

BUDDHISM IN NINH BÌNH PROVINCE UNDER THE ĐÌNH - LÊ - LÝ - TRẦN DYNASTIES IN THE CAUSE OF FOUNDING AND DEFENDING THE COUNTRY

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Abstract: *Before becoming a metropolis of Đại Cồ Việt in the second half of the 10th century, Ninh Bình might have been a Buddhist center in the presence of many Buddhist pagodas, including the pagoda was built in 541. Under the Đinh and pre-Lê dynasties, Buddhism have much to contribute in the development and management of the country with the reputable monks as Wu Zhen Liu, Zhang Ma Ni, Khuông Việt and Đỗ Pháp Thuận... In the beginning of the 11st century, Buddhism, especially the role of monk Vạn Hạnh, was an important part in bringing Lý Công Uẩn to the throne and founded the Lý dynasty. In the second half of the 13rd century, Ninh Bình is one of the important military bases of Đại Việt defeated the Mongol invader twice. We can say, during the dynasty of Đinh, pre-Lê, Lý, and Trần, Ninh Bình Buddhism has made important contributions in building and protecting the country.*

Ninh Bình has an important place in Vietnam. In 968 Đinh Bộ Lĩnh led people to quell revolts of 12 war-lords, brought nation back into unity. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh came to the throne and proclaimed himself Đinh Tiên Hoàng and renamed the country as Đại Cồ Việt. It was the feudal state of centralization of power in Vietnam.

King Đinh Tiên Hoàng built capital of Đại Cồ Việt country in Hoa Lư (now Trường Yên commune, Hoa Lư district, Ninh Bình province).

Before the Đinh dynasty, Buddhism had developed in Ninh Bình. In this province there were many pagodas.

In Đông Hội hamlet, Ninh An village, Hoa Lư district there was a pagoda which was built since Hai Bà Trưng period (two ladies Trưng). The history of Đông Hội temple wrote that “three children of Trần Hãn living in Thanh Liêm district, Nam Hà province were Đông Bụt, Diệu Nữ and Ngọc Nữ Trần Hoa refuged in a pagoda in Hoàng Sơn hamlet. There, they trained martial arts, assembled forces and followed Hai Bà Trưng to drive away Tô Định.

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Before the year of 541 Tân Yên pagoda was built in Tân Yên hamlet, Khánh Lợi village, Yên Khánh district.

Bàn Long pagoda was built before the 10th century in Khê Đầu Thượng hamlet, Ninh Xuân village, Hoa Lư district. The stele was carved on the Đài Tượng Mountain in the 14th century: “From Cổ Loa citadel going along Stone Mountain to South, we get to Bàn Long pagoda in Khê Đầu village. This pagoda is the old famous pagoda. Through Đinh, pre-Lê, Lý, Trần dynasties the pagoda became more well-known”.

Hoa Sơn pagoda was built before the Đinh dynasty in Áng Ngũ hamlet, Ninh Hoa village, Hoa Lư district. An infant prince of the Đinh dynasty had been lurked in this pagoda so it was called Phôi Sinh Tự.

Thiên Tôn pagoda has been in Thiên Tôn town, Hoa Lư district; it was built before the Đinh dynasty. When Đinh Bộ Lĩnh newly led one war-lord, he was heard that Thiên Tôn pagoda was sacred, so he came to pagoda and prayed to Buddha for help. So we can find that Đinh Tiên Hoàng realized the supernatural power of Buddha. After quelling revolts and coming to the throne, Đinh Tiên Hoàng expressed his deep gratitude to Buddha; he ordered to sculpt statue of Buddha and repair the pagoda.

When coming to the throne, king Đinh Tiên Hoàng built many pagodas in Hoa Lư capital: Tháp pagoda with Báo Thiên tower was near Hoàng Long river; Bà Ngô pagoda was also near Hoàng Long river; Đìa and Am pagodas were in exterior citadel of Hoa Lư capital.

When managing the court affairs, king Đinh Tiên Hoàng relied on Buddhist monks. In 971, king Đinh Tiên Hoàng began to confer titles on mandarins and Buddhist monks. Monk Ngô Chân Lưu (931-1011) was appointed to be Sangharaja, the leader of Vietnamese Buddhism. He was conferred great bonze Khuông Việt. Ngô Chân Lưu took part in political activities, he had great merit of building the court. He was talent and virtue monk. Monk Trương Ma Ni was also appointed to be Tăng Lục (the second office after Sangharaja).

Most of the monks in the Đinh dynasty were patriotic intellectuals; their contributions were important in the national politics. Buddhism of the Đinh dynasty took part in the cause of founding and depending the country.

In the spring of 979, Nam Việt Vương Đinh Liễn (Đinh Tiên Hoàng’s son) killed secretly his younger brother, Đinh Hạng Lang because Đinh Hạng Lang was made

crown prince instead of Đinh Liễn. After killing his young brother, Đinh Liễn felt regretful and suffering, he ordered to erect 100 octagonal stone sutra pillars at the shore of Hoàng Long River in order to pray for the repose of Hạng Lang's soul. On all of pillars were inscribed the incantation *Usnisavijaya dhàranì* in Sanskrit transliterated into Chinese characters. So we can find that Buddhism in the Đinh dynasty developed strongly.

In the pre-Lê period (980-1009) the role of Buddhism in the cause of founding and defending the country showed more clearly.

King Lê Hoàn very respected monks Khuông Việt and Đỗ Pháp Thuận. These two monks brought their talents in serving the country. They drew a plan for helping the court affair and consolidating the nation. King Lê Hoàn called monk Pháp Thuận Đỗ instead of Đỗ Pháp Thuận. The monk Pháp Thuận was a talented person; he decided the plan of the court and helped the king to compile diplomatic documents between two countries Đại Cồ Việt and Song dynasty. In 981-989, king Lê Hoàn wanted to have device to defend the country, so he asked monk Pháp Thuận about device. Monk Pháp Thuận answered king by a poem under the title *Quốc Lộ* (national destiny). This matter showed that king Lê Hoàn very believed in monk Pháp Thuận. *Quốc Lộ* poem had only 20 words:

Quốc lộ như đằng lạc

Nam thiên li thái bình

Vô vi cư điện các

Xứ xứ tức binh đao ⁽¹⁾

(National destiny is like flying cloud

Our country was in peaceful

The mystery was in the temple

Everywhere the war ends)

This poem had a style of a political commentary; it discussed on state affairs, politics and raised high the ideology of peace and love of people ⁽²⁾.

¹. Đoàn Thăng (Translate). *Prose and Verse in the Lý- Trần dynasties*, Volume I, Social Science Press, Hanoi, 1977.

². This poem is given in “*Literature Book*” of the 10th grade. This poem is considered the first Vietnamese literary work.

In 987, the ambassador of the Song dynasty, Lý Giác, came to Hoa Lu capital. King Lê Hoàn appointed monk Pháp Thuận to meet Lý Giác. Monk Pháp Thuận impersonated boat man, he was good at repartee. He completed his duty and Lý Giác felt great admiration for him. Lý Giác wrote a verse to present Pháp Thuận. After reading this poem, king Lê Hoàn gave this poem to monk Khuông Việt (Ngô Chân Lưu). He ordered Khuông Việt to write a verse to see off Lý Giác. Through this story we find that how king Lê Hoàn believed in monks. Actually, the monks had many great contributions in the pre-Lê dynasty.

In 1007, king Lê Ngọa Triều (Lê Long Đĩnh) sent our the ambassador to come to Song country for seeking *the Tripitaka* (the whole of Buddhist canon).

In the Lê Long Đĩnh reign, monk Vạn Hạnh also helped king to defend our country.

In the pre-Lê dynasty, many pagodas were built. Nhất Trụ pagoda was built in Yên Thành village, Trường Yên commune. This pagoda has an octagonal sutra pillar. This pillar was erected by Lê Hoàn in the second year of the Ứng Thiên reign (995) for offering to Buddhism. On the eight faces of this pillar were inscribed with 2.500 Chinese words quoting from *dhàranì incantations*, *Sùrangama-sùtra* for singing the praise of the talent and intelligence of Buddha.

In the pre-Lê dynasty Buddhism developed strongly and it became national religion. The monks became political activists; they helped kings in governing a county. Buddhism became the power of spirit and ideology and contributed to building national consciousness and culture.

In the Lý dynasty Buddhism still developed strongly in Ninh Bình province. The role of monks was important in helping Lý Công Uẩn to come the throne.

After killing older brother (king Lê Trung Tông, his posthumous name was Long Viet, the third children of king Lê Đại Hành) Lê Long Đĩnh came to the throne in 1005 in Hoa Lu capital. Monk Vạn Hạnh (his mother land was in Tiên Sơn district, Bắc Ninh province) was in Hoa Lu capital; he was good at three religions (Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism), he became a well-known monk; he used to be adviser of king Lê Hoàn. He continuously helped king Lê Long Đĩnh.

Because of the cruelty of king Lê Long Đĩnh, monk Vạn Hạnh foretold the decline of the pre-Lê dynasty. He helped Lý Công Uẩn, his loved pupil to come the throne. The Lý dynasty was born in Hoa Lu capital in November, 1009.

In the Lý dynasty, Ninh Bình province had a monk Nguyễn Minh Không whose mother land was in Đàm Xá village, Gia Tiên commune, Gia Viễn district (now Gia Thắng village, Gia Viễn district, Ninh Bình province). Monk Nguyễn Minh Không was born in 1065 and died in 1141. He left his home to become Buddhist monk when he was 11 years old. Firstly, he led a religious life in Vân Mông pagoda, and then moved to Keo pagoda in Hành Thiện village, Xuân Hồng commune, Xuân Trường district, Nam Định province. He became a famous monk and his religious name was Minh Không. Hence, he was called as Minh Không. He built many pagodas. When managing Quỳnh Lâm pagoda, Nguyễn Minh Không cast the bronze statue of Mitreya 6 *trượng* in height (6 units of ten feet). It is considered one of four precious things of Vietnam. He treated crown prince Dương Hoán. Crown prince Dương Hoán got serious disease. All his body was covered by hair, looking fearful. King invited all famous physicians in country to treat Dương Hoán but all of them gave up. At last, Nguyễn Minh Không was invited to the court to treating Dương Hoán.

It was said that Nguyễn Minh Không ordered to boil a cauldron of oil, and then he sprinkled all body of Dương Hoán with oil. After sprinkling many times the hair on Dương Hoán fell down. After that he put 100 needles into a cauldron of water then boiled cauldron of water. This water was brought from the well under Bái Đính mountain. He used these needles to sting Dương Hoán. Thanks to Nguyễn Minh Không's acupuncture, Dương Hoán recovered from illness. Crown prince Dương Hoán came to the throne and became king Lý Thần Tông (1128-1138). *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* (The Complete history of Great Việt) wrote that “monk Minh Không treated and saved Lý Thần Tông, so he was appointed to be Teacher of Prince. Since then he was called Lý Quốc Sư. After that event kings very respected and believed in monks”.

Under the Lý dynasty Ninh Bình had many pagodas. Monk Nguyễn Minh Không built Am Tiên pagodas in Trường Yên commune, Gia Viễn district and Bái Đính pagoda in Gia Thắng commune, Gia Viễn district.

In the Trần dynasty, Buddhism also contributed to a cause of defending the country.

According to *Thái Vi quốc tế ngọc ký*, after the first anti-Mongol war (1258) king Trần Thái Tông, 40 years old, passed the throne to crown prince Hoảng, and then he became *Thái Thượng Hoàng* (king's father) and entered religion in Vũ Lâm mountain. Vũ Lâm was also base of the second anti-Mongol war. It was about 100 km South from Thăng Long. Means of communication in this region was convenient.

After living in Vũ Lâm a period of time Trần Thái Tông built Sở pagoda in Văn Lâm village, Ninh Hải commune and A Nậu pagoda in Ninh Khánh district, Ninh Bình city.

In the second anti-Mongol war, on February 18th, 1285 Đại Việt troops exchanged fire with Mongol troops in North bank of the Red River, then the court and people withdrew from Thăng Long. After finding empty citadel Thoát Hoan (General-in-chief of Mongol army) did not dare to garrison in Thăng Long but he garrisoned in the North bank of the Red River. Đại Việt troops withdrew secretly into Thiên Trường palace (Nam Định) and Trường Yên palace (Ninh Bình). On June the 7th, 1285 king Trần brought his troops from Thanh Hóa to fight the Mongol troops in Trường Yên palace and won victory. It was possible that Vũ Lâm had contributed to kill the Mongol troops in Trường Yên palace.

In short, through the Đinh, Lê, Lý, Trần dynasties, Buddhism in Ninh Bình had great contributions in the cause of founding and defending the county. The monks became patriotic intellectuals; they took part in politic activities, helped the king to defend the country. Buddhism was considered the national religion and it became orthodox ideology to govern the social life of Vietnamese people at that time. /.