

PAGODAS IN HANOI AT PRESENT

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Abstract:

At present, most of pagodas in Hanoi⁽¹⁾ are ancient pagodas, but they are reconstructed. The reconstruction of pagodas depended on the origins of pagodas and religious faith of Hanoi people. Most of Hanoi pagodas were built in the period of domination of Northern invader, in the Lý, the Trần, the Lê, the Nguyễn dynasties until Hanoi was liberated in 1954. However, the great part of Hanoi pagodas was built in the Lê Trung Hưng dynasty and the Nguyễn dynasty.

On the origin, at first, Hanoi pagodas were village pagodas, private pagodas and court pagodas (national pagodas), then these pagodas gradually became the pagodas of cities. Some pagodas were nominated for national pagodas because they were built by court and they were bestowed royal decree by Court; for example, Diên Hựu pagoda, Trần Quốc pagoda, Ngọc Hồi pagoda. Then, almost these pagodas were not considered as national pagodas because later dynasties did not recognize them as national pagodas. The Nguyen dynasty only recognized some pagodas in Hue as national pagodas.

Afterward the private pagodas became pagodas of city because the right of ownership and the right of management of these pagodas were not private rights. In Hanoi urban areas many village pagodas become pagodas of city because they are related to activities of townspeople. The pagodas in the suburban areas or the edges of town have still been village pagodas because the inhabitants still have maintained their village customs. Nearly every village has its pagodas, but Cổ Nhuế village has three pagodas with 4 hamlets.

Because of their origins, landscape and architecture of Hanoi pagodas are often related to village and city. In each village pagoda was built in favorable position and it was next to communal house where tutelary spirit is worshipped. The communal house and pagoda are cultural center of village. All festivals, sacrifices and cultural activities of village are carried out in pagodas. Hanoi pagodas often have not their own precincts. Although Hanoi pagodas are

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¹ These pagodas are not included pagodas of Ha Tay province because this province has just been merged into Hanoi.

different from private houses, the wall and roof of pagodas are simple, so they integrate into landscape of city.

The architecture of Hanoi pagodas were built following the Đinh (丁), the Cong (工) and the Tam (三) Chinese pictographs. In front of the front hall there is a large brick yard. The feasts of pagoda and community activities are often realized in this yard. The decorative plants are often planted around yard, behind and in front of pagoda. The distance between the main hall and the house of patriarchs and the residence for monks is not large. In some pagodas there are decorative plants and a small rock work. They are in front of the house of patriarchs. Some pagodas in Hue and HỒ Chí Minh city were constructed in the model of the Chinese character for “mouth” the yards of these pagodas are larger. They are often behind the Main hall.

At present, the amount of Hanoi pagodas (not including pagodas in Ha Tay province) is about 600 pagodas. This statistic data is the result of investigation of the *Institute for Religious Studies* to be carried out at the close of the 20th century. This result is only relative because geography of some districts in Hanoi is changed. According to *the Management Board of Hanoi Buddhism*, the number of Hanoi pagodas in 2000 increased more than in 1995 about tens of pagodas. These pagodas are mainly in Hanoi suburbs. These pagodas are not new pagodas. They are rebuilt from the old pagodas which were collapsed in the war of resistance against the French colonialists.

The distribution of pagodas in Hanoi is special. In central districts of Hanoi there are few pagodas (16 pagodas). In other districts there are many pagodas. Every district has about 30 pagodas. Comparing to the number of pagodas in Hanoi suburbs, the number of pagodas in Hanoi urban area is fewer. In Hanoi urban area there are about 2 millions of people, but it has 100 pagodas. The number of pagodas in Hanoi suburbs is four times than the number of pagodas in Hanoi urban area, but the population of Hanoi suburbs is fewer than the population of Hanoi urban area.

The distribution of Hanoi pagodas depends on the origins of Hanoi pagodas. Among Hanoi pagodas there are many village pagodas. When streets were distributed stably, no new pagodas are built. It means that the number of pagodas in Hanoi urban area is stable, but its population is increasing more and more.

Before 1986, Hanoi pagodas were in bad order. Most of them were dilapidated and moss-grow because they had not been repaired since 1954. Some pagodas had not monks, so nobody tidied up pagodas. The precincts of pagodas were encroached. Many families built their houses in yards and gardens of pagodas. Yard of Liên Phái pagoda and zone of tower were occupied. People built their house next to the Front Hall. The precincts of Hòe Nhai, Châu Long, Phúc Khánh, Quang Hoa, Thiên Quang pagodas were also occupied.

Lands and precincts of many pagodas were occupied because the faith of people in Buddhism was faded in 1960s and 1970s. At that time few people went to pagodas. Many pagodas were deserted. Many monks were inferiority complex, so they dared not to object the occupancy of pagodas. Although the government did not destroy pagodas, he had not measures to punish all those who encroached the lands of pagodas.

In recent years, many Hanoi pagodas need to be repaired. With the permit of government many pagodas carried out to repair. Pagodas were under repair in different levels according to financial resource of each pagoda. We find that in some pagodas, people only repaired and upgraded the altar of Buddha Trinity, the incense-burning hall and the front hall but they built the house of patriarch, monks' quarter, living room and service hall extra. In adjacent part of pagodas there are two-storey houses to be built. These houses are equipped with expensive comforts. Quán Sứ pagoda is both the headquarters of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and Buddhist Institute, so it has two two-storey-houses in two sides of pagoda. After the occupation of Liên Phái pagoda has been settled, government and resident monk repair the dining room, stele pavilion and garden of pagoda.

Although the repair of Hanoi pagodas still keeps old characteristics of pagodas, aestheticism of market economy so many pagodas tend to "modernize" pagodas, so ancient and solemn characteristics of Hanoi pagodas are fading away now. For the repair of places of historical interest the State controls closely on administrative aspect but it relaxes on principles and architecture of pagodas.

In pagodas, people much pay attention to statue of Buddha and the altar of Buddha. The abstract conception on Buddhist enlightenment has been imaged by statues of Buddhas, first of all is the statue of Sakyamuni, then the statue of Amitabha and the statues of Trinity of Buddhas. The statues of Buddhas are

sacred symbols. Buddhist believers go to pagodas to pay homage to the statues of Buddhas. They pray and believe in Buddhas. In Hanoi pagodas, the statue of Sakyamuni is placed in center of the main sanctuary. The highest level of the altar in the main sanctuary is usually the place for the Trinity of Buddhas of the three epochs: the past, present and future. The second level of the altar there are three statues. The statue of Amitabha stands between statues of Mahasthamaprapta and of Avalokitesvara. The third level of the altar there are three statues, the statue of Sakyamuni stands between the statues of Majusri and Samantabhadra. In some pagodas the statues of Majusri and Samantabhadra are replaced by the statues of Anada and Kasyapa. The fourth level of the altar there is the statue of newly-born Sakyamuni.

Almost pagodas in Hanoi have above system of statues of Buddhas. Some pagodas have other statues. These statues are placed next to above statues. Some pagodas have statues of Bhaisaijyagura and Mitreya. These statues stand next to the statue of newly born Sakyamuni or the statues of Heavenly Kings. In two sides of main hall there are statues of Bodhisattva, multi-arm Avalokitesvara and Ksitigarbha. In Liên Phái and Quang Hoa pagodas, the statue of multi-arm Avalokitecvara is placed in front of incense table. Some pagodas have 9 statues of Arhats. These statues are placed two sides of main hall. The statue of Buddha in incense burning hall is placed according to the own manner of each pagoda. Behind the main hall is the house of patriarch. In the house of patriarch of some pagodas there are the statues of Amitabha and Avalokitesvara. If pagodas have not sanctuary of Goddesses, altars of Goddesses are in the house of patriarch.

In the altar of Hanoi pagodas there are statues of Amitabha and Avalokitesvara. The statue of Amitabha is bigger and it stands in the middle and in front of the statues of the Trinity of Buddhas of three epochs. The house of patriarch of some pagodas there is statue of Amitabha. People who go to pagoda often pay attention to the statue of Avalokitesvara because it is distinguished statue in pagodas. Next to statue of Amitabha there are the statues of Avalokitesvara and multi-arm Avalokitesvara... Formerly, the statue of multi-arm Avalokitesvara of Quán Sứ and Liên Phái pagodas was placed inside, but now it is placed outside room. Quán Sứ pagoda has white statue of Avalokitesvara. It is more than 2metres high. It is placed in the room next to the house of patriarch. Some pagodas in Từ Liêm district ask permission of government to place the statue of Avalokitesvara in the open air. The notability

of statues of Amitabha and Avalokitesvara proves that Buddhist believers tend to follow Pure Land sect. People who go to pagodas pray Avalokitesvara to protect, help and save them from misfortune and danger. It shows popular characteristic of Buddhism in Hanoi.

It is noted that almost Hanoi pagodas have altars of Goddesses. Some pagodas have sanctuaries of Goddesses. These sanctuaries are decorated splendidly. The sanctuaries of Goddesses of some pagodas attract more believers than Buddha sanctuary.

The worship of Goddesses was brought in Hanoi pagodas since last century, but now the worship of Goddesses has become need of many believers so that One Pillar Pagoda asks permission of government to build a house for worship of Goddesses. When Thiên Quang, Xã Đàn pagodas are reconstructed, they give priority to build or repair the room for worship of Goddesses.

When visiting Hanoi pagodas, we find clearly historical stamps because many historical persons have been worshipped in pagodas. In Láng pagoda there is the statue of Lý Thần Tông. In Sét pagoda there is the statue of Đặng Thị Ngọc Dao. In Huy Vân pagoda there are the statues of Lê Thánh Tông and Quang Phục queen; in Lý Quốc Sư pagoda there are the statues Minh Không and Từ Đạo Hạnh; In Hoàng Ân pagoda there are the statues Nguyễn Hoàng and Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Tú.

The historical stamp and cultural tradition of our country not only manifest in the worship of historical persons but also in artistic and aesthetic values of statues of Buddhas, lacquered bas-reliefs, the arrangement of the statues of Buddhas and architecture of pagodas. Many pagodas in Hanoi are considered cultural relics of state and Hanoi capital.

At present the cultural activities in Hanoi pagodas are more animated. So many people go to pagodas in the first lunar month, Vu Lan (Ullamban) festival and Phật đản festival (great Buddha's birthday). More and more people take part in reciting the Buddhist scriptures in pagodas. Many families place incense burner censer of the dead in pagoda because they hope the dead will lean on the help of Buddha. We always find that many people visit Hanoi pagodas on holiday because they would like to survey cultural relics or relax after working hard. /.