

**VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM: INFLUENCE OF
BUDDHIST CULTURE IN VIETNAM DURING LY-TRAN
DYNASTY (1009-1400 A.D.)**

***Abstract:** Ly-Tran dynasties (1009-1400 A.D.) was the peak period of Vietnamese feudalism history. It was also know as the golden age of Vietnamese Buddhism. Therefore, the finding of study aim on the explore influence of Buddhist culture in Vietnam during Ly-Tran Dynasty (1009-1400 A.D.), that finds absorbed and deeply influenced in Vietnamese culture. This article addresses the main influences of Buddhist culture on the decisive ideology of this period, which is the premise to create a great landmark in the history of Vietnamese Buddhism finds the influence several aspects related the Vietnamese Buddhists 4 aspects as follows: (1) influence on political - social thought, (2) influence on traditional and customs of Vietnamese, (3) influence on literature, and (4) influence on architecture and sculpture.*

***Keywords:** Buddhist Culture; Vietnamese Buddhism; Ly-Tran dynasty.*

Introduction

Culture was understood as the characteristics and knowledge of a specific group of people, including language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and the arts, ect. According to Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist made a comment "Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language,

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marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things." Thereby, Culture approaches to the values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes that underpin a society and its institutions and which animate the population's ways of being, talking, and doing. On the basis of the above statement, Buddhist culture is exemplified through Buddhist art, Buddhist architecture, Buddhist music and Buddhist cuisine etc. As Buddhism after going beyond oversea of India, took on the artistic and cultural elements of the host countries, and changed itself to adapt to indigenous cultures in other parts of Asia.

Buddhism spread to Vietnam very early, around the 2nd-3rd BC. Buddhism really marked the peak of fusion in Vietnamese culture and social life. From the time it was arrived to Vietnam, Buddhism accompanied its people and crept into rural and urban areas and became an inseparable part of the national spiritual tradition. It was this tradition that created the glue that attached Buddhism with Vietnamese in Ly-Tran period.

As a religion, Buddhism is a cultural constituent, so we discuss the issue of the expression of Buddhist culture, thereby clarifying the influence of Buddhism Vietnamese culture under Ly-Tran period involving the phenomenal, practices, activities, idea, norm and behavior in the social or community among of society members especially Vietnamese Buddhists.

1. Features of Vietnamese Buddhism in Ly-Tran period

The Ly-Tran dynasties took Buddhism as the national religion basis on the main ideology of the "Three religions of the same origin / 三教同源" (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism). It was also the period when Dai-Viet country established its social institution following the Confucian monarchy model, but still considered Buddhism as the state religion, still held three pagan exams and established the ability to integrate ideas. Ch'an masters themselves

are national lawyers, counselors, advisers; many emperors were simultaneously meditation teachers, and poets so furthermore many generals and the royal people like to be meditators or monks. So that many Vietnamese culturalists have called Vietnamese Buddhism a patriotic religion, having experienced the ups and downs of history with the people.

Buddhist ideology and the monastic order had a special place in the cultural and society of Dai-Viet. The sources of ancient bibliography, especially the book of Thien-Uyen-Tap-Anh (Compendium of Outstanding Figures of the Zen Garden), clearly defined the relationship between the monastic world and the kings and the government officials. It is the Ch'an masters who have participated in the career of education and nomination in a particular way, not only do they directly pass the exam, but at a higher level of intelligence, they can directly participate in politics, help the king to fight against invaders, teach for royal members in the court or perform rituals to pray for favorable weather. These things clearly show that, in the "engaged to the society of Buddhism" direction towards the secular community, the relationship between Ch'an Buddhist masters with the kings became an important criterion to confirm the role of Ch'an masters in social life and national community. This demonstrates the link between theocracy and the kingship as well as the dominant role in the spiritual life, the spiritual world of Buddhism as a "state's religion" in the contemporary period.

Buddhism in the Ly-Tran period was a prosperous development, occupying a leading position in "Three Religions". Buddhism became the state religion with the rule of virtue. Buddhism in the Ly-Tran dynasty was not only a demand for belief but also became the main spiritual value of a nation and a people. Ly-Tran dynasty's kings were not only devout people but also creators of Buddhist ideological values. From the Ly dynasty, the kings had imbued with the advice of Ch'an master Phap Thuan: "無為居殿閣,

處處息刀兵"¹ (In order for the country to be peaceful, at His court, the king must know how to apply the method, or the principle of Wu-wei (無為/ Nirvṇa, an Ultimate state of happiness attained by the practice of morality, meditation and wisdom). The kings themselves have cultivated moral values such as selflessness, loving-kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity, practice Buddha teachings day by day. At the same time disseminating good thoughts of Buddhism about the ways of life to all.

Unlike Indian Ch'an and Chinese Ch'an, Ch'an Buddhism in Vietnam has combined with indigenous beliefs, with the magic element of Taoism, so there were many the story of Ch'an masters who predict the serious affairs of nation like Van Hanh, using magic to cure exorcisms, to capture tiger, or to fly in the sky, to go underwater like Nguyen-Minh-Khong; to avenge his father, or to reincarnate like Tu-Dao-Hanh, etc. Buddhism in the Ly-Tran dynasty combined with Tantric Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam as early as the second half of the tenth century, a typical example is the inscription on stone pillar of Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya Dhāraṇī (佛頂尊勝陀羅尼) found in Hoa-Lu (Ninh Binh). Tantra factors is often mixed with traditional Vietnamese beliefs; assimilating the methods of Taoist magic, then influencing the masses with exorcism. Ch'an Buddhism in Ly - Tran dynasties was also associated with Pure Land Buddhism. Through the beliefs of the people at that time, Pure Land Buddhism entered the masses through the path of preaching compassion, saving suffering, and salvation, by erecting an Ultimate Pure Land, where was Amitabha Buddha ready to welcome those who practice good virtue, recite the Buddha's name, follow the Buddha's teachings, practice morality for Buddhist lay people (The five precepts/P. Pañcasīla), and pray for rebirth in the Pure Land. Pure Land School in Vietnam also erected the image of the Bodhisattva who attained enlightenment, but because of his compassion for sentient

beings, he remained in the world to save them. This image of the Bodhisattva is often encountered in folklore: "But" (Buodha/ Buddha/ 佛陀) and "Quan-The-Am" (Guan Yin/ Avalokitesvara), representing miraculous power and immense loving-kindness. So under Ly Dynasty, Thao Duong Zen sect built the One Pillar pagoda (Chua-Mot-Cot) worship Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.

Another highlight of Vietnamese Buddhism during this period was the fusion and vigorous development of various meditation lineages such as: Ch'an lineage of master Ty-Ni-Da-Luu-Chi (Vinītaruci/ 毘尼多流支, South Indian), Ch'an lineage of master Vo-Ngon-Thong (chinese monk), Ch'an lineage of master Thao-Duong (chinese monk but lived in Champa), and especially Ch'an of Truc-Lam lineage (was founded by king Tran-Nhan-Tong). Ch'an of Truc-Lam lineage was a leap of Vietnamese Buddhist ideology, has made great contributions to the national culture, and was a unique Ch'an line imbued with national identity with organizational systems and classics such as a separate religion. Besides, Ch'an lineage of master Ty-Ni-Da-Luu-Chi and Ch'an lineage of master Vo-Ngon-Thong also had Ch'an masters who played an active role and engaged to society, making great contributions to the nation in the early renaissance. Many monks have opened schools to teach and train talents for the country, some of whom have represented the court of the Song dynasty envoys such as Khuong-Viet and Phap-Thuan, some of them represented the court to welcome Song dynasty's emissaries such as Ven. Phap-Thuan, and other gave plans to help the king fight against the Song's army, the Champa's army like Ven. Van Hanh, etc.

In summary, Buddhism in Ly-Tran period has two most prominent characteristics, which also are the two most fundamental factors that make up the physical and spiritual strength of the Dai Viet feudal country: ideas of engaged to society and create new sects of Ch'an (Truc-Lam's Ch'an - pure line of Vietnamese).

Ch'an masters are people who contribute to politics and advise the king in the treatment of the country and the peace of the people but do not serve as an official in the court. They residences at pagodas in countryside and when king needed, he invited Ch'an masters to comment on the affairs of the country. Buddhism in the Ly-Tran dynasties did not hold the monopoly of cultural manipulation but developed with other religions. Vietnamese Buddhism is always outside the government and monks have their own lives at monasteries for religious practice.

2. Manifestations of the Buddhist culture influence to Vietnamese culture during Ly -Tran period

2.1. Influence on political - social thought

Under the influence of Buddhist culture, socio-political thought flourished and Buddhism played an important role in the ideological activities of Vietnam at that time. The values of basic doctrines of Buddhist ethics: Karma and rebirth; Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta; Path of the ten good actions (Dasa Kusala Kammapatha); Six Paramita; Bodhisattva's way; Four Immeasurable: Loving-kindness, Compassion, Empathetic joy, equanimity; etc., and especially the ideology of Ch'an schools in Vietnam (Sunyana, non-attachment, non-self, etc.) had significant impacts to the socio-political ideological trends in Vietnam.

Historical reality has shown that the Ly-Tran dynasty tended to seek an ideology for the nation from the Buddhist canon. However, the Ly-Tran dynasty did not advance to Confucianism thought and the model of Chinese centralized monarchy, but taking private the idea of Buddhism as the official thought for the political policy of the country². Therefore, thoroughly understand emptiness (basic on Diamond Sutra/ Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra) of Ch'an Buddhism has played a role as an effective philosophical methodology of the process of creating an independent and unified national ideology, and not assimilated by any culture and ideology.

In summary, we can look at the whole picture of the influence of Buddhist culture on the socio-political ideology of the Ly-Tran dynasty in the following points: Ly-Tran Buddhist culture became a realistic theoretical basis for political ideology and in the process of developing Dai-Viet political thought (Ly-Tran period), which has occupied a large position and also has a certain relationship with the people. When Buddhist thought used as the main ideology in the "three religions" (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism), Buddhism created the consensus between the feudal government of Ly-Tran dynasty and the people which was the basis for social stability and development.

2.2. Influence on traditional and customs of Vietnamese

During the Ly-Tran period, Vietnamese people still maintained and popularized customs, practices of the previous ages and beliefs of agricultural residents in their lives. That is the customs of natural belief and natural worship such as: tree, stone, river and stream worship, etc. Especially, worshiped Lingaism (Yin-yang/ 陰陽, Linga-Yoni, reproduction/ 繁殖), Thanh-Hoang (village's gods, founder of village or hero of nation) worshipping practices, Worship of Mother Goddesses practices, etc.; are also maintained and developed under Ly-Tran dynasties. Worship of Yin-yang (Linga-yoni/ male-female sex), especially of Yang (陽/ Linga/ male sex) is common in Vietnamese folk beliefs. In many pagodas from the Ly-Tran period: Dam Pagoda, Ly-Trieu-Quoc-Su pagoda, Lang pagoda, Thay pagoda ... there are stone pillars worship - symbols of Linga.

The practice of worshipping natural phenomena related to agriculture since ancient times under the Ly-Tran Dynasty has been maintained from the court to the country folk. For example, to avoid drought and crop failure, people worship the phenomenon of rain, sun, thunder, lightning, etc. and later, especially in the Ly-Tran period, it is influenced by Buddhism thought into the worship's rituals. The Zen masters of Buddhism set up an altar to pray for

peace, prosperity and the weather is favorable. In folk, the popular worship is four goddess: Ba-May (Cloud goddess), Ba-Mua (Rain goddess), Ba-Sam (Thunder goddess), Ba-Chop (Lighting goddess). Then, under the influence of Buddhism with a mixture of folk beliefs Four goddess became four lady Buddhas and formed the system of the Four Dharmas: Ba-May (Cloud goddess) changed to Dharma Cloud (Phap-Van) worshiped at Dau pagoda, Ba-Mua (Rain goddess) changed to Dharma Rain (Phap-Vu) worshiped at Ba-Dau pagoda, Ba-Sam (Thunder goddess) transformed into Dharma Thunder (Phap-Loi) worshiped at Ba-Tuong pagoda and Ba-Chop (Lighting goddess) became Dharma Lighting (Phap-Dien) at Ba-Dan pagoda. The kings, the generals all have to worship these Four Dharma goddess to get the favorable's weather.

Thus, besides the development of customs, beliefs in the Vietnamese mind were circulated widely in all classes of people from low to high levels in society, nowadays with the flourishing of Buddhism, Buddhism has influenced and deformed indigenous religions, Vietnamese belief's system. In addition, the custom of ancestor worship is the most popular belief of Vietnamese. This belief's type is also deeply influenced by Buddhism. It stems from belief that "souls" of the dead still exist and affect the lives of their descendants. When Buddhism entered Vietnam, it had integration with ancestor worship's belief. Due to the influence of Buddhism, the dead were held to pray at the temple and sent to the temple for protected, blessed by Buddha.

During the Ly-Tran dynasties, the tradition of releasing for birds is also a ritual to express the compassionate of the Buddhism. Every year on the 8th of April (Chinese calendar), the Buddha's birthday celebrates the "Buddha bathing ceremony" - which is also a traditional ritual of "raining pray" of the nation (the birthday of Four Dharma) was be Buddhistized. After Buddha's birthday celebration, there were some special festivals with many Buddhist influences such as: Dau Pagoda festival, Thay Pagoda festival, Boi

Khe Pagoda festival, Huong Pagoda festival (Hanoi); Keo Pagoda Festival (Thai Binh), The First Moon of year festival (mid-January), ect. According to Vietnamese custom, beside spiritual life and extremely rich of festivals, main feature is worship deities belief and deities has mixed in worship system of Buddhism. Worshiping Buddha is not only in pagoda but also in temple (worship's place of deities) and vice versa; the temple is not only a place for worshipping deities but also worshipping Buddha and Bodhisattva. In fact, Buddhism has a profound influence and monopoly position in Vietnam society. Although, Buddhism has made changes to fit with Vietnamese culture and integrating with Vietnamese folk beliefs; but the sublime philosophies of the Buddha's teachings are still upheld and preserved.

2.3. Influence on literature

Under the Ly-Tran Dynasty, Dai Viet literature has scored many brilliant achievements, marking a brilliant milestone in Vietnamese literature's history. The translation of Buddhist scriptures into Vietnamese and the transmission of Buddhist classic reference, the communication between monks, Buddhist scholars, Ch'an masters and writers, poets, Confucianism has become popular. The thought of Ch'an Buddhism has formed a Vietnamese literature's phrase with meditation ideas and engaged to society, combine service for human beings and virtue's practicing for themselves (Bodhisattva's way practicing).

Vietnamese literature's field of the Ly-Tran dynasty as: poems, prose, stories or Gatha (or verses/stanzas) are described, referring to different aspects of Buddhist philosophical ideas. Vietnamese Buddhist literature has changed the look of Ly-Tran literature and also brings important impacted in both content and form. In term of form, Buddhist literature has introduce "Gatha", one kind of Buddhist verses derived from India, used to speak, sing, recite or extol, cognate about knowledge level of Ch'an practices. In terms of content, Vietnamese literature under the Ly-Tran dynasty,

promoting the role of human being (Buddha-nature), being in harmony with nature, describing the landscape of nature to express Ch'an thoughts; mingled with Buddha's teachings like as: the true of human life, suffering from impermanence, the constant change of universe, the bliss of liberation's state or enlightenment. For example as a verse of Ch'an master Man-giac (1052-1096)³:

春去百花落
 春到百花開
 事逐眼前過
 老從頭上來
 莫謂春殘花落盡
 庭前昨夜一枝梅

“Spring goes, a hundred kinds of flowers fall,
 Spring comes, a hundred kinds of flowers bloom.
 All things are changing ahead of us,
 From the head old age is coming.

It do not say that spring had gone and flowers have fallen,
 Last night, at the pavilion blossomed a branch of apricot.”

(According to Ven. Man-giac, the phenomenal world changes constantly; but, its nature is immutable, which known as Chan-nhu/ Ultimate state/ Perfect happiness/ Great joy/ the permanence's liberation state/ Nirvana. This verse expressed the felling of hope, peace and optimism to the changed of the phenomenal world.)

The influence of Buddhist culture on literature of Ly-Tran period is very large. Literature of the Ly-Tran dynasty is mostly Buddhist literature. The majority author was Ch'an masters, or kings, generals' belief in Buddhism. Some typical Zen teachers (poet) such as: Ven. Phap-Thuan, Ven. Khuong-Viet, Ven. Van-Hanh, Ven. Vien-Chieu, Nun. Dieu-Nhan, Ven. Man-Giac, Ven. Khong-

Lo, Ven. Quang-Nghiem, Ven. Tran-Nhan-Tong, Tue-Trung-Thuong-Si, Ven. Huyen-Quang, etc.

2.4. Influence on architecture and sculpture

Influence of Buddhist culture did not only stops on the field of thought, literature and art, the influence of Buddhist culture on Vietnamese culture is also reflected in the field of architecture, painting, sculpture, and it manifests itself through create places of worship such as pagodas, temples, Buddha statues, stupa, etc. The first period when Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam (from 1st - 4th century A.D.), Buddhism was only a small hall to worship Buddha, relatively close to the ancestral shrines according to original beliefs of Vietnamese. The system of the Four Dharma pagoda are initial pagodas of Buddhism in Vietnam. Until the 5th – 6th century, according to historical documents recorded there were 20 pagodas on the land of Giao Chau (Jiao-zhu). Under reign of the Early-Ly, Ngo, Dinh, and Early-Le dynasties (in the 10th century), although Buddhism was prosperous, due to the short period of time of the dynasties, the pagoda was not built much. At that time some remain of Buddhism known as stone pillars carved verses (Mantra/ Darani) and notes of the Dinh dynasty, and the name of Khai Quoc pagoda was built in the Early-Ly dynasty.⁴

According to the Dai-Viet-Su-Ky-Toan-Thu (Complete annals of Dai-Viet) recorded: "at that time, the people flocked to the temple". Everyone who did anything, they always thought about the blessing of the Buddha like as: General Ly-Thuong-Kiet after fighting Song army and Champa army built Bao-An pagoda (Thanh Hoa province) to expressed gratitude with Buddha; Queen Linh-Nham built hundreds temples; King Ly-Thai-To build eight pagodas at the time of his ascended the throne. Historical documents depicts about pagodas that are very majestic and wide, while the palace is sketchy. Obviously, at that time, Buddhist architecture had an important position and stood out from other architectural works.

Notable point of Buddhist architecture in Ly period is Stupas. Stupas of Ly period was continuation of Indian Buddhist architecture, Stupas of Ly period for worshiping Buddha place (Chaitya) and practicing Buddhist rituals. Stupas wasn't for keep monk's relic (monk's tomb) or memorial stupa. This is difference point of Stupa's used between Ly dynasty and later periods. The Stupa is often at the center of pagodas, have many floors, which becoming a sacred symbol connected with heaven and earth, creating a yin-yang harmony, sending Buddhist followers wishes to the Buddha in the realm. The Ly period Buddhist stupas such as Phat-Tich, Bao-Thien, Chuong-Son etc.; now only have foundations, based on stupa's remains construction formula and archaeological terracotta tower model, archaeologists speculated Ly period's stupa were usually over ten floor and tens of meters high. While Buddhist architecture of Ly period has the sharp, sophisticated and detailed; but Buddhist architecture of Tran dynasty is simple, rustic and idyllic. Both periods are Vietnamese Buddhist architecture, but by the end of the Tran Dynasty, there was a shift from high to common. According to historian Le Van HUU, wherever there were people living there were Buddhist pagodas. And more specifically, in Linh-Xung Pagoda's inscription, wherever there were wonderful view of nature; that area there were pagodas. Thus, the architecture and sculpture of Vietnamese Buddhism were a flourishing manifestation of Ly - Tran dynasty's architecture and sculpture also. The scholarly elements of architecture and sculpture mingle with the folklore create a balanced and harmonious form, handed down to all generations and become the architecture and sculpture's symbol of Vietnamese Buddhism.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, the study see as perspective of the influence of Buddhist culture on Vietnamese culture during Ly - Tran dynasties (1009 – 1400 A.D.) as the following points:

Ly-Tran Buddhist culture focuses on "compassion", "engage to the society" to create a realistic theoretical basis for political ideology and in the process of developing Dai Viet political thought (Ly - Tran period), it has occupied a large position and also has a certain relationship with the people, when used as the main ideology in the "Three religions" (Confucianism, Buddha, Taoism), Buddhism created the consensus between the feudal government of Ly-Tran and the people is the basis for social stability and development.

The Vietnamese Buddhist culture under the Ly-Tran dynasties was freely and constantly changing to adapt with the struggle against foreign aggression (three times against the Mongols army in 1285 and 1288). Therefore, the role of Buddhism in Dai-Viet under the rein of Ly-Tran dynasty is extremely important and is manifested mainly in three aspects: firstly, because of tyrannical authority that proposed theological argument - choosing Buddhism make key ideology beside Confucianism and Taoism; two are a number of famous monks were invited as advisor for the feudal court and participated in discussions of important military policies; Thirdly, to comfort the common people, that is, through the propagation of the four immeasurable (Brahmavihārās): loving-kindness (Metta), compassion (Karuna), empathetic joy (Mudita), equanimity (Upekkha); engaged Buddhism, The law of Karma; impermanence (Anicca), non-self (Anatta), etc. every class in society conducts follow the teachings of Buddha, creating a national ideology with a peace mind, unity of thought and high patriotism. Therefore, the Buddhist culture not only works to create a link in national solidarity, but it also serves the feudal court, while ensuring benefits for the masses and stabilizing the people; social stability, creating the strength to overcome aggression of invaders and prosperity for the country. /.

Notes:

- 1 Thich Thanh Tu (2010), *Thien Su Viet Nam (History of Ch'an master in Vietnam)*, Hong Duc Publishing house, p.41.
- 2 D.C. Ahir (2001), *Buddhism in South East – Asia: A Cultural Survey*, Published by Sri Satguru Publishers, Delhi-110007, India, ISBN 81-7030-692-2, p. 124.
- 3 Thich Thanh Tu (2010), *Thien Su Viet Nam (History of Ch'an master in Vietnam)*, Hong Duc Publishing house, p. 128.
- 4 Nguyen Tai Thu (2008), *History of Buddhism in Vietnam, Cultural heritage and contemporary change: South East Asia*, CRVP, ISBN 1565180984, p. 76.

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8. Nguyen Ba Lang (1960), *Kien Truc Phat Giao Viet Nam (Vietnamese Buddhist Architecture)*.Vol 1. Saigon: Van Hanh University Press.