

# Development of buddhist education

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Buddhism has greatly influenced present day Vietnam. The rise of its civilization can be traced through the effect of Buddhism on the different dynasties. The early wars won by Vietnam can be associated with Buddhist leaders and even the faith that kept the people together during the years of suffering was Buddhism. It has been proclaimed before as the national religion of the country because of its contribution to society and it is only fitting that it be included in the education of Vietnamese children.

To gain a better understanding of the development of Buddhist education in Vietnam, we need to know first the roots and development of Buddhism as a religion, what are its beliefs, how it affected the lives of the Vietnamese populace, how it was integrated to education and from thereon discuss the developments that went through up to contemporary times. Buddhism: Origin and Teachings Buddhism originated from southern Nepal around 530 B. C. as an offshoot of Hinduism. Gautama Buddha, “ a prince who bridled at the formalism of Hinduism as it was being interpreted by the priestly caste of Brahmins” , was its founder.

He spent years meditating and wandering as an ascetic until he discovered the path of enlightenment to nirvana. Nirvana according to him is “ the world of endless serenity in which one is freed from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. ” Buddhism espouses that there are four noble truths – man is born to suffer in successive lives, earthly pleasures and possessions are the cause of this suffering, man shall be delivered from suffering upon cessation of this craving, and following the eight fold path, man shall achieved deliverance – and through this he shall receive salvation.

The foundation of the Buddhist concept of morality and right behavior, the eightfold path, consists of right views, or sincerity in leading a religious life; right intention, or honesty in judgment; right speech, or sincerity in speech; right conduct, or sincerity in work; right livelihood, or sincerity in making a living; right effort, or sincerity in aspiration; right mindfulness, or sincerity in memory; and right concentration, or sincerity in meditation". It is the most important religion in Vietnam.

Unlike other religions, " Vietnamese Buddhism stays on earth rather than ascends up to heaven, attaches to exorcism and prayers for wealth, happiness and longevity rather than heads toward nirvana. " Most Vietnamese practice Mahayana Buddhism rather than its Hindu counterpart. The doctrinal distinction between the two consists of their differing views of Gautama Buddha: the Mahayana school teaches that Gautama was only one of many " enlightened ones" manifesting the fundamental divine power of the universe; the Theravada school teaches that Gautama was the one-and-only enlightened one and the great teacher, but that he was not divine.

The Mahayana sect holds further that laypersons can attain nirvana, whereas the Theravada school believes that only ordained monks and nuns can do so. The beginnings of Buddhism in Vietnam The early beginnings of Buddhism may be traced back from as early as 300 B. C. It was said that Theravada Buddhism have been " imported directly into Vietnam from India through sea routes since the 2nd century A. D. " Although some believe that " Buddhism spread first from China to Vietnam's Red River Delta region in approximately the second century A.

D. , and then from India to the southern Mekong Delta area at some time between the third and the sixth centuries” , evidence shows that Buddhism reached Vietnam even before it entered China. In the past, Vietnam was very much like the intersection between India and China. At that time, either walking, or by boat, people made a trip from India to China or vice versa, in doing so they must cross Vietnam. Vietnam, therefore, was a good place to stop by for foreign business people as well as Buddhist monks.

Back to 3rd century BC, after King Asoka organized the Third Council -a Conference to Collect the Dharma- at Pataliputra, India, he sent 9 Buddhist monk delegates overseas. The monks went from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean to teach Dharma. One of these, lead by Sona and Uttara went to Burma then Indochina, including Viet Nam. Now, in Haiphong -60miles north east of HaNoi- there is a memorial tower to commemorate King Asoka that was built by local Vietnamese Buddhists at that time to express their gratitude to King Asoka.

From that evidence, we may come up with conclusion that Buddhism came to Vietnam as early as 300 years BC, even before China. Then in the second century, Buddhism in Vietnam became more popular and developed with the contributions of Marajivaka, K'Ang Seng Houei, Tchi Kiang Liang three great Buddhist monks who came from India and a local scholar, Mecu Fo. Because Mecu Fo is a key character in Buddhism's development in Vietnam, we should take a closer look at him. He was Vietnamese or might have been born and raised in a great Chinese-Vietnamesefamily.

We must take into consideration that his place of birth was not originally a Chinese territory, it was just annexed to China from Vietnam. Since he was

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skilled in Chinese education, he used this skill in order to convert more people into Buddhism. Mecu Fo was mandarin and took advantage of his position to teach his people about Buddhism. Due to his contributions in the propagation and spread of Buddhism in Vietnam, he is considered as the first ever Buddhist lay man in Vietnam. Buddhism: Its Role in Liberation and Its Golden Age

During the Ly and the Tran dynasties, Buddhism achieved a golden age in Vietnam. It was during the time of Emperor TRAN NHAN TONG that the first Vietnamese Meditation, Truc Lam Yen Tu was founded , this however did not come until 1010 several decades after Vietnam's independence from China. However, it is accurate to say that Buddhism was a very important element in the country's fight for freedom. For several centuries, the Chinese conquered Vietnam and ruled the people with an iron hand.

The Chinese's main objective was to transform Vietnam into another Chinese territory and annex it afterwards to mainland China. In order to achieve their goal, great atrocities were done to the people both physically and psychologically, the Chinese even employed Sinicization or cultural invasion in order to uproot Vietnamese culture from its citizens and replace it with theirs to ease the annexation. Despite the suffering, there was one thing that kept the Vietnamese people from breaking down and it was their religion.

By living on the teachings of Buddhism, the people believed that the wicked shall eventually be punished and that they should keep on surviving until that day comes. During the Chinese rule, revolutions such as that led by two sister trung aimed at liberation were attempted but to no avail. In these revolts, Buddhism also played a great role, its temples became the common

meeting grounds for freedom fighters and the perfect place to mobilize troops. Finally, in 939 a Vietnamese general named NGO QUYEN, led the Vietnamese people to victory over the Chinese on the decisive battle on Bach Dang river thus ending the Chinese rule.

After the war, Buddhist monks in coordination with the newly established government tried to build the kingdom. To show his gratitude, the emperor Dinh Tien Hoang helped organize the Shangha and named Khuong Viet and Phapthuan, both Buddhist monks, as his national security adviser and Secretary of State respectively. Another major milestone for Buddhism during this dynasty was that it was declared as the national religion by the emperor, who was himself a Buddhist.

The establishment of the kingdom was coupled with several hardships, the most crucial of all is the threat of another Chinese invasion. Although at first was a mere thought among the people, it became clear when a Chinese spy disguised as a delegate for diplomatic relations entered Vietnam to size up its military power. Upon entering Vietnam, the first person the delegate met was a ferry-man who was to take him to the capital, he was however surprised when the ferry-man was able to converse with him at a level worthy of government office.

When the delegate arrived and conversed with Vietnam's national Security adviser, he concluded based on his meeting with the ferry man and Khuong Viet that Vietnam was well-prepared for an invasion and that invading it would be disastrous. Apparently, the ferry-man who amazed and confused the delegate with the level of learning of a mere ferry-man was Phaptuan in disguise. In the end, the two highest-ranking monks were responsible for

averting a possible attack through their diplomatic skills and it forever went on in history as the first diplomatic war won by Vietnam.

After more than 30 years, the Chinese began to strengthen its military force on the borders of Vietnam resulting to an election of a fitting leader to decide on the course of action on the said threat. The leader chosen was a talented, kind and high moral man, he was the Commander in Chief of the army and is known as Ly Cong Uan, thus started the Ly Dynasty. Ly Cong Uan was a Buddhist monk raised by Zen Master Van Hanh in a Buddhist temple who then became his national adviser. Under his reign, 300 Buddhist temples were built and the Sangha was well organized with over 1000 monks. He incorporated Buddhist teaching in all aspects of governance.