters and a magnifying glass is needed to read them. It is rare to see those treasures. The Hsi Lai Temple has an

excellent reception area where teas are served. Its library is filled with precious Buddhist scriptures and texts for studies. Its garden is famed for the statues of the Arhats. Each statue has its individual expression. Several beautiful marble statues of the Buddhas and Avalokiteśvara are also there. Going a little further, you can also find the statues of Bodhidharma carved from rare wood. Above all, the temple has a good cafeteria. With only five dollars, we can have a decent vegetarian meal with pure and delicious food. This is the fourth time we have visited the Hsi Lai Temple. Nevertheless, I still have not see it all. The Temple is just too huge. Please note that the elevator on the right of the temple is for the elderly. Also, please pay attention to the time and return to the bus, without getting yourselves lost! We cannot afford to leave any of our precious guests here! Thank you!⁴⁸⁶

The buses returned to visit the next three Vietnamese Buddhist temples in the local area of Santa Ana, namely Phổ Đà Temple, Huệ Nghiêm Temple and Giác Lý Ashram. Visiting these Buddhist temples is optional and only three buses are needed. Nevertheless, all five buses return to Huệ Quang Temple. Venerable Abbott Thích Minh Mẫn is there to welcome them with a farewell dinner. That ends a day of making pilgrimage to visit and support others Buddhist temples, including some non-Vietnamese Buddhist temples. Afterward, the Buddhist laity return home happily with the results of their virtuous activities during the interaction with other Buddhist communities. I have not seen similar pilgrimages from the Buddhists in other Non-Vietnamese communities. There are many Buddhist temples in California, especially in the Santa Ana and Los Angeles regions. Every year, as time is permitted, the Vietnamese Buddhist laity keep making pilgrimages to visit those Buddhist temples during the Vietnamese New Year. It is good way to get to know other Buddhist groups and to cultivate the virtue of giving (*dana*), of the six Buddhist perfections (*paramitas*).

The Monastic members in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition also have interactions with other Buddhist masters from other non-Vietnamese Buddhist traditions. The Buddha Birthday celebration is used for the occasions. The Birthday of the Buddha is in the full-moon day of April of the Lunar month, which is in May of the Western calendar. At the celebration, the Buddhist message of compassion, loving-kindness, and wisdom taught by the Buddha after his awakening are repeated in various ways. In the world shaking by hatred and violence and other related issues, the Vietnamese Buddhist masters feel that the Buddha's message of compassion

⁴⁸⁶ Hue Quang, *Bus Trip Schedules*, Sunday February 13, 2005, pp. 1-8.

and wisdom can alleviate the problems. Compassion can help to put out the fire of hatred. Likewise, wisdom can help to penetrate the veil of attachment and delusion. The Sangha members can help to spread the message by their joint efforts. During the ceremony, the Venerable Masters from other Buddhist communities are invited to give speeches and to offer their traditional chanting. The Buddhist Venerables from the Buddhist tradition of America, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, are all invited. It is impressive to hear their Buddhist chants in their traditional languages. At the conclusion of the celebration, all of the monks and then the Buddhist laity join in to bathe the baby Buddha. It was the re-enactment of the birthday of the Buddha in Lumbini Grove, where in the past the newly born baby Buddha was bathed by the streams of pure water from the *Nagas*, the sacred snake beings. The Buddhist implication of the bathing is purifying one's own defilements (greed, anger, and delusion), so that a new Buddha in each of the Buddhist followers can be born.

The Buddha's Birthday celebration is the biggest public even in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. Buddhist temples make the celebration individually. Also, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks join together to perform a joint celebration, especially under the leadership of a large Buddhist organization like the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America. Hundred of Vietnamese monks and nuns attend. Some of them fly in from Australia and Europe. Thousands of Buddhist followers join in to participate. The stage is decorated with fresh flowers and colorful Buddhist flags and banners. Several times, in order to accommodate the grand celebrations, the Buddhist masters have to rent a courtyard of a public university. On May 16, 1999, the largest Buddha's Birthday celebration organized by the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress was recorded. The main courtyard of a local college in Santa Ana was used. It was completely covered with more than twenty-five thousand Buddhist followers. Nearly two hundred monks and nuns attended. The Buddhist masters from others Buddhist communities also attended and shared their traditional chanting.⁴⁸⁷ The local American and Vietnamese news reported the impressive international scale of the event. It was a hopeful sight for the unification of Buddhism in the United States. The Vietnamese Buddhist tradition continued to foster that spirit of unification through their Buddha's Birthday celebrations. Every year afterward, similar celebrations are delegated to other Buddhist centers of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress. Though, certain large Buddhist centers

⁴⁸⁷ Phật Giáo Hải Ngoại, Số 17, 1999, p. 128.

can manage the task, the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Sangha decided to rotate among themselves. Each takes a term to sponsor the event according to their local capability. As a result, every center has an opportunity share the merit of having the large number of Sangha coming to their local region for the event that they might never have otherwise. Also, it lightens the burden of the Buddhist centers which otherwise have to manage the celebration frequently.

Pilgrimages to the Sacred Buddhist Sites in India and Further Interactions.

After the years of practice and learning, the Vietnamese Buddhists began to travel to India to visit the sacred pilgrimage sites since the early 1990s. Despite the alertness about the danger of traveling by airplanes after the September 11 terrorist attack, their pilgrimage activity still continues up to the present time. Their pilgrimage to India is an indication of the fruits of their Buddhist practices. Not only did the Vietnamese Buddhist followers practice the Buddhist doctrines, also they began to appreciate their Buddhist roots and wanted to confirm what they have learned from Buddhist scriptures through their pilgrimages. Along their pilgrimages, they also learn more through the Indian cultural conditions of Buddhism. This section will present the establishment of a few Vietnamese Buddhist temples in India as the noticeable fruits of their Buddhist pilgrimages. Also, as apart of the interaction, it offers a glimpse into the efforts to revive Indian Buddhism by Udit Raj, a recent development in Indian Buddhism.

Indeed, the financially stable conditions of the Vietnamese Buddhists after a few decades of hard work in the United States is a significant factor in making Buddhist pilgrimages to India. It certainly gives them the financial means to tour India, a religious activity that was a mere dream for the common Vietnamese Buddhists in past Vietnam. Traveling out of the country was one issue and having the financial funds to travel abroad was another problem. Nevertheless, in the United States, everyone can travel abroad if they are willing to work hard and save enough money for it. Also, it is relatively less hassle to travel to Asian countries, including India, under an American passport. Yet, the Vietnamese Buddhists do not just travel to India because they have the available financial means. Rather, they can visit Vietnam and other Asian countries. Without the Buddha and the relevant sacred pilgrimage site, the large majority of Vietnamese Buddhists would have no need to tour India, especially when there are not comfortable with

transportation and local food. Yet, the Vietnamese Buddhists continue to tour India to make pilgrimages to the sacred Buddhist sites.

The Vietnamese Buddhist followers visit India because it is a Buddhist tradition. It is the decisive factor. In the context of Buddhist practice, making pilgrimages to the sacred Buddhist sites is a legitimate Buddhist practice instructed by the Buddha. Before entering final nirvana, the Buddha told his disciples to visit the four major sites, namely (1) Lumbini where he was born, (2) Bodh Gaya where he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, (3) Saranath where he taught his first lesson, and (4) Kushinagara where he entered final nirvana. Those four sacred sites would be places for Buddhist followers to have a vision of and “to pay their respects”⁴⁸⁸ to after the Buddha had gone. Those would arouse their emotions and faith as if the Buddha were still there. Also the Buddhist followers would accumulate great merits for doing so. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the discourse on the Buddha’s great passing, the Buddha gave those instructions directly to Ānanda, as follows:

Ānanda, there are four places the sights of which should arouse emotion in the faithful. Which are they? “Here the Tathāgata was born” is the first. Here the Tathāgata attained supreme enlightenment” is the second. “Here the Tathāgata set in motion the Wheel of Dharma” is the third. “Here the Tathāgata attained the nibbāna-element without remainder” is the fourth. And Ānanda, the faithful monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers will visit those places. And any who die while making the pilgrimage to those shrines with a devout heart will, after the breaking-up of the body after death, be reborn in a heavenly world.⁴⁸⁹

Following the instructions of the Buddha, the Vietnamese Buddhist followers make pilgrimages to those four sacred sites. For the Buddhists followers, seeing those sacred sites is truly having a vision of the Buddha. They can confirm what they have learned from the Buddhist texts and their faith increased many folds. Fundamentally, through those historical sites, the Buddhist followers recognize that the Buddha was a historical human being, who had a

⁴⁸⁸ Ānanda asks the Buddha that “Lord, formerly monks who have spent the Rains in various places used to come to see the Tathāgata, and we used to welcome them so that such well-trained monk might see you and pay their respect. But which the Lord’s passing we no longer have a chance to do this.” Then The Buddha instructs Ānanda about making pilgrimages to those four sights. See Maurice Walshe, *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing*,” in *The Long Discourses of The Buddha: A Translation of The Dīgha Nikāya*, p.263.

⁴⁸⁹ See Maurice Walshe, *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing*,” in *The Long Discourses of The Buddha: A translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, pp. 263-264.



Figure 72. The Lumbini Grove in Nepal (left) and the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya (right)

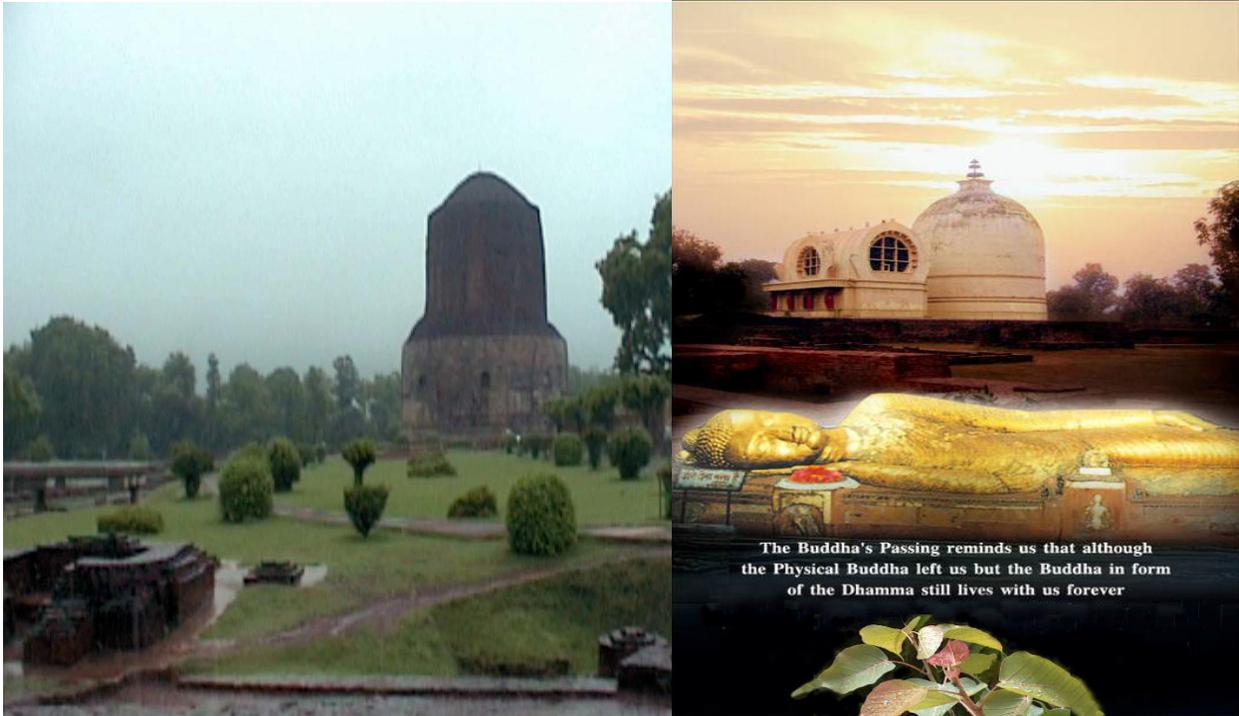


Figure 73. Sarnath in Varanasi (left) and Kushinagara (right).

real place of birth, a family like their families, and who also passed away at the end. Also, they can confirm that the Buddha had obtained awakening under the historical Bodhi tree and had taught them the Dharma at Saranath after striving practices. As a result, they are confident to embark on further Buddhist practice to attain a similar awakening state, becoming a Buddha like their Great Master.

At the sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites, all types of Buddhist practices are performed. The Vietnamese Buddhists make offerings of flowers and incenses then pay homage to the Buddha. They chant *gāthā* to praise the Buddha and his sublime virtues. They recite the short Buddhist Sutras and Mantras. Walking in line, they circumambulate around the Mahabodhi Temple at least three times. Some groups even make prostrations every three steps. During the break from their lodging, instead of resting after the day-long journey on the rocking train, some even return to do more prostrations and circumambulation by themselves. Many Buddhists take their time to meditate alone. It seems that the Buddhist followers do not get enough of their vision of the Buddha and the relevant sight when they are there at the major Buddhist sites, especially at Mahabodhi temple. This particular sacred site seems to have its magical attraction. Soaring up nearly two hundred feet into the sky, the solid Buddhist stupa, with its uniquely Indian pyramidal architectural style looks dignified and peaceful in all directions. The Buddhists pilgrims seem to be drawn toward it.

Instead of retiring to their bed in the resting hostel or temple's rooms, individually, many pilgrims return to walk around the Mahabodhi Temple complex. There, unexpectedly, they find out that other pilgrims in their respective groups are also skipping their resting time and return to the place and doing similar Buddhist activities. In addition to seeing Buddhists, especially the Tibetan monks, making prostrations throughout the day, I have seen many Buddhist followers sitting quietly and reflecting for hours under the shadow of the Bodhi tree. When I was there, I found myself comfortably making three prostrations to each of the images of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas surrounding the four sides of the Mahabodhi Temple. Those statues lined up the outer walls of the temple. Among the trees, the birds were singing in their unique sounds. Other Buddhist followers were also circumambulating around the walls. All types of Buddhist activities were constantly in flow. Yet, those activities were not a distraction to the individual practice of others. Likewise, my calm and deliberate prostration was also not a distraction to their mindful circumambulation, even though we were sharing the same walking path. We

participated in Buddhist activities collectively. Yet, other Buddhists were peacefully devoted to their individual circumambulations and I was calmly making my own prostrations. It was peaceful and harmonious. The spiritual atmosphere was pervasive.

When it comes to Kushinagara, another spiritual manifestation is revealed. One has to witness it to believe it. Seeing the beautiful reclining statue of the Buddha ten feet long, lying on his right side in the nirvana pose, people can not hold back their tears. With a very slight and contented smile, the facial expression of the face of the Buddha is nothing but peace. Yet, many Buddhist followers keep sobbing quietly while circumambulating around the statue. Rather than depressing, they feel regretting for missing the Buddha when he was alive. Many Vietnamese Buddhist monks have similar experience, though they do not shed tears while conducting funeral services for others. The Buddha had attained enlightenment, had completed his tasks, and had entered final nirvana. Yet, his disciples are still struggling on the path, because they had not worked hard enough when their master was still alive. Now, in samsara, they still have to work their way out, alone by themselves this time. Right on the foundation of the statue of the reclining Buddha is a bas-relief image of one of his disciple monks, his face directed toward the Buddha. It is a reminder to the Buddhists. From hearing the news that the Buddha was about to enter nirvana, the particular monk concentrated on his practice and became an Arhat. Busy with his practice, he had not come to see the Buddha like others. Yet, the Buddha praised the particular monk. He had accomplished what had to be done before the Buddha's Final Nirvana. That was the best way to repay the efforts of the Buddha.

Normally the Buddhists embark on the pilgrimages in groups. It is the most safe and convenient way to travel in India. However, they do not really embark on a pilgrimage in order to seek a sense of *communitas*. As suggested by Victor Turner, the transformation sought after during the pilgrimage is similar to the "liminal" phase of an initiation. It is a time where the pilgrims share a sense of commonality or *communitas* without adhering to the usual social distinctions.⁴⁹⁰ Rather, I am inclined to agree with Kathleen M. Erndl that "Pilgrimage is an intensely personal experience."⁴⁹¹ Visiting those Buddhist pilgrimage sites, one will witness that the Buddhists also prefer to practice away from their group. They meditate alone, make

⁴⁹⁰ See Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Interaction in Human Society*, pp. 166-230; and David Raybin, "Aesthetics, Romance, and Turner," *Victor Turner And The Construction of Cultural Criticism*, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁹¹ See Kathleen M. Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, p. 82.

prostration alone, and do their individual devotion alone, after following the routine practice of their groups. Several Vietnamese Buddhist pilgrims need to join pilgrimage groups because they do not know English or the Indian customs. The Indian people are generally well-known for their hospitality to visitors, especially those who tour the country as foreign guests. Personally, I felt safe mingling among the common Indians, even on buses packing with them and their humble belongings. They called me politely and friendly as “Vietnamese Lama.” They even talked to the police on my behalf so that my small suitcase would not go through an irregular search. Nevertheless, it is nearly an insurmountable task to travel around the country without speaking the local language and knowing the local customs. Certainly, communicating with the Indian in Hindi or other Indian languages is beyond the question. By joining an organized group, the Buddhists have their tour guides, who know English and the local customs. Most of those pilgrimage guides are Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns from Vietnam who are studying in various universities in Delhi and in a few other places in India.

As university students in India, those Vietnamese pilgrimage guides speak English in the Indian style and can communicate effectively with the local Indians. Also, through renting apartments and traveling around Delhi and other states associated with Buddhist sites, they know various local customs and expectations. After living and studying in India for a few years, many of the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns are able to extend their visits to other great Buddhist sites in South India. Without their initiative role in visiting Ellora, Ajanta, Sanchi and other Buddhist sites in South India, the pilgrim circuits for the Vietnamese Buddhists would be limited to the main sacred Buddhist sites in Northern India.

Their experiences with the local customs become handy when it comes to bargaining and bartering with the street vendors. A clay image of the Buddha is made to look antique and is priced at four hundred rupees (about ten U.S. Dollars). One can bargain as one likes. Yet, the Vietnamese monk and nuns there know that the clay icon actually costs only four rupees and are able to get them even at cheaper prices. Not too many tourist booklets will tell the Buddhist pilgrims to get a lock and lock the luggage at night on the train. Yet, those Vietnamese Buddhist monks will notify the pilgrims and even have a few locks handy. Those Vietnamese monks and nuns are a great help to the Vietnamese Buddhist pilgrims. Without them, it would be quite difficult to even get on the right train in the midst of half of a dozen trains that rush quickly through the confusing train stations. They charter the buses, buy the train tickets, reserve the

restaurants, and book the hotels, and prepare all the Vietnamese food. Most of the Vietnamese are not use to Indian spicy flavor. The Vietnamese food prepared by the Vietnamese Buddhist nuns and monks India make the long and exhaustive pilgrimages bearable. Also, those monks and nuns are the ones who know where to buy Vietnamese food. It is a relief to have their guidance. In appreciation of their support, many Vietnamese Buddhist pilgrims still send their money to support those monks and nuns in their studies, even after the trip.

When it comes to the sacred Buddhist sites, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns there are the experts. With their frequent visits, they are extremely helpful in giving the history and the recent developments at those Buddhist sites. The pilgrimages become lively and exciting when they explain the relevant Buddhist accounts connected to those sites. All of the major Buddhist stories concerning the life of the Buddha are recounted in connection to the four sacred Buddhist sites. Nevertheless, in addition to the major Buddhist accounts concerning the birth of the Buddha, his enlightenment, his first teaching and his final nirvana, each major pilgrimage site has numerous shrines, images, stupas and even the Asokan pillars which need to be explained. No books or paper tour guides can offer a quick and lively explanation about those Buddhist objects of reverence.

Also, they have knowledge of the non-Buddhist activities of the at those major Buddhist sites. Most of those major Buddhist sites open to the Buddhists are national monuments under the regulation to the Indian Government. Some of them are treated like a museum. At certain sites, the Hindu believers also share the religious facilities. Near the door of Mahabodhi Temple, on the left side of the visitors, a sizable Hindu shrine marks no distinction of its religious identity. It can be wrongly taken as a Buddhist shrine because it is right next to the entrance of the Mahabodhi Temple. It even has statues of the Buddha and Tibetan Buddhist thangka inside. Yet, it is a Hindu shrine. It has confused a number of uninformed Buddhists. The Muchalinda Lake, where the statue of the *Naga* King who coiled around the Buddha to protect him from the torrential rain resides, also becomes the place for Hindu *puja* or offering. That type of *puja* is not a Buddhist practice. Their food and fruit offerings, thrown into the stagnant water, have polluted the pond and damage the beautiful scene badly. In order to rectify the problems, the Management Committee of the Mahabodhi Temple has come up with an innovative strategy; they placed catfish into the pond in the hope that those fishes would feed on those food and fruit offerings. The catfish probably consumed those offerings. Yet, they also devoured all of the

water plants in the pond, including the lotus and water lilies of various types. As a result, the beautiful lotus and water lilies that I had seen in full bloom during my visit in Summer 1998 completely vanished when I returned in 2001. The water became filthy and dark green. Again, the Management Committee of the Mahabodhi Temple is seeking another workable strategy. Yet, in the mean time, the Buddhist followers are confused about those activities of making a *puja*.

While visiting the major Buddhist sites, the Vietnamese Buddhists also realized that they need to have at least a Vietnamese temple at each site. They do not feel at home by staying in the hostels and guestrooms. In 1987, Ven. Huyền Diệu, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk in Europe began establishing a Vietnamese Buddhist temple in Bodh Gaya and another one in Lumbini, Nepal, a few years later in 1993.⁴⁹² Hoping to have their own Buddhist temple, the Vietnamese Buddhists in America offered their contributions. However, the progress was slow. The Vietnamese Buddhists continued to send donations according to their capability, even though they were still struggling to rebuild their lives after their arrival in the United States. After the first ten years, the temples were still not completed. However, the buildings were ready to accommodate the pilgrims. Since then, the pilgrimages were organized on a more regular basis and funds were continued to be raised. Almost a decade later, near the end of 1990s, another group of young Vietnamese Buddhist monks in Germany, led by Thich Hanh Tan and Thich Hanh Nguyen, began to establish another Buddhist temple in Bodh Gaya. They hoped to complete a Vietnamese Buddhist temple sooner so that the Vietnamese Buddhist pilgrims would not have to wait. After a few years of living in India, they were able to organize Buddhist pilgrimages and saw a need of another Buddhist center in Bodh Gaya. They anticipated a promising potential to complete their vision of the Vietnamese Temple in the land of the Buddha. The Vietnamese Buddhist followers in American and European countries recognized their determination and supported them. Many Vietnamese Buddhist masters in the United States also encouraged their followers to support those two young monks. By 2002, the Viên Giác Institute, the first Vietnamese Buddhist temple in India completed by those young monks, was officially inaugurated. It could have been opened a year earlier. However, the terrorist attack on

⁴⁹² See Huyền Diệu, *Việt Nam Phật Quốc Tự Lâm Tỳ Ni* (The Vietnamese Temple in the Buddha Land, Lumbini), p.2.; Thuận Thiên, *Ngày “Hội Cầu Việt Nam” ở Lumbini (Nepal)* (The Day of “The Vietnamese Bridge Festival”, in Lumbini, Nepal), p. 1.

September 11, 2001 had prevented the Vietnamese Buddhists from the United States to attend the inauguration.

The other Vietnamese temple, the Việt Nam Phật Quốc Tự in Bodh Gaya was completed and inaugurated a year after, in 2003.⁴⁹³ The Vietnamese Buddhist became even happier when the Vietnamese Buddhist temple in Lumbini, the Việt Nam Phật Quốc Tự Lumbini, was completed and officially opened two years later in 2005.⁴⁹⁴ While the Buddhist monks were building the new temples, Thích Nữ Trí Thuận – a Vietnamese nun from France, also renovated the Linh Sơn Buddhist Temple in Kushinagara. Originally, the temple was a Chinese Buddhist temple named Song Lâm Tự and was donated to Venerable Thích Huyền Vi, the master of Nun Trí Thuận. As discussed in the previous chapter, Master Huyền Vi, from France, was also the leading preceptor of the Thiện Hòa High ordination at the Đức Niệm's Institute. With her assignment to Kushinagara in 1989, the Trí Thuận was in charge of the temple and determined to expand it.⁴⁹⁵ Within the last few years, she completed the renovation. Her temple, the Linh Sơn Buddhist Temple, became a well known Vietnamese Buddhist temple in Kushinagara. Now, instead of one, the Vietnamese Buddhists abroad have four Vietnamese Buddhist temples at the sacred Buddhist sites in India. Their efforts to establish Vietnamese Buddhist centers at the sacred Buddhist sites have borne fruits. They are elated to see the concrete fruits of their financial supports. In the mean time, The Kiều Đàm Di Vietnam Temple is constructing in 2005, in Vaishali, to commemorate the place where Mahaprajapati (Kiều Đàm Di in Vietnamese) joined the Buddhist Sangha and became the first Buddhist nun. The Buddhist nuns from Vietnam have been managing the project. Also, another Vietnamese Buddhist temple in Lumbini is near completion. Thích Linh Quang, the Vietnamese monk in charge of the project, is also a disciple of Master Huyền Vi.

While helping to build Buddhist temples at the sacred Buddhist sites, the Vietnamese Buddhists also support the local Indian people. Usually, they make direct donations to the needy Indians when they have certain time off from their pilgrimage routine. Again, giving, *dana*, a practice of the six perfections, the *paramitas*. In addition to following the teachings of the

⁴⁹³ See Huyền Diệu, *Việt Nam Phật Quốc Tự Bồ Đề Đạo Tràng* (The Vietnamese Temple in the Buddha Land, Bodh Gaya), p.5.

⁴⁹⁴ See Như Hiệp, *Đại Lễ Lạc Thành Việt Nam Phật Quốc Tự Lâm Tỳ Ni*(Ngày 17/12/2005) (The Grand and Joyous Inauguration of the Vietnamese Temple in the Buddha Land, Lumbini, 12/17/2005) p. 1.

⁴⁹⁵ See Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Linh-Sơn Thế Giới, *Kỷ Yếu Đại Hội Khoáng Đại Kỳ II: Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Linh Sơn Thế Giới*, p. 150.



Figure 74. The Viên Giác Institute (left) and the Việt Nam Phật Quốc Tự in Bodh Gaya (right).



Figure 75. The Việt Nam Phật Quốc Tự in Lumbini (left) and the Linh Sơn Buddhist Temple in Kushinagara (right).

Buddha, the Vietnamese Buddhists assist the Indians because they see it as a meaningful way to repay the great deeds of the Buddha. They have benefited from the teachings of the Buddha and wish to return what they can to the Indian people. Living through difficulties, especially, as refugees, the Vietnamese Buddhists understand the sufferings of the needy Indians. Furthermore, with compassion, they have tried various ways to help. Every pilgrimage was organized with a section for donation.

This is organized by the Vietnamese monks and nuns, who know well the conditions of the local Indians. They distribute rice and clothes to the poor. They provide funds to drill wells at the villages that need water. They help build bridges so that the local villagers can cross rivers without drowning in the rushing water during the monsoon. One of the noticeable bridges was the Vietnamese Bridge built by Huyền Diệu. It has saved the common Indian people from drowning while crossing the river. Now, showing appreciation, the local Indians have the Vietnamese Bridge Festival as a yearly celebration.⁴⁹⁶ Furthermore, visiting the local schools, the Vietnamese Buddhist pilgrims bring notebooks, pens, new clothes, and other tools for studies to hundreds of the poor students around the sacred Buddhist sites. Also, they distribute a small amount of money to the students and their teachers. Some of them make larger donations to build school restrooms for those students. One of the female Buddhist laity returned from the pilgrimage and reported to me about her gifts to those young Indian students. She said that she and the students all cried when she handed them the gifts and told them that they could make their lives better because they could do it. Using herself as an example, she confided to them, I left Vietnam as a refugee and I started my life in America from scratch. Now I could come here and do something to help all of you here today. I wanted you to try your best so that when you grow up you would be able to do something like me to help your families and others. Without the knowledge of anyone on the pilgrimage, this Vietnamese Buddhist woman was a very successful and respectable manager of a large tile company in California, which also had branches in Miami, Florida, and in other states. Humbly, she helped the Indian youths and hoped that one day they could help themselves and their own people. Again, compassionate help is a part of Buddhist practice. It can be done during pilgrimages to the sacred Buddhist sites in India.

⁴⁹⁶ See Huyền Diệu, *Cây Cầu Tình Thương Việt Nam Trên Dòng Sông Thanh Thoát* (The Vietnamese Bridge of Loving-Kindness on the River of Purity and Liberation), pp. 1-8.



Figure 76. Vietnamese monks and nuns help to fund the Buddha project in Lalganj, Vaishali.



Figure 77. The Vietnamese Bridge, a memorable and live-saving gift to the local Indians.



Figure 78. Ven. Minh Hạnh brings gifts to poor students (left), and one of the wells sponsored by the Vietnamese Buddhists through monk Đồng Thuận of the Viên Giác Institute (right).

During those trips to bring donations to the needy Indians, the Vietnamese Buddhists monks and nuns also contact the Indian Buddhist monks in the locality for their help. They are the best resources. As Buddhist monks, they have connections to the sacred Buddhist sites. They know well the local Buddhist schools in the areas. Working together with them, the Vietnamese Buddhists accomplish charitable activities smoothly and effectively. Many Buddhist monks in Bodh Gaya are the Ambedkarite Buddhists. They follow Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who started the revitalization of Indian Buddhism during the 1950s to uplift the Untouchables in India. Through them, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks learn more about the recent effort of the Ambedkarite Buddhists. Being the Buddhist pilgrims to the original land of Buddhism, the Vietnamese Buddhists rejoice in seeing that more Indian people have returned to embrace Buddhism and look forward to having the Indian Buddhist group as a recognizable part of the international Buddhist community.

Though Buddhism originated in India, it had faded out from the land of its birth for centuries. In the wake of Indian Independence in 1947, the 1950s saw a modern Buddhist revival, led by Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), an Untouchable by birth and also the drafter of the Indian Constitution. The movement intensified with the Deeksha or mass conversion of 500,000 Untouchables from Hinduism to Buddhism, on October 14, 1956, shortly before Ambedkar's death. Millions of Untouchables who have identified themselves as the Dalits, the Broken People, soon followed the movement to embrace Buddhism. As of 2001, there were 7.95 million Buddhists in India, most of them Dalit converts. Within the same year, another one million Indians decided to embrace Buddhism and chose to have a second mass conversion in New Delhi on November 4, 2001. They wanted to join the Buddhist tradition and to renounce Hinduism, which they associated with caste prejudice and oppression. The attempt was blocked by various political obstacles, orchestrated by Hindu militant groups. Nevertheless, the event attracted international as well as national attention.

After Ambedkar's death, his movement continued, but no Dalit leader had ever really taken his place until Udit Raj (1958-), a poor peasant Untouchable from Allahabad, emerged as a powerful leader. An educated Dalit, who benefited from the social reforms initiated by Dr. Ambedkar, he has earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in political science from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. In 1996 he founded the Lord Buddha Club. In 1997, he formed the All Indian Confederation, with the mission to reserve positions for Dalits in the public sector, private

sector, judiciary, and the army. He was able to mobilize several Dalit leaders in various states of India, forming a vast umbrella of leadership. In 2001, with a membership of four million, the Confederation stood out as the single largest Indian organization to fight for the rights of Dalits.⁴⁹⁷ In 2002, he established the Indian Justice Party. He subsequently ran for political office in the Parliament, with Lucknow as his base. Following in Ambedkar's footsteps, Udit Raj placed great importance on education and held that embracing Buddhism was a key to changing the Dalit mentality. Since Buddhism is a religion native to India, he maintained that embracing Buddhism was not a conversion but rather a re-affirmation of their proud and glorious Indian past.⁴⁹⁸

With those motives Udit Raj mapped out his strategies for the Deeksha on October 14, 2001. In order to make preparation, Udit Raj established two important sources of public relation, namely (1) his newspaper, the *Voice of Buddha*, and (2) his *Dhamma Vahan* or Chariot of the Dharma, launched on April 14, 2001 (Ambedkar's birthday) and conducted by the Venerable Bhante Buddha Priya Rahul, the foremost Preceptor of the Deeksha.⁴⁹⁹ The *Dhamma Vahan* was a minibus fitted with a sound system and pictures of the Buddha, Dr. Ambedkar, and Udit Raj. It started in Delhi then went through fourteen Indian states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chandigarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, and Haryana. In June, *The Voice of Buddha* announced that one million Dalits had registered. On August 1, the Chariot completed its mission and arrived in Delhi to be ready for the event in October.⁵⁰⁰ The rally, however, was rescheduled for November 4, 2001, after Ram Lila Grounds was made unavailable.

Just three days before the rally, R.S. Krishnaia, District Commissioner of Police, revoked the rally permit granted to the Confederation and attempted to ban the rally. His three major reasons for seeking the ban were (1) the disruption of communal harmony, (2) the limited capacity of Ram Lila Maidan, and (3) the Christian conspiracy. Krishnaia claimed that "material downloaded from the internet clearly indicates that there is an organized attempt to use this rally

⁴⁹⁷ See Ajt Kumar Jha, "Converting Dalit Politics, Udit Raj Style," *The Indian Express*, p. 1; Singh Manpreet, *50,000 Dalits Embraced Buddhism*, p. 4; Stuart Windsor and Tina Lambert, "Showing Solidarity with the Untouchables of India-November 2-6, 2001," *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁸ See S. Balakrishnan, "It Will Be a National Tragedy If Buddhism Is Thrown Out," *The Times of India*, p. 1.

⁴⁹⁹ See C.M. Mukundan, *Buddha Chariot in Delhi*, p. 1; Tej Singh, *Mission Caravan*, pp. 1-2; Akshaya Mulku, "Thousands of Dalits Embrace Buddhism," *The Times of India*, p. 1; and Kashmir Media Service, *200,000 Dalits Prepare to Embrace Buddhism*, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁰ See C.M. Mukundan, *Buddha Chariot in Delhi*, p. 1.

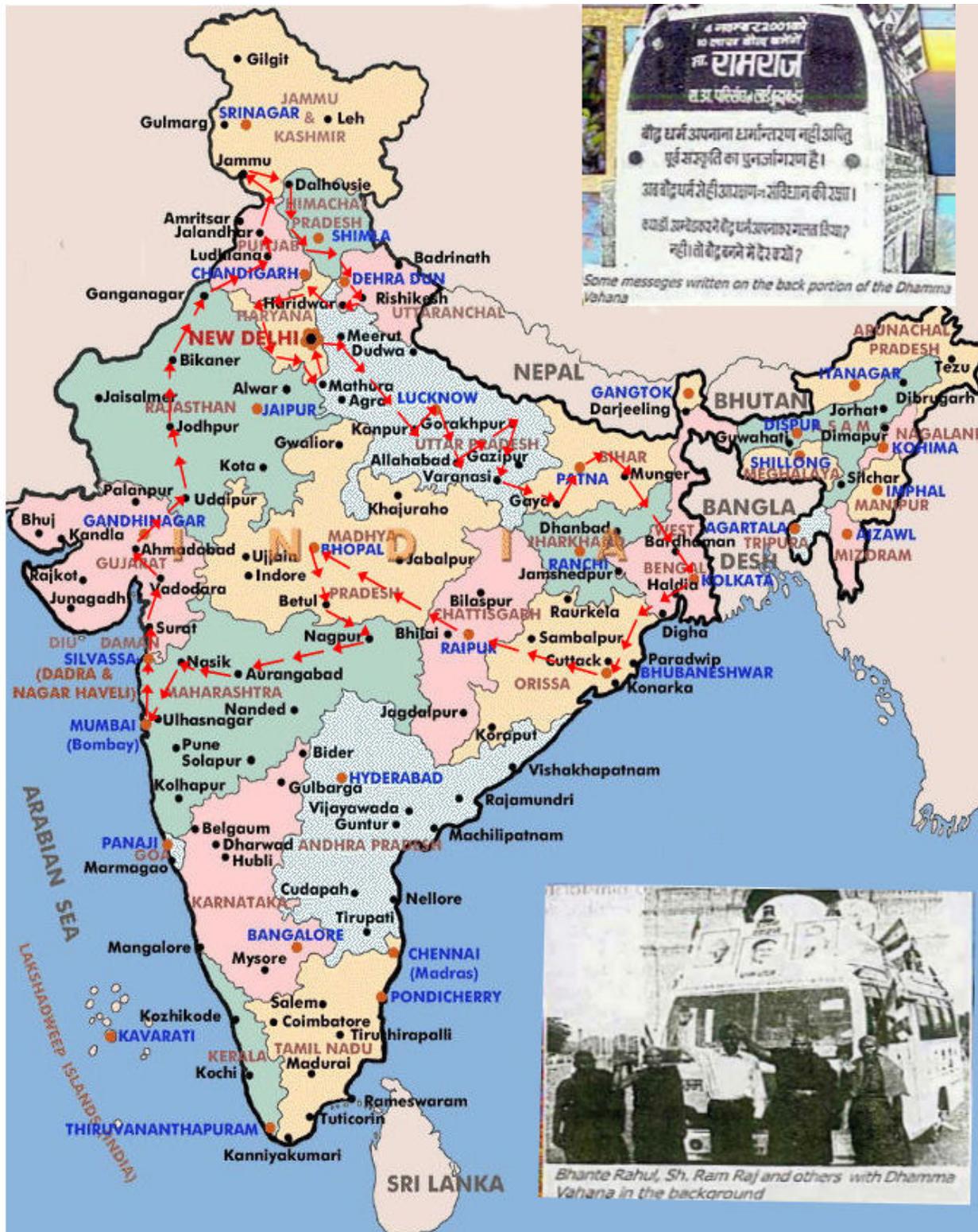


Figure 79. The route taken by the *Dhamma Vahan*, the Dharma Chariot, organized by Udit Raj and Bhante Buddha Priya Rahula for four months (April 14, 2001 to August 1, 2001) in order to mobilize the Dalits for the Buddhist Deeksha in Delhi on November 4, 2001.

for mass scale of conversion” and therefore, there was “every possibility of serious law and order situation and disruption of communal harmony.”⁵⁰¹ He also cited newspaper reports that one million would be coming. This number would exceed the capacity of the site and threaten public safety. It was above the number stated in their application. He alleged that the Confederation had registered only for a Buddhist rally of 100,000, not a “quit Hinduism” rally.⁵⁰² Furthermore, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee opposed the rally because he believed that “there is a conversion motive behind the welfare activities being carried out by some Christian missionaries... and it is not proper.”⁵⁰³ A week before the rally, his Bharatiya Janata Party Government and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which were the two wings of the same political movement, sided together in charging that the conversion was a “conspiracy” by western Christian organizations under the guise of a Buddhist event. They presented as evidence printouts from sensationalistic web sites and emails, with reports of truckloads of Christian literature ready to be distributed to the Dalits at the conversion. They found a Christian web site alleging that Udit Raj and his Dalits followers originally wanted to convert to Christianity. Another Christian web site even claimed that Udit Raj had gone to Colorado Springs to investigate the option of converting to Christianity and that the Dalits would convert to Christianity instead of Buddhism.⁵⁰⁴ Another Western-Indian based Christian web site took the opportunity to portray Islam and even Buddhism in a negative manner while elevating Christianity. Also, it announced that Christian literature and films would be distributed at the Deeksha.⁵⁰⁵ Calls for donation to furnish the cost of printing the *Gospel of John* to distribute to a million Dalits who would be attending the Deeksha were added along with a call for prayer. An extensive e-mail campaign added further fuel to the flames.

As a result, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad called for “volunteers” to come and disrupt the Dalits’ Rally, recruiting about 20,000 such volunteers.⁵⁰⁶ The police alleged that a conversion to Christianity at the Deeksha could heighten the tension between Christianity and Islam in the wake of September 11 and weaken the unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. Police

⁵⁰¹ See Amrith Lal, *Police Download From the Net to Block Access to Dalit Conversion Rally*, p.1; and David Hagen, *India’s Dalits Struggle for Freedom from Hype and Oppression*, p. 3

⁵⁰² See David Hagen, *India’s Dalits Struggle for Freedom from Hype and Oppression*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰³ See David Hagen, *India’s Dalits Struggle for Freedom from Hype and Oppression*, p. 5.

⁵⁰⁴ See John Mark, *Evangelizing India’s ‘untouchables,’* p. 1.

⁵⁰⁵ Rochunga Pudaite, “The Rally Heard Around The World,” *Bibles For The World*, pp. 2-5.

⁵⁰⁶ See David Hagen, *India’s Dalits Struggle for Freedom from Hype and Oppression*, p. 3.

officers were dispatched to all the railway stations and bus terminals to discourage, threaten, and harass those who were arriving for the Deeksha. They blocked more than 80 percent of the one million people expected. They also posted banners with fake messages that the rally had been called off. They even planned to arrest Udit Raj and other Dalit leaders. Despite such obstacles, thousand of supporters were able to pour into the capital and were put up at 167 monasteries.

Originally, the Deeksha Ceremony was intended to take place at Ram Lila Maidan, facing the Red Fort where the Declaration of Independence of India had taken place in 1947. After gathering at Ambedkar Bhawan at 9:00 a.m., all would march toward and reach Ram Lila Maidan at 10:00 a.m. The Deeksha would be performed at noon. However, on the night of November 3, the Central Police of Delhi activated their troops while calling in seven police organizations of neighboring cities for assistance. The armed police barricaded all roads leading to the Ambedkar Bhawan. The march was postponed in order to avoid violent confrontation. The ceremony was relocated to the grounds around Ambedkar Bhawan. The BBC and international media reported the number at 60,000.⁵⁰⁷ Despite political pressure and threats, participants continued to pour in with full enthusiasm and determination.

In general, the Deeksha followed closely the methods used by Dr. Ambedkar. Statues of the Buddha and Ambedkar were brought to the dais and Buddhist monks were invited to perform the Deeksha. Bhante Buddha Pariya Rahul, the foremost Preceptor, bestowed the three Buddhist refuges and the five precepts in Hindi. After that, Udit Raj and the new Buddhists announced the 22 vows of Dr. Ambedkar. Bhante Buddha Pariya Rahul gave a short Dharma discourse to instruct the new Buddhists on fundamental teachings, practices, and manners. Also, he reminded them to uphold their Buddhist stand, because they were liberated from the caste system.

Supporting the Indian Buddhists as a part of their international interaction, the Vietnamese Buddhists posted the news and photos concerning the Deeksha on various Vietnamese Buddhist web sites. They wanted to express solidarity with the new Buddhist converts. Thích Nhật Từ, a Vietnamese monk who attended the Deeksha to support the new Buddhists, regretted that the Dalits had not secured formal cooperation from international

⁵⁰⁷ See Thích Nhật Từ, *Hơn 50,000 Người Cùng Đình Từ Bỏ Ấn Giáo Quy Y Tam Bảo Tại Thủ Đô Ấn Độ, 4-11-2001* (More Than 50,000 Dalits Renounced Hinduism and Took The There Buddhist Refugees in The Capital of India, 11-4-2001), p. 3.



Figure 80. Dr. Ambedkar (left) and Udit Raj who leads the Deeksha on Nov. 4, 2002 (right).

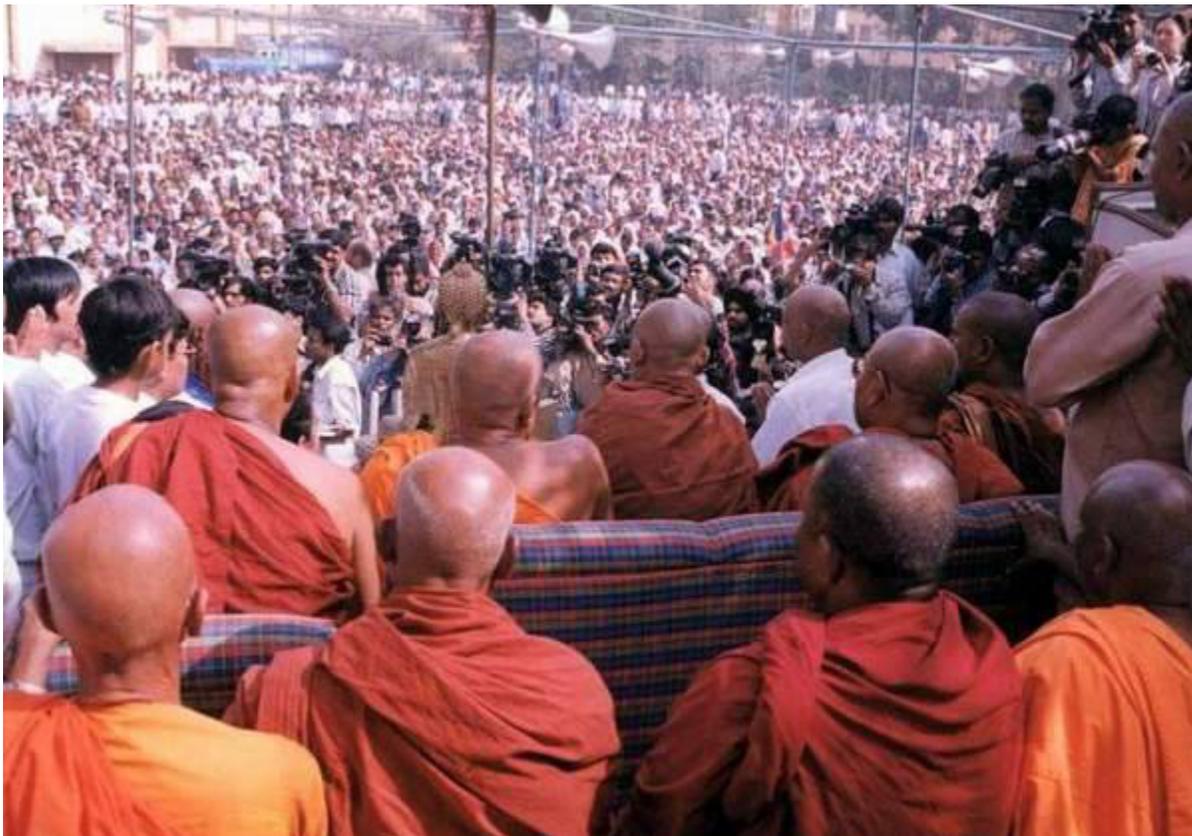


Figure 81. A view of the Grand Buddhist Deeksha at the Ambedkar Bhawan on Nov. 4, 2001.
Photos Manpreet Singh.

Buddhist organizations.⁵⁰⁸ The Vietnamese Buddhists were disappointed that religious freedom had been suppressed in a democratic country like India. Through their articles posted on the internet, they exposed and critiqued the attempts to suppress religious freedom there.

Vietnamese Buddhists still have the challenge of adapting their traditions to life in America. Yet, through interactions while making pilgrimages to the sacred Buddhist sites in India, they have made an effort to reach out and support needy Indians, including fellow Dalit Buddhists. Vietnamese Buddhists are making an effort to support and nurture Buddhist communities around the world, especially in India, the land of the Buddha's birth. Still, for those Vietnamese Buddhists living in America, the most immediate goal is the preservation and transmission of their tradition in their new homeland. In the next chapter, we turn once again to that goal, focusing on achievements of the past, obstacles in the present, and the direction of Vietnamese Buddhism in the future.

⁵⁰⁸ See Thích Nhật Từ, *Hơn 50,000 Người Cùng Đỉnh Từ Bồ Ấn Giáo Quy Y Tam Bảo Tại Thủ Đô Ấn Độ, 4-11-2001*, p. 3.

CHAPTER 6

ACHIEVEMENTS AND OBSTACLES

Vietnamese Buddhists in the United States have, through their adaptations and interactions, attempted to assimilate Vietnamese Buddhist tradition into the American way of life. Nevertheless, the tradition continues to retain its Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist core, serving the needs of the Vietnamese immigrants without completely changing into a new sect of Buddhism. In the process of adaptation and assimilation, the tradition has marked many worthwhile achievements along the way; it has also confronted obstacles. This chapter will discuss a few of the major achievements and highlight the remaining obstacles to be managed, especially the issue of Buddhist information on the internet. As this chapter will show, even after thirty years in the United States, the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition is still making adjustments.

Achievements

At present, the dominant traditions of Vietnamese Buddhism in America are Zen, Pure Land, and the combination of the two. My data shows that the Zen-Pure Land group is the largest, comprising ninety-three out of 101 Buddhist centers under research (roughly 93 percent). Five centers of Theravada Buddhism and three centers of Zen comprise the rest. Within the Zen-Pure Land group, there are twenty centers with some regular Zen focus, which includes nine centers that follow the practice of Engaged Buddhism taught by Nhất Hạnh. The predominance of Zen-Pure Land centers indicates that the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition still retains its Mahayana Buddhist core. Although it has made various adaptations to serve the needs of Vietnamese immigrants, the tradition has not changed into a new sect of Buddhism as it did in China and Japan. Importantly, in the United States, the tradition retains its unification of the Dharma, a distinctive Vietnamese Buddhist feature.

Within the last decade, since the late 1990s, a more intensive focus on Pure Land practices has been promoted within the Vietnamese Buddhist community. In earlier decades,

most of the popular Vietnamese Buddhist texts on Pure Land Buddhism had been reprinted and circulated to encourage the Buddhist laity to embark on the practice. Some excellent Vietnamese Pure Land texts were translated into English to accommodate the young generations of Vietnamese who had become more comfortable with English. Master Đức Niệm of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute helped fund the translation of several of those texts. At the time, only the teachings of Zen Meditation had been made widely available to the public, Master Đức Niệm and several other Vietnamese masters wanted to promote Pure Land texts, because they believed these texts would be the most practical and beneficial for Buddhist practitioners. According to them, anyone – monastics or laity – would be able embark on Pure Land practices according to the individual capability if they used these texts as fundamental guides.

Among the Pure Land texts, the most popular was the *Buddhism of Wisdom and Faith*, written by the late Venerable Thích Thiện Tâm. The Vietnamese title of the text, *Niệm Phật Thập Yếu*, means “the ten essentials for the Buddha recitation.” The text was even translated into Chinese. The text was an excellent manual of Pure Land practices. In addition to clarifying the tenets of Pure Land, the text differentiated various types of recitation and visualization, including combined techniques. It even provided instruction for using the *mala*, Buddhist rosary beads, for effective recitation. It instructed individuals how to manage the practice on their own without getting worn out. A year after coming to Florida State University, I gave my own English copy to Strozier Library when I realized that the text could enrich its collection.

Although Pure Land Buddhism has been the primary practice of the Vietnamese Buddhist community in America, it gained new momentum when the first generation of elderly Vietnamese Buddhist masters in America practiced it vigorously near the ends of their lives. These old masters had devoted themselves to establishing Buddhist centers for the purpose of training a new generation of monastics and to support the practice of the Buddhist laity. These Vietnamese Buddhist centers have indeed flourished across the country. The Vietnamese Buddhist laity have become confident in their practice, even to the point of making pilgrimages to visit the sacred Buddhist sites of India, regardless of the hardship and discomfort encountered there.

Having accomplished their task of reestablishing the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in America, these masters began to put more time into their own practice, aware that they had to

practice vigorously before time ran out. As previously discussed, the Venerable Nun Đàm Lưu of the Temple of Perfect Virtue concentrated on Pure Land practice, using the Pure Land texts translated and authorized by Master Thiên Tâm. Her conscious dying and her bodily relics left after cremation have demonstrated the validity of the practices.⁵⁰⁹ Likewise, Master Đức Niệm of the International Buddhist Monastic Institute, organized the Pure Land Karma Cultivation for temple practice. Furthermore, at the end of his life, Đức Niệm dressed up in a monastic inner robe and continued the Buddha recitation with the attending Buddhist masters and followers while consciously passing away.⁵¹⁰ After cremation, his remains, including his relics, were scattered into the ocean. He had directed this in his will to avoid the possibility that making relics would become a trendy aim of Pure Land practice. Leading masters of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha abroad convened seven weeks after the funeral, and on May 5, 2003, chartered the *Fanta Sea One*, a three-story ship that could hold about 400 people, and headed out to the sea to carry out his last wish, scattering his remains into the ocean.⁵¹¹ Nevertheless, a small portion of his remains was kept in a stupa in Saigon, Vietnam, by the Abbess Nhu Hoa, a senior Buddhist nun in Vietnam whom Master Đức Niệm continued to support and encourage after helping her to become a nun when she was young. When the condition of Master Đức Niệm had become serious, she had flown from Vietnam and specifically entreated the master to allow a portion of his remains to be placed into a stupa, as a special inspiration to the disciple nuns in her nunnery. She was the only one who received this honor.⁵¹²

In addition, several lay Buddhists achieved conscious dying by following the Pure Land practice. A lay Buddhist collected various accounts of conscious dying through Pure Land practice among monastics and laity within the last decade in the book *Những Chuyện Vãng Sanh Lưu Xá Lợi* (The Stories of Those Who Recited and Obtained Rebirth with Relic Remains).⁵¹³ Although the suggestion in the text that all Buddhist teaching should concentrate on the three Pure Land sutras was not practical, its reports of cases of conscious dying through Pure Land

⁵⁰⁹ See Thích Minh Đức, “Đàm Lưu: an Eminent Vietnamese Buddhist Nun,” in *Innovative Buddhist Women*, p. 120 and also in *Kỷ Yếu Sư Bà Đàm Lưu* (In Memory of Venerable Nun Đàm Lưu), p153.

⁵¹⁰ See Thích Tín Nghĩa, “Những Kỷ Niệm Với Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm (the memories with Venerable Thích Đức Niệm),” *Tưởng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), pp. 159-160.

⁵¹¹ See *Tưởng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), pp. 317-319.

⁵¹² See *Tưởng Niệm Hòa Thượng Thích Đức Niệm*, (In Memory of The Most Venerable Thích Đức Niệm), pp. 325.

⁵¹³ See Tịnh Hải, *Những Chuyện Niệm Phật Vãng Sanh Lưu Xá Lợi* (The Stories of Those Who Recited and Obtained Rebirth with Relic Remains), Garden Grove: 5 Star Printing, 2001.

practices were inspiring. The text made vivid the intensive Pure Land practices and the attainable results for both Buddhist masters and the laity. From these reports, Buddhist followers felt more confident about embarking on the Pure Land path and as a result, Pure Land sessions became the dominant part of the Uposatha, the Eight-Precept retreat. Also, several Buddhist masters organized a monthly Pure Land retreat, called “Phật Thất” or the Buddhist Retreat, one day during the weekend to accommodate lay practice. In addition, Vietnamese Buddhists enhanced their practices by using texts and lectures of Master Tịnh Không, a leading contemporary Pure Land master of Taiwan. As a whole, the practice of Buddhist Retreat became very popular within Vietnamese Buddhist communities during the last decade and continues to the present.

Although the fundamental format and requirements of the Buddhist Retreat were taken from the Uposatha, the practices were incorporated into to all Pure Land sessions. The sessions for walking meditation became sessions for walking recitation; sitting meditation turned into sitting recitation, with or without voice. The usual chanting sutras were replaced by the *Amitābha Sutra*. For example, the typical schedule for a day of the Buddhist Retreat at Quang Minh Temple in Chicago is as follows:

- 09:00 a.m. – 09:55 a.m.: The opening of the retreat with homage to Amitābha Buddha.
- 10:10 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.: Walking recitation.
- 11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.: Recitation with voice.
- 12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.: Meal time.
- 12:30 p.m. – 01:30 p.m.: Resting time or quiet recitation.
- 01:45 p.m. – 02:45 p.m.: Walking recitation.
- 03:00 p.m. – 04:00 p.m.: Chanting the *Amitābha Sutra*.
- 04:14 p.m. – 05:00 p.m.: Recitation with voice and complete the Retreat.⁵¹⁴

At lay Buddhist centers, the retreat is held once a month and the time for practice is shorter. In 2005, when I was conducting the Ullambana celebration at Lộc Uyển Temple in West Palm Beach, the local Buddhists had their Buddhist Retreat for two hours, from 10:00 a.m. to 12 o’clock at noon, just before the center’s regular weekend services. During the retreat, after chanting the *Amitābha Sutra*, they went on reciting the Buddha name while making their

⁵¹⁴ The time table is from *The Program for The Buddhist Retreat* authorized by Venerable Thích Minh Hạnh, the present abbot of Quang Minh Temple in Chicago.

prostrations and walking recitation. Recitations with voice and without voice alternated throughout.⁵¹⁵

As a whole, Pure Land practice is vigorous and active throughout the Buddhist Retreat. Practitioners employ melodious and rhythmic recitation of the Buddha's name. During the session for recitation, retreatants separate themselves into two groups and take turns doing the Buddha recitation. One group will vocalize a certain number of recitations while the other group recites without voice, and after a certain number of recitations, the previous group will resume the reciting. This way, the retreatants can continue to recite for hours without straining their voices, and the recitation goes on without interruption. Harmonious recitation requires the retreatants to be well organized. Otherwise, the recitation gets out of sync and the retreatants lose their concentration.

In addition to concentrating on the recitation, the retreatants focus on an image of Amitābha Buddha while sitting in meditation pose. With an image of Amitābha Buddha in front, an individual can conveniently visualize the Buddha while reciting the Buddha's name. This visualization is one of the sixteen contemplations instructed by the *Sutra on Visualization of the Buddha Amitāyus*. The result is a highly concentrated mind called the Buddha-Recollection Samadhi (buddha-anusmṛti)⁵¹⁶ which, together with a vision of Amitābha Buddha, guarantees rebirth in the Western Pure Land, as follows:

Those who have envisioned them [the good marks on the body of Amitābha Buddha] see all the Buddhas of the ten directions. Because they see the Buddhas, this is called the Buddha-Recollection Samadhi. To attain this contemplation is to perceive the bodies of all the Buddhas. By perceiving these, one also realizes the Buddhas' mind. The Buddha mind is Great compassion. It embraces sentient beings with unconditional Benevolence. Those who have practiced this contemplation will, after death, be born in the presence of the Buddhas and realize the insight into the non-arising of all dharmas. For this reason, the wise should concentrate their thoughts and visualize Amitāyus.⁵¹⁷

The visualization helps the retreatants focus on good thoughts, an essential criterion for Pure Land practice. When one comes to the last moment before death, this concentration on good

⁵¹⁵ See Chùa Lộc Uyển, *Thời Khóa Phậ Thất* (The program for the Buddhist Retreat) pp. 1-16; and its *Chương Trình Phậ Thất 02 Giờ* (The Schedule for the Buddhist Retreat in 2 hours).

⁵¹⁶ See Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, p. 17.

⁵¹⁷ See Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, p. 333.

thought is critical because it will lead to rebirth in the Pure Land. Buddhists are specifically instructed to avoid negative thoughts at the last moments, which would lead to rebirth in the lower realms. Discussing the power of the last recitation in the Japanese Pure Land tradition, Jacqueline I. Stone notes that this concentration is technically termed “right mindfulness at the last moment.” It also brings the experience of the descent of Amitābha Buddha to lead one to rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Stone illuminates the power of the last thought in the following remark:

Although Buddhism in general has held that the last moment of consciousness can influence one’s post mortem fate, in the Pure Land tradition, “right mindfulness at the last moment” (*rinjū shōnen*) was deemed the essential prerequisite to experiencing the *raigō* – Amitābha’s descent, together with his holy retinue, to welcome practitioners at the time of their death and escort them to his Pure Land.⁵¹⁸

During the Buddhist Retreat, Vietnamese Buddhist followers concentrate on an image of Amitābha Buddha so that their minds are directed toward the Pure Land. The visualization on Amitābha Buddha is their training for right mindfulness. Also, Vietnamese Buddhists make lay robes to wear during the practice. The robes give them a sense of belonging to the group. They are brown in color and modeled after monastic robes. However, they do not have the symbolic monastic field of merit, which appear as small rectangular pieces of fabric when sewn together. Rather, each is made from a whole piece of fabric without cutting lines.

The Buddhist Retreat has become increasingly popular in Vietnamese Buddhist communities. By 2004, thirty-four Vietnamese Buddhist centers in various states had organized regular Buddhist Retreats.⁵¹⁹ Nearly all of the thirty-three lay Buddhist centers under the spiritual guidance of Master Trí Chơn in the Eastern United States hold a Buddhist Retreat during their Uposatha retreat. Many Vietnamese Buddhist centers in Australia, Europe, and Vietnam have also established local Buddhist Retreats.

With the passing away of the older generation of Buddhist masters, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha confronts the urgent need for training the younger generations of Vietnamese Buddhist monks. The Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States

⁵¹⁸ See Jacqueline I. Stone, “By the Power of One’s Last Nenbutsu: Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan,” *Approaching The Land Of Bliss*, p.77.

⁵¹⁹ Tịnh Hải, *Đề Án Thành Lập Hương Quang An Dưỡng Chung Cư* (The Project for the Establishment of the Hương Quang Pure Land Apartments), pp. 17, 32.



Figure 82. A view of the Pure Land Buddhist Retreat, with the marble image of Amitābha Buddha in the background, at Phật Học Viện, the Institute. Photo Quảng Viên.



Figure 83. The retreatants of the Buddhist Retreat with their brown and grey lay robes.

convened and decided to tackle the problem by organizing the joint Summer Retreat. Since the Buddha's time, Buddhist monks and nuns have been required to enter a three-month retreat during the summer. It is called the Summer Retreat and is only for monastic members. During the retreat the monastic members remain on the monastery's premises and concentrate on intensive monastic practice. They cultivate their virtues and practices during the retreat so they can build up merit to transfer to the Buddhist laity.

According to the lunar calendar, the Summer Retreat begins in April after the Buddha's birthday and concludes in July with the Ullambana celebration. As householders with the burdens of secular jobs, the Buddhist laity are not required to join the retreat because they cannot stay in the monastery for such a long period of time. However, as previously seen in the Ullambana ceremony, they can join in at the end of the Summer Retreat to make offerings and to share the merit. In addition, the Buddhist laity who come without offerings still obtain similar merit by rejoicing with others who have offered gifts. As long as they are able to arouse their good intention, they obtain meritorious karma, which is based upon volitional or intentional action, rather than on the quantity of the offering. In the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition, as portrayed in the video *Footprint of the Buddha*, those without gifts can share the merit of the Summer Retreat even by simply touching the gifts that are passed up to the monks as offerings.

Traditionally, local monks joined together in groups of four or more for the Summer Retreat. It was likewise for Buddhist nuns. In ancient India, for safety and protection, when forests were infested with bandits and robbers, nuns were required to enter retreat in a locality with a monk Sangha nearby so that the monks could quickly come and help in an emergency. In general, monks and nuns did not have to travel to distant places. Rather they could organize a local Summer Retreat if they had the minimum number of retreatants.

In America, the joint Summer Retreat is an impressive effort to maintain the harmonious Sangha. The Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress organizes the retreat. The Buddhist center that volunteers to host the event must make all the accommodations. Monks and nuns, depending on their individual capacities, travel across the states, far beyond their localities, to attend the joint retreat. Some even come from Australia and Europe. Retreatants have to manage their own air fares because taking a flight is the normal mode of long-distance travel in America. As usual, the joint Summer Retreat begins after the Buddha's Birthday. However, it does not last for three months, but instead goes on intensively for ten days. Afterward, the

monks and nuns return to their local centers and continue their regular Summer Retreat. The local monastic members feel able to manage their centers this way during the Summer Retreat. The joint Summer Retreat is an excellent opportunity for the monastic members to meet, learn, and share their experiences with each other. The younger monks have valuable opportunities to learn the proper monastic conduct of the traditional Summer Retreat.

During the joint Retreat a panel of instructors is established. All of the eminent Vietnamese Buddhist masters are invited to give lectures. A number of the dedicated Buddhist laity are also invited to be on the panel. During the retreat, there are traditional monastic chanting sessions followed by Zen-Pure Land practice in the early morning. Afterward, members of the panel instruct on the Vinaya, the monastic disciplinary rules, for two hours every morning. They also take turns presenting relevant Buddhist topics to enhance the monastic skills and practices of the retreatants as well as to inform all members about recent strategies for adapting to life in the United States.

The first joint Summer Retreat took place at The International Buddhist Monastic Institute, with the participation of eighty monks and nuns.⁵²⁰ However, it lasted for seven days rather than ten, from June 21 to 28, 2004. The second joint Summer Retreat was ten days long, from June 20 to 30, 2005. It took place at the Buddha Temple (Chùa Phật Đà) in San Diego, California. The instruction program for the morning session from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. consisted of the following subjects taught by the respective masters:

1. Ven. Thích Thắng Hoan: Yogachara (Buddhist psychological studies).
2. Ven. Thích Thái Siêu: The Essentials of the Vinaya.
3. Ven. Thích Viên Lý: The Bylaws of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States of America.
4. Ven. Thích Hạnh Bình: The Philosophical Tenets of the Major Buddhist Sects.

In addition, dedicated lay Buddhist scholars, who are experienced in leading secular lives, brought strategies for organizational management and relevant administrative knowledge. They were responsible for the following topics:

1. Trần Quang Thuận: The Growth and Decline of Vietnamese Buddhist History.
2. Bùi Ngọc Đường: The Project of Translating the Buddhist Tripitaka into Vietnamese.
3. Huỳnh Tấn Lê: Organizational Management and Principles of Administration.

⁵²⁰ Vô Biện, *Tuần An Cư Của Chư Tăng* (The Week-long Summer Retreat of the Sangha), p. 1.

4. Tâm Huy: The Supporting Role of the Buddhist Laity.⁵²¹

During the evening session, from 7:30 to 9:00 every night, the retreatants joined together again to attend lectures given by eminent Buddhist masters. The aims and practices of the Buddhist path were clarified and elaborated in order to enhance understanding. Pure Land practices, Buddhist education, and supporting the Buddhist laity, were among the major concerns as reflected in the following schedule of lectures:

1. June 21 and 22, 2006, Ven. Thích Thắng Hoan: “Is There Superstition in Worshipping? Can Food *pujas* (Offerings) Be Eaten?”
2. June 22, 2006, Ven. Thích Nguyên Lai: “The Aims and Directions of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States.”
3. June 23 and 24, 2006, Ven. Thích Thái Siêu: “The Forty-Eight Vows of Amitābha Buddha.”
4. June 24, 2006, Ven. Thích Nguyên Trí: “Family Happiness According to the Buddhist Spirit.”
5. June 25, 2006, Ven. Thích Nguyên Siêu: “The Buddha and the Path of Complete Education.”
6. June 26, 2006, Ven. Thích Tuệ Chiếu: “The Four Methods to Liberation.”⁵²²

At the end of the retreat, the leading Buddhist masters also bestowed precepts on novices, lay Buddhists, and aspirant Bodhisattvas. With the attendance of fifty-three monastic members, thirty-six monks and seventeen nuns, the Joint Summer Retreat was a success. The younger generations of monks and nuns entreated the elder masters to repeat the Joint Summer Retreat, and the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha voted to continue the Retreat every year. In order to share the work and provide learning experience to monastic members, they agreed to take turns hosting the event.

The Joint Summer Retreat of 2006 was hosted by the Gautama Temple (Chùa Phật Tổ) in Long Beach, California. In 2007, the joint Summer Retreat was again hosted by the International Buddhist Monastic Institute, in San Fernando Valley, California. Returning to the Institute in 2007, the eminent Buddhist masters hoped to train the young monastic disciples of the late

⁵²¹ See Chùa Phật Đà, *Khóa An Cư Kiết Hạ tại Chùa Phật Đà-San Diego, từ Ngày 20 đến 30 Tháng 06 năm 2005* (The Summer Retreat at Phật Đà Temple, San Diego, from June 20 to 30, 2005), p. 2.

⁵²² See Chùa Phật Đà, *Khóa An Cư Kiết Hạ tại Chùa Phật Đà-San Diego, từ Ngày 20 đến 30 Tháng 06 năm 2005* (The Summer Retreat at Phật Đà Temple, San Diego, from June 20 to 30, 2005), pp. 2-3.



Figure 84. Buddhist monks, nuns, lay supporters at the Joint Summer Retreat, the Institute, June 18, 2007. Photo Quảng Định.



Figure 85. Entering the Main Hall for the Summer Retreat Ceremony. Photo Quảng Định.



Figure 86. The monastics listen to the rules and regulations of the Retreat. Photos Quảng Định.

Master Đức Niệm to continue the tradition. The retreat went on for ten days, from June 18 to 28, 2007. One hundred and fifty monks and nuns attended, which was nearly double the figure of the first joint retreat in 2004. More than twenty monastic members tried to register at the end, but the Institute was unable to make further accommodations because it had reached its capacity. The retreat progressed smoothly according to traditional Buddhist monastic conduct. Again, the message of the retreat was to train the young generation of monastic members and to continue adapting to life in America. This was reflected in the opening remark of Venerable Thích Thắng Hoan, the Supreme Leader of the Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States:

All of us have chosen this as our second homeland for our culture to develop in this new setting.... We, the household renouncers, have the responsibility to implement the Buddhist spirit as a vital energy for the Vietnamese in diaspora. We, the Sangha, the representatives of the Tathāgata, have the responsibility to transmit the Dharma and to serve all sentient beings in this new land. Therefore, this great Dharma platform is a representation of the harmony of the disciples of the Buddha.⁵²³

The retreat is expected to be another great success that can set a model for the coming years.

Observing the leading roles of the illustrious Vietnamese Buddhist masters in reestablishing the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in their diaspora in the United States, I have come to question the theory about the Buddhist conquest of China proposed by Erik Zucher. According to Zucher, Indian Buddhism was able to penetrate and conquer the higher and the highest strata of medieval Chinese society because it spread among the Chinese gentry, the lower strata of society, and made them the “new intellectual *élite*.” As a result, Buddhism allowed persons of the most diverse origins “to engage in intellectual activities.” Zucher believes that this way of spreading Buddhism was merely a Chinese affair without much involvement of Indian monks – the “foreign missionaries,” as he termed it.⁵²⁴

It would be presumptuous to follow Zucher’s proposal to insist that “foreign missionaries,” like the Dalai Lama, Thích Nhất Hạnh, and Thích Thiên Ân, have made no significant contribution to the formation of Buddhism in America. In the case of Vietnamese Buddhist refugees in America, Vietnamese Buddhist masters have played an indispensable role

⁵²³ See PN, *Khai Mạc Khóa An Cư Kiết Hạ Năm 2007 do Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất Hải Ngoại Tại Hoa Kỳ Tổ Chức Tại Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, Thành Phố North Hills, CA* (The Opening of the Summer Retreat in 2007 organized by Vietnamese American Unified Buddhist Congress in the United States at the International Buddhist monastic Institute, in North Hills, CA), p. 2.

⁵²⁴ See E. Zucher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, pp.8-9. Also see Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, p. vii.

in preserving the tradition. Without their dedication, the tradition would have died out already. Moreover, Buddhist monks and nuns in this tradition have not attempted to conquer anybody. Rather, they try to conquer their own negative habits, the three poisons. Furthermore, instead of seeing the spread of Buddhism among the lower strata of society, as in Zucher's theory, I observe that educated scholars are interacting with and writing about Buddhism.

I do, however, see some Vietnamese Buddhists, whether consciously or not, repeating the Chinese system of adapting Buddhist terminology known as “ko-i” or “matching concepts.”⁵²⁵ Fundamental Buddhist concepts like karma, nirvana, sangha, and so forth, have been incorporated into American English terminology. Certainly, such *ko-i* terminologies share similar problems with those of the Chinese past. For example, some students in my Buddhist Tradition class had a difficult time understanding that the Sangha does not include the laity. According to the Vinaya, the Buddhist Sangha consisted of at least four Buddhist household renouncers, four monks or four nuns, living in harmony. The students, however, had read that the laity were important and were members of the Buddhist Sangha! People in the past had this same problem of matching Buddhist terminologies. I will elaborate upon the issue of “matching concepts” when I discuss the problem of manipulating Buddhist information during the electronic age. History seems to repeat itself and time will be needed to rectify problems of misunderstanding and misconception.

During the course of making adaptations, the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition has made a number of efforts to foster healthy understanding of the tradition. In general, Buddhist centers are kept in order and their temple gardens are well tended. Traditionally, the natural beauty of the Buddhist temple is used to inspire peaceful feelings. At present, during the process of adaptation, the orderly appearance of a Buddhist center also shows the neighborhood that it is a positive addition to the community. In addition, Buddhist centers avoid having noisy activities during inappropriate hours, so they will not disturb their neighbors. For example, Vietnamese would traditionally set off firecrackers during the eve of *Tết*, the Vietnamese New Year. It was an auspicious welcoming of the New Year. Without the setting off of the firecrackers to greet the New Year, Vietnamese would feel flat, like having a July Fourth in America without the usual fireworks. Yet, Vietnamese Buddhists do not set off firecrackers at their centers when the noise might disturb the neighbors. Hopefully, in the future, as more understanding is achieved,

⁵²⁵ See Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, p. 37.

American neighbors can join in setting off firecrackers during the Vietnamese New Year, adding another exciting festival similar to the July Fourth celebration.

In order to promote further understanding, Buddhist followers invite their neighbors to their centers during annual celebrations and festivals. This has been an excellent way to nurture mutual respect and toleration. Most of the neighbors around Buddhist centers do not realize that everyone is welcome in such places. Like Buddhist followers, non-Buddhists can visit the centers just to enjoy the beautiful scenery and peaceful settings.

One successful interaction between Vietnamese Buddhists and local people is the Lotus Garden Festival organized by the Bửu Môn Temple, a Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist temple in Houston, Texas. I have met Venerable Thích Huyền Việt, the abbot of the temple, on a number of occasions when we conducted Buddhist teachings in the Eastern region of the United States. Master Huyền Việt has been growing a spectacular garden with various types of lotuses and water lilies. With years of experience in cultivating them, he has become a well-known distributor of those types of water plants. As of 2007, he has forty-three types of lotuses and fifty-four types of water lilies in his catalogue. His lotus garden has been open to the public in the temple's yearly Lotus Garden Festival for the last nine years and the people love it, including those in the vicinity. The Annual Lotus Garden Festival of 2006 attracted more than 2000 people. Among them, about five hundred were local American visitors. The visitors return year after year, and more people attend every year after they learn about this Lotus Garden Festival.⁵²⁶ Rather than seeing this temple as part of a strange and mysterious religious culture transplanted from a foreign land, they see a peaceful and beautiful religious building within a public fair that all can attend without hindrance. With their misconception about the Buddhist center removed, they comfortably enjoy the flowers as a community art show. Also, participants have an opportunity to enjoy traditional Vietnamese cuisine purchased from local vendors. No religious criteria is required for participation. Venerable Huyền Việt says the festival is his Buddhist service to the community. At least his garden can be of service to the public who come and enjoy the beautiful flowers.

With this kind of event, people gradually come to appreciate the worth of having a Buddhist temple in the community. Last year, on Saturday, November 4, 2006, a day before the

⁵²⁶ Thích Huyền Việt, Thông Báo của Chùa Bửu Môn về Bộ DVD Lễ Hội Phật Đản và Vườn Sen 2006 (Announcement of Buu Mon Temple about the DVD set on The Buddha's Birthday Celebration and the Lotus Garden Festival 2006), p. 1.

Kathina celebration of offering robes to monks, Master Huyền Việt was joined by the Texas Bamboo Society for one of his yearly festivals. The collection of more than thirty species of clumping (non-invasive) bamboo from the Texas Bamboo Society has attracted a large number of visitors, and the event has become a local high mark.⁵²⁷ As a result, Master Huyền Việt and the Texas Bamboo Society have already planned for the second annual Bamboo Festival and Kathina Celebration in October 2007.

A Buddhist center does not need to have a large and professional lotus garden similar to that of Venerable Huyền Việt to be interesting to the public, especially nearby neighbors. Buddhist statues and other symbols are fascinating enough to attract outsiders. Every center can have a day of Open House to allow the public to make visits and learn about the temple. Such neighbors probably do not know that the gate of a Buddhist temple is traditionally open to all throughout the day, regardless of belief. Naturally, people are curious about unfamiliar religious buildings and want to see what they look like, especially when it is in the neighborhood where they live. They are not at ease when they do not quite know what people are doing in their strange neighboring center. However, being polite and uncertain about how to react to the Buddhists, they do not want to intrude without being invited. Buddhist centers can help to remove these unsettling feelings by creating an opportunity for their neighbors to come and tour the place. A day of Open House offers an opportunity to interact and learn from one another. Like the Lotus Garden Festival, it is a good way to foster understanding.

Obstacles

Now that a number of their Buddhist centers are firmly established in the U.S., the Vietnamese tradition has accomplished its initial goal of transition. However, the process of its adaptation does not end there; the difficulties of managing those centers must still be overcome. Finding qualified monastic members to act as managers has become a pressing issue for the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in America. Many temples organized by the laity are in need of resident monastic members, while the first generation of Vietnamese Buddhist masters here has become very old. A few have even passed away. As a result, the training of new Sangha

⁵²⁷ Thích Huyền Việt, *Southern Texas Bamboo Festival and Kathina Celebration*, p. 3.

members is vital to the survival of the tradition. Furthermore, since the younger Vietnamese who were born and raised in the United States often do not speak Vietnamese, monastics must be able to speak English in order to communicate with them. Thus, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha confronts the issue of training monks and nuns who will be competent in English in addition to being fluent in Vietnamese.

There is an urgent need for training bilingual monks and nuns to carry on the Vietnamese tradition in America. It is consistently reflected by the answers to questions number 6 and 7 in the fifth section of my questionnaire. Question 6 asks, “What are your concerns for the younger generations of your members?” Question 7 inquires further about the programs for the youths, “What can and should be done to improve these programs [for young people]?” From those answers, I have heard serious concerns about the education of the young generation of Vietnamese. Some of them are included below:

1. Bát Nhã Temple, Santa Ana, CA. (Monastic center): We are very concerned and hope that the future generation will be successfully prepared, in order to contribute both to the United States of America and to Vietnam in post-communist times. We are always updating our instructions to help our young people make progress in this civilized society while preserving the good qualities of the past generations. We hope to see Vietnamese youth follow the examples of their valorous predecessors, to build the country, to protect the nation, and to maintain Buddhism.

2. Phước Điền Temple, Manchester, NH (Lay center): The young generation is not concerned or interested in Buddhism. There has been no program to teach, lead, train, and guide them! Nothing at all! Why? There was no monk or nun to lead the temple; therefore, no program existed. There was also a lack of manpower and funding to support any such program. It seems that only in CA, TX, and in big cities or warm states, that monks and nuns can prosper enough to spread Buddhism. In small and colder climate states such as NH, VT, ME, MT, and so forth, there is hardly a new temple open, except this one. This is a serious matter! No attention is given to the needs of the poor fellows and no one wants to come or visit! No one cares!⁵²⁸

⁵²⁸ It is advisable to take this type of statement as individual opinion rather than an absolute fact. The next lay center in Florida, where the climate is warmer, still has similar needs. Likewise, many lay centers in California and Texas have managed and intended to manage their centers without a resident monk or nun. This type of statement from the lay centers is written in English by educated Vietnamese Buddhist leaders, who have accomplished their university

3. Diệu Đế Temple, Pensacola, FL (Lay center): The main concern is that we don't have an English-speaking monk who can teach the youngsters. We currently don't have any plan for improving our program for young people. I think we need an open-minded monk who can associate with both the older and the younger generation.

4. Thanh Tịnh Temple, Rochester, NY (Lay center): The primary concern is to overcome the challenge of getting more young members to consistently attend and get involved in temple activities, so that the tradition can be passed to new generations and so strengthened. We need more leadership with vision, to help recruit young talents to further propagate the teaching of the Buddha.

5. Pháp Bảo, Knoxville, TN (Lay center): The local Buddhists dream of having a monk who can teach the dharma in English to guide the followers, especially the young Buddhists. There is a need to train monks at the college level to help teach the Dharma, to the youth as well as to the non-Vietnamese people who have an interest.

6. Bảo Quang Temple, Santa Ana (Monastic center): We try to help our young people to avoid drugs and to become good American citizens while maintaining Vietnamese culture. The monk watches for changes in direction and will make rectifications where needed, so that communist ideas cannot infiltrate and the national ideology of the Vietnamese refugees will be maintained. This temple is the temple of the Vietnamese refugees (who fled from the communists) in Orange County.

7. Lộc Uyển, Palm Beach, FL (Lay center): The youths are unable to understand Vietnamese, to chant in Vietnamese, and visit the temple only infrequently. The Vietnamese youths in America do not want to enter the household-renouncer life. In the future, after our

education and some are sending their children to be educated in American universities. They are quite familiar with the high cost of investing in education. They demand educated monks and nuns. Yet, they forget to invest in the education of monks and nuns, including the cost of their education. If they had invested in the education of monks and nuns the way they did for themselves or for their children, then perhaps more educated monks and nuns would be available. As a monk, I have to manage my own cost of graduate education. I was fortunate to have teaching assistantship from Department of Religion at Florida State University. Nevertheless, my bi-weekly TA payment of \$333.33 during the time between Fall 2001 and Spring 2005 did not even cover my monthly housing bill of \$355. In addition, I had to pay for my monthly utilities, phone services, and other basic living expenses. From those figures, one can get an image of an ascetic life for a monk who has managed his own education in the twenty-first century. I have gone without health insurance. I was thankful to have my students loans. In the recent years, my life was somewhat improved when my Department was able to help me out after my two Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awards by increasing my bi-weekly payment to \$451.60. Like the Buddhist laity, I always hope that more educated monks and nuns will be available to accommodate the Buddhist needs. Nevertheless, I also hope to have a large endowment to support the education of Buddhist monks and nuns in the future.

venerable older monks have departed, there will not be replacements. At the present, a number of temples have invited monks and nuns from Vietnam. It is uncertain that their attitude and activities are compatible with the cultural conditions and life in America. We need monks who can teach the Dharma in English. We also need bilingual Buddhist texts that can be used here.

8. Cổ Lâm, Seattle, WA (Monastic center): Unable to speak Vietnamese, our young people are losing their cultural roots as well as the compassionate and wise Buddhist way. We need parental cooperation in teaching the children. The teaching program of the temple needs to be joined to the dignity and dedication of the parents of the family.

9. Vạn Hạnh Temple, Centerville, VA (Lay center): The young people will eventually lose the practice we had in Vietnam when we were their age. It is very difficult to inspire them to join temple programs. These need to be more open to kids growing up in America. It is better to have bilingual practice, in order to incorporate their way of thinking. The traditional practices of “Gia Đình Phật Tử (The Buddhist Youths)” at another temple turned my children off after two and a half years, as they became older.

10. Quang Minh Temple, Chicago, IL (Monastic center): For the younger generations, we have been concerned with how to find monastic members who have good English skills. We need those monastics so that we can bring the teachings of the Buddha to the children. Also, we really need some young people to become monks and nuns, so that they can maintain the Buddhist tradition in the United States in a good and prosperous manner.

These answers from ten typical Buddhist centers, taken randomly from various states, agree on the need for monks and nuns who can teach in both English and Vietnamese. Without those capable monastic members, the future of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in America looks gloomy. It appears that the lay centers feel the burden of providing bilingual monks and nuns is on the monastics, and that the need to train monk and nuns bilingually is urgent.

Furthermore while the Vietnamese centers are trying to foster a healthy understanding of Buddhism in America, other people are spreading misconceptions about Buddhism through the cyber-Sangha visible on the internet. They bring confusion to the people through their commercialized version of Buddhism. Again the matching of concepts is seen in the modern time, during the electronic age. However, this time on the internet, it is consciously done to manipulate people, even at a global level. In 2002, the alarming situation was reported in *The Middle Way Journal* as “The Quiet Crisis within Western Buddhism” by Elliot Cohen, the joint

chair of the Manchester Metropolitan University and Manchester University Buddhist Society, in England. He observed people defining Buddhist concepts according to their own terms and then using them to promote their selfish interests, including selling secular products to people. These concepts, rather than being authentic Buddhist teachings drawn from the Tripitaka, are drawn from mass media presentations. It is called popular Buddhism and has the following features:

Popular Buddhism draws most of its sustenance from mass media representations: men dressed as Buddhism monks trying to sell dog food, tranquil music or even a deodorant named Zen, to name but a few examples. This is ‘fortune cookie’ Buddhism, in which the entire Dhamma/Dharma is reduced to a few clever one-liners about peace, love and ‘everything being one.’ Although these are often wonderful sentiments to hold, they are somewhat vacuous, a product of the ‘New Age,’ which, in attempting to embrace the whole world, succeeds in holding absolutely nobody.⁵²⁹

In addition to their greedy activities, those cyber gurus and pseudo-Buddhists have created divisions among other Buddhists. Without having a real Buddhist lineage, they claim themselves to be the only recognized teachers for others to follow. Their unscrupulous activities and lack of attention to virtue can mislead the public and taint the good name of the Buddhist traditions. Their Buddhist knowledge is unreliable and their explanation of it confusing, as shown when they are pressed to define the technical Buddhist concept of Dhamma/Dharma:

-It is about finding your oneness with all things.

-It cannot be articulated.

-It is about finding God.

-It about reincarnation.

-There are no rules to follow.⁵³⁰

Web users can learn to avoid the traps set by those pseudo-Buddhists by reading about Buddhism in authentic sources, searching the web for correlative information, checking for a group’s lineage, and looking up the identity of the group through typing its name into a search

⁵²⁹ Elliot Cohen, “The Quiet Crisis within Western Buddhism,” *The Middle Way Journal*, vol. 76: 4, February 2002, p. 2.

⁵³⁰ Elliot Cohen, “The Quiet Crisis within Western Buddhism,” *The Middle Way Journal*, vol. 76: 4, February 2002, p. 2.

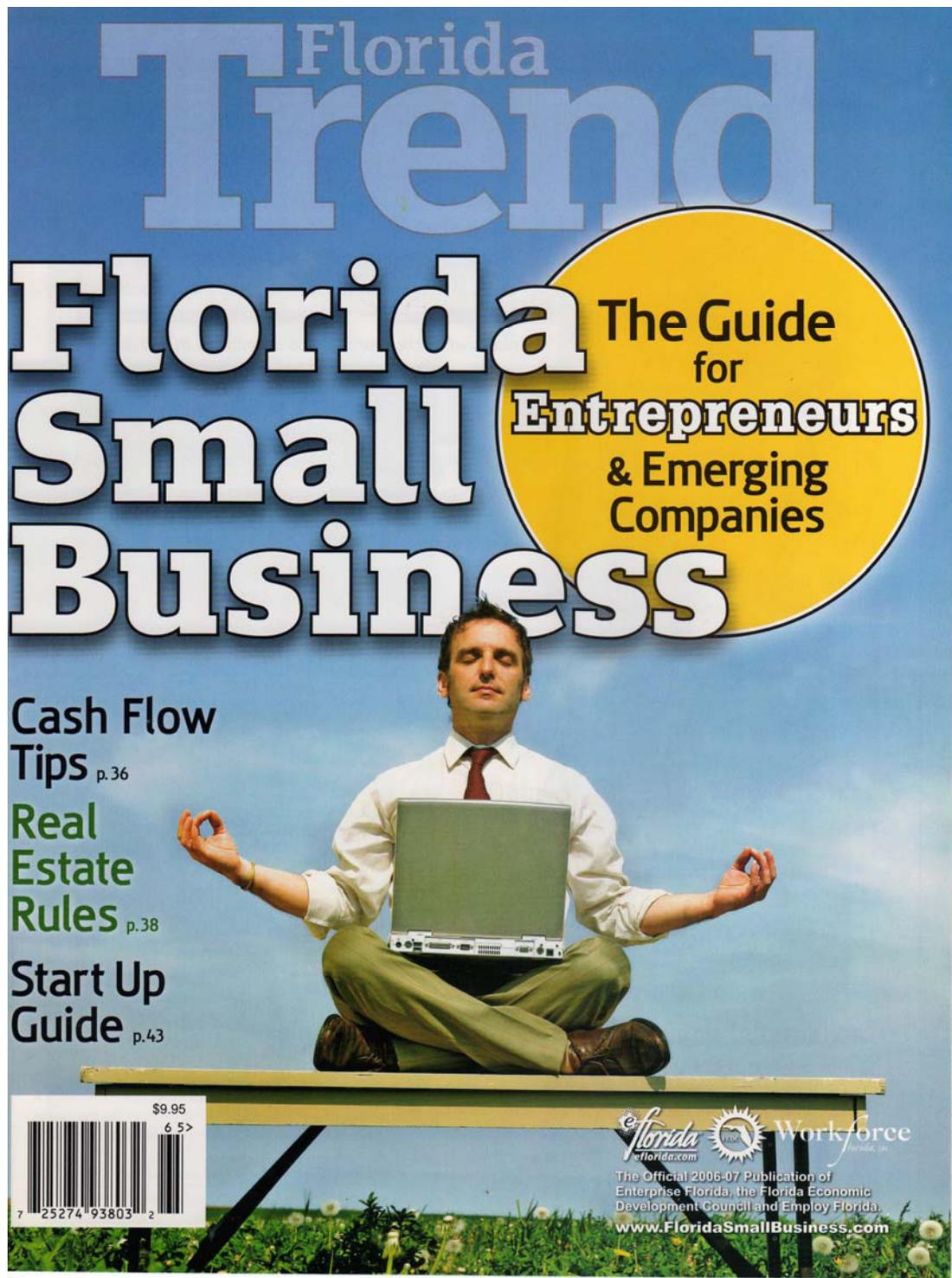


Figure 87. The cyber Sangha and popular Buddhism – a quiet crisis in Western Buddhism.

engine.⁵³¹ Nevertheless, uninformed people will continue to be confused and misled. From the responses collected from students in six of the *Buddhist Tradition* classes I have taught at Florida State University, it seems that practical solutions might include going to a Buddhist temple to talk to a reliable Buddhist master or taking a class taught at a public educational institution, like *Buddhist Tradition*.⁵³² Though people are at liberty to learn from the internet, they should not embark on a religious practice by merely following the information they find there. Rather, they should make an effort to educate themselves by observing and learning from reliable Buddhist sources. Again, the buck stops at Buddhist centers and their monastic members. This has ever been the task of monastics, including Vietnamese monks and nuns, since the time of the Buddha. Monastics must explain and instruct Buddhism over again with every new generation of Buddhists. Even in this electronic age, they are still the indispensable sources of reliable Buddhist instruction. Vietnamese Buddhist monastics have a special duty to instruct their followers, that they may help them avoid the confusion created by the pseudo-Buddhist Sangha in cyber-space.

Misinformation about Buddhism is not the only obstacle facing the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition: it also has to confront the issue of Christian evangelization aimed at its followers. This is not really produced by American Christians so much as by certain Vietnamese Christian converts. The Buddhist tradition does not attempt to evangelize or convert people from other religions. Rather, it instructs only those who become interested in its teachings and come voluntarily to seek learning. The Buddha was quite conscious about the Indian Sramana traditions, in which one would leave home to seek spiritual practice after a certain age. The Buddha himself even instructed his lay followers to continue to support religious teachers from other Indian religious traditions, so that they could survive and continue their spiritual practices.

⁵³¹ Elliot Cohen, "The Quiet Crisis within Western Buddhism," *The Middle Way Journal*, vol. 76:4, February 2002, p. 4.

⁵³² Every semester, students in my class REL 3340, the Buddhist Tradition, read Elliot Cohen's article, *The Quiet Crisis within Western Buddhism*, as a part of their reading assignments concerning the Buddhist Sangha, after they finish their learning about the Buddha and the Dharma. The second question pertains to the article used in my class is in the following:

Who were the new gurus of the cyber Sangha and the pseudo-Buddhists? Describe their "shameless" practice. How did they exploit popular Buddhism through the internet? How can their conduct be distinguished from those of the authentic Buddhist teachers, including the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh? What are Cohen's three tips in searching for Buddhist Dharma using the internet? In your opinion, what should people do or change in order to help eliminate those problems? Or should they just let it go? Why?

In the *Upāli Sutta*, Upāli, an influential householder, became a Buddhist after listening to the Buddha's answer to his challenging questions. The Buddha suggested that Upāli should consider supporting the Nigaṇṭhas, the Jain ascetics, of his former religion. His words to Upāli are as follows: "Householder, your family has long supported the Nigaṇṭhas and you should consider that alms should be given to them when they come."⁵³³

Maintaining the tradition, Buddhist followers do not go around trying to convert people to their way of thinking. On the contrary, they respect others' individual beliefs and expect people to respect theirs. Religious freedom means every one is free to believe, and that everyone must respect others' freedom to believe. Buddhists only discuss their religious tradition with those who sincerely ask to learn from them. In America, however, even though Vietnamese Buddhists do not approach others with their personal religious beliefs, they are bothered by evangelical attempts to impose Christianity on them, not by American Christian groups but by certain Vietnamese Christian converts.

Rather than being an impulsive act by certain uneducated individuals, the attempt to convert Vietnamese Buddhists in America is systematized and is definitely, openly strategized in public documents. An illustrative example is the 90-page long doctoral dissertation titled "Evangelization of Vietnamese Buddhist Refugees" submitted to the School of Theology at Claremont, California, in 1985, by Son Xuan Nguyen, a Vietnamese Christian pastor. Strategies for evangelizing unwary Vietnamese Buddhists are clearly enumerated in the text, step by step. Dialogue, infiltration, hospitality, and celebration are the proposed means of evangelizing. Educated or uneducated, the Vietnamese Buddhist refugees in America are targeted for evangelization, as in the following passage:

In my experience as a pastor to the refugees and in my interview with several new converts to Christianity from Buddhism, I have found none who have a good understanding of Buddhism, although many of them were very devoted. I have also found out that those who know Buddhism well have a higher degree of tolerance toward Christianity, although they are less likely to be converted. This is congruent with John Cobb's statement that the Buddhist societies tend to be more tolerant of other religions.

⁵³³ Nanaoli and Bodhi, "Upāli Sutta," *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, p. 484.

At any rate, it is our responsibility as Christians to announce the Good News and, if possible, to convert Buddhists at all levels of understanding.⁵³⁴

Under this scheme of evangelization, Son Xuan Nguyen proposes that educated Buddhists, especially Mahayana Buddhists, deserve “to be more concerned” in conversion efforts because of their intellectual capacity.⁵³⁵

Instead of direct confrontation, a special working agenda based upon “dialogue” is then suggested. This so-called dialogue is not intended to promote religious toleration and mutual respect, but is a disguise intended to hide their preparations for conversion of Buddhist targets. The pastor's strategies include the following four points:

1. Educate Christians on Buddhism.
2. Invite Buddhist scholars to some Christian Conferences.
3. Join with Buddhists in some humanitarian and moral projects to facilitate a favorable mood for evangelization.
4. Continue with an opportunity for dialogue.⁵³⁶

The document also maps out an agenda for converting less educated Vietnamese Buddhists. It suggests avoiding direct confrontation or intellectual dialogue, and instead emphasizing the magnetic feminine aspects of the Virgin Mary, which Vietnamese Protestants had formerly understated while trying to compete with the Vietnamese Catholics. Son Xuan Nguyen believes that less educated Buddhists live more with their feelings than with reason, and as a result he proposes a strategy of emotional infiltration. He believes that with uneducated Buddhists it is necessary to avoid hurting their feelings, as seen in his following assertion:

I propose that, in the evangelization of the Vietnamese Buddhist refugees, we need to infiltrate into their minds and hearts with the Gospel. Confrontation is not desirable, in any form, and must be considered unwise. This is especially true with the poorly educated Buddhists, who respond more to their feelings than to reason. Confrontation hurts their feelings. We have sometimes heard the disappointment of those Buddhists who were sponsored by some Christian churches. The pressure that the churches

⁵³⁴ Son Xuan Nguyen, *Evangelization of Vietnamese Buddhist Refugees*, p. 74.

⁵³⁵ Son Xuan Nguyen, *Evangelization of Vietnamese Buddhist Refugees*, p. 75.

⁵³⁶ Son Xuan Nguyen, *Evangelization of Vietnamese Buddhist Refugees*, p. 76.

imposed upon them, that if they don't go to church they don't get help, caused them to be angry and resentful of the Gospel.⁵³⁷

As a result, the need to deal with religious competition, especially evangelical attempts from Vietnamese Christian groups, is another issue pressing on the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in America. Fortunately, religious freedom is protected under the Constitution of the United States. Vietnamese Buddhist refugees, like other people in the U.S., are protected from forced conversion. All the foregoing material, including even the passages by the Vietnamese Christian pastor, indicate that Buddhist followers are unlikely to convert to another religion when they truly understand their Buddhist tradition. Education is the essential means for that understanding. The burden of educating Buddhist followers clearly rests with monastics, who have to live the Buddha's teachings and who must explain and teach the way to the Buddhist laity. It is imperative that the monks and nuns of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition in America take on the task of making Buddhism understandable locally. This will continue to be their major task in the twenty-first century.

⁵³⁷ Son Xuan Nguyen, *Evangelization of Vietnamese Buddhist Refugees*, p. 79.

CONCLUSION

As the Vietnamese tradition in America makes its entry into the twenty-first century, it can claim to have accomplished the initial task of establishing Vietnamese Buddhism in the United States. The old masters of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition were able, between 1975 and 2005, to realize their vision of building a solid base here. Vietnamese Buddhist centers have been built throughout the States to accommodate Buddhist practices. Now, the new vision must focus on maintaining and developing that tradition.

To maintain Buddhism, the new vision must include using English to educate followers. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns have to move beyond *Quốc Ngữ*, a language which they had managed to adopt for monastic use within the last century. However, for the future of the young generations of Vietnamese Buddhists in America, at certain point in the future, they have to adopt English, another new language to the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. It is unfortunate. Yet, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns have to manage this language shift successfully. They can always learn from the Vietnamese Buddhist masters of the past who had unified together to revitalize the tradition during the colonial period and who had dedicated their lives to train them in *Quốc Ngữ*. When English is used as the language for transmitting Buddhism, the majority of lay people, especially the young generations of Vietnamese, will gain a better understanding of Buddhism. When the tradition is alive in English, the young Vietnamese Buddhists can always return to Buddhism when they need it. This means that training bilingual monks and nuns is the most pressing task for the Sangha. In order to further develop Buddhism, the new vision must encompass more extensive and substantial monastic training for members of the Sangha. Those virtuous and dedicated monks and nuns will be a decisive factor in promoting the growth of Buddhism.

In training bilingual monastics, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has the option of sending their members to learn English in public educational institutions. In the United States, English is taught at every level of public schools. Buddhist monks and nuns can attend English classes at the local college or university. It is not important that they pursue secular educational degrees for financial gain. Rather, they should focus on learning how to communicate effectively using the local language, so that they can convey Buddhism successfully to the



Figure 88. Heading toward the 21st century: Visual and digital storage of Buddhist information.



Figure 89. Buddhist visual technology in English for the generations of the electronic age.

generation of Vietnamese and other Americans who await them and who cannot approach Buddhism through the Vietnamese language. In other words, using English to bring Buddhist understanding to the laity for the purpose of preserving the tradition is the aim. This vision can be extended to include the point where the switch into English occurs.

At the present time, most established religious communities in America use English for all of their functions and services. None has lost their religious quality by the mere use of English as a language medium. Many of those religious communities did not use English before they came to America, but switched to English afterwards. The religious communities of German ancestry, including the Lutherans,⁵³⁸ switched to English during the First World War in order to dissociate themselves from the Germans who attacked the Allies. The majority of young Japanese switched into English to distance themselves from Japan during the Second World War, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.⁵³⁹ Vietnamese Buddhists have already distanced themselves from the Communists of Vietnam by escaping to America as refugees. The U.S. is their new homeland and new generations of Vietnamese speak only English, so at a certain point the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition will have to switch its language to English. Monks and nuns, as religious leaders, will share an important role in that language shift. Though teaching Vietnamese to preserve the Vietnamese culture must always be part of the tradition, it is practical to make the language switch sooner rather than later.

Since the Buddhist Sangha is essential to continuing the tradition, it is of crucial importance to strengthen the Sangha itself. This must be a major part of the new vision for developing Vietnamese Buddhism in America. Concerning the life of a religious movement,

⁵³⁸ When I was in Patchogue, Long Island, New York, I visited Fred Henson, my colleague from Cornell University. His family belonged to a Lutheran Church in Downtown Patchogue. He said that his great grand parents spoke German when they came to America. The older brother of his grand mother knew and could speak German. His Grand Mother, Johanna Henson née Koschara (born 1914), however, was not taught German since she was young. The Lutheran Community in Patchogue decided to stop using German at certain time after April 6, 1917 when America declared war on Germany, especially after the sinking of the Lusitania and the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram. The services of the Lutheran Church in Patchogue were switched into English since then.

⁵³⁹ According to Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, the author of *Farewell to Manzanara*, the young Japanese students in the school of the interment camp spoke English as a means to fit in or to be accepted into the American culture during WWII. Not only did they speak English, they also sang songs in English. The songs *Beautiful Dreamer*, *Down By the Old Mill Stream*, *Shine on Harvest Moon*, *Battle Hymn of the Republic* were among the musical tunes of her young days. (Houston 90) For the Japanese Buddhists in Hawaii, the use of English in Buddhist functions was promoted as early as 1918, when the Buddhist Bishop Imamura declared that “the creation of a local, English-speaking clergy had become an absolutely necessity” because “priests born and educated in Japan were not equipped to preach Buddhism to the second generation” of Japanese Americans. See Louise H. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii*, p. 163.

Anthony F. C. Wallace agrees with Max Weber that after revitalization the training of the charismatic leader is decisive.⁵⁴⁰ Without a stable framework for training the new generation of leaders any religious movement will die out. Likewise, without the leading role of the Buddhist Sangha, the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition will not last long. To find a training method that can preserve the life of the Sangha, it is appropriate to return to the traditional teaching of the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. The value of his instruction lies not in the authority of the Buddha. Rather it is timeless because it is practical and effective in preserving a religious community. It may also be well regarded because his tradition continues to function effectively after almost three thousand years. Buddhist monks and nuns can always go back to his instructions concerning the maintenance of a stable and harmonious Sangha. Even a country can be kept stable and unassailable by following his succinct instructions.

Initially, when the Buddha gave this particular teaching on maintaining a stable Sangha, he was dealing with the ambition of King Ajātasatru who wanted to attack the Vajjians, who were also Buddhists. In this situation, the Buddha was consulted on war matters. In present terms, King Ajātasatru actually wanted the Buddha to give him political advice on whether or not he should invade a powerful neighboring country. This presented the Buddha with a dilemma, because both sides were his supportive Buddhist followers. Moreover, as Buddha, he should not tell the king to wage war against and attack another country for no noble reason. Diplomatically and wisely, not only did he instantly get out of the dilemma, he also gave the most practical and perfect teaching against war which can still be applied to our own time.

Instead of answering the question directly, the Buddha turned and asked his attendant Ānanda, who was fanning him, the following question: “Ānanda, have you heard that the Vajjians hold regular and frequent assemblies?” Ānanda confirmed, saying: “I have heard, Lord, that they do.” While the messenger of King Ajātasatru was listening, the Buddha continued: “Ānanda, as long as the Vajjians hold regular and frequent assemblies, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.” Similarly, the Buddha went on asking Ānanda the following questions:

-Have you heard that the Vajjians meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony?

-Have you heard that the Vajjians do not authorize what had not been authorized already,

⁵⁴⁰ See Anthony F.C. Wallace, “Revitalization Moments,” in *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, William A Lessa and Evon Z. eds., p. 426.

and do not abolish what had been authorized, but proceed according to what had been authorized by their ancient tradition?

- Have you heard that they honor, respect, revere, and salute elders among them, and consider them worthy to listen to?
- Have you heard that they do not forcibly abduct others' wives and daughters and compel them to live with them?
- Have you heard that they honor, respect, revere, and salute the Vajjian shrines at home and abroad, not withdrawing the proper support made and given before?
- Have you heard that proper provision is made for the safety of the Arhats, so that such Arhats may come in future to live there, and those already there may dwell in comfort?⁵⁴¹

After Ānanda affirmed each question, the Buddha repeated that as long as the Vajjians do so, they may expect to prosper and not decline. Then the Buddha told the Brahmin Vassakāra that when he was at the Sāranada Shrine in Vaishali, he taught the Vajjians those seven principles. The Buddha continued that as long as those principles were kept, the Vajjians would be expected to prosper and not decline. As a result, Vassakāra told the Buddha that if the Vajjians were able to keep even one of those seven, they would be expected to prosper and not decline. As a wise minister, Vassakāra got the message and left to report to his king. On his own determination, without any feeling of being under pressure, King Ajātasatru abandoned his intent to attack the Vajjians.

After the Brahmin minister of King Ajātasatru had left, the Buddha gave to the monks the direct teachings on keeping the Sangha prosperous and not in decline. They are called the seven things that are conducive to welfare of the Sangha, and are in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* or *The Great Passing: The Buddha's Last Days*. The Buddha knew the day of his passing three months in advance. These instructions were among his special preparations for the Sangha for his departure. Similar to the instructions that kept the Vajjians unassailable, the seven principles taught by the Buddha aimed to foster virtuous and harmonious monastic conduct that would lead to the prosperous welfare of the Sangha. In the teaching, the Buddha instructed the members of the Buddhist Sangha to hold regular assemblies; to conduct monastic activities, including

⁵⁴¹ See Maurice Walshe, "Mahāparinibbāna Sutta or the Great Passing: The Buddha's Last Days." *The Long Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 233.

convening, breaking up, and facilitating meetings, in harmony; to adhere to the rules of monastic training; to reverently respect their senior monks; to distance themselves from sensual desires; to devote themselves to the simple ascetic life; and to practice mindfulness. In the words of the text, the seven principles for the prosperous welfare of the Sangha are as follows:

1. As long as the monks hold regular and frequent assemblies, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.
2. As long as they meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.
3. As long as they do not authorize what has not been authorized already, and do not abolish what has been authorized by the rules of training, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.
4. As long as they honor, respect, revere, and salute the elders of long standing who are long ordained fathers and leaders of the order, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.
5. As long as they do not fall prey to desires which arise in them and lead to rebirth, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.
6. As long as they are devoted to forest-lodgings, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.
7. As long as they preserve their personal mindfulness, so that in future the good among their companions will come to them, and those who have already come will feel at ease with them.

As long as the monks hold to these seven things and are seen to do so, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.⁵⁴²

When the members of the Sangha are able to conduct themselves according to these seven principles, peace and harmony are maintained. As a result, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. Thus, Buddhist followers have clear instructions for developing the Sangha, which they can still rely on in the twenty-first century. Indeed, peace and harmony are promoted by these special teachings. It is the task of the Buddhist Sangha to live up to those teachings. Perhaps, these Buddhist teachings can be a modest contribution to enrich future life in America.

⁵⁴² See Maurice Walshe, “Mahāparinibbāna Sutta or the Great Passing: The Buddha’s Last Days.” *The Long Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 233.

APPENDICES

The appendices consist of six parts. The first two are the requirements from the Graduate Office at Florida States University. The first Appendix contains the copies of letter of approval from the Human Subjects Committee at Florida State University. The second Appendix is the questionnaire used to collect data for this dissertation. This questionnaire has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee at Florida State University. In sequence, these appendices are as follows:

Appendix A: Letters of Approval from the Human Subject Committee at FSU.

Appendix B: Questionnaire.

The remaining four appendices are the English translations of the major Sanskrit mantras used in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition. They are literary translations for scholarly purposes. These mantras have been converted into the Romanized Sanskrit versions from the Siddham Sanskrit script by Chua Boon Tuan, a Chinese Buddhist in Malaysia, and are made available on the internet.⁵⁴³ Because of my limitation in Mandarin Chinese, I am unable to communicate with Chua Boon Tuan or use his Chinese translations. My translation of the mantras is directly from Sanskrit, which I have been learned from Dr. Kathleen M. Erndl, who is specialized in the Hindu-Shakti Goddess tradition and Dr. Jayaram Sethuraman, a Hindu Sanskrit pundit, who was also the former chair of the Statistic Department at Florida State University. In my translation, I also consult the Vietnamese version of the *Śūrangama Mantra* in Siddham Sanskrit owned by Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế, the International Buddhist Monastic Institute, in North Hills, California. For reference concerning the correlation between the Siddham and the Sanskrit scripts, I use the section “Siddham: Script of God and Buddha” in *Sacred Calligraphy of The East*, by John Stevens.⁵⁴⁴ In order, the translations of the popular Buddhist Mantras are as follow:

Appendix C: *The Śūrangama Mantra* with English translation.

Appendix D: *The Great Compassion Dhāraṇī* with English translation.

Appendix E: *The Ten Minor Mantras* with English translation.

Appendix F: *The Uṣṇsavijaya Dhāraṇī* with English translation

These mantras have never been completely translated from Sanskrit into Vietnamese. Rather the Sanskrit sounds of the mantras were transcribed into Vietnamese sounds because the mantras work by the primordial Sanskrit sounds rather than by the meanings of the Sanskrit words. Also, knowing meanings of the mantras does not enhance concentration. Thinking about the meanings and the efficacies of the mantras while reciting is a distraction. Doing so will defeat the purpose of generating a highly concentrated mind through the use of Sanskrit sounds. Furthermore, the Tantric meanings of each Sanskrit syllable in a mantra is expansive, as previously discussed in the *Prajñāparāmitā Sutra* where the Buddha teaches Ānanda the meanings of various Sanskrit letters, including letter “अ” (“A”). Likewise, the meanings for the popular mantras, including the “Om Mani Padme Hum” or the “Om Cale Cule Cundi Svāhā” are numerous. In order to cover the basic meanings and practices of these short mantras, it takes a long text of more than a hundred pages, like *The Sutra on The Buddha’s Teaching of the Jewel*

⁵⁴³ See Chua Bon Tuan and the Sanskrit mantras accompanied by his Chinese translations at his website, <<http://www.siddham-sanskrit.com>>.

⁵⁴⁴ See John Stevens, *Sacred Calligraphy of The East*, pp.1-69.

King of Mahayana Adornment or *The Sutra on Cundi Dhāraṇī*, respectively.⁵⁴⁵ Thus, translating the numerous meanings of those mantras is not practical for usual recitation. Reciting esoteric mantra is analogous to taking medicine in that one only needs to know the reliable name of the medication or getting it from a reliable physician and its cure. Then one takes it according to the proper instructions without the need to know the chemical formulas and constituents of the medicine. Of course, one can devote time and effort to learn all about the chemical components of the medicine. However, as one becomes an expert on it, that one will be like other ordinary pharmacists and will tell the patients to just take the medicine without rationalizing much about the chemical components of the medication. As always, one can look for other cures if one does not feel comfortable with the medication. Likewise, one can embark on other Buddhist practices, if one does not feel comfortable about the practice of mantras.

As a result, the translations of these mantras, especially the long *Śūraṅgama Mantra*, are for scholarly purposes. They are intended to be a resource for further studies in esoteric Buddhism. The Indian origin of these mantras can be traced from the translations. Several of the indigenous Indian spirits, deities, Jain figures, and other opponents of Buddhism, which did not exist outside of the Indian culture, were enumerated in those mantras. In several instances, certain verses of the mantras were recited to protect the Buddhist followers from their inauspicious incantations. Also, the Indian origin of the Pure Land practice is further confirmed when Amitābha Buddha of the Pure Land tradition is mentioned in the *Śūraṅgama Mantra*, which had been popular at Nalanda Monastery in ancient India.

⁵⁴⁵ See Triệu Phước, *Mật Tông Phật Giáo Tinh Hoa* (The essentials of Mantrayana), the upper fascicle; and Thích Viên Đức, *Kinh Chuẩn Đề Đá-La-Ni* (The Sutra on Cundi Darahni).

APPENDIX A



Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8633 FAX (850) 644-4392

REAPPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 6/29/2006

To:

Quang Minh Thich
150 Bliss Dr. Apt. 12
Tallahassee, FL 32310

Dept.: **RELIGION**

From: **Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas L. Jacobson".

Re: **Reapproval of Use of Human subjects in Research:**
Vietnamese Buddhism in America

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by 6/28/2007 please request renewed approval.

You are reminded that a change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must report to the Chair promptly, and in writing, any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chairman of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols of such investigations as often as necessary to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

Cc: Dr. Kathleen M. Erndl
HSC No. 2006.0558-R



Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 7/27/2005

To:

Quang Minh Thich
150 Bliss Dr. Apt. 12
Tallahassee, FL 32310

Dept.: RELIGION

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: **Use of Human Subjects in Research**
Vietnamese Buddhism in America

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110(b) 9 and has been approved by an accelerated review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by **7/26/2006** you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Dr. Kathleen M. Erndl
HSC No. 2005.487

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

This project, intended to obtain public information about Vietnamese Buddhist Centers in America, has been official approved by the Human Subjects Committee at FSU. Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. No harm or benefit is anticipated. The participants can withdraw at anytime without harm. (Đề án này, chủ ý thu thập chi tiết công cộng về các Trung-tâm Phật-Giáo Việt-Nam tại Hoa-Kỳ, đã được Hội Đồng về Đề-án Nhân Chứng Học tại Đại Học Đường Bang Florida chánh thức chấp thuận. Tham dự phỏng vấn này hoàn toàn do tự nguyện. Không có lợi nhuận hoặc tai hại chi dính kèm. Quý vị tham dự có thể rút lời lại bất cứ lúc nào và sẽ chẳng có chi phiền hại.)

I. In order to establish the history of the temple, the following questions concerning the public information of the center will be asked. (Những câu hỏi sau đây được dùng đáp ứng chi tiết công cộng thông thường về quá trình xây dựng của Chùa quý vị):

Name of the Temple (Chùa tên là): -----Phone: -----

Address (Địa chỉ):-----

1. When was the temple completed and opened to the public (Chùa hoàn tất và khánh thành vào khi nào)? 19 __ ; 19 __ .

2. When did you begin to establish the temple (Quý vị bắt đầu lập Chùa vào năm nào)? 19 __ .

3. Where did your members practice before having this temple? Home/Temporary site/rent site. (Trước khi có ngôi chùa này, bà con hội viên tu tập tại nơi đâu ? Nhà/ Nơi tạm/ Nơi mượn).

4. In what year did you arrive in the United States (Quý vị đã đến Hoa-Kỳ vào năm nào)? 19 __ , and in this location (và tại địa phương này vào) ? 19 __ .

5. Is it the first temple in the local? Yes/ No. (Có phải đây là ngôi Chùa đầu tiên tại địa phương chẳng?) Phải/ Không.

6. When was it built or acquired (Chùa được xây hay trực thuộc quý vị khi nào)? 19 __

7. What sort of building or land was it (Xưa nơi đây là khu phố xá gì hay vùng đất chưa xây)?

8. Who was originally involved in establishing of the center (Những ai từng chung sức xây Chùa này ngay từ khi khởi đầu) ? -----

9. Do you still have a photo of the old building and also the present one?
(Quý vị còn hình ảnh nào của nơi đây lúc xưa không ? Ảnh Chùa hiện nay ?)

II. The following questions are intended to obtain the general information concerning the effort and goals envisioned by the Buddhist center (Những câu hỏi sau đây được dùng để đáp ứng chi tiết thông thường về quá trình cố gắng và dự tính cho tương lai của Chùa quý vị).

1. Did the community encounter any difficulties in acquiring or building this place for use as a religious center (Chùa Quý vị có gặp khó khăn gì khi thành lập hay xây cất chăng) ?

2. What were the considerations in choosing this building or property (Có lý do gì đặc biệt trong việc chọn khu đất này để xây Chùa không) ?

3. Why is the temple constructed in this style (Chùa kiến trúc theo kiểu này, có lý do gì đặc biệt chăng) ?

4. What will be its Buddhist significance and its cultural significance (Có ý nghĩa Phật giáo hoặc văn hóa dân tộc gì trong những kiểu kiến trúc Chùa này) ?

5. How about the statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva outside (Tôn tượng Quán Âm Bồ-Tát lộ thiên)? -----

6. How did you get those statues of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas in the main hall (Quý vị làm sao tìm được tượng Phật và chư Bồ tát trong Chánh điện như vậy)?

7. Why are those statues set up in that particular manner (Tại sao các tôn tượng được sắp xếp theo thứ tự này)?

II. The following questions are intended to provide information about the situation of the Buddhist center at present (Các câu hỏi sau đây được dùng đáp ứng tin tức về hiện tình tổ chức của ngôi chùa).

1. Who participates here now (Những ai thường tới đây tu hành)? -----

2. Is it a particular ethnic group, or it is ecumenical (Một cộng đồng dân tộc hay mọi người)?

3. Does your center have American visitors and how frequent (Chùa quý vị có người Mỹ viếng thăm chẳng, có thường xuyên không)? -----

4. Do you have many American Buddhist members joining your activities and practices (Chùa quý vị có nhiều Phật tử Mỹ đến dự và tu tập không)?-----

5. What is the size of the community that gathers here (Cộng đồng tới đây đông cỡ nào)? -----

6. Has it changed in recent years (Số lượng có tăng giảm gì trong những năm gần đây chẳng)?

7. How many resident monastic members live here (Ở đây có được bao nhiêu chư Tăng Ni)? ----

8. Do you have monastic training for new generations of monks and nuns here (Quý vị có chương trình đào tạo Tăng Ni không)? -----

9. Who is in charge of the center (Ai lãnh đạo chùa viện này)? -----

10. What kind of leadership? Monastic leaders? Lay Leaders? Teachers? Is there a governing board? (Hệ thống lãnh đạo: Xuất gia lãnh đạo? Cư sĩ lãnh đạo? Ban giảng sư? Hội lãnh đạo?)

III. The following questions are intended to obtain information about the practices and activities of the Buddhist center (Các câu hỏi sau đây được dùng để đáp ứng tin tức về hoạt động của ngôi Chùa).

1. What are the major festivals and events celebrated or observed (Những ngày lễ lớn nào được cử hành ở chùa) ? -----
2. What family rites and rituals take place here and when (Các ngày lễ gia đình nào được cử hành ở đây và vào lúc nào)?-----
3. In general, how many people will attend those major events (Thông thường có bao nhiêu người tham dự những buổi lễ quan trọng đó)?-----
4. What language is used most commonly here in recitation, worship, and conversation (Trong khi tu tập, đọc tụng, lễ lạc, và chuyện trò, ngôn ngữ gì được sử dụng)? -----
5. What will be the main texts for daily chanting (Quyển Kinh nào được đọc tụng hàng ngày)?

6. What will be the texts for traditional Buddhist practices (Quyển Kinh nào được áp dụng trong tu tập)? -----
7. Do you have traditional practice sections of Zen, Pure Land, Mantra, Uposatha, or others? (Quý vị có các khóa tu Thiền, Tịnh-Độ, Mật-Chú, Bát Quan Trai Giới, hay các khóa tu khác không?)-----
8. Do you have occasional visits from monks belonged other Buddhist traditions (Thỉnh thoảng quý vị có chư Tăng thuộc các phái tu tập khác đến viếng không)?-----

9. Are there newsletters, chronicles, or other publications (Chùa có Bản-tin, Đặc-san, hay sách báo khác không)? -----

IV. The following question are intended to provide information concerning the use of modern technologies and Western style of conducting activities in the center (Các câu hỏi sau đây được dùng đáp ứng tin tức về việc xữ dụng kỹ thuật mới và Tây Âu hóa hoạt động của ngôi chùa).

1. Does your Center have a library (Quý vị có lập Thư-viên không)? -----

2. Does the temple have a website or email address (Chùa quý vị có website và email không)?

Website: -----

Email:-----

3. Does the temple have affiliation with other Buddhist organizations? What are they? (Chùa có chi nhánh hoặc trong liên hội nào không? Xin kể ra nếu có)

4. Are there any particular programs for young people? Educational programs? Summer camps? Language programs? Community services? Pilgrimages? (Quý vị có chương trình cho các em nhỏ không ? Chương trình giáo dục? Trại Hè ? Dạy ngôn ngữ ? Hành hương?)

5. How effective are they (Kết quả đạt được như thế nào)?

6. What will be your concerns for the younger generations of your members (Quý vị có những ưu tư, lo lắng gì về thế hệ Phật tử trẻ ở đây) ? -----

7. What can and should be done to improve these programs (Cần nên làm gì để cải thiện các chương trình ấy)? -----

APPENDIX C

ŚŪRANGAMA MANTRA

1. ⁵⁴⁶ Namaḥ sarvatathāgatāya sugatāyaārḥate samyaksambuddhāya.
(Salutation to all the Thus Come One, the Well Bestowed One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)
2. Namaḥ sarva-tathāgatakoṭyuṣṇisāya.
(Salutation to the uṣṇiṣa on top of all the Thus Come Ones!)
3. Namaḥ sarva-buddhabodhisattvebhyaḥ.
(Salutation to all the enlightened Bodhisattvas.)
4. Namaḥ saptānām samyak-sambuddha-koṭinām sa-śrāvaka-saṃghānām.
(Salutation of the innumerable multitudes of the Sangha of the unsurpassed perfect knowledge Voice-Hearers!)
5. Namo loke Arhatānām.
(Salutation (to) the Arhats of the world!)
6. Namaḥ srota-āpannānām.
(Salutation to those who have entered the Holy Stream!)
7. Namaḥ sakṛdāgāmīnām.
(Salutation to those who have but once more to be born!)
8. Namo angāmīnām.
(Salutation to those Non-Return Ones!)
9. Namo loke samyag-gatānām samyak-pratipannānām.
(Salutation to those of holy conducts and worthy of admiration in the world!)
10. Namo Ratna-trayāya.
(Salutation to the Triple Jewel!)
11. Namo bhagavate, dṛḍḍha-sūra-senā-praharaṇa-rājāya, tathāgatāya, arḥate, samyak-sambuddhāya.

⁵⁴⁶ The number is added to the original text for the convenience of the reader and to mark the individual verse or group of verses. The English translation is placed in the brackets.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, the Mighty Heroic Army Subdued King, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

12. Namō bhagavate, Amitābhāya, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to The World Honored One, to Amitābha, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

-Namō bhagavate, Akṣobhāya, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, Akṣobha, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

-Namō bhagavate, Bhaiṣajya-guru-vaīḍūrya-prbha-rājāya, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, to Radiant Beryl Medicine Teacher King, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

-Namō bhagavate, saṃpuṣṭita-sāleṇdra-rājāya, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, The Supreme Blooming Sala Flower King, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

-Namō bhagavate, Śākyamunaye, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to The World Honored One, to Śākyamuni, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

-Namō bhagavate, Ratna-kusuma-ketu-rajaya, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, to Radiant Jewel King, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

-Namō bhagavate, Samanta-bhadra-rājāya, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, to Universal Worthy King, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

-Namō bhagavate, Vairocanāya, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, to Vairocana, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

-Namō bhagavate, vipulya-netra-utpala-gandha-ketu-rājāya, tathāgatāya, arahate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, to the Permeating Radiant King, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha!)

13. Namō bhagavate tathāgata-kulāya.

(Salutation the Tathāgata Family World Honored Ones.)

-Namō bhagavate padma-kulāya.

(Salutation the Lotus Family of the World Honored Ones.)

-Namō bhagavate vajra-kulāya.

(Salutation the Vajra Family of the World Honored Ones.)

-Namō bhagavate maṇi-kulāya.

(Salutation the Maṇi Family of the World Honored Ones.)

-Namō bhagavate gaja-kulāya.

(Salutation the Elephant Family of the World Honored Ones.)

-Namō bhagavate kumāra-kulāya.

(Salutation the Prince Family of the World Honored Ones..)

-Namō bhagavate nāga-kulāya.

(Salutation the Nāga Family of the World Honored Ones.)

14. Namō deva-ṛṣīnām.

(Salutation (to) the Sages among the Devas [Gods]).

15. Namaḥ siddha-vidyādharāṇām.

(Salutation (to) the Accomplished Preservers of the Mystic Formulas).

16 & 17. Namaḥ siddha-vidyādhara- ṛṣīnām sāpānuḡraha samarthānām.

(Salutation (to) the Accomplished Sages among the Preservers of the Mystic Formulas whose profound concentration overpowers the evil spells!)

18. Namō brahmane.

(Salutation to Brahman!)

19. Nama indrāya.

(Salutation to Indra!)

20. Namō bhagavate rudrāya umā-pati-sahīyāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored One, Rudra, the ally of the Husband of the Goddess Umā!)

21. Namō nārāyaṇāya, lakṣmī-sahīyāya, pañca-mahā-mudrā-namas-kṛtāya.

- (Salutation to Nārāyaṇa, the Ally of the Goddess Lakṣmī, the One whose the Great Five Mudrās of salutation is dedicated!)
22. Namō mahā-kālāya tripura-nagara-vidrāpaṇa (vidrāvaṇa)-kārāya, adhi-muktika-śmaśāna-vāsini mātrgaṇa namas-kṛtāya.
(Salutation to the Great Black One who penetrates the City Tripura, the Town Nagara, and the market and to who the salutation is dedicated by the Assembly of the Divine Mothers dressed in charnel-ground clothes!)
23. Ebhyaḥ namas-kṛtvā, imaṃ bhagavatas tathāgaroṣṇīṣaṃ sitātapatram.
(Having done salutations to those, from the World Honored Ones [has, manifests] this White Canopy on the uṣṇīṣa of the Thus Come One.)
24. Namō aparājitaṃ praty-aṅgiraṃ.
(Salutation to the Unconquered Vanquisher of Aṅgira, [the name of the Surangama mantra])
25. Sarva deva-namas-kṛtām.
(The one whose salutation dedicated by all the Gods)
26. Sarva devebhyaḥ pūjitaṃ.
(The one who is honored by all the Gods)
27. Sarva deveśa ca pari-pālitaṃ.
(And the one who is protected by all the Gods)
28. Sarva bhūta-grahani graha-karyām.
(The one who made pestilence in the seizing all beings)
29. Paravidyā chedana-karyām.
(The one whose the destruction of the exceedingly mystic spell is made)
30. Dur-dāntānām, sattvānām, damakaṃ duṣṭānām nivāraṇyām.
(The conqueror of those beings who are difficult to subdue, the extinction of the wicked ones)
31. Akāla-mṛtyu-praśamana-karyām.
(The one who made the removal of sudden death)
32. Sarva bandhana-mokṣaṇa-karyām.
(The one who made the liberation from all bondages)
33. Sarva duṣṭa-duḥ-svapna-nivāraṇyām.

- (The extinction of all wicked nightmares)
34. Catur-aṣītīnām-graha-sahasrānām vidhvamsana-karyām.
(The one who made the destruction of the 84,000 pestilences)
35. Aṣṭa-viṃśatīnām nakṣatrānām prasādana-karyām.
(The one who made the subduing of the twenty-eight stars)
36. Aṣṭānām mahā-grahānām, vidhvamsana-karyām.
(The one who made the destruction of the eight grave pestilences)
37. Sarva śatru-nivāraṇyām.
(The extinction of all foes)
38. Ghorām duḥ-svapnānām ca nāśanyām.
(The frightful annihilation of the nightmares)
39. Viṣa śastra agni udaka ut-tāraṇyām.
(The rescuing from poison, weapon, fire, water)
40. Aparājitā-ghorā mahā-balācaṇḍām, mahā-dīptām, mahā-tejām, mahā-śvetām.
(The great terrifying unconquered, powerful, radiant with luster in magnificently white dress Caṇḍā)
41. jvālā, mahābalā śrīya, paṇḍara vāsinyām ārya-tārā bhkutyām
(The exceedingly powerful and blazing the Noble Tārā (is) splendidly dressed in white)
42. Bhkutyām ced vājām vajra-māleṭiḥ.
(as if holding the vajra garland (as being) the weaving)
43. Padmākaṃ vajra-jihvaḥ ca mālā ceva aparājitā-vajra-daṇḍī,
(The vajra flame and the lotus garland just like the mighty one with unconquered vajra staff)
44. Viśālā ca śānta-vaideha-pūjitā, saumī-rūpā-mahā-śvetā-ārya-tārā.
(The mighty one, the revered one with calm and beautiful body, the moon form, the great Noble White Tara)
45. Mahābalā-aparājitā-vajra-saṃkalā ceva vajra-kaumārī kulaṃ-dharī.
(The great strength, the unsurpassed vajra accumulation, just like the one who endowed with a family of vajra maidens)
46. Vajra-hastā ca mahā-vidyā.
(The vaira hand and the great mystic formula)

47. Tathā-kāñcana-mallikāḥ kusumbha-ratnaḥ.
(Just as the golden geese (and) the golden safflowers)
48. Ceva vairocana-kūṭārthoṣṇīṣā
(just like the uṣṇīṣā for the shake of the eminent Vairocana)
49. Vi-jṛmbha mānā ca-vajra-kanaka-prabha-locanā
(The permeating honors (and as if) the illuminating golden Locanā)
50. Vajra-tuṇḍī ca śvetā ca kamalāksaḥ śaśi-prabhā
(The one (with) vajra face, lotus-eye and shinning as the moon)
51. Ity-ādi-mudra-gaṇaḥ sarve rakṣāṃ kurvantu mamāsyā
(Thus, Primordial Mudra! The assembly (has) the protection, let them perform this here in all)
52. Oṃ! Rṣi-gaṇa pra-śasta-tathāgatoṣṇīṣam sitātapatram
(Oṃ! The Sagely Assembly! [It is] proclaimed the White Canopy on the Tathāgata Uṣṇīṣam.)
53. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Jambhanaḥ. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Stambhanaḥ. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Mohanaḥ! Hūṃ bhrūṃ!
Mathanaḥ.
54. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Para-vidyā-saṃ-bhakṣaṇa-kara!
(The one who devoured the exceedingly mystic spell together!)
55. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Sarva duṣṭānām stambhana-kara.
(Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Oh! The one who paralyzed all of the destructions!)
56. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Sarva yakṣa-rākṣasa-grahāṇām vidhvamsana-kara.
(Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Oh! The one who caused to destroy all of the pestilences of the yakṣas and rākṣasas!)
57. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Catur-aśītīnām graha-sahasrāṇām vināśana-kara.
(Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Oh! The one who made the annihilations of the 84,000 pestilences!)
58. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Aṣṭā-viṃśatīnām nakṣatrāṇām prasādana-kara!
(Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Oh! The one who subdued the twenty-eight constellations)
59. Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Aṣṭānām mahā-grahāṇām vidhvamsana-kara.
(Hūṃ bhrūṃ! Oh! The one who caused to destroy the eight grave pestilences!)

60. Rakṣa rakṣa mām! imān mama asya!⁵⁴⁷

(Protect! Do Protect me! My name(s) are these....)

61. Bhagavān tathāgatoṣṇīṣaṃ sitātapatram mahā-vajroṣṇīṣa,

(The World Honored One [has] the White Canopy of the hair knot of the Thus Come One. Oh! The great Vajra Uṣṇīṣa!)

62. Mahā-praty-aṅgīre mahā-sahasra-bhuje sahasra-śīrṣe koṭī-śata-sahasra-netre abhede,

(when the great one against Aṅgīra who has massive thousand arms, thousand heads, and numerous identical eyes)

63. Jvālita-naṭanaka mahā-vajrodāra-tribhuvana-maṇḍala.

(Oh! The blazing performer! Oh! The great Sublime Vajra triple world Maṇḍala!)

64. Om! Svastī bhavatu nama rāja-bhaya cora-bhaya, agni-bhaya, udaka-bhaya, viṣa-bhaya,

śāstra-bhaya, paracakra-bhaya, dur-bhikṣa-bhaya, aśani-bhaya, akāla-mṛtyu-bhaya, dharaṇi-bhūmi-kampa-bhaya, ulkā-pāta-bhaya, rāja-daṇḍa-bhaya, nāga-bhaya, vidyud-bhaya, suparṇi-bhaya.

(Om! Let it be my fortune here. The fear of kings, the terror of thieves, the terror of fire, the terror of water, the terror of poison, the terror of weapons, the terror of the army of the enemies, the terror of famine, the terror of lightning thunder, the terror of sudden death, the terror of earthquakes, the terror of falling meteors, the terror of stick, the terror of dragons, the terror of flashing, the terror of Suparṇi eagles)

65. Devagrahā (the pestilence of Deva), nāga-grahā (the pestilence of nāga), yakṣa-grahā (the pestilence of Yakṣa), gandharva-grahā (the pestilence of Gandharva), asura-grahā (the pestilence of Asura), garuḍa-grahā (the pestilence of Garuḍa), kiṃnara-grahā (the pestilence of Kiṃnara) , mahoraga-grahā (the pestilence of Mahoraga), rākṣasa-grahā (the pestilence of Rākṣasa), preta-grahā (the pestilence of Preta), piśāca-grahā (the pestilence of Piśāca), bhūta-grahā (the pestilence of the Bhūta), pūtana-grahā (the pestilence of Pūtana), kaṭapūtana-grahā (the pestilence of Kaṭapūtana), kumbhāṇḍa-grahā (the pestilence of Kumbhāṇḍa), skanda-grahā (the pestilence of Skanda), unmāda-grahā (the pestilence of Unmāda), chāyā-grahā (the pestilence of Chāyā), apa-smāra-grahā (the

⁵⁴⁷ In the version of the mantra for actual recitation, the names that the reciter wishes to receive the result of the recitation are added in at this point.

pestilence of Epilepsy), ḍāka-dākinī-grahā (the pestilence of Ḍāka-Dākinī), revatī-grahā (the pestilence of Revatī).

66. Ojāhāriṇyā (by feeding on vitality), garbhāhāriṇyā (by feeding on womb), jātāharinyā (by feeding on birth), jīvitāhāriṇyā (by feeding on death), rudhirāhāriṇyā (by feeding on blood), vasāhāriṇyā (by feeding on marrow), māṃsāhāriṇyā (by feeding on flesh), medhāhāriṇyā (by feeding on oblation), majjāhāriṇyā (by feeding on bone), vāntāhāriṇyā (by feeding on vomit), aśucyāhāriṇyā (by feeding on impurity), cittāhāriṇyā (by feeding on the mind).

67. Teṣāṃ sarveṣāṃ, sarva-grahāṇāṃ vidyāṃ chedayāmi, kīlayāmi

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell under all pestilences of all of those.)

68. Pari-vrājaka-kṛtāṃ vidyāṃ chidayāmi kīlayāmi

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by the wandering mendicants)

- ḍāka-ḍākinī-kṛtāṃ idyāṃ chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by Ḍāka-Dākinī)

-mahā-paśupati-rudra-kṛtāṃ vidyāṃ chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by Rudra, the great Lord of Animals)

-tattva-garuḍa-sahīya-kṛtāṃ vidyāṃ chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by the most powerful Garuḍa beings)

-mahā-kāla-māṭṛ-gaṇa-kṛtāṃ vidyāṃ chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by Mahākāla and the assembly of Divine Mothers)

-kāpālika-kṛtāṃ, vidyāṃ chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by the Kāpālika, the Śaivai-skull mendicants)

-jayakara-madhukara-sarvārtha-sādhana-kṛtāṃ vidyāṃ chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by those who propitiated for all purposes concerning gaining pleasure and victory)

-catur-bhaginī-kṛtām vidyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by the Four Bhaginīs)

-bhṛgiriṭi-nandikeśvara-gaṇapati-sahīya-kṛtām idyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by the ally led by Śiva, the Lord of Bhṛgiriṭi and Nandika)

-nagna-śramana-kṛtām vidyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by the naked Mendicants)

-arhanta-kṛtām, vidyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by the Superior Jaina divinities)

-vīta-rāga-kṛtām vidyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by the deified Jaina Saints)

-brahma-kṛtām vidyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by Brahman)

-rudra-kṛtām vidyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by Rudra)

-nārāyaṇa-kṛtām vidyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by Nārāyaṇa)

-vajrapāṇi-guhyakādhipati-kṛtām, vidyām chidayāmi kīlayāmi,

(I am caused to eliminate and subdue the mystic spell performed by Vajrapāṇi-guhyakādhipati)

69. rakṣa rakṣa mām, imān mama asya.

(Protect! Do Protect me! My name(s) are these....)

70. Bhagavan, sitātapatra namo 'stute.

(The World Honored One! The White Canopy! Let the salutation be done to you.)

71. Asita-nalārka-prabha-sphuṭa-vikas-sitātapatre,

(At the White Canopy permeating [with] illuminating radiant over the rays from inauspicious stars)

72. Jvala jvala (Oh! Blazing! Blazing!) dhakka dhakka (Oh! Destroying, destroying!) vidhakka vidhakka (Oh! Annihilating, annihilating!) dara dara (Oh! Shattering, Shattering!) vidara vidara (Oh! Bursting, bursting!) chida chida (Oh! Cutting off, cutting off), bhida bhida (Oh! Shattering, Shattering!)
73. Hūṃ Hūṃ Phaṭ Phaṭ svāhā
(Hūṃ Hūṃ! Phaṭ Phaṭ! Hail!).
74. Hehe Phaṭ Amogāya Phaṭ. Apratihātāya Phaṭ!
(He he! Phaṭ! Unfailing! Phaṭ.! Unobstructible! Phaṭ!)
75. Vara-pradāya Phaṭ! Asura-vidārakāya Phaṭ!
(To the excellent bestower of wishes. Phaṭ! To the splitter of the Asuras. Phaṭ!)
76. Sarva devebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Devas. Phaṭ !) Sarva nāgebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Nagas. Phaṭ!) Sarva yakṣebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Yakṣas. Phaṭ!) Sarva gandhavebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Gandhavas. Phaṭ !) Sarva asurebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Asuras, Phaṭ!) Sarva garuḍebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Garuḍa Birds. Phaṭ!) Sarva kiṃnarebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Kiṃnaras. Phaṭ!) Sarva mahoragebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Mahoragas. Phaṭ!)
77. Sarva rakṣasebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Rakṣasas. Phaṭ!)! Sarva bhūtebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Bhūtas Phaṭ!)! Sarva piśācebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the piśācas. Phaṭ!) Sarva kumbhāṇḍebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Kumbhāṇḍas. Phaṭ!) Sarva pūtanebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Pūtanas. Phaṭ!) Sarva-kaṭapūtanebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Kaṭapūtanes. Phaṭ!) Sarva uṣṭāakebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Uṣṭāakas. Phaṭ!) Sarva-dur-laṅghitebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all those who are difficult to attack. Phaṭ!) Sarva-duṣ-prekṣitebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all those who are difficult to look at. Phaṭ!)
78. Sarva jvarebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the fevers. Phaṭ!) Sarva-kṛtyakārmaṇi-kākhoredebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the destroying sorceries and charms of death [devil-lores]. Phaṭ!) Sarva-apasmārebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Epilepsies. Phaṭ!) Sarva-śramaṇebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Ascetics. Phaṭ!) Sarva-tīrthikebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the heretics. Phaṭ!) Sarva-unmādebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the madnesses. Phaṭ!) Sarva-vidyā-ācāryebhyaḥ Phaṭ (To all the Masters of mystical spells. Phaṭ!)
79. Jayakara-madhukara Sarvārtha-sādhakebhyo vidyā-ācāyebhaḥ Phaṭ (To the masters of magical charms for all purposes of accomplishing victory and pleasures. Phaṭ !) caturbhaginībhyaḥ phaṭ (To the Four Kumārīs. Phaṭ !)

80. Vajra-kaumārī-kulaṃ-dharī-vidyārājebhyaḥ phaṭ (To the kings of charms who hold the family of vaira maidens. Phaṭ!) Mahā-prati-aṅgirebhyaḥ phaṭ (To the Great vanquishers of the Aṅgiras Phaṭ!)
81. Vajra-saṃklāya prati-aṅgira-rājāya phaṭ (To the royal vajra accumulation vanquisher of the Aṅgiras. Phaṭ!) Mahākālāya, mātr-gaṇa-namas-kṛtāya phaṭ (To Mahākālā whose dedications are made by the assembly of the Divine Mothers. Phaṭ!)
82. Indrāya phaṭ (To Indra. Phaṭ!) brāmaṇiye phaṭ (To Brāmaṇi. Phaṭ!) rudrāya phaṭ (To Rudra. Phaṭ!) viṣṇave phaṭ (To Viṣṇu. Phaṭ!)
83. Viṣṇaviye phaṭ (To Viṣṇavī. Phaṭ!) brāmiye phaṭ (To Brāmi. Phaṭ!) varāhiye phaṭ (To Varāhī. Phaṭ!) agniye phaṭ (To Agnī Phaṭ!) mahākāliye phaṭ (To Mahākālī. Phaṭ!) raudriye phaṭ (To Raudrī. Phaṭ!) kāladaṇḍiye phaṭ (Kāladaṇḍī. Phaṭ!) aindriye phaṭ (To Aindrī. Phaṭ!) mātṛe phaṭ (To Lakṣmī. Phaṭ!) cāmuṇḍiye phaṭ (Cāmuṇḍī. Phaṭ!) kālārātriye phaṭ (To Kālārātrī. Phaṭ!) kāpāliye Phaṭ (To Kāpālī. Phaṭ!)
84. Adhi-muktaka-śmaśna-vāsinīye phaṭ
(To the zealous inhabitator of the charnel ground. Phaṭ!)
85. Ye ced cittāḥ sattva mama, duṣṭa-cittā, pāpa-cittā, raudra-cittā, vi-dveṣa-cittā, amitra-cittā.
(Although, those minds of my being, [namely] the wicked minds, the destructive minds, the violent minds, the contempt minds, the rival minds)
86. Ut-pādayanti (they are caused to arise), kīlayanti (they are cause to be restrained, regulated), mantrayanti (They are caused to be enchanted with spells), jāpanti (they invoke), juhanti (they offer).
87. Ojāhārāḥ (Those feeding on vitality (ojas), garbhāhārāḥ (those feeding from the womb), rudhirāhārāḥ (those feeding from blood), māṃsāhārāḥ (those feeding from the flesh), medhāhārāḥ (those feeding on the sacrifices), majjāhārāḥ (those feeding from bones), vasāhārāḥ (those feeding from the marrows), jataāhārāḥ (those feeding on birth), jīvitāhārāḥ (those feeding on death), balyāhārāḥ (those feeding on semen virile), mālyāhārāḥ (those feeding from garlands), gandhāhārāḥ (those feeding on fragrances, odors), puṣpāhārāḥ (those feeding on flowers), phalāhārāḥ (those feeding on fruits, sasyāhārāḥ (those feeding on grains).
88. Pāpa-cittāḥ (The destructive minds), duṣṭa-cittāḥ (the wicked minds), raudra-cittāḥ (the violent minds)

89. Deva-grahāḥ (The deva pestilences), nāga-grahāḥ (the Naga Pestilence, yakṣa-grahāḥ (the Yakṣa demon pestilences), gandharva-grahāḥ (the gandharva nymph pestilences), asura-grahāḥ (the Asura pestilences), garuḍa-grahāḥ (the Garuḍa Bird pestilences), kimnara-grahāḥ (the Kimnara pestilences), mahoraga-grahāḥ (the Mahoraga pestilences), rākṣasa-grahāḥ (the Rākṣasa demon pestilences), preta-grahāḥ (the Hungry Ghost pestilences), piśāca-grahāḥ (the Piśāca pestilences), bhūta-grahāḥ (the Bhūta pestilences), pūtana-grahāḥ (the Pūtana pestilences), kaṭapūtana-grahāḥ (the Kaṭapūtana pestilences), kumbhāṇḍa-grahāḥ (the Kumbhāṇḍa demon pestilences), skanda-grahāḥ (the Skanda pestilences), unmāda-grahāḥ (the Madness pestilences), chāya-grahāḥ (the Nightmare pestilences), apasmāra-grahāḥ (the Epilepsy pestilences), ḍāka-ḍākinī-grahāḥ (the Ḍāka-ḍākinī flesh eating goblin pestilences), revatī-grahāḥ (the Revatī pestilences), jamika-grahāḥ (the Jamika pestilences), śakuni-grahāḥ (the causing children sickness Śakuni demon pestilences), mātṛnāndi-grahāḥ (the Mātṛnāndi pestilences), muṣṭikā-grahāḥ (the Muṣṭikā pestilences), kaṇṭhapāṇinī-grahāḥ (the Kaṇṭhapāṇinī pestilences), miṣika-mahiṣaka-grahāḥ (the Miṣika-Buffero pestilences), mṛgarāja-grahāḥ (the Lion pestilences), mātṛkā-grahāḥ (the Mātṛkā pestilences), kāmīnī-grahāḥ (the Goddess Kāmīnī pestilences), mukha-maṇḍikā-grahāḥ (the Maṇḍikā Face pestilences), ālambā-grahāḥ (the Ālambā pestilences)
90. Jvarāḥ (The fevers), ekāhikāḥ (those lasting for a day), dvaitīyakāḥ (Those lasting every second day), traitīyakāḥ (Those lasting every third day), cāturthakāḥ (those lasting every fourth day), nitya-jvarāḥ (those frequent fevers), viṣama-jvarāḥ (those intermittent fevers), vātikāḥ (the rheumatic diseases), paittikāḥ (the bilious diseases), ślaiṣmikāḥ (the phlegmatic diseases), sām-nipātikāḥ (the combining diseases), sarva-jvarāḥ (all fevers), śiroṛtiḥ (the headaches), ardhāvabhedakāḥ (the headaches in half of the head), arokaḥ (the un-appetite stomachic diseases)
91. Akṣi-rogaṃ [(A/s/m) the eye disease], mukka-rogaṃ (the mouth disease), hārda-rogaṃ (the heart disease), ghrāṇa-sūlaṃ (the disorder of the noses), karṇa-sūlaṃ (the disorder of the ears), danta-sūlaṃ (the toothache), hṛdaya-sūlaṃ (the chest pain), marman-sūlaṃ (the pain of the joints), pārśva-sūlaṃ (the rib pain), pṛṣṭha-sūlaṃ (the back pain), udara-sūlaṃ (the stomachache), kaṭi-sūlaṃ (the hip pain), vasti-sūlaṃ (abdominal pain), ūru-sūlaṃ

- (the pain in the thighs), nakha-śūlaṃ (the pain in the nails), hasta-śūlaṃ (the pain of the hands), pāda-ślaṃ (foot pain), sarva-aṅga-pratyāṅga-śūlaṃ (the pain of all the limbs and related parts of the body).
92. Bhūta-vetāḍa-ḍāka-ḍākinī-jvarāḥ (the fevers [caused by] the Demons and Demonesses Bhūtas, Vetāḍas, Ḍākas, and Ḍākinīs), dadrūḥ (the leprosies), kaṇḍūḥ (the itches) , kiṭibhāḥ (the bugs), lūtāḥ (the spiders), vaisarpāḥ (the diseases caused by heat), loha-liṅgāḥ (the bloody swollen boils)
93. Śāstra-saṃ-gara (the weapon together with war!), viṣa-yoga (The poisonous incantation!), agni (The fire!), udaka (The water!) māra (The death!) vaira (The hostility!) kāntāra (The calamity!) akāla-mṛtyo (The sudden death!)
94. Try-ambuka (The deadly ground bee!), trai-lāṭa (The horse fly!), vṛścika (The scorpion!), sarpa (The snake!), nakula (The ichneumon!), siṃha (The lion!), vyāghra (The tiger!), ṛkṣa (The bear!), tarakṣa (The wolf!), camara (The deer!) jīvi (Oh! The life!) bhī (Oh! The terror!) teṣāṃ sarveṣāṃ (of all of them).
95. Mahā-sitātapatraṃ mahā-vajroṣṇīṣaṃ mahā-praty-aṅgiraṃ
(The Great White Canopy on the Eminent Vajra Uṣṇīṣa of the Mighty Vanquisher of the Aṅgira.)
96. Yāvad dvādaśa yojana abhy-antareṇa (Whenever within the inside as far as twenty yoyanas), sīmā-bandhaṃ karomi (I make [the Great White Canopy...as in line 95] abiding the boundary), diśā-bandhaṃ karomi (I make abiding the cardinal regions), para-vidyā-bandhaṃ karomi (I make abiding the vicious spells), tejo-bandhaṃ karomi (I make abiding the vital breath), hasta-bandhaṃ karomi (I make abiding the hands), pāda-bandhaṃ karomi (I make abiding the feet), sarva-aṅga-pratyāṅga-bandhaṃ karomi (I make abiding the limbs and all related parts of the body).
97. Tadyathā: Oṃ! Anale, anale, viśada, viśada, bandha, bandha, bandhani, bandhani, vīra-vajrapāṇi, Phaṭ! Hūṃ! Bhrūṃ! Phaṭ! Svāhā! (Thus, in this manner: Oṃ! In the fire, in the fire. The Radiance! The Radiance! The Binding! The Binding! The Abiding! The Abiding! The Mighty Vajrapāṇi! Phaṭ! Hūṃ! Bhrūṃ! Phaṭ! Svāhā!)
98. Namaḥ sarva tathāgatāya sugatāya, arhate, samyak-saṃbuddhāya. (Salutation to all the Thus Come Ones, the Well Bestowed Ones, the Blessed Ones, the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddhas) sidhyantu mantra-padāḥ svāhā! (Let the verses of the mantra be accomplished! Svāhā!)

APPENDIX D

THE GREAT COMPASSION DHĀRAṆĪ (The Popular Version)

1. Namō rant-trayāya.
(Salutation to the Triple Jewel).
2. Nama āryāvalokiteśvarāya bodhisattvāya mahāsattvāya mahākāruṇikāya.
(Salutation to the great compassionate Noble Avalokiteśvara, the Great Bodhisattva Being).
3. Oṃ! Sarva bhayeṣu trāṇa tasya.
(Oṃ! In all the grave terrors of his. Oh! The Protection!)
4. Namas-kṛta imam āryāvalokiteśvaraṃ dhāvanam anārakini hṛt.
(Doing this salutation to the Noble Avalokiteśvara, who attacked and removed those freed from connections to hellish realms)
5. Mahāpāṭha asya me sarvārtha duḥśubhaṃ ajeyaṃ sarvasādhanāḥ mahā sādhana
(Oh! The great recitation! All my accomplishments [are] an antidote [against] the ill-fortune of all purposes. The great accomplishment!)
6. Mahāgharma-bhā dhāto.
(The great sunshine splendor nature!)
7. Tadyathā, Oṃ! Avaro he loka te kāra te, ye hṛd mahābodhisattva
(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! the Unsurpassed! Ho! The World! To you. The Hymn of praise! Those whose hearts to you. The Great Bodhisattva!)
8. saha saha māramārāḥ
(The world of Enduring! Enduring! The deaths of death.)
9. Mahe mahe arthayān kuru kuru.
(In offering, in offering, make, do make the swishes!)
10. Kāmān dhuru dhuru bhājayate mahābhājayate.
(To the Bestower, the great Bestower of Wishes)
11. dhara dhara dhṛtīśvarāya
(Holding! Holding! To the happiness.)
12. cala cala mama bhamāraṃ utsaiḥ.

(Confusing! Confusing! My pestilence, with the clouds.)

13. -Ehyehi śīnāḥ śīnā arasān varāḥ śālīḥ

(Obtain! Obtain! Those with firm wishes, the resolute ones [have] the feeble and the fine grains)

14. Bhāsa bhāsān vara śayāḥ.

(Those abiding the wishes (are) the bright among the brilliants)

15. Huro huru mārāḥ (Huro huro! The deaths), huru huru ḥṛt (Huru huru! The Removals)

16. Sāra (The best!) sāra (The most excellent!) , śrī (Splendor!) śrī (Splendor!), suru suru (?)

17 Bodhyā bodhyā, bodhaya bodhaya, amityāḥ

(With wisdom, with wisdom, may the infinite destroyers of enemies wake them up!)

18. Nārakini dhr̥ṣṇunā pāya mānāḥ svāhā!

(In hell, may the honored ones protect with confidence! Svāhā)

19. Siddhāya (to the Accomplisher) svāhā!

20. Mahāsiddhāya (to the Great Accomplisher) svāhā!

21. Siddhayogeśvarāya (to the supreme yogic Accomplisher) svāhā!

22. Anārakini (With the one free from Hell) svāhā!

23. Amāra nāra (The indestructible among men) svāhā!

24. Sīla samamoghāya (to the infallible in virtues) svāhā!

25. Sahamahāsiddhāya (To the Great Unaccomplisher of Saha) svāhā!

26. Ca kīlāsiddhāya (And to the Unaccomplisher of the inner syllable of mantras) svāhā!

27. Padam aṣṭāya (To the undecaying, the step) svāhā!

28. Nārakini (in hell) pagharāya (to the protector of house in hellish path) svāhā!

29. Mahārṣaṃ-karāya (To the maker of the sacred speech/text) svāhā!

30. Namō ratna trayāya (Salutation to the triple Jewel). Nama āryāvalokiteśvarāya (Salutation to the Noble Avalokiteśvara) svāhā!

31. Om! Sidhyantu mantra-padāya (May they accomplish the verses of the mantra) svāhā!

APPENDIX E

TEN SMALL DHĀRANĪS.

1. The Wish Fulfilling Precious Wheel King Dhāraṇī:

-Namo bhudhāya. Namo dharmāya. Namaḥ saṃghāya.

(Salutation to the Buddha. Salutation to the Dharma. Salutation to the Sangha)

-Nama āryāvalokiteśvarāya bodhisattvāya mahāsattvāya mahākāruṇikāya.

(Salutation to the great compassionate Noble Avalokitesvara, the Great Bodhisattva Being)

-Tadyathā, Oṃ! Cakravatin cintamaṇi mahāpadme ru ru tiṣṭhat jvala ākarṣāya hūṃ phaṭ svāhā.

(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! The wheel turning Monarch! The mystical wish-fulfilling cintamaṇi jewel! The great lotus! Praise! Praise! Established! The Splendor! To the attraction. Hūṃ! Phaṭ! Svāhā!)

-Oṃ! Padma cintamaṇi mahā-jvala Hūṃ! Oṃ, varada padme Hūṃ!

(Oṃ! The Lotus! The mystical wish-fulfilling cintamaṇi jewel! The great Splendor! Hūṃ! Oṃ, The Fire! The Lotus! Hūṃ!)

2. The Calamity Dispersing Mantra:

-Namaḥ samanta buddhānām aprathita śāsanānām.

(Salutation of the entire Buddhas and the unimpeded teachings)

-Tadyathā, Oṃ! Kha kha, khāhi khāhi! Hūṃ! Hūṃ!

(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! The Sky! The Sky! The sky and the wind! The sky and the wind! Hūṃ! Hūṃ!)

-jvala jvala prajvala prajvala, tiṣṭha tiṣṭha, ṣṭi ro ṣṭi ri, sphaṭ sphaṭ, śāntika śrīye svāhā.

(Splendor! Splendor! Illuminating! Illuminating! Establishing! Establishing! ṣṭi ro ṣṭi ri! Sphaṭ! Sphaṭ! To the (śāntika) propitiated glory! Svāhā!

3. The Meritorious Precious Mountain Dhāraṇī:

-Namo bhudhāya. Namo dharmāya. Namaḥ saṃghāya.

(Salutation to the Buddha. Salutation to the dharma. Salutation to the Sangha.)

-Sīte huru ru, sindhūru kṛpā kṛpā siddaṇi pūrṇi svāhā.

(In Binding, huru ru, the Extremely Compassionate! The Compassionate! In accomplishment, in satisfying. Svāhā!)

4. The Cundā Dhāraṇī:

-Namah saptānām samyak-saṃbuddha koṭīnām.

(Salutation of the seven millions Unsurpassed Perfect Buddhas)

-Tadyathā, Oṃ! Cale cule cunde svāhā.

(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! The Moving One! The Excellent Cundā! Svāhā!)

5. The Noble and Infinite Life Illuminating King Dhāraṇī:

-Namo bhagavate Aparimtāyur-jñāna-su-viniścita-tejo-rājāya tathāgatāya arhate samyak-saṃbudhāya.

(Salutation to world honored one, to the king radiant determined wisdom and immeasurable life, to the Thus Come One, to the Blessed One, to the Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha)

-Tadyathā, Oṃ! Sarva saṃ-skāra pariśudha dharmate gagana samudgate svabhāva vi-śuddhe, mahānaya-pari-vārī svāhā.

(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! All the perfect and purified Dharma! The One Arisen in the sky! The purifying Nature! The great conduct for warding off! Svāhā!)

6. The Medicine King Buddha Dhāraṇī:

Namo bhagavate bhaiṣajya-guru-vaiḍūrya-prabha-rājāya tathāgatāya arhate samyak-saṃbudhāya.

(Salutation to the World Honored one, the King medicine teacher radiating beryl, the Thus Come One, the Blessed One! The Unsurpassed Perfect Buddha)

Tadyathā, Oṃ! Bhaiṣajye bhaiṣajye bhaiṣajya-samudgate svāhā.

(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! The Medicine! The Medicine! The Medicine well arisen One! Svāhā!)

7. Avalokitesvara Dhāraṇī:

Oṃ maṇi padme Hūṃ! (Oṃ! The maṇi Jewel! The Lotus! Hūṃ!)

Mahā-jñāna cittot-pāda (The great wisdom of the established Mind!),
cittasya na-vitarka (The doubtlessness of the mind!), sarvārtha bhūri siddhaka (The accomplisher
of all important purposes!), na-purāṇa na-pratyutpanna (The unaging and unborn one!). Namō
lokeśvarāya (Salutation to Lokeśvara!) Svāhā!

8. The Misdeed-eradicating Mantra from the Seven Buddhas:

Deve (The Deva)! Devate (The Deva)! su ha cyu hate (?), dhara (The Sustaining!) dhṛte (The
Sustaining), nir-hṛte (The Undeclared!) vimalate (the Purifying!) svāhā.

9. The Future Rebirth Mantra:

-Namō Amitābhāya tathāgatāya.

(Salutation to Amitābha, the Thus Come One!)

-Tadyathā, Oṃ! Amṛtod-bhave, amṛta siddham bhava, amṛta vi-krānte, amṛta vi-krānta, gamini
gagana kīrti-karī svāhā.

(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! The Immortal Being! The Being for Immortal

Accomplishment! The Immortal Victory! The Intending to go! The Sky! The conferring
of majestic power! Svāhā!)

10. The Mantra of the Virtuous Goddess:

-Namō Buddhāya, namō dharmāya, namah saṃghāya. Namaḥ śrī mahādevīye.

(Salutation to the Buddha. Salutation to the Dharma. Salutation to the Sangha.

Salutation to the Noble Great Goddess!)

-Tadyathā, Oṃ! Pari-pūraṇa cāre samanta darśane.

(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! The vanquisher of pūraṇa! The Progression! The Entire
Vision!)

-Mahāvihāra-gate (The one going about the great monastery!) samanta vi-dhamane (The
complete destroyer!). Mahā-kārya prati-sthāpane (The great offering of stool for the feet!)
sarvārtha-sadhane (the accomplishments of all purposes), su-pratipuri ayatna (The fulfilling of
the path!) dharmatā (the natural conditions!) mahāvīkurvite (The Great Miracle!), mahā-maitrī
(The Great Compassion) upa-saṃhite (the Accompanied one!), mahā-rṣi su saṃgrhite (The great
teacher in restraining) samantārtha anu-pālāne (the guarding of all purposes!) svāhā!

APPENDIX F

THE UṢṢĀVIJAYA DHĀRAṆĪ

1. Namo bhagavate trailokya prativīṣṭāya buddhāya bhagavate.
(Salutation to the World Honored One, the most excellent Buddha in the three worlds, the World Honored One!)
2. Tadyathā, Oṃ, viśodhaya viśodhaya, asama-sama samantābvabhāsa-spharaṇa gati gahana svabhāva viśuddhe, abhiṣṭcatu mām.
(Thus, in this manner, Oṃ! The Purified One! The Purified One! The equaled among the unequaled! With a shield of pervasive illumination. The Moving! The Sky! The one with purified Nature! May it consecrate me!)
3. Sugata varavacana amṛtabhiṣekai mahāmantra-padaī.
(To the Well Bestowed! The Excellent Recitation! To the immortal consecration! To the matter of the Great matra!)
4. Āhara āhara āyuh saṃdhāraṇi, śodhaya śodhaya gagana viśuddhe.
(The Performing! The Performing! The human race. The sustaining! The purified, purified sky! The purification!)
5. Uṣṭṣa vijaya viśuddhe sahasra-raśmi saṃcodite.
Uṣṭṣa vijaya viśuddhe sahasra-raśmi saṃcodite.
6. Sarva tathāgata avalokani ṣaṭ-pāramitā-paripūraṇi.
(In beholding all the Thus Come ones, in fulfilling the Six Perfections)
7. Sarva tathāgata-mati daśabhūmi pratiṣṭhite.
(The establishment of the ten levels of the Bodhisattva path and all knowledge of the Thus Come ones)
8. Sarva tathāgata hṛdaya adhiṣṭhānādhiṣṭhita mahāmudre, vajrakāya saṃhatana viśuddhe.
(The Great Seal established from the established minds of all the Thus Come Ones! The purification of the firmly united Vaja body!)
9. Sarvāvarana apāya-durgati pari viśuddhe, pratinivartaya āyuh śuddhe, samaya adhiṣṭhite.

- (The purification of the misfortunes together with all of the accompanying destructions! The returning human race. The purification! The establishment of the convention!)
10. Maṇi maṇi mahāmaṇi, tathatā bhūtakoti, paṛisuddhe, viṣphuṭa buddhi śuddhe.
(The mystical maṇi jewel! The mystical maṇi! The great mystical maṇi! The millions of beings! The purification! The purification of the manifested wisdom!)
11. Jaya Jaya, vijaya vijaya, smara smara, sarva buddha adhiṣṭhita śuddhe, vajrī vajra-garbhe vajrām bhāvatu mama śarīraṃ.
(Victory! Victory! Triumphant! Triumphant! The recollection! The Recollection! The purification established by all Buddhas! The vajrī-vajra Womb! May it be my vajra body!)
12. Sarva sattvānām ca kāya pari viśuddhe, sarva gati paṛisuddhe.
(The purification of the bodies of all beings! The purification of all the movings!)
13. Sarva tathāgata siṅca me samāśvāsyaṃtu.
(The Consecration by all the Thus Come Ones! Let they be caused to take courage of me!)
14. Sarva tathāgata samāśvāsa adhiṣṭhite
(The establishment of courage by all the Thus Come Ones!)
15. Budhya budhya , vibudhya vibudhya, bodhaya bodhya, vibodhya vibodhya samanta paṛisuddhe.
(Awakening! Awakening! Being awakening! Being awakening! Wisdom! Wisdom! Being enlightened! Being enlightened! The complete purification!)
16. Sarva tathāgata hṛdaya adhiṣṭhānādhiṣṭhita mahāmudre svāhā.
(The Great Mudra established by the established minds of all the Thus Come Ones! Svāhā!)

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Quang Minh Thich (Thich Minh-Quang) was born and grew up in Vĩnh Long, a Southern Vietnam provincial town graced by the flowing brownish earth-tone silt-laden Mekong River and a vast sea of stretching green rice fields dotted with villages partially hidden under the shady swaying bamboo, palm trees, and various type of tropical fruit plants. Almost a decade after the fall of Saigon, he escaped from Vietnam by boat and came to Malaysia. Eventually, he was transferred to the U.S. as a refugee. While staying with a foster family under the sponsorship of the State of New York, he finished his High School education at Patchogue-Medford High School, Long Island , and went on to study Chemistry at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. In 1990, he moved to Los Angeles and studied at California State University, Northridge, where he earned a BA degree in Philosophy in May 1995 and studied in the MA program in English Literature. During this time period, he also attended the Buddhist monastic training and became a Bhiksu in the Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist Tradition at the International Buddhist Monastic Institute (Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế), North Hills, California. In 1997, he was admitted to the MA program in Asian Religion at Florida State University. While attending the graduate program in the Department of Religion at Florida State University, his focus was Buddhism. He earned his MA degree from Florida State University, Department of Religion, in Spring 2001, and then his Ph.D. degree at the same Department in Summer 2007.