

## THE IMPACT OF BUDDHISM ON POLITICS AND THE ARTS LY - TRAN STAGES IN VIET NAM (FROM 11<sup>TH</sup> TO 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

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*Abstract: Buddhism in Vietnam during the reign of Lý, Trần plays an important role for national history and can say that this is the peak period of Buddhism in Vietnam. The reign of Lý, Trần has used Buddhism as a means to link the human mind, and to strengthen the dynasty against invasion forces strong. In contrast, Buddhism has many interactions with ideology, politics, ethics, literature and art. These effects have contributed to their own cultural nuances of the Ly, Tran and leave the milestone in the Đại Việt culture. This article includes three main contents are as follows: Essential Buddhist appearance of the Lý, Trần reign; of the Buddhist influence in politics during the Lý, Trần; Influence of Buddhism to art in the period of Lý, Trần.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Buddhism was introduced over two thousand years ago and has contributed to many meaningful events in Vietnamese history. It has affected many aspects of social life, contributed to creating the cultural character of Vietnam in the Ly - Tran stages (11<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> century) and played an important role in Vietnam. It is said that this is the property stage of Vietnamese Buddhism as well as the most glorious period in the history of fighting aggressors in our nation. Many Buddhist monks participated in court affairs, working as advisors for the court. Otherwise, many kings and mandarins were Buddhists and some of them reached the peak of the Way in their religion, having deep knowledge in Buddhology and were the talented leaders of Vietnam. The most well-known person is King Tran Nhan Tong, after two times leading the country to defeat Mongolian troops; he abdicated in 1294, became a Buddhist monk and founded the Truc Lam Yen Tu Meditation. He was not only a talented thinker but also a preeminent politician. In this period, Buddhism had a close relationship with the court but it still kept its specific character and values and contributed to promoting social development.

The dominant class of both Ly and Tran dynasties used Buddhism as a mean to secure its popularity, strengthen the country to fight against foreign invaders.

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Buddhism in the Ly and Tran dynasties had a voice in the ideal arena, having a strong effect in the development of Vietnamese cultural life during that time. Humanity and merciful philosophy, humanity, saving one from misfortune and the dangers of Buddhism really helped consolidate the royal dynasty. This was an effective way to govern the country, reassuring the kings of their power in the country.

In any case the impact of Buddhism on ideology, politics, morality, literature and arts was the factor in creating the particular culture of Ly - Tran dynasties. It is said that, Ly and Tran dynasties were the brilliant stages in the culture of Dai Viet (Great Viet) with a huge contribution from Buddhism. It is a specific historical stage. Under the leadership of Buddhist kings and the contribution of monks, Vietnam developed in such aspects as: military, politics, literature, and the arts. This specific historical stage has still left a good reputation up to now, being the pride of Vietnam, the evidence for a close relationship between religion and life. In this research, we concentrate on the following issues: first, some features about Buddhism in the Ly - Tran dynasties; second, influences of Buddhism on the politics of the Ly - Tran dynasties; and last, influences of Buddhism on the arts of the Ly - Tran dynasties.

### **I. Some features about the Buddhism in Ly - Tran Dynasties**

The Ly - Tran dynasties are the most famous stages in the feudal country Dai Viet. Both Ly (1010-1225) and Tran (1226-1400) dynasties lasted nearly 400 years. King Ly Thai To, the founder of the Ly dynasty, was brought up in a pagoda and received the support of Buddhist people in the enthroned movement. After being enthroned, he promulgated many decrees bringing benefits for the development of Buddhism. He built many pagodas, assisted people to become monks, pointed the emissary into China to seek Buddhist scriptures, etc.

The later kings of the Ly dynasty also venerate Buddhism were, Ly Thai Tong, the seventh generation of Vo Ngon Thong sect, king Ly Thanh Tong, Ly Anh Tong and Ly Cao Tong of the Tsao-T'ang sect, respectively. Ly Hue Tong who abdicated the throne for Ly Chieu Hoang was also a Buddhist monk with the honorific title of Hue Quang. Some mandarins also left their home to become Buddhist monks and were respected in the society like the Buddhist monks: Vien Chieu, Quang Tri, Tri Bao and nun Dieu Nhan, respectively.

Under the Ly dynasty, Buddhism had strong influence. The court had the policy of allotting cultivated land for pagodas, making the pagoda become an economic unit having assets. Kings, Queens, and mandarins invested in building the pagodas.

During the Ly Thanh Tong's era 950 pagodas were built, gold and silver on casting bells were used. Many pagodas with huge structures or specific architecture were built in this stage such as: Phat Tich, Dam, Dien Huu, Pho Minh, Quynh Lam, etc.

The court also showed their influence by casting "four types of weapons" in copper, the symbols of Buddhism: Bao Thien tower, Quy Dien Bell, Smiling Buddha statue in Quynh Lam temple, Pho Minh cauldron, respectively. On the other hand, queen mothers and queens also built many precious towers serving religious purposes. Queen mother Linh Nhan built 84,000 precious towers. The Ly dynasty especially helped many people to become monks four times, therefore, the number of monks increased rapidly. There were many famous Buddhist monks who received the respect of people and had socio-economic positions such as: Van Hanh, Man Giac, Vien Thong, Tu Dao Hanh, Nguyen Minh Khong, Giac Hai, Phap Loa, Huyen Quang, etc. Those monks were considered as the spiritual leaders of the court and the country, being granted the title of *Master of the Nation* such as: Van Hanh, Kho Dau, Khong Lo, and Vien Chieu. At the end of the Ly dynasty, in 1179, due to the large number of monks, there appeared many evils in the Buddhist monks. In 1198, the king selected and dismissed the unqualified monks.

In the Tran dynasty, Buddhism was still a state protection religion. The kings of Tran stage are masters in Buddhism. Kings: Tran Thai Tong, Tran Thanh Tong, Tran Nhan Tong, Tran Anh Tong had deep knowledge in Buddhism. King Tran Nhan Tong was the founder of Truc Lam Yen Tu meditation, being the first ancestor of the Truc Lam faction. Under the Tran Nhan Tong period, Vietnamese Buddhism rose to the top of prosperity. Kings and aristocrats believed in Buddhism but they didn't invest in building the new pagodas, they focused on restoring the old pagodas and towers. The main reasons were that, at that time, our country had many pagodas and towers; otherwise, the Tran dynasty had to use money as well as human forces in fighting Mongolian troops three times. The monks did not participate in the political meeting directly like the Ly dynasty but Buddhism still developed strongly and deeply affected all of social aspects of life in Viet Nam during this stage.

At the end of the Tran dynasty, after the prosperous period, Buddhism fell into a degradation age. The pagodas were also the economic units; therefore, many people hid in pagodas to evade the responsibility of the country. On the other hand, Buddhism was not political theory; it didn't meet the demand of building the centralized state. It was the reason why kings of the Ly - Tran dynasties still needed the support of Confucianism even if this was the most prosperous stage of Buddhism.

***Basic features of Buddhism in the Ly - Tran Dynasties:***

***1. Syncretism with traditional beliefs, Confucianism and Taoism***

When introduced into Viet Nam, Buddhism fell in line with the traditional beliefs of the Vietnamese. Therefore, Buddhism added strength to overcome the barrier of geology, culture and ideology of the Vietnamese. In the Ly-Tran dynasties, Buddhism continued to harmonize with the traditional beliefs of our nation to create a new cultural value, incorporating the specific character of Vietnamese culture.

Under the Ly dynasty, the monks were usually masters in Confucianism - Buddhism - Taoism like Tu Dao Hanh, Khuong Viet, Van Hanh, Vien Thong, Man Giac. With the harmony of Buddhist tenets, the Buddhists used the theory of Confucianism to improve the theory on learning and politics under the management of the Ly dynasty.

In the Tran dynasty, the kings Tran Thai Tong and Tran Thanh Tong expended Confucianism. In 1253, king Tran Thai Tong built a national institute in the imperial city, sculptured the statues of Chu Cong, Confucius, and Mencius and drew 72 ancestors to worship. He also held the examination in 1232, 1247, and other examinations to choose talented persons. At this time, education was consolidated from Confucianism - Buddhism - Taoism. Thanks to this harmony, in the middle of the 14 century, Buddhism was still in a prosperous stage.

***2. Harmony trend between the sects of Ly-Tran Buddhism***

There were 3 sects of Buddhism in the Ly dynasty: Zen, Jodo and Esoteric. The Zen sect includes Vinitaruci and the Singon Sect. In the Ly Thanh Tong period, the Tsao-T'ang Zen sect appeared founded by Tsao-T'ang monk, who was Chinese. He was a prisoner arrested in Champa, liberated by Ly Thanh Tong and the King allowed him to carry on missionary work in Khai Quoc pagoda in Thang Long (Flying Dragon) capital in 1069. In 1294, Tran Nhan Tong, under the guidance of Zen Master Tue Trung Thuong Si, left the court to become a monk in Yen Tu mountain (Quang Ninh province), unifying the three sects into Truc Lam Zen sect in 1299.

In general, the sects of Buddhism affect each other. The three sects mentioned above were under the influence of Esoteric Sect, especially the Vinitaruci. Many Zen Masters like Van Hanh, Tu Dao Hanh, Nguyen Minh Khong, etc. were masters in magic. In the Tran dynasty, the Esoteric Sect did not cover all Buddhism, there

appeared to be a combination between the Zen Sect and Jodo Sect, the combination between “*self-reliance*” and “*other reliance*” then awakening.

### *3. Strong spirit to enter life*

When introduced into Viet Nam, the Vietnamese Zen Masters naturalized Buddhism to make it harmonize with our nation, creating a specific culture in Vietnam. In the Ly-Tran dynasties, Buddhism did not narrow in the pagodas, monasteries; it was not the philosophy of monks but was the living philosophy of people regardless of kings, mandarins or common people. Buddhism had a strong attachment to the spiritual life of the Vietnamese. It was the philosophy of Buddhism in the two dynasties that made Vietnamese society develop strongly militarily, politically, culturally and artistically. The monks and kings in spite of following Buddhism, still participated in fighting against invaders, defending our country. This point made the difference between the Buddhism in Vietnam, India and China.

Ly - Tran Buddhism brought a living philosophy. The Buddhist Ly - Tran have executed this philosophy their whole life. Ly - Tran Buddhist is the religion of the merciful and intelligent, the two main virtues of Buddhism. Buddhist kings of both dynasties were good-hearted and deeply loved their people, being alive to the merciful spirit, gladly and readily sacrifice, altruism. Ly - Tran kings conquered the people's hearts and mind by their morality, not ruling by law. They created a social impregnability with mercifulness and happiness.

## **II. The Impact of Buddhism on the politics of Ly - Tran stages**

When introduced into Vietnam, Buddhism was not only spread out in the common people classes but the king and mandarins classes as well, affecting their policies. Buddhism was highly appreciated from the Pre-Le dynasty, but up to Ly - Tran dynasty, it rose to its highest rank. The changes from the Pre- Le dynasty into the Ly dynasty made an important landmark on the influence of Buddhism on Vietnamese political life.

Ly Cong Uan was a mandarin under the pre-Le dynasty brought up by Zen Master Van Hanh in a pagoda (his mother died when he was small) and the Zen Master Van Hanh trained him to be a talented person. When recognizing the degradation of the Pre-Le dynasty, the depravity of king Le Long Dinh, Zen Master Van Hanh and Da Bao held a political movement, putting Ly Cong Uan on the throne. The Zen Master spread Buddhism, brought up the consciousness of independence, self-control, and nation and made a rare non-uprising revolution in the history of our nation. The book

*Thiên uyên tập anh* recorded the prediction of Mr. Dinh Khong (?-808). It was handed down in the masses at that time that: in the future, at Co Phap village (part of Bac Ninh) will appear as king - last name Ly who made Buddhism become prosperous. These predictions handed down from this generation to other generations up to 200 years later. At the time of master monk Van Hanh (?-1025), it became true.

In the Đinh dynasty, the Pre-Le dynasty (before the 11<sup>th</sup> century) and the beginning of the Ly dynasty, the eminent monk took part in political affairs directly, consulting the kings. Master Ngo Chan Luu offered the very meaningful mark “Helping Viet country” (Khuong Viet). Until the Le Dai Hanh dynasty (sitting on the throne 980-1005), his talent and virtue was respected by the king. *Thien uyen tap anh* recorded: “with regards to the military affairs, state affairs in the court, Buddhist monks even took part.” *Thien uyen tap anh* also recorded about Do Phap Thuan: “While the Le dynasty formed the work, drew up policy, monks take part efficiently in the event. Until the peaceful and prosperous time, monks did get any awards. Le Dai Hanh king was respected more, he often was not called by his name, he was just called Do Sharman and he brought the document authorizing the assignment of the monk”. He even imitated a boatman in welcoming Tong ambassador - Ly Giac in 978 and left the unscripted poem, together with Khuong Viet. Ly Giac admired Nam country’s talents.

Da Bao and Van Hanh monks were not only the teacher of Ly Cong Uan, the founder of the Ly dynasty, but also the important political consultant for the king in leading the country. They did not teach the king about Buddhism law, but the king welcomed him coming to the palace to ask his opinion and taking part in deciding national policy. Le Dai Hanh asked his advice about the results of the resistance war against Tong invaders in 980, the result exact to his prediction. Van Hanh was also Ly King’s consultant on geomancy. He helped the king to decide to move the capital city from little Hoa Lu to Thang Long, opening a new development era for the nation, for the undaunted Đại Việt spirit.

After moving the capital to Thang Long, Ly Thai To ordered his people to seek out the Taisho Tripitaka from China and decided to build ten pagodas in the capital. In 1024, the King decided to build Chan Giao pagoda within the city to act as a place for meeting, chanting and doing penance. This was not simple for returning graces of the bonze from a Buddhist devout person. More importantly, this aims at political - cultural goals. The Buddhism coming to Vietnam created a Dai Viet cultural feature independent from the North culture (strongly characterized by Confucianism),

helping to unite the population closely and bring up the spirit of self-control, independence and self-strengthening of our country (the tenets of Buddhism gives prominence to self-control and slave abolishment).

In the era of Ly Thai Tong king (1028-1054), the King focused on building hundreds of pagodas, including Dien Huu pagoda (One Pillar Pagoda – the symbol of Hanoi nowadays). In 1069, Ly Thanh Tong successfully mounted a punitive expedition against Champa and created a new development trend to our country. As a political leader and a Buddhist, Ly Thanh Tong king was aware of selecting Buddhism as decisive thought for human development and training. In 1070, the king decided to build the Temple of Literature and six years later (in 1076), Ly Nhan Tong king decided to found the Temple of Literature - the first university in Vietnam educational history. With the aim of national development, all the kings in the Ly dynasty did not hesitate to bring Confucianism in to support their educational intentions.

The prominent point of Buddhism in this period was the rise of Tsao T'ang dhyana with the official inheritance generations who was not a Buddhist monk, they are major retired scholars of the first generation, and Ly Anh Tong was the third inheritance generation. Recluse of Buddhism was not out of purpose connecting religion to daily life, making Buddhism familiar in taking part in activities of social life. Especially, if these retired scholars were the highest leaders of the country. This is the first time in Vietnamese Buddhist history, retired scholar's role affirmed through the official way, appropriate to the country's development requirements.

In his era, Ly Thanh Tong Buddhist priest completed two important matters. It is establishing Temple of Literature and dhyana generation for retired scholars. Afterwards, King-Tran Thai Tong presented in his writings: *Thien tong chi nam tu* as follows: The policy of establishing the Temple of Literature to use Confucianism to spread Buddhism, the re-closing explained by theory "*Cu tran lac dao*" (Enjoy religion in life).

The expansion of the edge to the South together with the necessary requirements training talents for the country, Buddhist's leaders - Ly Thanh Tong, Ly Nhan Tong formed the Temple of Literature, aiming to bring Buddhism into daily life, in every family with the form of Buddhist priest-retired scholars, establishing a strong influence supporting Buddhism, strengthening Buddhism to develop rapidly and deeply in the people. This trend was the premise for the appearance of Buddhist priest-

retired, thinkers of our country such as: Tran Thai Tong, Tran Nhan Tong, and Tue Trung master Taoist.

Under the spiritual construction of many Buddhist priest, Buddhist in the Ly era created a politically humane culture. The Ly dynasty is considered as one of the most tamed dynasties in Vietnamese Feudal dynasty history. Kings of this dynasty had an ethical and spiritual life, not affected by the power fighting, riots, and torture instead of the tolerant political policy with their people and enemies.

Under the Ly-Tran era, a merciful, gladness and readily sacrificing spirit was impregnated with the people. This way applied virtue instead of rule by law approving the integration of Buddhism into the daily social political life. Under the control of the Dinh dynasty and the Pre-Le dynasty they often used torture such as hot cauldrons of oil, tiger caves to punish criminals. The Kings of Ly dynasty use the tolerant rule policies combining the rule by law and rule of virtue. After his term, Ly Cong Uan abolished all instruments of stature in prisons, he built many Buddhist temples. Ly Thanh Tong, the third king of Ly dynasty, was very famous as a good-hearted king. A legend about him was as follows: One day, the king gave an audience, the king pointed to Dong Thien princess and said: "I love my people as my daughter. But, the people act carelessly. So they must be convicted for their crimes. I feel pity for them. So, from this time, every offence will be commuted". The King-Ly Thai Tong pardoned Nung Tri Cao, he did not kill Champa king - Che Cu.

The political event in 1226 tolls the knell of the Ly dynasty. Tran Canh (1218-1277) acquired power and influence. The mark was Thai Tong, establishing a new dynasty called the Tran dynasty. Tran dynasty is one Buddhist dynasty, with many brilliant feats of arms such as: defeating Mongolian invaders three times and reached splendid success in the task of building the country. At the beginning of the Ly dynasty, Buddhist priest interfered directly in political issues. The Ly dynasty needed talented people, diplomatic skills and training skills to support their popularity. In the Tran dynasty, the situation changed. Tran kings were wise. Even the direct control of political affairs of the Buddhist monks were being lost, however, Buddhism still developed faster than ever before. The direct impact of Buddhism was felt in the social-political, economic and cultural fields of the Tran dynasty.

Under this dynasty control, the equal and humane idea of Buddhism was still brought into play. Buddhist's spirit helped many politicians to apply closing people's policy and democratic policy. In 1284, shortly before the invasion of the Mongolian



invaders, Tran Nhan Tong has convened a meeting with Dien Hong to ask whether to fight the invaders or not. The attendees were not the officials, but the respected elders among the people. They shouted in chorus among hundreds people with the same mind: “fighting, fighting and fighting” representing the spirit of a national undaunted struggle, the trust of victory and sureness of victory.

Inherit and uphold the tradition “religion connects closely to social life”, the Buddhist priest Kings in Tran dynasty brought brilliance to Vietnam Buddhism in this period. If the political role is taken care of for the people, it brings peace to the society and the land. The role of combining harmoniously two roles in the position of national leaders helped bring the tenets and philosophic theory they discover to become the strength contributing greatly to the multi-faceted social and science life.

Tran dynasty’s kings found the spiritual support in Buddhism. One principle, one political creed helped build and protect the country. Beginning the world active spirit of Vietnam, Thien Tong king put religion closely in social life, a liberating enterprise for the country. Tran dynasty’s Buddhist priest Kings, even took full advantage of allowing free study of Buddhist texts. When the country is in danger, they are ready “Open the monk’s robe, put the war dress on, go out to battle”. The spirit of Buddhism impacts totally the fearless spirit of sacrifice. All support for the country’s freedom and independence. The Buddhist priest kings can not enter into life to rescue the people following merciful, gladness and the readily spirit of Buddhism. But, after completing the task, they are ready for “leaving the throne such as leaving a corrupted shoe”. After twice guiding the people to defeat Mongolian invaders, Tran Nhan Tong already abdicated in favour of one of his son’s named Tran Anh Tong and become a Buddhist monk and lead a religious life in Yen Tu Mountain in 1294. One talented, righteous and generous king was on the top of the world after winning for the glory of the country making a decision to become a Buddhist monk which might have created repercussions at that time.

About the role and influence of two kings of the Tran era, Le Si Thang wrote: “Is there any king except for Tran Thai Tong and Tran Nhan Tong who gave up the top honor, the top of their power and their prestige, to become a Buddhist monk after the ethnic liberation? If there is, it is also rare in the history of ethnic groups that we did not know before. For all that, we believe that, after giving up the royal robe to wear a monk robe, live in the Yen Tu foggy mountain and be faraway from all the dust and the black balloon, writing *Khoa hu luc* as Tran Thai Tong or creating Truc Lam Zen

sect as Tran Nhan Tong, the two Tran kings expressed their thought, by then, the liberation of people does not stop after liberating people. Liberation must also continue to release people from pain, the sufferings of life, sever the source of our suffering and happiness is not in power or reputation,"<sup>(1)</sup>. Only those who actually penetrate the law of impermanence, not-self of the Buddha can do so. These important mental factors contribute importantly to the great achievement of the people during this period.

Tran Nhan Tong is the symbol of patriotism and heroic history of feudalism in Vietnam. In the leadership of the country, he has made the glorious pages of the nation and brought Buddhism in Vietnam to the top of its development. His name is associated with the most important political, cultural and social activities in this period. The history of Vietnam actually experienced the most vibrant and exciting events during this time. Tran Nhan Tong led the country to two successful wars against the Mongols in 1285 and in 1288. His ideas are reflected brightly and extremely diverse in many genres including poetry, poetic essays (long poetic poems), lectures, prose and diplomatic messages. King Tran Nhan Tong sent to the content of a deep thought which was cast from many activities related to Buddhism, related to life as well as the penetrative, thorough study of the Buddha and study. However, critical thought makes up the entire thought of his thought is "*Cu tran lac dao*" (Enjoy religion in life). This concept reminds people the fragile, temporary body of people which is the objective existence of natural as sunrise and sunset. The attitude to accept the loss of the body will awaken people to acquire the value of life, no desire to enjoy life and not fear death when intimate. According to the opinion of Tran Nhan Tong, he who sees the impermanence of death is living a new life of deserving and therefore also receives the death of peace, in itself. Tran Nhan Tong considered religion as a means to serve the nation. Also, he thoroughly performed Buddhist philosophy in both life and in business to fill in to make life beautiful for life, which can be useful for countries. "Tran Nhan Tong not only was a political visionary, but also a gifted military leader, not only a diplomat but also he was full of ideas, a writer, poet, not just a King, but also a Priest, not just the culture, but also an excellent Zen Master".<sup>(2)</sup>

The kings of the Ly-Tran had "Vietnamized Buddhism", applied Buddhism creatively in accordance with the circumstances of Vietnam. Dealing with the

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<sup>1</sup> . Thang Le Si, *Human Liberation in the Thought of two Tran Kings*, Philosophy Magazine, N<sup>o</sup>. 1/1994, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> . Hau Nguyen Hung, *Summary of Thien Truc Lam's Thought in Vietnam*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1997, p. 119.

invasion, the meditating monks, the Buddhist Purity was not to just sit down, but study Buddhism, have concern for personal liberation that must go into the idea of large-Liberation of people. If those kings only kept the world safe by prohibiting killing people and individuals, Buddhism in Vietnam would not have been able to gain such successful development and leave a great reputation and the history in the Ly - Tran era would not have had glorious milestones. Therefore, Buddhism went into the life of ethnic groups, but also with ethnic history. It is also the reasons why Buddhism penetrated more deeply into the heart of the land in Vietnam.

A Buddhist priest in this stage who has a great role for Vietnamese Buddhism was Tue Trung Thuong Si. His life and career strongly influenced not only king Tran Nhan Tong (he is a master of king Tran Nhan Tong), Truc Lam faction, but also historical ethnic thought. For him, education was the only means to reach out and it should be applied reasonably and flexibly. This Buddhist priest opened a new deep, intimate and unique road in Vietnamese Buddhism. As a recluse, he talked in a very transcendental style, a style found only in a person who has deep knowledge about religion. As a prince and a general he took part in three wars against the Mongol invasion, he was not bound by reputation and prestige but he saw it as temporary, impermanent. He considered death as only a game, lighter than a feather, while it is threatening to normal ones. This is the way and method of enlightenment he applied in Vietnam which made Vietnamese Buddhism unique and full of national ethnic groups.

### **III. The Impact of Buddhism on the arts of the Ly - Tran stages**

Buddhism in the Ly-Tran era not only strongly influenced politics, public order policy and reassurance of people of the contemporary authority class but also contributed to the rich culture of Vietnam. Buddhism influenced directly on the literary and arts in this period. When Buddhism leads in all aspects of social life, the feelings to create literature and art on Buddhism has great influence into the cultural life and thoughts of the time. Within this article, the focus has been on researching the influence of Buddhism on art in the Ly-Tran with the two main aspects of architecture and sculpture.

A long time ago, the pagoda became a symbol of Vietnam urban areas, which is similar to the people but holy. Every Vietnamese pagoda is embedded with oriental signs which are presented in the architecture, pattern and symbol of the pagoda. All most all pagodas in Vietnam are often harmoniously arranged with the landscape. Ly - Tran dynasties has left honor on history to our country when pagodas were

constructed in large numbers and monumental. Apart from making pagoda construction, many statues, epitaphs, bells with unique designs were built. In 1010, Ly Cong Uan, newly crowned, built about 300 pagodas over the country. In 1024, he built pagoda Chan Giao and in 1036 held a ceremony for the Dai Phat Nguyen statue.

In 1040, the La Han festival at Long Tri was equipped with 1000 Buddhist statues, 100 Buddhist pictures and more than ten thousand flags. In 1041, Ly Thai To arranged to cast a Smiling Buddha statue with copper weighing 7,560 kg placed at Thien Phuc institute. In 1049, Ly Thai Tong King built Dien Huu pagoda (One Pillar pagoda). In a historical document, in 1049 Ly Thai Tong King had a dream that *avalokiteśvara* was sitting on Buddha's throne and put him in it. The courtier stated that it was not good, Thien Tue monk advised the King to build the pagoda as in the dream. The king ordered to build the pagoda, a stone pillar at the center of the lake with Buddha's throne on the top. The monks sat around to pray for the King to live for long time. It was the reason for the pagoda to be named Dien Huu. Dien Huu pagoda, from the name of the pagoda to rites was related to Ly kings. The pagoda was a creative construction of architecture in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a picture of a giant lotus on the water surface, ensured solid construction but noble, graceful, and covered Buddhism philosophical ideology and art contents.

The pagoda under Ly dynasty was built on a large scale, with ambition to affirm the independence and freedom of Dai Viet. Ly dynasty took notice to set up culture and art of the nation. It was shown at the Thang Long capital (Flying Dragon); there were many palaces, a Court in front of the royal palace, royal gardens in the historical document without detailed sizes, popularly one floor, sometimes with stairs. While, contemporary epitaphs showed the detailed scale, a large size of Chua Thap (pagoda of Tower) built over the country.

The architecture of pagodas during the Ly dynasty were large and built at quaint locations close with the nature to create a comprehensive landscape with mountains, rivers, trees and the building. Charming landscape was exploited by artists under the Ly dynasty to respect the beautiful and supernatural character of the pagoda. In hundreds of pagodas under the Ly dynasty; two pagodas of a large scale were Phat Tich and Dam pagodas. They were visited by Ly kings, and were given their names. Two pagodas were located at the hometown of a Ly king, not far from Thang Long capital, advantageous for traveling by sea and by road for the King. They were built

on a large surface. Apart from these two pagodas, there were also other architectural structures on a large scale.

Phat Tich pagoda was located in Bac Ninh province, in 1057, but the scale of the pagoda was erected as a monument in 1680. “The third king under the Ly dynasty, Long Thụy Thái Bình year the fourth (1057) built the tower, the statue was covered with gold with a height of 6 meters. On the front bench, there were ten animals; in the rear, there was a dragon lake; at the upper corner, there was a picture of a phoenix, a dragon hand to touch the sky”. In 1071, Ly Thanh Tông king went to visit Phat Tich, carved on a rock on back of a mountain. However, the characteristics of the Phat Tich pagoda have remained in tact for 300 years. During the First Indochina War the pagoda was totally destroyed in 1947. When the country regained peace, three small parts of the pagoda were recovered to put the *amitōbha* statue made from the precious rock.

Many sculpture works of the Ly dynasty have been kept in the pagoda till now. Right at the second terrace, there are 10 animal statues which are 10 meters high, including a lion, elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, and a horse. Each type has two statues, lying on a lotus base carved from big blocks of stone. In the middle of the pagoda is a blue stone statue of Buddha zoning on a lotus that is 1.85 meters high. On the base and among the lotus petals are shapes of dragon, flowers and leaves of the Ly dynasty. In the pagoda there are some other relics from the Ly dynasty, such as pestle stone, etc., scored with shapes of colossus, professional executants, dancers, etc.

Another pagoda named Dam is located on Dam Mountain, Bac Ninh province. The pagoda was built in 1086 and finished in 1094, on a large scale and was invested specially by the court. Until the eighteenth century, the beauty of the pagoda was described by King Trần Nhân Tông: “An architectural painting consists of twelve layers, nature is seen thousands times wider.” The locals acknowledge the pagoda’s scale with the folk verse defining the time of the moon rising: “*Mười rằm trăng náu; Mười sáu trăng treo, Mười bảy sây giường chiếu, Mười tám đóng xong cửa chùa Dam*”. It means that: if the whole hamlet Mon Tu participated in building the door of the pagoda from the afternoon, when they had just finished the work, the Moon just rose.

Today, Dam pagoda does not exist, but only the system of door steps to the substratum is a monument, in which the door steps to the first substratum are 16 meters high and wide. The old architects and sculptors were clever to arrange the space sensibly to multiply the value and beauty of the works and to express the

Oriental philosophy of beauty. Beside the large-scale architecture, Dam pagoda also has an original art of monument. With the architectural works at Dam pagoda, Ly dynasty can be regarded as the beginner of the large scale monuments in architecture and in shaping the Dai Viet nation. Cot Bien - the outside monument (existed for over 9 centuries) has become the pride of Vietnam's sculpture. Many artists had a passion for seeing that monument silhouetting impressively and miraculously on the mountains, fields, rivers and streams at different moments when the sun is shining. It's not accidental that this monument is made in its version to be laid in the Museum of Vietnamese Arts.

Some architectural vestiges of the pagoda under the Ly dynasty remained art characteristics such as: carved stone used of wood pillars, tubular tile carved flowers and leaves, and ridge-tile carved dragons and phoenixes which created selective landscape, happiness and optimism. Each tile was built on a stone lotus which was surrounded by four orchestras as in a festival. The total roof was carved with flowers and dragons, phoenixes which were similar and unique.

Many sculpture works of the Ly dynasty have been kept in the pagoda till now. Right at the second terrace, there are 10 animal statues which are 10 meters high, including a lion, elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, and a horse. Each type has two statues, lying on a lotus base carved from big blocks of stone. In the middle of the pagoda is a blue stone statue of Buddha zoning on a lotus that is 1.85 meters high. On the base and among the lotus petals are shapes of dragons, flowers and leaves of the Ly dynasty. In the pagoda there are some other relics from the Ly dynasty, such as pestle stones, etc., scored with shapes of Kim Cuong, colossus, professional executants, dancers, etc.

Buddhism architecture under the Tran dynasty followed the great heritages from the Ly dynasty but developed strongly with impressive achievements stressed by self-improvement and self-strength. The Tran dynasty renewed the old pagoda such as One-pillar Pagoda (1249), Bao Thien tower (1258), Khai Nghiem pagoda (1333-1335), Linh Te Tower on Duc Thuy mountain (1337). Some places were considered as Buddhist centers under the Ly dynasty and they still existed and were developed under the Tran dynasty such as Phat Tich pagoda, Quynh Lam pagoda. In particular, Hoa Yen pagoda in Yen Tu Mountain and Pho Minh tower has been famous works which were well-known throughout history. Beside that, newly-built architectural projects on a large scale such as Huong Tich pagoda, Hoa Long pagoda and Thong pagoda, Hang pagoda, Binh Son tower at Vinh Phu, Boi Khe pagoda, etc., were built as well.

Today, architectural projects under the Tran dynasty have been gradually destroyed over time. However, through historical documents, we can see the vast and influence of Buddhism project of that glorious time. Under the Tran dynasty, Buddhism was very prosperous, so statues were cast in large numbers. A number of 1,300 small and big statues were cast at one time with the large size such as Smiling Buddha statues having heights ranging from 1 to 6 feet. The King spent much money to cast the statues. Tran Nhan Tong King appointed people to cast 3 statues in copper such as *amitōbha*, *sakkamuni*, Smiling Buddha with a height up to 17 feet when coming to the throne.

Among statues in the pagoda, *avalokiteśvara* statues accounted for the largest number. If in China, India, *avalokiteśvara* was paternal, in Vietnam was maternal. *Amitōbha* statue at Boi Khe pagoda was designed with 7 couple of large hands, balanced in each couple, left bare, round wrist and worn circle, slender figure. With a straight nose, long hair, earring, shaman hat, chignon, etc; the face expressed kind-heartedness. In addition, *amitōbha* God is often seen in pagodas in the Ly-Tran age, in which the statue at Phat Tich Pagoda is a rare and valuable statue. This statue is made of plaster at a height of 2.77m of which carving lines are highly appreciated. Smiling Buddha is Buddhism in the future, usually worshiped with the Buddhism in the past and at present to create Phat Tam The set. Smiling Buddha sat with bare shoulders, a big abdomen, brilliant face and a perfect smile. Looking at the statues, we could feel life happiness and a restful character at the soul, giving up sorrowfulness.

In general, under the foot of every statue, there was a lotus or daisy abutment. Lotus is symbol of nobility, Buddhism and awareness of Buddhist law. This also represents the imposingness, the hermit and priest. A dragon is often seen in pagoda of the Ly - Tran age which represents human's ideology of flexibility and firmness in all relationships with other countries. The dragon is the symbol of nobility, everlasting life, and the planet's strength. Fine carving lines, and the feelings of every statue show the age's style and fine humanity philosophy of Buddhism.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Ly - Tran period is Vietnam's golden age. Buddhism in this age was actually prosperous and made significant contributions to the nation regarding politics, economics, morality, literature, the arts, and etc. The Ly- Tran period was also a special age because the authoritarian class was Buddhist believers. Kings used

Buddhism ideology for state management, combining virtue and law (in which virtue is predominant) successfully. “Using ethics in the state management boosts the government’s strength, but doesn’t make the state fall into decadence.”<sup>(3)</sup>

Kings - Buddhists of the Ly - Tran age not only had high direction spiritual life but also were wise leaders. The Buddhism in this age was not pessimistic ideology when any difficulties arose. On the contrary, this was a positive miracle with sporting spirit and a glorious feat of arms. The first great victory against Sung’s invaders in 981 was a contribution of the Pre-Le age headed by Le Dai Hanh king, a Buddhist, too. In 1077, Ly court headed by Ly Thuong Kiet, a recluse, defeated Sung’s invaders for a second time. Then our nation defeated Mongol invaders 3 times in 1288 (headed by Tran Thai Tong, a Buddhist priest), in 1285 and 1288 (headed by Tran Nhan Tong, a priest of Buddhism). The great victory against the Mongol invaders for the second and the third time was made mainly by the famous general, Tran Hung Dao, who was a priest. This is a strange phenomenon in history. Buddhism connected closely with Vietnamese’s fortune, even deciding its fortune, king Ly Cong Uan. It could be said that under the Ly - Tran age theocracy made significant contributions to the development of royalty and reversely, the royalty also boosted the development of Buddhism.

With the establishment of Truc Lam Yen Tu Meditation by Tran Nhan Tong, Vietnam Buddhism had its own renowned feature. This was the period of unifying the thought of Zen, forming the ideology “*Cu tran lac dao*”. The Zen not only met requirements of the Đại Việt: building a country which was independent, self-controlled not in terms of politics, economics, culture, but also religion. Buddhism prayer brought beautiful poems making Buddhism ideology literary.

Pagodas under the Ly - Tran reign were voluminous. This showed that the economy in the reign was very developing. The architecture and the art of carving Buddha statues at the time indicated that the people had a high aesthetic level. Buddhism actually contributed to form the cultural character of Vietnam. Literature, architecture, the art of carving Buddha statues in the Ly - Tran reign was typically developing, and contributing to affirming an independent, self-controlled reign of the Đại Việt.

Regardless of being impermanent of space, time, the Buddhism still existed. The Buddhism was born by the human being, of human being and existed together with

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<sup>3</sup> . Lang Nguyen, *Contributions to Vietnam Buddhist History, Volume 1*, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 1992, p. 231.



existence of human being. Modern Vietnam Buddhism was innovating and updating to transfer religious ideology to decorate the life and build fair, democratic and civilization society. /.

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