

A STUDY OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM

By

Mae Chee Huynh Kim Lan

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Arts
(Buddhist Studies)

International Master Degree of Arts Programme
Graduate School
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University
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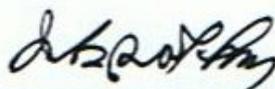
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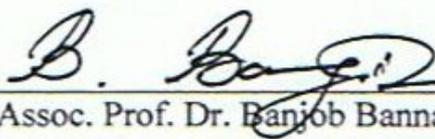
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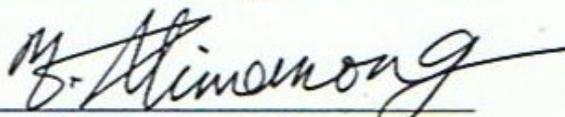
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Abstract

This thesis has the following three objectives:

- (1) To study the history of Theravāda in Vietnam.
- (2) To study the characteristics and practices of Theravāda in Vietnam.
- (3) To study the present status of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

The result of the findings is as follows:

Firstly, passing through the historical periods of the land of present day Vietnam, Theravāda Buddhism was practiced by the Khmer in the Mekong Delta, which is recorded to have been integrating into the homeland of Vietnam. Thereby, Theravāda Buddhism became to be practiced in Vietnam. Besides this, Theravāda Buddhism appeared and is followed by the Vietnamese people in other parts of Vietnam outside the Mekong Delta area. The Vietnamese in those areas were interested in Theravāda Buddhism as it was practiced for a long time in the history of Cambodia. In addition, the development of Theravāda Buddhism was greatly helped through contacts with Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

As a result, the Vietnamese received knowledge of the Theravāda tradition directly from these sources of the original Teaching of the Buddha. It is interesting that the Theravāda followers in Vietnam always aspire to study in those countries that follow the original Theravāda tradition. They want to study Theravāda in countries where the original Teaching is put into practice to truly understand the Theravāda doctrine. Therefore, in chapter 2 this research makes us to recognize clearly the history of development of Theravāda in Vietnam during the different periods of Funan, Chenla and Vietnam.

Secondly, by analyzing the characteristics and practices of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam: its common features and some different characteristics due to the difference national culture of the Khmer and the Vietnamese. We easily can recognize the similarities between Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam and Theravāda Buddhism in the above mentioned five Theravāda countries. The specialty is the same faithful traditions shared by Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam and Theravāda Buddhism in Theravāda countries. It is also pointed out that there are differences between the earlier Vietnamese and Khmer faith cultures. This is because the Vietnamese people are influenced by the Mahayana culture. This makes the Vietnamese Theravāda missionaries to have new ways of Dhamma propagation aiming to make the Vietnamese to understand the Theravāda doctrine. They are not like the Khmer people following Theravāda Buddhism as a national tradition. Due to these situations, the Vietnamese Theravāda followers in Vietnam have basic knowledge of the difference between Mahayana and Theravāda Buddhism. This is a good factor for missionary work in Vietnam.

Thirdly, my study goes to examine the seven different fields of the present status of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. They are the monks and temples, the Education, the Propagation, the Meditation activities, the Relation between Khmer and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam, the Relation between Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam and the Problems and their solutions for Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam

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Based on the requirements of the Master Degree of Arts in Buddhist Studies of the Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, I today have finished this thesis and submit it to the MCU. I may express my thankfulness for those who helped me during my study and to accomplish the thesis. I am grateful to Thai Buddhism and the Thai King's support for Buddhism. It is a chance given to me to come to Thailand for studying the Dhamma in the International Master of Arts Degree Programme in Buddhist Studies at the MCU.

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September 8th, 2009

List of Abbreviations

In quoting the Pali sources, the references are given according to the volume and page number of the PTS editions.

Pali Sources

Dhp. : Dhammapada

Other Sources

A.D : Anno Domini
 B.C : Before Christ
 B.E : Buddhist Era
 Ed : edited
 HCMC : Ho Chi Minh City
 KTB : Khmer Theravāda Buddhism
 Ibid. : ibidden/ in the same book
 MCU : Mahachulalongkornvidyalaya University
 No. : Number
 Op cit : opera citato / as referred
 P (p) : page (p)
 Pp : pages
 PED : Pāli-English Dictionary
 PTS : Pāli Test Society
 Tr. (tr.) : translated
 TBV : Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam
 Vol (s) : volume (s)
 VTB : Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism
 VTBS : Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist Sangha Congregation

Table of Contents

	Page No
Approval	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
List Abbreviations	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Chapter I: Introduction	1
1.1 Background and Significance of the Study	1
1.2 Objective of Research	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Definitions of the Terms	5
1.5 Review of the Literature and Research Works Concerned	6
1.6 Method of Study	6
1.7 Expected Benefits of the Study	7
Chapter II: The History of Theravāda Buddhism of Vietnam	8
2.1 The Origin of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam	8
2.2 Development of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam	11
2.2.1 Period of Funan	11
2.2.2 Period of Chenla	13
2.2.3 Period of Vietnam	16
2.2.3.1 Under the Nguyễn Lord ‘s Government	16
2.2.3.2 Under the French’s Rule	18
2.2.3.3 Under the United States’ Rule	22
2.2.3.4 Under the Communist Party (After 1975)	24
2.3 Factors Leading to the Development of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam	26

2.4	Buddhist Relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam	30
2.5	Concluding Remark	33
Chapter III:	The Characteristics and Practices of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam	36
3.1	Sangha Activities	36
3.1.1	Life of monks	36
3.1.1.1	System of the Sangha	36
3.1.1.2	Social Activities	38
3.1.2	System of Education in the Sangha	42
3.1.2.1	System of Studying Dhamma	42
3.1.2.2	Purpose of Education	50
3.1.2.3	View of Liberation	52
3.1.3	Ordination Name	53
3.1.4	Going on Alms rounds	53
3.2	Activities in the life of Theravāda nuns	57
3.2.1	Religious Lifestyle	57
3.2.2	Study	60
3.2.3	Changes	62
3.3	Laity	64
3.3.1	Making Merit	64
3.3.2	Sīla Day	68
3.4	Temple	69
3.4.1	Managing temples	69
3.4.2	Temples as School	70
3.5	Traditional Ceremonies	71
3.5.1	Theravāda Buddhist Tradition	71
3.5.1.1	Māghapūjā	71
3.5.1.2	Visakhapūjā	73
3.5.1.3	Asalhpūjā	77
3.5.1.4	Kathina	79
3.5.2	Faith Tradition of People	81
3.5.2.1	Chaul-Chnam-Thmay	81
3.5.2.2	Phchum-Pinda	84
3.5.2.3	Ok-Om-Bok	85
3.5.3	Views of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism on Folk Traditional Ceremonies	86
3.6	Concluding remark	88

Chapter IV:	The Present Status and the Future of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam	89
4.1	Monks and Temples	89
4.2	Education	93
4.3	Propagation	95
4.4	Meditation Activities	98
4.5	Relation between Khmer Theravāda and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam	100
4.6	Relation between Theravāda and Mahayana Buddhism in Vietnam	101
4.7	Problems and their Solutions for Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam	102
4.8	Concluding remark	104
Chapter V:	Conclusion and Suggestion	106
5.1	Conclusion	106
5.2	Recommendation for Further Research	109
Bibliography		111
Appendix	Some Illustrative Photographs of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam	120
Biography		126

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

When talking about Vietnamese Buddhism, most people immediately think of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which has deeply influenced the Vietnamese culture for many centuries. That is what we see today, but how was it in ancient times? It is true that we cannot see what happened in the past with our own eyes. We can only see it through historical records and artifacts to guess what it was. According to historians, the former Ne Le town of Giao Chau¹ is the Do Son region of Vietnam today. In this area, now called Hai Phong which is 12km East of Hanoi, there is a memorial tower to commemorate King Asoka. It was built by local Vietnamese Buddhists to express their gratitude to King Asoka. Besides this, the Hoang-Gia-My's genealogy register of this region also recorded an Asoka tower at Do Son². In addition, the former Kingdom of Champa, in the present central region of Vietnam, which was founded in part by Indian colonists in the 2nd century CE (until it got absorbed by Vietnam in the 15th century AD) is said to have had Theravāda Buddhism from as early as the 3rd century BC³. Another factor is, when we consider the Buddhist sculptural tradition of the Buddha image at Quảng Khê. Some are of the opinions that in the early period of the Champa kingdom two styles of the Buddhist sculptural tradition existed. These are the Buddha images with both shoulders covered by robes and the other one when only the left shoulder is covered. From that we may conclude that Theravāda as well as Mahāyāna was brought to Champa by traders, as well as Indian and Chinese monks. In the development process, the Mahāyāna teachings

¹ Former name of Vietnam.

² Thích Đức Nghiệp, **Phật Giáo Việt Nam "Buddhism in Vietnam"**, (Hà Nội: Hà Nội Publishing House, 1988), pp.28-29.

³ Skilton Andrew, **A Concise History of Buddhism**, (Birmingham: Windhorse Publication, 1994), p.160.

and the doctrine of Bodhisatvas were considered to be suitable for the people of Champa as they combined well with several ancient traditional faiths. That is why Mahāyāna has been easily received. Theravāda Buddhism was not.

As we can see from this, Theravāda Buddhism was present in the early period in Vietnam. Of course, at that time Vietnam was not called Vietnam as it is today. However, this is not the reason that the Vietnamese people are believed not to know the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, which is a large Buddhist school in Southeast Asia. Nowadays, there are two branches of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. One is Theravāda Buddhism practiced by the Khmers in Southern Vietnam. The other is Theravāda Buddhism as practiced by the Vietnamese people. Both of them study and practice the Pāli-Tipitaka. Their difference is in the period of their beginning and in the cultural characteristics of the people.

Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in the Mekong Delta has been practiced for a long time. It can be traced back to the 3rd century B.C during King Asoka's period as is the case in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka. In the thoughts of the Khmer people in South Vietnam, Theravāda Buddhism is the traditional religion of its people. Theravāda Buddhism thus, has become the spirit of the Khmer people. It has undergone several changes in the changing history of the Khmer people. Even the enforced policy to assimilate the Khmer people of Nguyễn Lord (Chúa Nguyễn) which compelled the Khmer people to live according to Vietnamese culture did not change that. It included forcing the Khmer Theravāda Buddhist monks to become Mahāyāna monks, and the Khmer Theravāda Buddhist monks were not allowed to learn the Khmer language⁴. However it is not for these reasons that the Theravāda tradition was made weak in the heart of the Khmer people. They love the Theravāda doctrine as if it were their own blood and bones. Although facing serious difficulties, Khmer Theravāda Buddhist monks patiently tried to teach the Dhamma to younger generations. Dhamma classes were opened secretly to care for Theravāda Buddhist monks living in the

⁴ Cơ Quan Đặc Trách Công Tác Dân Tộc ở Nam Bộ, Vai Trò Của Chùa Đối Với Đời Sống Văn Hóa Của Đồng Bào Khmer Nam Bộ, Chuyên Đề Nghiên Cứu Khoa Học (Role of Buddhist Temple in Culture Life of the Southern Khmer Compatriot). Cần Thơ: Topic of Scientific Research, 2000, p.38. (Mimeography).

Southern part of South Vietnam⁵. As a result, Khmer Theravāda Buddhism turned over a new page in history. Gradually, it developed together with the other people in Vietnam. Nowadays, Dhamma classes are allowed by the Vietnamese government and even a Khmer Theravāda Academy for Buddhist Studies has just appeared in the city of Cần Thơ thanks to the support of the Vietnamese government. It was in 2005, that the Vietnamese government allowed Khmer Theravāda monks in the southern part of South Vietnam to go to Thailand for higher study and. There are 60 Khmer monks who have been studying at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University up to now.

Although Khmer Theravāda Buddhism has existed in the Mekong Delta for a long time, only a few of the Vietnamese people follow Theravāda Buddhism. It may be due to the difference in language. Khmer monks cannot use the Vietnamese language to teach the Dhamma to Vietnamese people. Mostly the Vietnamese people, therefore, follow the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. In 1939, the first opportunity for the Vietnamese people came when Vietnamese monks, who were ordained according to the Theravāda tradition in Cambodia, led by Ven. Ho Tong (Vaṃsarakkhita), together with the Cambodian Sangharāja, the Ven. Chuon Nath (Jotaññāno) and 30 Cambodian bhikkhus, came to Vietnam to establish the Sīma boundary for the first Vietnamese Theravāda temple.⁶ Since that time, the Vietnamese people have gradually come to know Theravāda Buddhism. From that period onwards Vietnamese Theravāda temples were founded, following the tradition of the Elders. Although Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism is very young in the Buddhist history, it got soon recognized in the Buddhist World as was the Ven. Naga Mahā Thera Bửu Chơn, who was an outstanding Vietnamese Theravāda monk, and also a counselor in the World Buddhist Council. The Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist Sangha Council took part in the Sixth Buddhist Council in Myanmar⁷. Now, the Vietnamese Theravāda

⁵ Huỳnh Kim Lan, **Phật Giáo Theravāda Trong Đồng Bào Khmer Nam Bộ** “Theravāda Buddhism in Southern Khmer Compatriot”, **B.A Thesis** (Ho Chi Minh City: Vietnamese Buddhist University, 2005), p.25.

⁶ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Nam Tông Việt Nam** “**History of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism**”, **B.A Thesis** (Ho Chi Minh City: Vietnamese Buddhist University, 1996), p.38.

⁷ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Bước Đầu Tìm Hiểu Phật Giáo Nam Tông Việt Nam** “**Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam**”, (Hà Nội: Religion Publishing House, 2007), p.56.

Buddhism has spread deeper and bigger in the Vietnamese society. Many Vietnamese families now practice Theravāda Buddhism as their own traditional religion. A lot of Vietnamese children have been trained in accordance with the Theravāda tradition. For that reason, they love the Theravāda tradition very deeply. Wherever they go, the Vietnamese people always keep their own Theravāda tradition. We can see that many Vietnamese Theravāda temples have been built in many Western countries.

Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam today is present with both the Vietnamese and the Khmer people. Both of them have propagated the true Dhamma in Vietnam. In this research, I am not only going to deal in this thesis with the Theravāda School practiced by the Vietnamese people, but also how, according to new methods the Theravāda doctrine is spreading among the Vietnamese monks of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition and will also deal with the Theravāda School practiced by Khmers in Vietnam who have followed Theravāda Buddhist tradition. Actually, studying in Thailand, I am very happy to learn the Dhamma in a Theravāda Buddhist country. In Vietnam, many people are surprised when seeing me in white robes as a Maechee. They usually ask why I wear white clothes. Even on the day when interviewed at the Mahachulalongkorn University as well as in class, most of the Acharns thought that I was a Mahāyāna nun in Vietnam and had switched into Theravāda when coming to Thailand. I am proud to be a Theravadin. Some of them also asked why I believe in Theravāda Buddhism while Vietnam is a country with a Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. These reasons caused me to choose the topic of my thesis. The aim of my study is to introduce the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam as well as its characteristics and the current status of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

1.2 Objectives of Research

- 1.2.1. To study the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.
- 1.2.2. To study the characteristics and practices of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.
- 1.2.3. To study the present status of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

1.3 Research Questions

1.3.1 How did the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam develop?

1.3.2 What are the characteristics and practices of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam?

1.3.3 How is the present status of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam?

1.4 Definitions of the terms

Theravāda is the name of a school in Buddhism. Theravāda is the school of the Elders. It is the oldest original form of the Buddha's Teaching, which was accepted by the Council of 500 Elders soon after the Buddha's death. Theravāda is the only one of the old schools of Buddhism, which has survived up to today.

Chaul-Chnam-Thmey is the name of the Cambodian holiday that celebrates the new year. The meaning of Chaul-Chnam-Thmay in Khmer language is "entering the new year". Chaul: entering; Chnam: year; Thmay: new.

Tết Nguyên Đán is the Vietnamese festival beginning on the first day of the first lunar month. It marks the beginning of a new year and the arrival of spring. Tết is the most popular festival in Vietnam and artifacts suggest that it has been celebrated since at least 500 B.C. An exact origin is unknown.

Pchum-Pinda is the Festival of Offering something to spirits. In Khmer language, Phchum means to gather to meet together; Pinda means Rice. So Phchum-pinda is a Khmer festival during which food is offered to Buddhist monks in the hope that such a good deed will benefit the spirits of the deceased relatives of the offerers.

Vu Lan Bồn is the name of the Spirit Offering Festival. The word Vu Lan is derived from the Pali word Ullombana, meaning saving disposition, full of mercy. The word "Bồn" is derived from the Vietnamese-Chinese characters. It means a pot to hold food offering to the monks for the purpose of giving merit to beings who are hungry ghosts and demons.

Ok-Om-Bok is the name of a ceremony. The purpose of this ceremony is to predict the rainfall of the following year. In Khmer language, Ok means to try to swallow too much food at one time; Om-Bok means pounded rice. In this Festival, people eat pounded rice in the Ok way.

Nun in this thesis is to show an ordained woman observing eight precepts or ten precepts in Theravāda Buddhism today, but is not a Bhikkhuni.

1.5 Review of the Literature and Research works concerned

Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, “History of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism”, **B.A Thesis**, HCMC: Vietnamese Buddhist University, 1996.

This thesis gave out a brief background of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism from its establishment in earlier times and its development up to now.

Huỳnh Kim Lan, “Theravāda Buddhism in the Southern Khmer Compatriot”, **B.A Thesis**, HCMC: Vietnamese Buddhist University, 2005.

I examined the characteristic of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Southern Vietnam. This study also gave out the origin of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam and the traditional culture of the Southern Khmer Compatriot.

Nguyễn Văn Sáu, “Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam”. Religion Publishing House: 2004.

Abstract: This book gave out the basic history of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam and its structure of Council in both Khmer and Vietnamese society.

1.6 Methods of study

The research methodology can be divided into three stages as follows:

1. Collecting data from Buddhist articles, sutras, and texts
2. Analyzing collected data critically and interviewing some Buddhist monks and assisting in celebrations of Buddhist festivals.
3. Comparing two data resources mentioned above.

1.7 Expected Benefits of the study

After doing the research, the following benefits can be achieved.

1. To know clearly the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.
2. To know the characteristics and practices of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam
3. To know the present status of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam as well as its development in the future

Chapter II

The History of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam

When thinking of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, most people think of the five countries which are traditionally considered to be the countries of the Theravāda tradition. Those five countries are: Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. Interestingly nobody seems to know that outside of the five countries mentioned above there is also a historical presence of the Theravāda tradition from ancient times in Vietnam. This presence of Theravāda tradition is in a remote part of Southern Vietnam. How did it come to be? We will know about it in detail as follows:

2.1 The origin of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam

To understand the presents of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam, we have to study the history of present day Southern Vietnam. It is right, what we know as Southern Vietnam is called so only since about 300 years. Which country did this land belong to before becoming a territory of Vietnam.

According to Chinese historians, from the first to the seventh century A.D, the land of Southern Vietnam was the Kingdom of Funan. The center of this country was located on the lower course of the Mekong River delta, but its territory at the time of its zenith must have encompassed Southern Vietnam, including some part of the Mekong River and a large part of the Menam Valley and the Malay Peninsula. The capital of this territory was Vyadhapura, “the city of hunters”⁸. This is similar to what is recorded in the legends about the origin of Funan country. It was the marriage of an Indian named Kaudinya to a princess named Liu-ye (or Soma) of the land of Funan which started a royal line.

⁸ Coedes, George, **The Indianized States of Southeast Asia**, (Honolulu: East West Center Press, 1989), p.36.

The name of this country which the Chinese called Funan, in the modern Mandarin pronunciation the two characters were once pronounced biu-nam, which is the transcription of the old Khmer word bhnam, the modern form of which is phnom “mountain”. The kings of this country had as their royal title “Parvatabhupala”, a term meaning “King of the mountain” which in Sankrit is “Sailaraja” and in Khmer- Kroung bhnam⁹. From this we can clearly see that, the people of Funan were Khmers. Usually, when historians go anywhere to write about the history of an area, they will, based on the pronunciation of the area in the vernacular language, transcribe the name of that locality into their own language. With the original name of the area being in the Khmer language, proves that Funan belonged to the Khmer people.

Furthermore, according to Mr. Phan Khoanh, a well known writer on historical topics, the peoples of Funan (including Chenla) were Khmers. They came from the Indo-China Peninsula several centuries before the Christian Era¹⁰. Another researcher, Mr Thach Voi wrote that in 300-200 BC, the Khmer people at the Mekong river delta clustered on the phums (places). They established a way of living based on farming, cattle breeding, and they cremated their dead together with their ornaments. They followed matriarchy and believed in gods such as: Arak, Neakta, Tevoda. So the Khmers had their indigenous culture before the arrival of the Indian culture¹¹. Therefore, Funanese culture was a mixture of local beliefs and Indian ideas. This Funanese kingdom is said to have been heavily influenced by Indian culture. The coming of the Indians to Southeast Asia gave way to the establishment of Buddhism. It is known that the early Buddhist missionaries sent by Emperor Asoka propagated beyond India the Theravāda Buddhist School.

According to the historical source of the Mahāvamsa, it was recorded that Asoka sent missionaries headed by Buddhist elders to as many as nine territories. One of these territories was known as Suvarnabhumi where the two Theras, Sona and Uttara, were said to have

⁹ Coedes, George, op cit., pp.36-37.

¹⁰ Phan Khoanh, **Việt Sử Xứ Đàng Trong “The Southern Vietnamese History”**, (Vietnam: Khai Tri Bookstore Publishing House, 1969), p.303.

¹¹ Trường Lưu (ed.), **Văn Hóa Người Khmer Vùng Đồng Bằng Sông Cửu Long (Khmer Culture in Mekong River Delta)**, (Vietnam: People Culture Publishing House, 1993), pp.26-27.

proceeded to¹². Where exactly was the land of Suvarnabhumi? Is it the land of Southeast Asia or Indo-China? This is a much argued issue. Based on Chinese historical data and the archaeological site at “Oc-Eo”, a coastal area of Southern Vietnam, in the early centuries A.D, there were ships from India and also from Rome which came for trading. Their presence, can be seen as proof that¹³ Buddhism spread into these lands

Furthermore, the history of the Khmer people revealed that two Theras came to Suvannabhumi, to spread the Buddhadharma to Myanmar, a region of Mon Land, Thailand, Laos and Funan. When coming to Funan, the two elders arrived at the Oc-Eo port, which now is the Kien Giang province, by a trading ship. At this time, Queen Nagi Soma ruled Funan. The two Theras stayed at a mountain preaching the Dhamma to the people of Funan. One day, recognizing the people there had taken refuge in the Triple Gem they went forth. After the two Elders left, the people named this mountain “Phnom Pathe” meaning “Theras already left”. This mountain is about 3 km away from Oc-Eo which, today is called “Phnom Pathe and belongs to the Vong community in the Thoai Son District of the Kien Giang Province of Vietnam¹⁴. Based on the above historical data, we can conclude that recognizing the fact that Asoka reigned from 269-237 B.C, Theravāda Buddhism spread to Vietnam during the 3rd century B.C.

The Theravāda Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia claim that Buddhism was spread there in the 3rd century B.C by the two Arahants, Sona and Uttara. In Thailand, the Great Stupa today called Phra Pathom Chedi meaning the first Chedi was built at Nakhorn Pathom. As a historic event this certified that Nakhorn Pathom was the capital or one of the most important cities of Suvarnabhumi and it became an active center for the propagation of the Buddha’s teachings¹⁵. The Thaton area of Burma was claimed as the capital of Suvannabhūmi, where the Sona and Uttara

¹² Karuna Kusalasaya. **Buddhism in Thailand: Its Past and Its Present**, (Thailand: Mental Health Publishing House, 3rd printing 2001), p.6.

¹³ Lê Mạnh Thát, **Lịch Sử Phật Giáo Việt Nam** (quyển 1), “**History of Vietnamese Buddhism**”, Vol. I, (Vietnam: HCMC Publishing House, 2006), p.27.

¹⁴ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **Sử Du Nhập Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy Đến Việt Nam**, (Propagation of Theravāda Buddhism to Vietnam. **Theravāda Buddhism Magazine**, Nov, 11th November, 2008), p.48.

¹⁵ P.A. Payutto, **Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World**, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornvidyalaya Press. 2548/2005), p.24.

Theras preached the Brahmajāla Sutta¹⁶. Of course, what we all can believe is that the main duty of the two Theras who came to Suvannabhumi was to propagate Theravāda Dhamma and it is impossible to imagine that it happened only at one place. It is sure that the two Theras went to many other places to preach the Dhamma. This leads to the believe that Phnom Pathe (mountain which the two Theras had left) in Southern Vietnam of today is one of the places where the two elders: Sonathera and Uttarathera left their footprints.

2.2 **Development of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.**

According to what we know, Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam today is mostly in the South. To easily understand the process of its development, we will divide it into the three historical periods, which are Funan, Chenla and Vietnam.

2.2.1 **Period of Funan (1st -7th century A.D)**

Talking about the history of Southeast Asia, we all know that the territory of the Funanese Kingdom at its climax included Cambodia and the South of today's Vietnam, as well as a part of Laos, Thailand and Myanmar, and extended into the Malay Peninsula. So it is very clear that Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam in the period of Funan was at the same historical time in the areas which belonged to the Funanese Kingdom.

It is certain that between 479 and 502 CE, the Buddhist missionary who appeared in the Chinese history was the monk Nagasena from India. In 484 CE he was sent as an envoy to the Chinese emperor by the king of Funan. Nagasena was reported to have told his host that Brahmanism and Buddhism both flourished in Funan.

Another point worthy of note is that through both, his ambassador and his successors, in the year 503, a Funanese King was said to have sent Buddhist presents to a Chinese emperor. The presents were

¹⁶ Roger Bischoff, **Buddhism in Myanmar: A Short History**, (Srilanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995), p.27.

two ivory stupas and a coral Buddha image, a sound indication that Buddhist ideas and practices had in some form, infiltrated royal circles. Another two Buddhist monks from Funan, Sanghapala Thera and Mandra Thera went to China in the early years of the sixth century A.D to teach Buddhism and meditation to the emperor of China. Sanghapala Bhikkhu had translated an important Buddhist scripture, the *Vimuttimaggā*, into Chinese¹⁷. The text is considered to be a feature of traditional Theravāda Buddhism and is considered to be part of the missionary work of the Arahant Upatissa, a famous Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka who lived in the first century C.E.

In addition, in the Long An and Gia Lai provinces of Southern Vietnam, archaeologists excavated inscriptions which were carved in the ancient Pali language and inscribed in Brahmi script and are dated fifth-sixth centuries A.D. The content of this Pali inscription was a four-line stanza which the Venerable Assaji gave to Upatissa¹⁸. Of course, Pali is the canonical language of Theravāda Buddhism.

Moreover, in the Đồng Tháp province of Southern Vietnam, archaeologists found some Buddha statues such as a wooden Buddha statue dated to the fourth-seventh centuries A.D. During archaeological excavations at the ancient port of Oc-Eo in the Kiên Giang province, and in the Long An province they found some Buddha statues dated to the fifth-seventh centuries¹⁹.

Another case is that there is a stele carved in Sanskrit in Võ Cạnh village in the region of Nha Trang, Khánh Hòa province. This stele is considered one of the documents on the history of Funan. Its content is the teachings of the Buddha²⁰. Furthermore, in the Mekong Delta today, there are still seven temples which were built in the period of Funan.

¹⁷Harris Ian, **Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice**, (Bangkok: O.S. Printing House, 2006), pp. 5-6.

¹⁸Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **Sử Du Nhập Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy Đền Việt Nam “Propagation of Theravāda Buddhism to Vietnam”**, op cit., p.5.

¹⁹Nguyễn Sĩ Lâm, **Kiến Trúc Chùa Khmer Nam Bộ Dưới Tác Động của Tư Tưởng và Kiến Trúc Phật Giáo Ấn Độ**, “Architecture of Khmer Temple under Affection of Indian Buddhist Architecture and Thought”, M.A Thesis, (HCMC: Architecture University, 2004), p.33.

²⁰Lê Hương, **Sử Liệu Phù Nam “Historical Datas of Funan”**, (Vietnam: Sai Gon, 1974), p.49.

Those are: Wat Sombuasamriddhi, built in 373 CE; Wat Kohkeosiri, built in 613CE; Wat Somrong Ek, Wat Pitakatyaram and Wat Bodhisalaraja were all built in 642 C.E. These five temples are in the Tra Vinh province. Wat Kop Treng built in 400 CE, is in the An Giang province; Wat Sanghamangala, built in 632 CE, in the Vĩnh Long province²¹. All the above events give us proof of Theravāda Buddhism in the period of Funan. Although this nation's predominant religion was Hinduism, Buddhism still existed side by side with it. The archaeological remnants and the works of engraving on steles have given us a picture, describing the role of Buddhism in the early time of this area. Theravāda Buddhism had in fact influenced strongly the social and spiritual life of the people of Funan.

2.2.2 Period of Chenla (630-1845)

As a natural law of the universe: “Everything is good in its season the fairest rose at last is withered”.

The bright Funanese period fell in the first half of the seventh century. Chenla had arisen to replace Funan. The name Chenla is used consistently by the Chinese for Cambodia. In Khmer language, “Can” means “moon” and “Reap” means “to obey, submit”. The word “Chenla” (Zhenla) in the Chinese stems from Can Reap in the Khmer language which means to show the Dynasty of the Moon (moon dynasty)²². The Kingdom of Chenla is the beginning of the Cambodia (Kambuja) period. It was originally a vassal kingdom of Funan. But it has gradually increased in power over the country and subdued Funan. The King of Chenla at that time was Bhavavarman, grandson of the King of Funan. Through his marriage to a princess of Chenla named Kambujarajalakshami (the fortune of the Kings of the Kambujas) he became King of this country²³. After 627 CE, this territory (now South Vietnam) belonged to the Chenla Country. For the new Cambodia country, Hinduism was still a predominant religion. However, at around the seventh century AD, the popular usage of the Pāli language in the

²¹ Cơ Quan Đặc Trách Công Tác Dân Tộc ở Nam Bộ, op cit., pp.36-41.

²² Ngô Bắc, **Vị Trí của xứ Heling hay Zhepo tại Miền Nam Đông Dương, (Position of Heling or Zheppo in South of Cochinchina)**, Retrieved 7 June 2008, <http://www.gio-o.com/NgoBac.Han.Zhenhua.html>.

²³ Geodes Geoge, op cit., pp.65-67.

Southern regions suggested a strong appearance of Theravāda Buddhism in Cambodia in which Southern Vietnam was included.

A rather more significant proof which serves as evidence of a possible Theravāda presence in Cambodia is a portion of a Pāli text engraved on the back of a seventh century Buddha statue from Toul Preah Theat in the Prey Veng province. Pali of course, is the canonical language of Theravāda²⁴.

In 731, at the beginning of the eighth century, the period of the breakup of Cambodia started. Land Chenla was in the northern half, a land of mountains and valleys; the other one was the southern half, bound by the sea and covered with lakes, was called Water Chenla. At this time, the country was governed by Queen Jayadevi, who was a follower of Hinduism²⁵. Meanwhile, Hinduism was the religion of the Royal Kingdom of the Land Chenla. The part of the Mekong Delta was a remote area far from the capital and was less influenced by Hinduism. According to archaeological documents, it is said that the Trà Vinh province of Vietnam where a big number of Khmer people lived at that time was a large Buddhist centre in the pre-Angkorean period. Among the thirteen Buddha statues found at Trà vinh, there were four Lokeçvara statues (Mahāyāna Bodhisatva). This proves that both Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism have existed here²⁶.

In the period of king Jayavarman II (802-850) at the beginning of the ninth century CE, the kingdom Chenla was in its united period. It opened a splendid page in the history of Cambodia. That is the Angkorian period. The relics found of this time revealed a bright period of Brahmanism and of Mahāyāna Buddhism that had flourished in Cambodia. During the reign of Jayavarman V (968-1001A.D), through the period of King Jayavarman VII, Mahāyāna Buddhism was supported fully.

But the late Angkorian period was the time in which Theravāda Buddhism developed. In 1180 CE, one of Jayavarman's sons named Tamalinda, was believed to have received Theravāda ordination in Sri

²⁴ Harris Ian, op cit., pp. 9-10.

²⁵ Ceodes Geage, op cit., p. 25.

²⁶ Nguyễn Sĩ Lâm, op cit., p.35.

Lanka²⁷. From that time, the god-king worshipping was neglected and Theravāda Buddhism had become the predominant religion of the people of Angkor by the end of the Jayavarman VII's reign.

The 9th-13th century period was the brightest period in the history of Cambodia, the Chenla empire of Angkor followed Mahāyāna Buddhism, but in the southern part of South Vietnam, a area remote from the capital, the inhabitants were mostly farmers who practiced Theravāda Buddhism which was the predominant religion of the people there²⁸.

In the early 13th century, a Chinese envoy arrived in Cambodia in 1296. He reported that the local monks there shaved their heads, wore yellow garments, uncovered the right shoulder, fastened a skirt around the lower part of the body, and went barefoot. It is very obvious that Theravāda monks lived there at that time and that the color of their robes was yellow. It was reported that there were no Buddhist nuns in the country. The monks there were definitely Theravadins. Besides this, Pali inscriptions at Kok Svay Chek near Siem Reap, dated 1308 AD, which indicated a possible Theravāda presence. In addition, it was recorded that by the time Jayavarmadiparamesvara took the Angkorian throne around 1327 CE, Theravāda Buddhism was already well established. Furthermore, the last inscription in Sanskrit at Angkor is dated from 1327, and Mahāyāna Buddhism itself largely disappeared after the fall of Angkor in 1431 which proves that the strength of the Theravāda School had gained the power to replace the ancient Mahayan-Brahmanical dominance. This regime had already become “either deficient or declining, if not both” toward the end of the Angkorian period²⁹.

In the sixteenth century A.D. Buddhism continued to flourish in Cambodia. King Ang Chan (1516-1566), a relative of King Dhammarāja, was a devout Buddhist. He built pagodas in his capital and many Buddhist shrines in different parts of Cambodia. In order to propagate Buddhism, King Satha (1576-1594) restored the great third floor of Angkor Wat that had become a Buddhist Temple to replace God Visnu, which was built by King Sutyavarman II (1150 A.D).

²⁷ Noble Ross Reat, **Buddhism: A History**, (California: Jain Publishing Company, 1994), p.105.

²⁸ Nguyễn Sĩ Lâm, op cit., p.36.

²⁹ Harris Ian, op cit., pp.25-26.

To sum up, the process of development of the Khmer nation, Theravāda Buddhism flourished gradually as mentioned above. So it is from the early fifth century, that we have Khmer inscriptions's of Theravāda texts. Certainly, when Theravāda religious symbols and texts were engraved, it seems that Theravāda Buddhism must have been widely practiced, probably for many centuries prior to this period. This can be considered a starting point of the progress. At the beginning of the late Angkorian period (12th century), Theravāda Buddhism had become the national religion of the country³⁰.

2.2.3 Period of Vietnam

2.2.3.1 Under the Nguyễn Lords' Rule (1757-1864)

After the bright period of Angkor, the Kingdom of Chenla began to fall into a period of dark days. Since the beginning of the 17th century, Cambodia had become a satellite of Siam. The Cambodian rulers, who were unhappy with this, sought alliances with Cambodia's neighbors to the east, the Vietnamese government, to seek protection³¹. During this time, Vietnam suffered the Trịnh-Nguyễn war. The Trịnh Lords in the North, were called Đàng Ngoài (Out Expanse) and the Nguyễn Lords in the South, were called Đàng Trong (Inner Expanse). As an opportunity for expanding southward the Nguyễn Lord in a process known as Nam Tiến, (literally Southward march), accepted to protect Cambodia. In exchange for this alliance, the Nguyễn Lords obtained administrative control over many of the areas. In addition, in 1620, princess Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Vạn, the daughter of Lord Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên, became the wife of King Chey Chetta II of the Kingdom of Cambodia. Under the protection of Queen Ngọc Vạn, the Nguyễn Lord encouraged the Vietnamese natives to come to settle in the areas of the Mekong Delta. Until 1757, the Nguyễn Court fully established its complete government system over the whole Southern region³².

³⁰ Here, the writer uses the period of Chenla is used to show the Cambodian country after the period of Kingdom of Funan

³¹ Chandler David, **The Land and People of Cambodia**, (USA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), pp.90-94.

³² Vũ Minh Giang (ed.), **Lịch sử Vùng Đất Nam Bộ-Việt Nam, (History of A Part of Southern Vietnam**, (Ha Noi: World Publishing House, 2008), pp. 27-37.

In 1810, in the beginning of 19th century, Cambodia became a satellite of both Vietnam and Siam, a “two headed bird”, as a chronicle called it, facing both east and west. Chan, the King of Cambodia hoped that Vietnam would protect him against Thailand. For twenty years, Thai, Cambodian and Vietnamese forces skirmished in Cambodia without gaining any advantage³³. In December of 1845, the three countries: Annam (Vietnam), Siam (Thailand) and Cambodia signed a treaty accepting that six provinces of the south (Water Chenla) belonged to Vietnam³⁴.

During this time, Theravāda Buddhism endured serious difficulties. The Nguyễn Court harshly forced the Khmer population to abandon the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, custom, and their language. They compelled Khmer Theravāda monks to become Mahāyāna monks³⁵. The Khmer temples had to be renamed in Vietnamese language. The Khmers of many provinces of the Southern region could not bear these humiliating policies and revolted against the assimilation policy of the Nguyễn Court. It also happened in this period of oppression of Theravāda Buddhism of the Khmers in the Southern part of Vietnam that Sơn Kui (Chao Vai Kui), who was the Governor of Trà Vinh province and also the leader of the Khmer people who resisted against the Nguyễn Court had died. Under the oppressing forces of the Nguyễn Court that increased day by day, Chao Vai Sơn Kui had to give up his life to save the Khmer nation and Theravāda Buddhism from being annihilated. Sơn Kui requested the Nguyễn Court to agree to preserve the practice of Theravāda tradition and the Khmer Culture³⁵. After agreeing to his demand, the Nguyễn Government executed Chao Vai Sơn Kui by beheading him. Before his final breath on this earth Sơn Kui made a final statement to the Khmer Buddhist monks which the citizens that all Khmers remember in their hearts:

I am moved very much to see our compatriots and Buddhist monks before I depart from this life... I must end my life so that our Khmer nation lives on without a bit of remorse. Now our customs, tradition, culture and Khmer Buddhism have been returned after my request. Therefore may the Venerable Buddhist monks and all compatriots

³³ Chandler David, op cit., p.94.

³⁴ Vũ Minh Giang, op cit., p.45.

³⁵ Cơ Quan Đặt Trách Công Tác Dân Tộc ở Nam Bộ, op cit., p.38.

preserve, defend, protect and guard them religiously from perishing...³⁶

The body of Son Kui was buried at the Trà Vinh and his tomb is still standing in the Bodhisalaraja temple until today. It is also the site where the building of the Khmer Theravāda Buddhist College of the Trà Vinh province stands.

The great sacrifice of king Chao Vai Son Kui to protect the Theravāda Buddhist tradition and his Khmer compatriots has made him a national hero in the heart of all the Khmers. In the Southern part of South Vietnam today, most Khmer people always remember to preserve their cultural and Theravāda traditions which have been considered, till now, as a great legacy of the Khmer culture.

During the Nguyễn Court regime, Khmer Theravāda Buddhism and the Khmer people have become one. Theravāda Buddhism is the blood and bones of the Khmer people. Although so many serious difficulties have fallen on Khmer Theravāda Buddhism, it could not destroy the Theravāda tradition of the Khmer people and the Khmers have always been ready to die to protect their religion.

Buddhism in other countries has survived supported by many factors, whereas in Southern Vietnam, Khmer Theravāda Buddhism has survived by the sacrifices of the lives of Khmer people.

2.2.3.2 Under the French's Rule (1864 -1954)

A similar destiny of many countries in Southeast Asia happened in the nineteenth century when the British evaded Burma and Malaysia in the 1880's. The Spanish and American annexation of the Philippines, the Dutch empire expanded its bases in Java and Sumatra to all the islands of present day Indonesia. The French established their Head Quarters in Cambodia soon after they had set up a protectorate over several provinces in southern Vietnam³⁷.

³⁶ Sakal kim (Administrator), Remember Khmer Heroes: Heroic Son Kuy, Retrieved 9 January 2008, <http://www.Khmerkromngo.org/heroes/Listofheroes.htm>.

³⁷ Chandler David, op cit., pp.98-99.

When the French colonized the Indochina regions (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos) in the mid 1800s and ruled it until 1954, the Southern Part of Vietnam was called Cochinchine. Under the French, the Khmers Krom (Low Khmer) who, lived in the Southern part of Vietnam received some privileges or the right of Khmer issarak (Free Khmer). They enjoyed this privilege, including their rights to be Khmer Citizen in Cambodia. The Khmer monks in Southern Vietnam were taken care of Cambodia Buddhism. They could attend higher Pāli studies at Schools in Phnom Penh. The same practice was also adopted by the current Royal Government of Cambodia. Moreover, the Khmer temples in Southern Vietnam were also named by the Cambodian Sangharāja³⁸.

The French directly supported Khmer Buddhism. They gave “tax exemption” to Khmer Buddhist activities leading to legitimate benefits for Buddhism. They even established a Khmer Buddhist educational system that is similar to a government management system. There are a lot of good policies such as, salary for monk teachers and teachers were skillfully trained in the French and Khmer languages; opening the Khmer Buddhism Study organization, increasing the roles of The Board of Buddhist directors and temple directors. All of them had to attend classes to learn to run the Khmer society. The temples were considered to be educational centers. Establishing Public Works to conform with Khmer national religious architecture. At meetings, the monks who were dignitaries in Khmer Buddhism were given equal positions as the French officials³⁹.

Although the war had damaged the nation, the period of French Indochina was the time that Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Southern Vietnam developed very much. It not only gave the people a chance to develop Khmer Theravāda Buddhism but it was also a chance to give rise for Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism to appear.

At that time, the Vietnamese people who lived under the French could freely work in Laos or Cambodia in agreement with the French government. This was an opportunity for intellectual Vietnamese to come

³⁸ Huỳnh Kim Dung, Tác Động Của Lịch Đối Với Di Sản Văn Hóa Phật Giáo Nam Tông Khmer Ngành Khmer tỉnh Trà Vinh, “**Affection of Tourist toward Cultural Legacy of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism at Tra Vinh Province**”, B.A Thesis, (HCMC: Opening University, 2008), p.22.

³⁹ Cơ Quan Đặt Trách Công Tác Dân Tộc ở Nam Bộ, op cit., p.39.

to Theravāda Buddhism in Laos or Cambodia. As is recorded in the history of Vietnam Buddhism a Vietnamese group was living in Cambodia at that time. They contacted and practiced the Theravāda doctrine there. Consequently, they propagated the light of the Buddhadhamma according to the Theravāda school in Vietnam. The special figure of this historical period is the Venerable Hộ Tông (Vamsarakkhito). He was a young veterinary doctor named Lê Văn Giảng. He was born in South of Vietnam, received higher education in Hà Nội and after his graduation, he was sent to Phnom Penh, Cambodia to work for the French government.

By chance, he met the Deputy Sangharaja of the Cambodian Sangha and was recommended a book on the Noble Eightfold Path. By the clear message in the book he decided to try out the Theravāda way. After practicing Anāpānāsati meditation, he achieved deep Samādhi states. He, then, decided to propagate the Theravāda doctrine in Vietnam. In Cambodia, he established the Sùng Phước temple where the Pāli Canon was studied. He led Vietnamese who lived there to follow Theravāda Buddhism. Here, he met his Vietnamese friends and introduced Buddhism to them. Later some of his friends became the Venerables Bửu Chơn and Thiện Luật.

In 1939, as the sunlight of wisdom for the Vietnamese people, Mr Lê Văn Giảng was ordained as a Bhikkhu. This is a historical event that proves that Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism has been in existence in Vietnam. The ceremony for a Sima boundary of the first Vietnamese Theravāda temple was done by the Ven. Chuon Nath (Jotaññāno) and 30 Cambodian Bhikkhus together with four Vietnamese Bhikkhus who had practiced Theravāda Buddhism in Cambodia⁴⁰ namely the Ven. Thiện Luận, Ven. Huệ Nghiêm, Ven. Bửu Chơn and Ven. Hộ Tông. From that time on, by the diligent practice of the Vietnamese Theravāda missioneries, spiritual support by the Sangharaja Ven. Chuon Nath and Cambodian Buddhists were given. Therefore, there were a lot of Vietnamese who have followed Theravāda Buddhism. Many of them were sent to Cambodia to ordain according to the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, and to study the Dhamma in Cambodia. Early Vietnamese Theravāda temples have grown up to serve the missionary work of the

⁴⁰ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam**, op cit., pp.9-10.

Theravāda doctrine. They are Sùng Phước, Chùa Bửu Quang, Chùa Giác Quang, Chùa Kỳ Viên and Chùa Bửu Long. One of these temples, the Chùa Kỳ Viên (Jetavanavihara) was considered as the famous Center for spreading Theravāda teachings at Ho Chi Minh City. It is located in the central area of SaiGon, where there are a lot of advantages for its missionary work. This temple is also the place where the Ven. Narada who came from Srilanka stayed and gave several discourses during his missionary work there in 1952⁴¹.

As we have seen that during the French colonial period, the policy of freedom of religion has helped Theravāda Buddhism in Khmer areas and in Southern Vietnam to develop. It is clear that Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism came into existence from Cambodia. However, the French's interest in Indochina was not to develop Buddhism, they aimed at establishing a commerce policy in the region. So Khmer, Vietnamese and other peoples in Vietnam resisted against their colonial rule. General Võ Nguyên Giáp defeated the French and its allied troops in the battle at Điện Biên Phủ. The Geneva Peace Accord was signed by France and Vietnam. France was forced to leave Vietnam by the Geneva Convention of July 1954.

Furthermore, another historical event happened during the French Colonial period, on June 4th, 1949. It affirmed the position of the Khmer Krom. The President of France, Vincent Auriol, signed a law annexing Cochin China to Vietnam. Since then, the Khmer Krom (Lower Khmer) people have been legally separated from their motherland Cambodia. They are now considered as Khmers in Vietnam⁴². So! From the French colonial period the Theravāda Buddhist School was added to the history of Vietnam. It was practiced by both the Khmer and the Vietnamese people.

⁴¹ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **History of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism**", op cit., p.42.

⁴² Vũ Minh Giang, op cit., p.53.

2.2.3.3 Under the United States' Rule (1954-1975)

It was happened that Vietnamese Buddhism in general and in particular Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in the Southern Vietnam region experienced greath difficulties. After the French left Vietnam, the United States came in and influenced too much the South Vietnamese government where they started a counter revolutionary body against the communist party. The Americans supported Ngô Đình Diệm, the leader of South Vietnam. Diệm, a fervent Roman Catholic, repressed Khmer Buddhism over all other aspects, compelling Khmer monks to become Mahāyāna monks, closed all Khmer pagoda schools; forbid the study of Pāli and the Khmer language and the preaching of the doctrine of the Buddha and also the ceremonies of the Khmer Buddhist tradition. He ordered banned Dhamma Books from Cambodia entering Vietnam. Some of the Khmer temples were taken by the forces and used as military bases for the then government. He even forced some Khmer monks to become soldiers. This was Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's rule⁴³. Under his regime, the troupes attacked, aiming to destroy Khmer Theravāda Buddhism and its followers in the Mekong Delta provinces. Meanwhile, on the other hand, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism in SaiGon gradually came to be developed by pioneers such as Mr Nguyễn Văn Hiếu and his friends who were intellectuals and officials at the time. Thanks to many arduous supporters the Theravāda missioneries attracted increasingly the interests among the Vietnamese Buddhists and many more Vietnamese Buddhists started to follow Theravāda Buddhism.

As a result, on December 18, 1957, the Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist Sangha Congregation (VTBSC-Giáo Hội Tăng Già Nguyễn Thủy Việt Nam) was formally established and recognized by the Diệm government, with Venerable Hộ Tông as its first president⁴⁴. After establishing the VTBSC, the Vietnamese Theravāda missioneries gained a lot of advantages in their work of propagating the Dhamma. Nationwide, they organized ordination ceremonies for bhikkhus, novices and nuns aiming at educating talented monks and nuns at a later time.

⁴³ Cơ Quan Đặt Trách Công Tác Dân Tộc ở Nam Bộ, op cit., pp.39-40.

⁴⁴ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **History of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism**, op cit., pp.51-52.

Besides, these Theravāda missioneries quickly got in touch with other countries to send monks and nuns for studying abroad. These participants were: Venerables Kim Triệu, Dũng Chí, Pháp Nhẫn, Tâm Lực, Nguyệt Quang, who studied in India⁴⁵. Venerable Hộ Nhẫn, and Sư Cô Diệu Đáng (Theravāda nun) studied in Myanmar. The Venerables who studied in Thailand were Kim Quang, Tịnh Giác, Giác Tuệ, Hộ Pháp, Tịnh Đức, Chơn Trí, Đức Minh, Giác Minh, Thiện Dũng ... One of them is Ven. Tịnh Giác, who has studied nine classes of Pāli. He succeeded Pāli examination VIII and three classes of Nakdham according to the traditional Buddhist program in Thailand. The Ven. Tịnh Giác became a Bhikkhu in 1962, at Wat Samphraya, Bangkok. His Uppajjhaya is the most venerable Samdet Buddhakosajarn (Jutindharo), who was the abbot of Wat Samphraya at that time. Until now Ven. Tịnh Giác has stayed there nearly 50 years. He is the first Vietnamese Theravāda monk who succeeded in a high the Pāli examination in Thailand; and the most venerable Đức Minh (Gunajoti) became a Bhikkhu at Wat Rajasiddharama, Thonburi, Bangkok, and studied the Dhamma. Today, the most Venerable Đức Minh is residing in France and established a Theravāda Buddhist temple there. It is Buddharatanarama (Phật Bảo Temple), at 3 rue Broca, 91600 Savigny-sur-Orge, France⁴⁶.

Although the VTBSC was established under the Diem government, this government could not keep secret the action of their troops' which repressed Buddhism in 1963. The VTBSC later joined the Vietnamese Buddhist movement's struggle against the Diem regime and became a member of the Vietnamese unified Buddhist Sagma which was founded in 1964. Students, intellectuals, Buddhists and others joined the communists in opposition to the government. During this troubled period, Khmer Buddhist monks and the Buddhist laity contributed effectively to the great revolutionary cause of fighting for national independence, liberty and happiness leading to the great victory on April 30, 1975⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, "Vài Nét Về Sự phát Triển Của Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy Tại Việt Nam" "A Brief Introduction of the Development of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam", (**The Enlightenment Magazine**, No.88, July 2003).

⁴⁶ Interviewed with the Most Ven. Tịnh Giác (Visuddhasāro) in Wat Samphraya 165, Bangkok 10200, Thailand, July 16, 2010.

⁴⁷ Thái Chợt, "Vai Trò Vị trí Ngôn Ngữ Của Dân Tộc Trong Đời Sống Xã Hội Của Dân Tộc Khmer Nam Bộ, Đề Tài Nghiên Cứu Khoa Học", (Value and Role of Language in Social Life of Southern Khmer). Vietnam: Topic of Scientific Research, 2003, p.7. (Mimeography).

Generally speaking, in the period of the United States supported regime, Buddhism in Vietnam as a whole faced serious difficulties. According to the Khmer Cultural tradition the people deeply loved Theravāda Buddhism like their blood and bones and the brave diligence of the Vietnamese Theravāda missionaries' to spread the teachings of the Buddha to its people, all of those forces have increased the vital power of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam, which can carry on against any force.

2.2.3.4 Under the Communist Party (after 1975)

On April 30, 1975, the historical Hồ Chí Minh military operation, totally liberated Vietnam. On April 25, 1976, the General Election for the whole country opened up a new era for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, unified from Lang Sơn to Cà Mau. In this auspicious political background, a movement to unify Vietnam Buddhism started on February 12, 1980, under the chairmanship of the Most Venerable, Thích Trí Thủ. Positive and fruitful activities of this movement led to a General Congress of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha on November 4th, 1981 at Quảng Sư Pagoda, Hà Nội. This General Congress was attended by 165 delegates, representing the Buddhist Sects of the whole country: Northern Buddhism (Mahāyāna-Bắc Tông), Southern Buddhism (Theravāda-Nam Tông), Mendicant Sect, Khmer Buddhists, monks, nuns and lay disciples from all provinces of the country⁴⁸.

From the time of 1980, Theravāda Buddhism was one of the Buddhist Sects in Vietnam. Vietnam had to face serious difficulties when peace was just restored. Vietnam Buddhism too had to face serious difficulties. In November 1994, the Prime Minister signed a decree to establish a Buddhist school for the Khmer compatriots. The Pāli Intermediate Supplementary Education Nam Bộ was set up. This school aims at teaching Buddhism in Pāli language using the Khmer medium and also general knowledge about Vietnam in the Vietnamese medium. Besides, the government greatly supported the opening of Khmer Pagoda schools to teach Pali, Vinaya and the Khmer language to serve the monks and the Khmer population. Some Khmer temples were recognized as part of the historical cultural heritage. The government has helped to rebuild

⁴⁸ Thích Minh Châu, **Vietnam Buddhism and Its Activities For Peace**, (HCMC: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, 1990), p.15.

the Khmer temples which were ravaged during the war. They supplied magazines, televisions, and radios to the Khmer temples to serve the public⁴⁹. In addition, in 1994, a remarkable event for Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam happened. Two Theravāda monks went abroad to study in Sri Lanka. They were the venerable Bửu Hiền, who is a Vietnamese monk and the venerable Brahmāpalita, who is a Khmer monk of the Trà Vinh province. This was made possible by the Sri Lanka Sangha which offered two scholarships for Theravāda monk students.

The Most venerable Thích Minh Châu attended the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace, and as good deeds had risen, the two Theravāda monks mentioned above were chosen and recommended by the Vietnam Buddhist University and the Theravāda Buddhist organization in Vietnam to study in Sri Lanka. They were the first two Theravāda monks in Vietnam to study abroad after 1975⁵⁰. Generally speaking, after 1975, Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam has gradually developed along with the progress of the nation. The right of freedom of belief and religion has helped Khmer Theravāda Buddhism and the Khmer population to restore their Buddhist cultural tradition, and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism has grown very quickly among the Vietnamese people.

The presence of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam through its 528 temples, are the contributions of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition to Vietnamese Buddhism. The Khmer Theravāda Culture in the Mekong Delta has brought its characteristic cultural nature to enrich the beauty of the Vietnamese culture. We all can today clearly see that Vietnam has two Buddhist traditions: Mahāyāna and Theravāda. The history of Khmer Theravāda Buddhist tradition had its beginning at almost the same time Theravāda had in traditional Theravāda countries in the world.

⁴⁹ Cơ Quan Đặt Trách Công Tác Dân Tộc ở Nam Bộ Hóa, op cit., p.41.

⁵⁰ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam**, op cit., p.63.

2.3 Factors leading to the development of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

As we have known many states of Southeast Asia are influenced to some extent by Indian royal authority. Religion in ancient time was firstly the belief of the royal families. Usually, the Kings adopted any religion which they favored. They did not practice the religious activities only by themselves, but also extended it in their whole country. When the Kings practiced Theravāda Buddhism, they did not practiced it by themselves but also established it as their country's culture. They hoped that all people of their country would follow the religion which they had chosen. The people in the state, out of respect for their king, always easily followed their kings' religion.

Also, due to the royal authority, Khmer Theravāda Buddhism flourished very quickly. That Theravāda Buddhism was prominently practiced by the Mon people in the kingdom of Dvaravati in the fifth to the seventh century A.D is an important historical factor. This was the point which helped the development of Khmer Buddhism when the Mon and Khmer regions came into contact. At about the twelfth century A.D, Sri Lanka's fame as the foremost country of Theravāda Buddhism reached the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia. The knowledge of Sinhalese Buddhism was so widely spread and the Sinhalese monks became so well known in the contemporary Buddhist world then. At this time, the Cambodian prince Tamalinda traveled in a party of Mon monks to Sri Lanka to study Sinhalese Buddhism under the able guidance of the Sinhalese Mahatheras. Buddhism continued to flourish in Cambodia in the thirteenth century A.D, but had yet to become the dominant religious sect in the country.

At the same time, relative to this development period a Ceylonese princess married a member of the Cambodian royal family. From what we know of the religious situation in Cambodia at the time there would have been good reasons to establish alliances with other powerful Theravāda countries⁵¹. Thereafter due to the influence of the Thais, who were ardent Buddhists and they had conquered a large influence. Sinhalese Buddhism was also introduced to Cambodia.

⁵¹ Harris Ian, op cit., p.24.

Thailand's dominance in Cambodia's politics helped the former to influence the religion of the latter.

The Thai King and Thai Buddhism made a contribution to the progress of Theravāda Buddhism. With the passage of time, the Brahmanical Gods of the Angkorean period were replaced with Buddhist traditions. To the advantage of Cambodia, the cultural connection between Cambodia and Sri Lanka in the fifteenth century, had yielded good results. A delegation of eight monks headed by Mahanasiddhi from Cambodia and another 25 monks from Thailand came to Sri Lanka to receive the Upasampada ordination at the hands of the Sinhalese Mahatheras. Theravāda Buddhism continued to flourish in Cambodia in the sixteenth century AD. Under the royal authority of King Ang Chan (1516-1566), a relative of King Dhammaraja, who was a devout Buddhist, pagodas were built in his capital as well as many Buddhist temples in different parts of Cambodia⁵².

The Mekong Delta at that time, was a part of Cambodia. The Khmers in the Mekong delta were influenced by their King's religion. Therefore, Theravāda Buddhism had become the dominant belief of Khmers in the Mekong Delta. However, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the region of the Mekong Delta came under the rule of the Nguyễn Court. An unhappy historical turn happened to Khmer Theravāda Buddhism due to the Nguyễn Court's policy of abolishing Theravāda Buddhism and getting rid of the Khmer people. All Khmers in Southern Vietnam were bravely opposed against it and tried to save the Theravāda tradition and the Khmer national culture. For the Khmers in the Mekong Delta, Theravāda Buddhism and Khmer people were one unit. No one could separate that. It was recorded that the Khmers in the Mekong Delta resisted, but without any support from others, while the Thais moved into Cambodia as a way to protect Theravāda Buddhism from the Mahayanist Vietnamese⁵³. This proved that the existence of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam today results from the sacrifice of the Khmer people who saved Theravāda Buddhism.

⁵² Sophan Seng, bhikkhu (Voteano), **History of Buddhism in Kingdom of Cambodia**, Retrieved on January, 20th 2009. <http://www.cambodianview.com/cambodian-buddhism-history.html>

⁵³ Noble Ross Reat, op cit., p.06.

It was true that Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism originally appeared during the Vietnam War. No royal authority supported it. It was rooted from Cambodian Buddhism. Venerable Sangharaja Samdet Choun Nath and Cambodian monks helped the Vietnamese monks, guided them, and showed them the way to study and practice meditation according to the original Theravāda tradition. It is an important historical factor that the Vietnamese Theravāda missionaries were intellectuals from the periods under the French and the United States' regimes. They were the Venerables Thiện Luật, Hộ Tông, Bửu Chơn, Giới Nghiêm, Ân Lâm, Tịnh Sự, Tối Thắng, Giác Quang, Hộ Pháp, Thông Kham, Siêu Việt, Pháp Tri, Hộ Nhân, Pháp Lạc and Vô Hại.

Among those, Venerable Hộ Tông, the first President of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist Sangha organization, graduated from a college in the capital of Hà Nội. During his religious life in Cambodia, he did not only study Dhamma under the Cambodian Sangharaja and Deputy Sangharaja, but also studied deeply the method of meditation and observed Dhutaṅga in the forest. With his virtues, he was able to attract the interest of the people who came to him. This has helped him to succeed in spreading the Dhamma.

Another important factor to remember is that the Venerable Bửu Chơn, was a high ranking officer in his lay-life. He grew up in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition in Cambodia. His twelve years of practicing Dhutaṅga in a forest in Cambodia made him to recognize his religious conviction. He was, furthermore, a scholar, proficient in twelve languages, which are Khmer, Thai, Laos, Myanmar, Sinhala, Chinese, Pāli, English, French, German, Italian, and Russian. He was also the Deputy Chairman of the fifth World Buddhist Council in Thailand, in 1960⁵⁴. By his virtues and talent, he contributed a very large part to the development of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism. He has helped world Buddhism recognize VTB. He contributed also a very important part in the development of VTB though it has just appeared in Vietnam.

Besides, a particular Thera the Venerable Giới Nghiêm propagated Theravāda Buddhism to the Central Region of Vietnam (Miền

⁵⁴ Thích Đồng Bôn, **Tiểu Sử Danh Tăng Việt Nam Thế Kỷ 20, "Biography of Vietnamese Eminent Monks in the twentieth Century"**, (Vietnam: HCMC Buddhist Sangha, 1995), p.561.

Trung) for the first time. He was a Mahayanist monk in the ancient capital of He, where the Mahāyāna tradition was prominent. After meeting the first Vietnamese Theravāda missionary, he again became an Upasaka for about three months according to Theravāda's rule and then was ordained as a Bhikkhu according to the Theravāda tradition in Cambodia, by the Cambodian Sangharaja⁵⁵. After his nine years of teaching the Dhamma in Cambodia and Thailand, he came back to his native land to spread the Theravāda doctrine to Mahāyāna monks and lay disciples. In 1953, the first Theravāda temple was established in the central region of Vietnam. It is the Tam Bao temple today.

One more case was that the Venerable Tịnh Sự, who was also a Mahayanist monk and the abbot of a Mahāyāna temple before becoming a Theravāda monk, recognizing the different views of the Mahāyāna and Theravāda doctrines changed his Buddhist practice and got ordained according to the Theravāda tradition at Phnom Penh as a novice and then became a Bhikkhu at Wat Paknam in Bangkok. He was renamed Santikicco by his teacher who was a Thai monk. In Thailand, he studied Pali and Abhidhamma. After finishing the Abhidhamma Pandit program, he returned to Vietnam. By his compassion and wisdom, he devotedly translated all of the Abhidhamma Pitaka into the Vietnamese language and opened Abhidhamma classes to spread the Abhidhamma doctrine to Vietnamese⁵⁶.

With his wide knowledge of Buddhism of both Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, he has influenced a lot of Mahāyāna followers and converted them to Theravāda Buddhism. He has also changed many Mahāyāna temples into Theravāda temples. He contributed a very important part to the Theravāda Buddhist missionary work in Vietnam.

Furthermore, the supporters of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism were also intellectuals and officials in the current government. They established a union of lay disciples in 1956, aiming at spreading wide the Buddhadhamma by activities such as writing on the Theravāda doctrine and building pagodas. They were Mr. Nguyễn Văn Hiểu, Mr.

⁵⁵ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Bước Đầu Tìm Hiểu Phật Giáo Nam Tông Cổ Đô Huế, "Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Ancient Capital of Hue"**, HCMC: Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House, 2002), pp.12-17.

⁵⁶ Đại Đức Giác Chánh (ed.), **Kỷ Yếu Hòa Thượng Tịnh Sự, "The History of Most Venerable Tịnh Sự"**, (Vietnam: Sai Gon, 1984), pp.08-09.

Truong Văn Huân, Mr. Trần Văn Cầm, Mr. Trần Văn Nhân, Mr. Trần Văn Nhơn, Mr. Huỳnh Công Yến, Mr. Đặng Văn Chất, and Mr. Đặng Văn Ngô. Thanks to the energy of members of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism in that early time, Theravāda Buddhism has developed very quickly among the Vietnamese people during the Vietnam War.

The factors leading to the development of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam include:

- Royal authority
- French colonial rule
- Vietnamese governments upholding freedom of religion
- The great sacrifice of the Khmers to save Buddhism
- The strength of some intellectuals of the Vietnamese people
- The devotion of the people to Theravāda Buddhism

2.4 Buddhist Relationships between Cambodia and Vietnam

We know from the above the many problems in ancient time that happened between Cambodia and Vietnam and their relationship regarding Buddhism. Strictly speaking, Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Southern Vietnam and Cambodia's Buddhism came from the same origin and their two processes of development are also the same. They are the same ethnic people and they all had lived in the same country during the period of the Funan and Chenla (Cambodia) Kingdoms. During the seventeenth century A.D, they were split up into the land of Water Chenla or Khmer Cambochea and Krom (lower Khmer) belonging to Vietnam. It became a Southern part of South Vietnam. However, under the French' rule, the French gave the right of freedom of religion to the Khmers (Free Khmer) in the lower Mekong Delta and in Cambodia.

In addition, there have been many Khmer monks from southern Vietnam coming to Cambodia to study higher Pali and Buddhist Studies. Some of them are known until today such as Mr. Maha Sock (expired), Mr. Maha Son Thong (expired) at Tra Vinh province, Mr. Maha Kenh at

Tra Vinh, who were good teachers, teaching Pāli Studies at Tra Vinh and also Sanskrit at the Khmer Theravāda Academic for Buddhist Studies in Can Tho City, Vietnam.

At Soc Trang province, there were Mr. Maha Tang Pari, Mr. Maha Tung, Mr Maha Chau On. All were teachers at the Khmer Theravāda Academic for Buddhist Studies. They were Khmer monks from Southern Vietnam who had studied at Phnom Penh, but later, turned to be Upasakas. Only a few monks, such as the Venerable Kesaravinayo Maha Tran Danh, who is Chancellor of the Buddhist Tra Vinh provincial Council, and the venerable Maha Tang No, who is the Vice president of the Pāli Supplementary Education Nam Bo at Soc Trang province. They all have lived a holy life of a monk till now⁵⁷.

Also during this period, Theravāda Buddhism from Cambodia was spread to Vietnam. So we can say that both Khmer Theravāda Buddhism and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam are the same. Here, Cambodian Buddhism was considered the elder brother of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

A disaster befell Cambodia during the period of the Khmer Rouge or “Red Khmer” domination, from 1975 to 1979 under General Pol Pot. Under Pol Pot the Khmer Rouge carried out a sustained program ostensibly designed to return Cambodia to “year Zero”. Therefore, at least a half million people died prematurely under this period. Many of these died incidentally of starvation, disease and overwork in the miserable economic conditions. They were tortured, and brutally executed - often clubbed or hacked to death so as not to waste bullets. During this situation, Buddhism, as a potential rival for the allegiance of the Cambodian people, was one of Pol Pot’s prime targets. Monks were first coerced and then forced, on pain of death, to renounce their ordinations, so that the Sangha vanished completely. Many monasteries and temples were destroyed intentionally, while others succumbed to neglect or were used as warehouses and barns. When seeing these inhuman actions, the Vietnamese returned again to Cambodia, to save Cambodia. During 1980s, The Vietnamese were welcomed as liberators. Under Vietnamese protection, Cambodia was able to achieve a limited reconstruction of its

⁵⁷ It was recorded by Venerable Munijoto, who was a former student at Soc Trang Province and he is a monk of Tra Vinh province.

society and civilization. Reconstruction work has at least begun on most of the important temples and shrines, which the people were now free to visit. The few monks who had survived Pol Pot's "year zero" campaign were allowed to take up again their robes and work toward rebuilding of the Sangha. So, a delegation of monks from Vietnam were welcomed for the first ordination ceremonies, after the Cambodian Sangha had been eradicated under Pol Pot⁵⁸.

The delegation of monks from Vietnam included:

1. Venerable Bửu Chơn: leader of a delegation
2. Venerable Giới Nghiêm: Vice leader of a delegation
3. Venerable Siêu Việt in HCMC
4. Venerable Minh Châu in HCMC
5. Venerable Thiện Tâm in HCMC
6. Venerable Danh Dĩnh in Rach Gia province
7. Venerable Danh Bận in Rach Gia province
8. Venerable Danh Đệm in Rach Gia province
9. Venerable Danh Am in Rach Gia province
10. Venerable Danh Ôn in Rach Gia province
11. Mr. Hải Như: Member in HCMC
12. Mr. Đỗ Thế Hồng in HCMC

On September 17, 1976, the delegation came to Phnom Penh. At Pochentong airport, they were welcomed by Mr. Mac Ti and Mr. Chia Xim. Who were commissioners of the political ministry of Cambodia's revolutionary People's Party.

It was noted that the first seven Cambodian monks were officially re-ordained as follows:

1. Venerable Bru Dit: seventy years old
2. Venerable Ich Sim: sixty years old
3. Venerable Ken Von: fifty years old
4. Venerable Non Nget: sixty years old
5. Venerable Dinh Sarum: fifty years old
6. Venerable Tep Von: fifty years old
7. Venerable Cot Vai: eighty years old

⁵⁸ Noble Ross, op cit., pp.101-108.

All of them earlier in their lives have been monks before. They had been the elder monks in the Sangha. With their deep knowledge and devotion of the Buddhadhamma, Cambodian Buddhism was restored very quickly⁵⁹.

Furthermore, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhists are always grateful to Cambodian Buddhists about all the support that Cambodian Buddhists had extended to the Vietnamese Theravāda monks in spreading Theravāda Buddhism into Vietnam. From the monasteries and temples that had helped the holy life of the Vietnamese Theravāda monks; and the forest in Cambodia where the Vietnamese Theravāda monks had lived for their Dhutaṅga and meditation practice as well as for the food that Cambodian lay disciples had offered to the Vietnamese Theravāda monks. All of these are still in the memory of the Vietnamese monks. As a proverb says, “when you drink from the stream, remember the spring”.

In Vietnam Cambodian Buddhism is viewed as a cradle of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism. To render thanks, the Venerable Sieu Viet, who was also ordained as a monk in Cambodia, immediately offered the Pāli-Khmer Tipitaka to the Cambodian Sangha. The Thankfulness is not only toward Vietnamese Theravāda missionaries but also toward all Vietnamese, following Theravāda Buddhism. Thanks to Cambodian Buddhism the Vietnamese people can come today to Theravāda Buddhism and practice the Theravāda doctrine which is considered the original teachings of the Buddha.

As a result of history, the relationship between Cambodian and Vietnamese Buddhists have become like brothers in their friendship of the two countries. This is viewed as the beautiful history of Buddhism in Vietnam and Cambodia.

2.5 Conclusion Remark

The history of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam clearly undergoes throughout the history of land of Southern Vietnam encompassing three historical periods the Phnom, Chenla and Vietnam period. We also showed four important points to clarify the historical factors of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. They are: 1. The origin of

⁵⁹ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **History of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism**, op cit., pp.57-59.

Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam, 2. Its development, 3. Factors leading to its development, 4. The Buddhist relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam.

The Origin of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is from India during the time of King Asoka about the 3rd century B.C. The legend of the name of mountain Pathe means “In the mountain, two Theras have left”. To remember the two elders who were Sona and Uttara who came there to spread Buddhism and then left. This mountain is about 3 km away from Oc-Eo and belongs to Vong community in the Thoai Son District of the, Kien Giang Province of Vietnam.

The development of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is divided into the three historical periods. The period of Funan (1st-7th century A.D) and Chenla (630-1845) were the periods of the Khmer nation. Theravāda Buddhism flourished gradually from the fifth century until the late Angkorian period. The rise of Theravāda Buddhism made it to become the national religion in about the twelfth century A.D. After that time began of period of Vietnam. This period was divided into four historical sections of government rule. Those are:

1. Under the Nguyen Lords’ rule (1757-1864). They harshly forced the Khmers to abandon the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, compelled Khmer Theravāda monks to change into Mahāyāna monks, but they could not destroy the Theravāda tradition in the Southern Vietnam because the Khmers were always ready to die in order to protect the Theravāda tradition.

2. Under the French rule (1864-1954). The French supported the Khmers and Buddhism. During this time was marked not only by the development of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism, but also by the appearance of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism that came from Cambodia in 1939. On June 4th, 1949, the French president Vincent Auriol signed a law which annexed Cochin China to Vietnam. Since then, the Khmer Krom people have been legally separated from Cambodia. They are now considered as Khmers in Vietnam. From that time, the history of Vietnam Buddhism got enlarged by The Theravāda Buddhist School which was practiced by both the Khmers and the Vietnamese people.

3. Under the United States Regime (1954-1975). The leader in Vietnam was Ngo Dinh Diem. He used a decree to suppress Khmer

Buddhism. However, on December 18, 1957, the VTBSC was established.

4. Under the Communist Party (after 1975) the whole of Vietnam was restored in peace but faced a lot of difficulties after the war. Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam gradually got an opportunity to develop in accordance with the progression of the nation.

5. Factors leading to its development were royal support, French colonial rule, Vietnamese governments upholding freedom of religion, the great sacrifice of the Khmers to save Buddhism, the strength of some intellectuals of the Vietnamese people, the devotion of the people to Theravāda Buddhism.

6. The good relationship between Cambodian and Vietnamese Buddhist is a historical result. Cambodian Buddhism and Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam are of the same origin and the history of their development of Buddhism is also the same. Besides, Cambodian Buddhism is considered as a cradle of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism.

Chapter III

The Characteristics and Practices of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam

It can be said that Theravāda Buddhism is a religion, which follows the ancient teachings of the Buddha. But what happened when Buddhism spread beyond India to many different cultural traditions and countries? Although, all Theravadins always have the common view, that is to continue to preserve the original teachings of the Buddha according to the Pāli Tipitaka. The characteristics and practices of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam have the same as well as different points with Theravāda Buddhism in other countries. Through the vicissitudes of time, some of the formal factors of Buddhism were practiced differently due to the specific culture in each country. Some such formal sectors are the life of monks and nuns, Buddhist rites and ceremonies. To see these clearly, we will step into the contents of the third chapter, which follows:

3.1 Sangha Activities

3.1.1 Life of Monks

When speaking of Buddhism, we immediately think of monks and nuns. They are considered great disciples practicing and preserving the Buddha's teachings. For Theravāda Buddhism, nowadays monks have the most important influence on lay disciples because the Bhikkhuni sangha does not exist anymore. So! Please look into Theravāda monks' life in Vietnam in order to know more what they have to do in their life.

3.1.1.1 System of the Sangha.

In Theravāda Buddhism, monks are the most important part in the BuddhaDhamma. The presence of monks is the embodiment of the existence of Dhamma, because the Dhamma is the monk's sole guide.

Therefore, the rules and regulations of the monastic life as given in the Pāli Canon are considered final and cannot be altered. Thus, the authority in the Sangha is strictly administrative according to seniority and official appointment. In addition, Theravāda monks in Vietnam live and practice depending on the rules, which are laid down in the Pāli Canon. To become a member of the Sangha, a person must undertake a two-fold ordination:

-First: the novitiate ordination (Pabbajjā)

-Later: the Bhikkhu ordination (Upasampadā)

The way of a monk's holy life is ranked as follows:

-The Sāmaera: observing ten precepts. Usually, one may receive the novitiate ordination at any age but one cannot be ordained as a Bhikkhu before the age of twenty. In Vietnamese, it is called Sa-di.

-The Bhikkhu: Must observe 227 rules, and gaining seniority according to years, as a Bhikkhu must be recognized. It is assumed that the greater number of years a monk has, greater wisdom and self-discipline are achieved. After ten years as a Bhikkhu is considered a Thera (elder) (Thượng Tọa in Vietnamese) and after twenty years as a Bhikkhu, he is considered a Mahāthera (great elder) (Hòa Thượng in Vietnamese). Gaining a seniority of years in the order is recognized whenever monks are together, chanting in private, or being publicly honored and only those of Thera rank and above are qualified to give ordination.

As the early followers of the Buddha began to take up a settled life in monasteries, it became necessary for them to formulate regulations for the life of Bhikkhus and Samaneras living together in one place. These regulations are embodied in the Pāli Canon, particularly the Pātimokkha of the Vinaya texts, and are therefore, as binding on Theravāda monks as the Buddha-words themselves and cannot be altered⁶⁰. However, in the 19th century, there appeared the Dhammayutta Nikaya in Thailand and it spread to Cambodia. Therefore, in Vietnam, Dhammayutta has also been practiced by the Khmer compatriots in An Giang. This province is located near the boundary between Vietnam and

⁶⁰ Robert C. Lester, **Theravāda Buddhism in Southeast Asia**, (USA: University of Michigan Press, 1973), pp.99-100.

Cambodia. This province has 19 Dhammayutta temples and 250 monks there under the administration of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha⁶¹.

Besides this, the Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Council in Vietnam has an elected Mahāthera of all disciples (Hòa Thượng Môn Đồ). He got the most seniority in years as a Bhikkhu of the group of temples in the area. The Mahāthera's duty is to attend to the monks and temples, which he directly manages. There are a lot of Hòa Thượng Môn Đồ and each one is elected by the disciples in the temples of the area. Each year, all monk disciples come together to pay respect to their Mahāthera one time before entering the rainy season retreat (Vassa) and to listen to the advice of the Mahāthera. This way of management helps the Khmer Theravāda monks in Vietnam to take care of each other, leading to the spiritual unity in the association of Khmer Theravāda monks in Vietnam. This has contributed very largely to the progress in the monk's lives in the study and practice of the Dhamma and to preserve the Buddha's teachings⁶².

Because the Vietnamese Theravāda monks are not many, they only follow the Pāli Canon in the temple where they practice and follow the directions of the temple abbot.

Generally speaking, the system of the Sangha of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam also follows the Pāli-Vinaya, which the Theravāda Sangha in other countries also practices.

3.1.1.2 Social Activities

Returning to the Buddhist historical pages, we clearly see that the Buddha exhorted the first messengers of truth as follows:

Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the many folks, for the happiness of the many folks out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing and the happiness of devas and men. Let not two (of you) go on one (way). Monks, teach the Dhamma, which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the end.

⁶¹ Interviewed with Ven. Sơn Ngọc Huỳnh, Deputy of the Buddhist Council of Vinh Long Province, 22, Oct, 2008.

⁶² Huỳnh Kim Lan, op cit., p.23.

Explain the spirit and the letter the holy life completely fulfilled, wholly pure.⁶³

That is the way of social service of the Buddha who sent the first religious teachers to the society in the early days of Buddhism. The Sangha has done duties toward the society, which is done out of their compassion for others to propagate the Buddha's teachings. Actually, according to the flow of time, the modern society is different from the ancient one. Therefore, the monk's life has to change as well. The members of the Sangha no longer limit their holy life to monastic activities. The monks today have taken part in social activities in various ways. Yes! Because the monks are members of the society and, of course, due to the social life in the community, they have many different contributions.

Here, the Theravāda monks in Vietnam are also particular. They have a very large role in the educational activities of their Khmer compatriots. In Khmer society, the monks are considered as the intellectual strata; and as we have seen, the Khmers in Southern Vietnam underwent serious difficulties to maintain Theravāda Buddhism and the national culture. Therefore, Khmer Theravāda monks became a refuge for the Khmer compatriots. The monks are the cultural teachers. They teach both Khmer language and the virtues to Khmer believers. The Khmer Buddhist monks function very crucially in the social and academic activities of the Khmer People. For the Khmer society, monks are considered as scholars who understand the teachings of the Buddha. They received trainings and maintained the spiritual life of Buddhist followers. In addition, they represent the voice of the public to the governor. They use their own experience in morality as good samples for society. Thus, Theravāda Buddhism has become the life style of the Khmer people. Almost all Khmer monks are teachers who teach Buddhism to Khmer children as well as culture, literature, and principles of morality. Although being a normal class in a corner of a Temple, it contents the concept of maintaining the value of Khmer characteristics. The stage of monk-hood and the teaching by Khmer monks provide a good background to develop the citizen. Based on the outlook of Buddhist activities it has influenced deeply all members of the family of

⁶³. **I.B. Horner, tr, The Book of The Discipline (Vinaya Pitaka), Vol. IV, (London. Luzac & Company LTD, 1951), p.28.**

the Khmer community and made practitioners to represent the good, the merit, and the opposite of all evils. People learn how to be modest, forgiving and helpful⁶⁴.

Although there are Ethnic Boarding Schools in every province, and many Khmer children have studied at these schools, they never forget their native language. During vacations, temples welcome them to learn the Khmer language. During those times, we can hear the sound of children reading everywhere and Buddhist chanting is taught too. To preserve the Khmer culture, there are proverbs that have existed word by word: “Wordless Nation Disappears, Word Preserving Nation Develops”. The whole Khmer culture has been written in Khmer texts. If the script are lost, they will not understand the Khmer culture as its texts, the proverbs’ meaning, is not clearly explained, and little by little the significance of Khmer culture gradually disappeared. Therefore, regardless of time and space, Khmer people never close their program of teaching and learning Khmer Script and their native language.⁶⁵ This program is very suitable for modern education such as literature followed, teaching respect and education for morality, especially paying respect and love to others. For Khmer people, the teaching of Loving-kindness and compassion of Buddhism has strongly influenced their hearts, and life style. This concept has been taught to Khmer children to have a good way of living and to have the spirit of charity. It goes in line with natural law taught by monks, which is “every one for each other” which society today has to struggle to achieve. Besides teaching ethnic script and morality, monks also teach the fundamentals of Mathematics, Literature and History in Khmer language. That program protects Khmer traditional culture and also the up-to-date technology of modern science throughout the World⁶⁶.

In short, for Khmer people, being in the monk-hood and teaching literature are very important in preserving the teachings of the Buddha, and their cultural identity.

⁶⁴ Cơ Quan Đặc Trách Công Tác Dân Tộc ở Nam Bộ, op cit., p.42.

⁶⁵ Thái Chợt, “Giáo Dục Truyền Thống Dân Tộc Cho Học Sinh Khmer, Đề Tài Nghiên Cứu Khoa Học. The National Traditional Education of Khmer Pupil” (Vietnam: Topic of Scientific Research, 200), p.6. (Mimeography).

⁶⁶ Nguyễn Đăng Duy, **Văn Hóa Tâm Linh Nam Bộ**, “**Spirit Culture in Southern Vietnam**”, (HaNoi: Hanoi Publishing House, 1997), p.224.

For the Vietnamese Theravāda monks, there is a little difference. Because they are Vietnamese living in Vietnam, the protection of Vietnamese culture is not their major duty. It belongs to the education system of schools. So Vietnamese Theravāda monks contributed to welfare activities.

Here, as we have known, the Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist Sangha Congregation was established during the Vietnam War and it has to face lot of difficulties. The elders regard the missionary work for the Theravāda doctrine more important than social welfare works. However, after the incident of Tết Mậu Thân in 1968 the VTBSC took part in helping the war victims at Sài Gòn and at Huế with medicines, food, rice and money.

After 1975, Theravāda Buddhism has gradually developed widely in Vietnam. There have been a lot of new followers. So, the social activities of Vietnamese Theravāda monks became more active. They go to remote areas to help unlucky compatriots in calamity. With lovingkindness and compassion for the people who are facing disaster and suffering, Vietnamese Theravāda monks strongly take part in social activities. They are the venerables Thiện Pháp, Giới Đức, Pháp Tông, Tuệ Tâm, Pháp Cao, Tăng Định, Chánh Niệm, Pháp Chất, Thiện Minh and Chánh Định. All of them and the Theravāda lay disciples (local and oversea) have contributed very much to the social activities including property, rice, food, clothes and money⁶⁷. A particular point to be noted is that the Theravāda monk in Huế City, the Venerable Giới Đức made a major contribution. He has built the Bạch Yến bridge which costs about 70 000US\$ to help lessen the difficulty for the local people in the rainy season.

So, according to the social situation, Theravāda monks in Vietnam have contributed to the society in many different ways. The Khmer monks participate strongly in keeping their national culture and also were the brothers of the Vietnamese to fight the French and America's regime. Whereas Vietnamese monks contributed to the welfare works to reduce the sufferings of unlucky persons. In brief, all social

⁶⁷Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam**, op cit., pp.66-69.

activities of Theravāda monks in Vietnam have made their society a better society in all aspects of life.

3.1.2 System of Education in the Sangha.

3.1.2.1 System of studying Dhamma

In the early days of the Buddha's time, the knowledge of the Dhamma was spread directly by many disciples according to the natural backgrounds of each person. The Buddha surely had a suitable way to teach the Dhamma; but after his passing away, to preserve the teachings of the Buddha and propagate Buddhism, the learning of the Dhamma was gradually established in the educational system of each Buddhist country. In addition, in Vietnam, the study of the Dhamma has been a cultural tradition of the Khmer people because Buddhism has become a Khmer-cultural-lifestyle in southern Vietnam. To keep, what ancestors have done, to go on, the Khmer Theravāda monks always try to open Dhamma classes to educate Sangha members and lay devotee. Although facing difficulties in the war, the spirit of the Khmers still existed in the words "What is to inherit? It is essential to protect the valuable treasure of Buddhism".

Today, the past is history and there are new changes in the Vietnamese government's policy about the freedom of belief, which is of advantage to contributing to the educational system that has developed quickly. It is officially allowed by the government. The Dhamma classes are held in each temple. According to the condition of the temple, different levels of classes are opened. The Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Council of each province has a private educational structure. For example, the Trà Vinh province mainly teaches Pāli the Kiên Giang province teaches Vinaya; and so on. Therefore, the monks of each province can move to another province to study as they wish. Here, I present an educational system of the Department of Buddhist Studies of the Mahānikāya Buddhist Sangha of Trà Vinh. It offers a four years course in Buddhist Studies - Primary level and a three years course in Buddhist Studies- Secondary level (Madhyamasiksha) as follows:

Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Studies- Primary Level
(Pathamasikshā)
 (Study duration four years)

A. Pali language:

1. Pāli Grammar
2. Pāli Vocabulary
3. Dhammapaddaṭṭhakātha (8 Vol.-Khmer Script)
4. Dhammapada

B. Dhamma Studies:

1. Samāṇeravinaya
2. History of the Sakyamuni Buddha
3. Anubuddha
4. The Great Disciples of the Buddha
5. Jātaka
6. Philosophy of Religion
7. Questionnaires of Buddhism
8. Analysis of Buddhism
9. Dhamma in Category
10. Abhidhamma

C. Social and Science Studies:

1. Khmer Dictation
2. Khmer Grammar
3. Composition
4. Maths

Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Studies-Secondary level.

1. Buddhist code of conduct (Pāṭimokkha I, II, III)
2. English I, II, III
3. Pāli (Maṅgalaṭṭhadīpanī) I, II, III)
4. Khmer literature I, II, III
5. Khmer language I, II, III
6. Maths I, II, III
7. Composition I, II, III

Although it has a different educational program in each province, the study at University is the same. Now the Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academies for Buddhist Studies has been in place but Colleges not yet. The following are the curriculums of the Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academy for Buddhist Studies in Cần Thơ City:

1	History of Buddhism	(4 credits)
2	Psychology	(1 credit)
3	Methodology	(1 credits)
4	Religion	(2 credits)
5	Pāli Collocation	(4 credits)
6	Pāṭimokkha	(2 credits)
7	Pāli Composition and Translation	(3 credits)
8	Pāli literature	(2 credits)
9	Khmer Buddhist Literary	(5 credits)
10	Khmer culture	(3 credits)
11	Sociology	(2 credits)
12	Indian philosophy	(2 credits)
13	Dhamma English	(5 credits)
14	Thai language	(3 credits)
15	History of Mahāyāna Buddhism	(2 credits)
16	World religions	(2 credits)
17	Visuddhimagga (Pāli)	(4 credits)
18	Social culture	(2 credits)
19	Logic	(3 credits)
20	Ethnic	(3 credits)
21	Theravāda Buddhist philosophy	(2 credits)
22	Sanskrit	(5 credits)
23	Meditation	(2 credits)
24	Introduction to Computer and Information Technology	(4 credits)

Nowadays, The Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academy for Buddhist Studies is a member of the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU) and the International Academic Seminar on Buddhism and Ethnics at MCU Main Campus, Wang Noi, Ayutthaya Province, Thailand.

For the Vietnamese people, Theravāda Buddhism has been in existence in Vietnam for nearly seventy years. The Theravāda monk force is not as strong as that of other Buddhist sects are. However, in the past before 1975, some Theravāda Buddhist studies were organized at temples such as the Pháp Quang the Phật Bảo, the Nam Tông and the Nguyễn Thủy. The principals at that time were Dr. Ven. Dũng Chí and Dr. Ven. Thiện Giới, who went to study aboard before⁶⁸.

The establishment of Buddhist studies aimed at training Sangha members. In addition, Dhamma classes were opened at temples where the monks could teach Dhamma to people who wanted to learn. Vietnamese Theravāda monks really taught the Dhamma even if the class had only one student. Sometimes there was only one teacher and one or two monks or lay disciple students in a class. Dhamma classes still exist if there is someone who likes to study the Dhamma. This happens due to the strong determination of Vietnamese Theravāda monks who wanted to propagate Theravāda teachings and the students who wanted to know Theravāda Buddhism. Here, studies were free of charge and teachers also did not get a salary. They only aimed at understanding the Dhamma⁶⁹. To continue the path of the elder missionaries the Vietnamese Theravāda monks in later times opened Dhamma classes to train the future members of the Theravāda Sangha in Vietnam, and also to spread widely the Theravāda doctrine to the Vietnamese people. The temples, which usually organize Dhamma classes for monks and nuns, are the Bửu Long temple at HCMC, Siêu Lý temple at Vĩnh Long province, Thiện Quang I and the Phước Sơn temples at Đồng Nai province. With the purpose of spreading the Dhamma of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition for monks, novices and nuns in Theravāda Buddhism Dhamma classes were organized in those temples mentioned above⁷⁰. This situation lasted until the year 2003, when the first Theravāda educational institution was officially founded at the Huyền Không Vihāra in Huế.

⁶⁸ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam**, op cit., pp.5-6.

⁶⁹ Interviewed with Ven. Pháp Nhiên (Jotidharo), who is an abbot of Paramattharama at HCMC, Oct, 22, 2008.

⁷⁰ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam**, op cit., p.64.

The Curriculum
The Theravāda Buddhist College
(Intermediate Level)

The First Year

- A. Buddhist Subjects: (20 periods per week, 4 weeks per month, and 9 months per year. Totally, 80 periods per month; 720 periods per year)
1. Sutta: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)
 - Enumeration of Dhammas.
 - Dhammapada.
 - Jātakas.
 2. Vinaya: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)
 - Everyday Conducts and Manners. Fourteen Dhammas of Practice (*CuddasaKhandhakavattāni*)
 - The Ten Contemplations on Sâmana Conducts. (*Dasa dhammā pabbajitena abhiñña paccavekkhī abbā*).
- * further instructions on
 ‘A Manual of Vinaya in Everyday Application’
3. Basic Buddhist Teachings:
 - (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)
 - The Triple Gem (*Tiratana*)
 - The Triple Refuge (*Tisarana*), the Five Precepts (*Pancasila*)
 - The Way to Worship the Buddha (*Buddhavandā*)
 - The Practice of Repentance, Reciting suttas, Recollecting the Buddha’s virtues.
 - The Faith of a Buddhist Follower.
 - The path of wholesome Kamma (*Kusala-kamma-patha*).
 - The Beings’ Realms (*Bhūmi*).
 - The Six Principles of Harmony.
 - The Four synthesis Methods (*Saṅgaha-vatthuni*).
 - The Principles of Causality and *Kamma*.
 - The Four Immeasurable Minds (*Brahmavihāra*).
 - The common characteristic of Dhamma (*Tilakkhaṇa*).
 - The Three trainings of *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, *Paññā* (*Tisikkhā*).
 4. History of Buddhism: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)
 - A Brief History of Buddha Sakyamuni and His Great

Disciples.

-A Brief History of the Historical Buddhist Councils.

5. Pāli: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

-Textbook: New Pāli Course I (Part 1)

6. Chinese: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)

-Vocabulary, Grammatical Structures.

7. English: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

-Basic English.

B. Further Activities: (2 pers. month, 18 pers. year)

- The Activities of the Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation:
Charter and Regulations.

The Second Year

A. Buddhist Subjects: (22 periods per week, 4 weeks per month, months per year. Totally, 88 periods per month; 792 periods per year)

1. Sutta: (4 pers. a week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

-Summary of *Dīgha-nikāya*.

-Some Passages of *Dīgha-nikāya*.

-Summary of *Aguttara-nikāya*.

-Summary of *Saṅgīyutta-nikāya*.

2. Vinaya: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)

-Vinaya rules for Novices (*Sāmañera sikkhāpadā*).

-Qui Son Canh Sach (Exhortations by Most Ven. Qui Son).

3. Basic Buddhist Teachings: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

- The *Milindapañhā*.

-The Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri ariyasaccāni*).

-The Principle of Dependent Origination.

(*Paṭiccasamuppada*)

-The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*).

-The Four Right Efforts (*Padhāna*).

-The Four Bases of Miraculous Powers (*Iddhipāda*).

-The Five Faculties (*Indriya*), the Five Powers (*Bala*).

-The Seven factors of Enlightenment (*Bojjhaṅga*).

-The Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya aṭṭhāgikamagga*).

4. History of Buddhism: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72

pers year)

-A Brief History of *Theravāda* Buddhism in Vietnam.

-A Brief History of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in Vietnam.

5. Pāli: (4 pers. a week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

- Textbook: New Pāli Course I (Part 2)

6. Chinese: (2 pers. week, pers. a month, 72 pers. year)

- Vocabulary, Grammatical Structures.

7. English: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

- Basic English.

B. Further Activities: (2 pers. month, 18 pers. year)

-The Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation: Plans of Activities; Resolutions.

The Third Year

D. Buddhist Subjects: (24 periods per week, 4 weeks per month, 9 months per year. Totally, 96 periods per month; 864 Periods per year)

1. Sutta: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

- Summary of *Majjhima-nikāya*.

- Some Passages of *Majjhima-nikāya*.

- The Path of Purification (*Visuddhimagga*).

* practice of reporting before the class.

2. Vinaya: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

- The Four moral purifications (*catuparisuddhi-sīla*)

- *Sarvāstivāda* Discipline for Bhikkhu.

3. Abhidhamma: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)

a) The Outline of Abhidhamma.

-Minds and mental factors (*Citta* and *cetasika*).

b) Meditation in the Abhidhamma.

4. History of Buddhism: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)

- A Brief History of the World's Buddhism: India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Japan.

- The Outline of Buddhism in the West.

5. Pāli: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)

- Textbook: New Pāli Course II (Part 1)

6. Chinese: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)

- Grammatical Analysis, Translation.

- 7. English: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)
 - Buddhist English.
- B. Further Activities: (2 pers. month, 18 pers. year)
 - The Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation: Resolutions of The Central Buddhist Congregation and the Provincial Buddhist Congregation.

The Fourth year

- A. Buddhist Subjects: (22 periods per week, 4 weeks per month, 9 months per year. Totally, 88 periods per month; 792 periods per year)
 - 1. Sutta: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)
 - Summary of *Khuddaka-nikāya*.
 - Summary of the Principal Texts of Northern Buddhism.
 - Comparison of *Dīgha-nikāya* and Corresponding *Āgama*, *Majjhima-nikāya* and Corresponding *Āgama*.
 - *Practice of preaching.
 - 2. Vinaya: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)
 - The Four moral purifications (cont'd).
 - Introduction to the Four-Divisional Discipline.
 - 3. Abhidhamma: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)
 - *Rūpa* and *Nibbāna*.
 - *Abhidhamma* and *Vijñaptimatravāda*.
 - 4. History of Buddhism: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72pers year)
 - A Brief History of Vietnamese Buddhism in the Dinh, Le, Ly, Tran Dynasties.
 - Introduction to the Doctrinal Aspect of Buddhist schools.
 - 5. Pāli: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)
 - Textbook: New Pāli Course II (Part 2)
 - 6. Chinese: (2 pers. week, 8 pers. month, 72 pers. year)
 - Translation.
 - 7. English: (4 pers. week, 16 pers. month, 144 pers. year)
 - Buddhist English (practice of writing and translating).
- B. Further Activities: (2 pers. month, 18 pers. year)
 - The Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation: Introduction to

the Formal Structure of the Central Buddhist Congregation⁷¹.

And of course, this is the Theravāda Buddhist College at the central region. Therefore, the monk students are all in the central region. In the South, Dhamma classes are still organized as before. Nowadays, the Theravāda Buddhist College (Intermediate Level) at the Huyen Khong Vihāra in Hue is a member of The International Conference of All Theravāda Buddhist Universities at International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University, Yangon and Woodlands Hotel, Poppa Mountain Resort, Bagan, Myanmar, 9-12th March 2007.

3.1.2.2 Purpose of Education

Education is a process of teaching, training and learning to improve knowledge and to develop skills. Here, the purpose of education by the Sangha of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam also aims at improving knowledge of the Theravāda doctrine and of developing skills of practice and propagation.

Presently, what we can easily see, in the five Theravāda countries is that only males are ordained. Their common view is that men must be trained in moral principle of Buddhism during one's life. For the Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam, usually, males must be ordained about once in their lives. They either can live the religious life or can return to a layman life at anytime. It is an occasion to make merit in one's life and to offer it to their parents. Besides, in Vietnam, if a Khmer male becomes a monk is the best way to learn Khmer language and the Dhamma, since Khmer temples are the linguistic and national cultural centers of the Khmer people. They learn the Dhamma, Pāli and the Khmer language. Therefore, joining a monk's life, Khmer males have a good condition to be trained in both the religion and in the knowledge of the Khmer culture. In language learning, is included and the national culture and language exist in the people's life.

Recognizing these benefits, they always like entering the holy life. It is not only a duty but also is an honor in one's life. Whoever lives a long time in the holy life, the believers will greatly respect him. If he

⁷¹Ven. Dhammavamsa, "The Growth of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam". Retrieved 18 October 2008, <http://atbu.org/node/35>.

returns to a layman's life, he will become a member of the temple management. He contributes very diligently to the temple. He has a role of taking care of the monk's needs and of leading the believers in ceremonies.

Summing up, the purpose of education of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is to educate talent and virtue for the monks to preserve Theravāda Buddhism and training lay people, who have the ability to serve Buddhism and the nation. This also aims at educating citizen servicing societies. It contributes to have a good religion and world today and in the future.

The Vietnamese people are different from others such as the Burmese, Khmer, Laotian and Singhalese, who have practiced Theravāda Buddhism as their national religion. Vietnamese people came to Theravāda Buddhism by studying this Buddhist school, which they did not know before. Because the Vietnamese culture is influenced by Mahāyāna, They knew Buddhism only in the form of Mahāyāna. However, the teaching of the Buddha they have now realized is the system of mental training and not of only belief and worshipping.

When studying the Theravāda doctrine, the Vietnamese came to understand the original teachings of the Buddha. They really received the ancient teachings as a true path of practice. In Vietnam, although fewer Vietnamese follow Theravāda Buddhism than other Buddhist sects, they deeply love the Theravāda doctrine and respect it as a magnetic needle leading to liberation. Therefore, they taught their offsprings to follow Theravāda. Young disciples are trained according to the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. Gradually, the number Vietnamese who followed Theravāda Buddhism is increasing. For these reasons, the training of Sangha members has become important and necessary to keep and spread Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. To learn the original teachings of Theravāda Buddhism, Vietnamese Theravāda monks usually go to Theravāda countries to learn the Dhamma.

It is very clear that the purpose of educating the Vietnamese in Theravāda Buddhism is to spread the Dhamma, and to improve the knowledge of the Theravāda doctrine to develop Buddhism in the world.

3.1.2.3 View of Liberation

According to Theravāda Buddhism, the expansion is based on the Pāli Tipitaka. The liberation is based on one's own diligence and not by praying to the outside powers.

Actually, the liberation in Buddhism is the ending of the defilements: lobha, dosa, moha. These defilements arise in the minds of each of us. Therefore, to be liberated one must undergo the whole process of training the mind and the body. This has to be practiced by oneself:

By oneself, indeed, is evil done;
 By oneself is one defiled
 By oneself is evil left undone;
 By oneself indeed, is one purified.
 Purity and impurity depend on oneself.
 No one purifies another.⁷²

Thus, the idea of the doctrine of saving all beings to be liberated is impossible. Because the ending of defilements is a result of a process of striving diligently by oneself. No emancipation or purification can be gained without personal striving. It may be mentioned that amongst the thirty- seven factors that lead to enlightenment (Bodhipakkhiya-Dhamma), energy (viriya) occurs nine times.

Clarifying his relationship with his followers, the Buddha states:

Striving should be done by yourselves.
 The Tathagatas are teachers.
 The meditative ones, who enter the way,
 Are delivered from the bonds of Mara⁷³.

This view of liberation is very scientific. It depends on the ability of one's own diligence, which will lead to a corresponding result.

⁷² Dhp 165; Narada Thera, tr, **Dhammapada, Pali Text and Translation with Stories in Brief and Notes.** (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 4th Edition 2538-1993), p.149.

⁷³ Dhp 276; Narada Thera, tr, op cit., p.221.

3.1.3 Ordination Name

Ordination Name is a name, which is given by the Upajjhāya (Spiritual Teacher) when one is ordained as a samaṇera or a Bhikkhu as a mark of entering the spiritual life. Usually, Theravāda countries give a Pāli name to a monk. Also, in Vietnam, the tradition of naming in Pāli still in done in Theravāda Buddhism. It is not only giving Pāli names to monks but also to nuns. However, the ordinary addressing is different between the Khmer and the Vietnamese. Khmer Theravāda monks usually use a name that was given by their parents, which was recorded in the birth certificate. But in the ceremonies, to address a Venerable or the most Venerable, they always use both the Pāli name and the given family name. For example Bhikkhu Son cường, has the Pāli name Kalyānacāri. He will be addressed as Venerable Kalyānacāri Son cường. In cases when the word Mahā is put before the lay name and after the Pāli name. its usage is to show a person with great learning, even if a monk has disrobed, the word Mahā is still used to show respect to those who were a learned monk.

For Vietnamese Theravāda monks and nuns usually only their ordination name is used (also called Dhamma name or religious name) but translated into Vietnamese to address. For example, the name of the first president of the VTBSC is Hộ Tông, translated from the Pali name Vaṃsarakkhita. In addition, Vietnamese Theravāda monks usually use the surname “Thích”, which is the Mahāyāna style. For example, Thích Tuệ Dũng. The word ‘Thích’ is the Vietnamese transcription of the word ‘Sakya’ which was the family name of the Buddha. This characteristic exists only in Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism, but not in Khmer Theravāda Buddhism.

3.1.4 Going on Alms rounds

When becoming a Theravāda monk, one of the first properties of monks is a bowl. This remarks the starting of going for alms-food in the monk’s life. The Khmer monks carry on this tradition. Other Buddhist sects seldom do so in Vietnam. Going for alms food is a Buddhist tradition, which has its origin from the Buddha’s days. It is recorded by a story that the Buddha went on alms round in the first time when he visited his relatives after his enlightenment. This was summarized by the

Venerable Nārada in **the book The Buddha and His Teachings** as follows:

As there was no special invitation for the noon on the following day, the Buddha and his disciples got ready to seek alms from the houses of the citizens of Kapilavatthu. Before proceeding, he considered within himself.

Did the Buddhas of the past, upon entering the city of their kinsfolk, straightaway enter the houses of their relatives; or did they go from house to house in regular order receiving alms? Perceiving that they did so from house to house, the Buddha went in the streets of Kapilavatthu seeking alms.

On hearing of this seemingly disgraceful conduct of the Buddha, the King greatly perturbed in mind, hurried to the scene and assaulting him said, “Son, why do you ruin me? I am overwhelmed with shame to see you begging for alms. Is it proper for you, who used to travel in golden palanquins, to seek alms in this very city? Why do you put me to shame?

I am not putting you to shame. O great king! I am following the custom of my lineage”, replied the Buddha, to the king’s astonishment. However, dear son, is it the custom of my lineage to gain a livelihood by seeking alms? Surely, ours is the warrior lineage of Mahasammata, and not a single warrior has gone seeking alms.

O great king that is not the custom of your royal lineage. But it is the custom of my Buddha lineage. Several thousands of the Buddhas have lived by seeking alms⁷⁴.

In Vietnam, the going for alms-food is seldom seen and almost all people do not like it, because they think that everybody has to seek food by one’s work and has to nourish one’s life. Why seeking alms from other persons, depending on others’ lives?

⁷⁴ Narada, **The Buddha and His Teachings**, (Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 4th Edition B.E 2532-C.E 1988), p.69.

Although facing these attitudes, Khmer monks in Vietnam still go for alms food everyday as a duty of the monk's life. Each day, under appointment of the abbot, the Khmer monks go over the streets in the village to seek alms. The food is then brought for all monks in the temple to have it together.

Khmers in Southern Vietnam are farmers. They are not rich in properties, but they are very rich in respecting the Triple Gem. The Khmers are ready to give their food to the monks who are Dhamma observers. Actually, Buddhism has been rooted deeply in the hearts of the Khmers.

While Khmer Theravāda monks practice well the tradition of going for alms food, Vietnamese Theravāda monks cannot keep this tradition. Vietnamese Theravāda monks today are disadvantaged when for their living they have to go for alms-food. Because the lay disciples of the Theravāda school in Vietnam are not many. Their houses are far from Theravāda temples. The ordinary people are not followers of Buddhism and they do not believe in the Triple Gem and do not know how to offer food to the monks by putting food into bowl of the monk. So! It is too difficult for Vietnamese Theravāda monks to practice the holy life by going for alms food. Therefore, the monks and the lay disciples agree in practice that the lay people give money to the abbot of the temple, and another lay group would cook food to offer to monks. Usually, there are of lists of alms givers who register to offer food to monks in every temple. To remember the tradition of going for alms food in the time of the Buddha the Vietnamese Theravāda monks celebrate a ceremony of going for alms food at the central temples on Māghapūja, Visākhapūjā, and Āsaḥapūjā.

However, in the early time of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism, the elder missionaries went round for alms food everyday aiming at causing attention in the public. When seeing Theravāda monks going for alms food, the people were surprised and then went to the Theravāda temples to study Theravāda Buddhism. Usually, the people only offer vegetarian food because they did not know Theravāda Buddhist monks could eat meat. Sometimes, lay disciples of Theravāda Buddhism offer meat to the monks, then later, other lay people put vegetarian food into bowl and when seeing meat, they immediately get the meat out and said sorry to the monks for those givers did not know

Buddhism. In this case, Theravāda monks still kept their silence, although they had to eat vegetarian food and not meat for a long time⁷⁵.

Nevertheless, in Vietnam there still appear special Theravāda monks who live by only going round for alms food. That was the Most Venerable He Hen, who was the third chief monk of the Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist School after the Vietnam Buddhism Congregation was established. The Most Venerable He Hen (Khantīpāla Mahāthera) practiced going for alms round food and he only had three robes. He practiced these two Dhutaṅga Dhammas during his holy life to develop himself and to remind the monks and nuns of the simple and purified life by going for alms food and know this being enough to meet their requirement.

A particular point in his life of a monk is that of the Vietnamese Theravāda monk ordained as a Bhikkhu during the sixth Buddhist Council. It took place at a cave in Rangoon at 9.30 on Dec 29, 1955. Mahāthera Pokka Siyanda was his Upajjhāya, who was also chairman of this Council, and his other two teachers were the Venerable Nandavamsa and Mahasi Sayadaw, and it was done in the presence of 300 elder Bhikkhus. During this time, he practiced Vipassana meditation under the teaching of the Meditation Master Mahasī Sayadaw. After returning to his homeland, he lived diligently practicing meditation and going for alms food, and teaching Vipassana meditation to his disciples until he passed away⁷⁶.

Today, the Vietnamese government does not allow monks to go for alms food because a lot are not monks, but they are only disguise in the form of Buddhist monks to go for alms around and for money. However, Khmer Theravāda monks have practiced it well. In HCMC, the Venerable Tăng Định, the current abbot of the Jetavanavihāra (chùa Kỳ Viên), has practiced going for alms food on every Sīla day (8 days in each month) with the permission of the government.

⁷⁵ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam**, op c it., pp.98-99.

⁷⁶ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Ancient Capital of Hue**, op cit., pp.30-31.

From this we see clearly that the spirit of practicing the tradition of going for alms round is very lively, though the advantage of it is very limited for Theravāda monks in the Vietnamese society.

3.2 Activities in the Life of Theravāda Nuns

Perhaps there is in the different Buddhist sects, but we can see clearly that there is no nun Order in Theravāda Buddhism today. Yes, that is so. There is only a kind of nuns who observe either eight precepts (atthasila) or ten precepts (dasasila) and are wearing clothes according to the regulations of Theravāda Buddhism that each country permits. Although there are Buddhist nuns in some Theravāda countries, the High Priests of all the five Theravāda countries do not recognize these nuns as being correctly ordained in accordance with the rules of the Theravāda Vinaya⁷⁷.

Therefore, the re-establishment of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka in 1998 has not been officially accepted as yet in Theravāda countries⁷⁸.

The two Bhikkhuni Movements in Thailand were never accepted by Thai Buddhism⁷⁹.

So! What about Theravāda nuns in Vietnam? How is their religious lifestyle? Please come to study it!

3.2.1 Religious Lifestyle

As what has been recorded today in Vietnam is that in 1970 there appeared nuns in Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism, but not in Khmer Theravāda Buddhism. So in this part, we only concentrate on Vietnamese Theravāda nuns.

The first Theravāda nun in Vietnam was Sur Cô Diệu Đáng⁸⁰, who was ordained officially by the monks. During this time, Theravāda

⁷⁸ Pabbiliye Marthree Moorthree, **A Critical Study of the Re-Establishment of Bhikkhuni Sangha in Sri Lanka**. M.A Thesis. (Bangkok; Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2548.), pp. 2-3.

⁷⁹ Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, **Thai Women in Buddhism**, (California, Parallax Press, 1991), pp.45-48.

nuns wore a pink color garment according to the Burmese nun's style of the school of Mahasī Sayadaw⁸¹. Although they observed only eight precepts, the monks have recognized them as ordained women, but of course, they were not Bhikkhunīs. The monks called them therefore, Theravāda nun, which in the Vietnamese language is Tu Nữ. It means an ordained woman. According to the elder monks' teachings, the Bhikkhunī Sangha disappeared in Theravāda Buddhism, it could not be re-established in accordance with the regulation laid down by the Buddha. Therefore, to open the way of ordination for women in Theravāda Buddhism today, the monks allow women enjoying the holy life as a nun by a type of ordination when they shave the head, observe atthasila and are wearing clothes in accordance with the regulations of the Theravāda monks in each country⁸².

From that time, Vietnamese women who desire to become a nun in Theravāda Buddhism would be ordained as above. Usually they stay at the Theravāda temples to study the Dhamma and practice meditation. Their income depends on their family and on believers or by self-supporting means. In some places they themselves cook, in some other places they offer the service cooking for monks and eat after the monks had their meals. They are respected as being in higher position than lay disciples are and in lower position than monks are. After Vietnamese Theravāda monks came back from Thailand, they made changes to the regulations for Vietnamese Theravāda nuns, which are similar to those of the Thai Mae Chee. It means that Vietnamese Theravāda nuns wore white clothes. During this time, ordained women in Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism had been recognized as Buddhist nuns under the management of the Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist Sangha Congregation.

After the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha was established in 1981, Theravāda nuns were not accepted as nuns in Vietnamese Buddhism. From that time, the management of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha rejected Theravāda nuns in Vietnam. Although serious difficulties

⁸⁰ Sur Cô Diệu Đáng: Diệu Đáng is her ordination name. The word Sur Cô in Vietnamese is used to show respectfully nun in Buddhism.

⁸¹ Interviewed with Sur Cô Diệu Tâm (Succita), Manager of Diệu Quang Temple, Vietnamese Theravāda Nun Temple at 100 Trần Văn Quang Street, Ward 10, District Tân Bình HCMC, Oct 25, 2008.

⁸² Interviewed with Ven. Thích Thiện Minh, An abbot of Bửu Quang Temple – the first Vietnamese Theravāda temple, Oct 24, 2008.

befell the Theravāda nuns in Vietnam, it could not break the heart of the women loving the teachings of the Buddha. When understanding that the Theravāda doctrine is the original teachings of the Buddha, a lot of women still aspire to enjoy the holy life as a nun according to Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism, even when they were despised by other Buddhist sects in Vietnam.

A symbolic figure was *Sư Cô Liên Tài*. She was a nun of another Buddhist sect before coming to Theravāda Buddhism. After several years of studying the Dhamma with the Most Ven. *Tịnh Sự* at the *Viên Giác Temple*⁸³ and Ven. *Giác Giới*⁸⁴ at the *Siêu Lý temple* in the *Vĩnh Long province*, she decided to change her tradition and then ordained as a nun according to Theravāda Buddhism. She faced several difficulties in her life in a self-supporting way, trying to practice the Dhamma, but was denied the right as an ordained person and was put down by her Dhamma friends in other Buddhist sects because they were in a nun order. Although stranded in this situation, *Sư Cô Liên Tài* does not only practice Theravāda Buddhism but also converted her family to believe in Theravāda Buddhism as the original teachings of the Buddha. Her younger brothers and younger sisters also have become a monk and a nun according to Theravāda Buddhism. Now it can be said that in Vietnam, her family is one of the Theravāda Buddhist families that have practiced Theravāda Buddhism as a traditional religion⁸⁵.

However, some of the nuns only aim at serving the temple by cooking and cleaning for the monks as an opportunity to make merit. Because they admitted that they were very old, could not learn the Dhamma, and meditation practice is too difficult for them. Of course, today these members are very few. Almost all Theravāda nuns always try to manage their holy life as a nun.

In short, the religious life style of Theravāda nuns in Vietnam in the past was difficult to follow in their religious activities as being in a

⁸³ Most Ven. *Tịnh Sự*, who came back from Thailand and translated whole Pali – Abhidhamma into Vietnamese.

⁸⁴ Ven. *Giác Giới*, who is *Ajharn* in Pali and Abhidhamma Subject of Vietnam Buddhist University at HCMC and Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academy in Can Tho City.

⁸⁵ *Sư Cô Liên Tài*, who is my elder sister.

nun order, but Vietnamese Theravāda nuns always think of themselves as ordained persons.

3.2.2 Study

Ananda, for what I have taught and explained to you as the Dhamma and the discipline will, after my passing, be your teacher.⁸⁶

Yes! Those are the words of the Buddha before He passed away: Dhamma and Vinaya will be our teacher and we must study them to train the body and mind. Therefore, for anybody coming to Buddhism, the study of the Dhamma is a most essential need. Studying is to know the Dhamma, knowing is to train for oneself and to spread the Dhamma to the public.

Today what we inherit from the Pāli Tipitaka is also due to studying and practicing by the followers of many generations. So! To protect the teachings of the Buddha and wanting them to survive, the study of the Dhamma is the first duty of all Buddhists. Of course, being ordained persons in Buddhism, Vietnamese Theravāda nuns have to study the Dhamma. There is nothing that says that ordained women do not need to study or have no right to study. Nevertheless, in Vietnam there existed some narrow views. Some Vietnamese Theravāda monks did not allow ordained women to officially attend Dhamma classes. Vietnam Theravāda nuns were considered as listeners and had no right to register for class. Dhamma classes were only for monks. However, this period only happened depending on the view of some Ajharns, but not all; and it ended. Not only this, but also in the Vietnam Buddhist Academy, they did not allow Vietnamese Theravāda nuns to attend the course.

Now the study life of Theravāda nuns in Vietnam has to face many difficulties. In the Vietnam Buddhist Academy in HCMC, Session V (2001 – 2005), two Vietnamese Theravāda nuns, Huỳnh Kim Tuyết and Huỳnh Kim Lan, were expelled because these two Theravāda nuns were not Bhikkhunis. By the intervention of professor Trần Tuấn Mẫn and the Vietnamese Theravāda monks the Ven. Bửu Chánh and the Ven. Thích Tăng Định who are Ajharns of this Academy, these two

⁸⁶ Maurice Walshe, tr. **Digha Nikaya**, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), p.270.

Vietnamese Theravāda nuns were supported to continue to study until they finished all four years. Finally, these two nuns received their Bachelor Degree in Buddhology on 16, August 2005. They are the first two Vietnamese Theravāda nuns who have graduated from the Vietnam Buddhist Academy in HCMC⁸⁷.

Despite of the obstacles, which prevented the advance in their study, the Vietnamese Theravāda nuns had to overcome the red tape all the way through their study of the Dhamma. The study life of a nun in Buddhism is an assertion of oneself. However, in the early time, Vietnamese Theravāda missionaries respected all Dhamma learners. Any time when people wanted to learn the Dhamma, the elders were ready to teach and to lead them to the BuddhaDhamma of the ancient teachings of the Buddha. Such as in 1970 the Most Ven. Tịnh Sự came to the Thốt Nốt District in the Cần Thơ province, a remote village very far from town, to teach the Abhidhamma doctrine to Ms. Sư Cô Ngọc Duyên and a group of lay people. Thanks to his teachings, Sư Cô Ngọc Duyên decided to change her tradition and was accepted to become a Theravāda nun in the form of an ordained woman according to the regulations of Vietnamese Theravāda monks. Today, at her village, she invited many lay people from another Buddhist sect to come to seek refuge in the Theravāda teachings. She and her nun disciples established a big Theravāda nun temple at her hometown with the support of her lay disciples. Sư Cô Ngọc Duyên has become a Theravāda missionary in the region where Vietnamese people never before knew the Theravāda Buddhist sect⁸⁸. It can be said that she is an outstanding Vietnamese Theravāda nun who has succeeded in propagating Theravāda Buddhism in the area.

Under the management of the Most Ven. Giới Nghiêm at the Phật Bảo temple, Sư Cô Diệu Tâm, Sư Cô Dung, and other nuns attended officially as students the Dhamma classes. Furthermore, being a nun in the modern society, Vietnamese Theravāda nuns not only have the duty of a nun at the temple but also work for the social welfare for the Buddhist Sangha. They usually visit cripples and poor people to help them. Sư Cô Diệu Tâm at the Diệu Quang temple took part in the Women Association of the Bình Thạnh District in HCMC and Sư Cô Hạnh Châu

⁸⁷ These Vietnamese Theravāda nuns are my elder sister and myself

⁸⁸ Interviewed with Sư Cô Ngọc Duyên, An abbot of Tịnh Thất Siêu Lý (Paramattharama), June 15, 2009.

at the Nguyễn Thủy temple established a relief fund to help solitary and poor Theravāda nuns⁸⁹.

Yes! Such is how they are! Although Vietnamese Theravāda nuns are not Bhikkhunis, and are not recognized officially as nuns, they always think of themselves as ordained persons doing the duties of studying, practicing and spreading the Buddha Dhamma to bring happiness and well-being to all beings.

3.2.3 Changes

Seeing that the Theravāda nuns have to face serious difficulties in the holy life, Vietnamese Theravāda monks feel pity for them. The monks recognize that ordained women in Theravāda Buddhism today are neither Bhikkhunis nor Upāsikas⁹⁰, because Upāsikas are lay women observing only the five or eight precepts for an undetermined time. Upāsikas can be married and can wear any kinds of clothes they like. They do not have to shave their head. However, Theravāda nuns are women who shave and wear only clothes, which are regulated by Theravāda monks according to the usage of each country. They observe eight or ten precepts. They are single for their whole life, are dedicated to study, and practice the Dhamma to destroy the Kilesas. These are their important duties. Actually, their lifestyle and their practice reflect that they are ordained persons and not Upāsikas. It can also be assumed that they are also samana, meaning recluse woman⁹¹.

Recognizing these, Ven. Pháp Nhiên (Dhammajoto) who is an abbot of the Siêu Lý temple in HCMC, has given ten precepts (dasasīla) to ordained women and considered them as sāmāṇerīs⁹².

Besides, in recent years, at the Phước Sơn temple, a Vipassana meditation center at the Đồng Nai province, where there are many Theravāda nuns who practice meditation, the Ven. Bửu Chánh who is an

⁸⁹ Interviewed with Sư Cô Diệu Tâm, A manager of Dieu Quang Temple, Nov 25, 2008.

⁹⁰ The Teachings of Ven. Pháp Nhiên, an abbot of Siêu Lý Temple at HCMC.

⁹¹ T.W. Rhys Davids (ed.), **Pali_English Dictionary**, (London: The Pali Text Society, 1998), p.682.

⁹² Interviewed with Huỳnh Kim Dung, who is a Theravāda nun at Siêu Lý Temple, HCMC. Nov 25, 2008.

abbot of the monastery allows Theravāda nuns to go on alms rounds together with monks. They have to walk behind the monks in the ceremonies.

For these reasons, in 2008, Vietnamese Theravāda monks made a proposition to the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, requesting that ordained women, according to Theravāda Buddhism have to be recognized as nuns in Buddhism under the management of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha. As a result there are some changes as follows. Theravāda nuns have to observe ten precepts and seventy-five Sekkhiyas⁹³. They will wear a dark yellow garment. They have to stay at temples, supported financially by lay people⁹⁴.

So! In the future, Vietnamese Buddhism will widely be open for Theravāda nuns to develop. Vietnamese Theravāda nun will be recognized officially as nuns in Buddhism. They will wear yellow garment, which is a Buddhist traditional color, and they observe *dasasīla* and 75 *sekkhiya*. It can be believed that Theravāda nuns in Vietnam will develop very quickly together with other Buddhist nuns in local areas as well as in the world and of course, they can offer a large contribution to the spreading of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

Vietnamese Theravāda monks certainly know that the ordination style of Theravāda nuns of today is not mentioned anywhere in the Pāli Canon. But speaking about the characteristics of *nekkhammapāramī*, going forth to aim at annihilating *kilesa*, these ordained women are worthy of the status of ordained persons with the aspiration of reducing defilements leading to cut off *samsara*. Therefore, being missionaries of the teachings of the Buddha, they always want more people to practice the Dhamma. As the Buddha declared, the gate of deliverance is open to all, of every walk of life, high or low, saint or sinner, who would care to turn a new leaf and aspire perfection. So! Here, there is no reason nor is there any right to prevent women in their wish to diligently practice the teachings of the Buddha.

Because the life of a lay disciple is too busy with the world, these women like to become nuns to train the body and mind to achieve higher levels. Although, in the Pāli Vinaya, their ordination is neither the

⁹³ Interviewed with Ven. Thích Thiện Minh, Oct 24, 2008.

⁹⁴ Interviewed with Sư Cô Diệu Tâm, Oct 25, 2008.

ordination of samaneri nor sikkhamana nor Bhikkhunī, they are considered as ordained persons but not as laywomen such as the Upāsikās. This ordination is an encouragement to practice better.

Hence, Vietnamese Theravāda monks decide to support ordained women but of course, they are not in a Bhikkhunī Sangha.

3.3 Laity

3.3.1 Making merit

Of the Buddhist laity, everyone knows of making merit. Making merit has become a duty of the laity. This was practiced by particular figures in the time of the Buddha, such as the Upāsakā Anāthapiṇḍika and the Upāsikā Visākha. They used to visit monks and nuns and were ready to help in what the sangha needed. In addition, the laity in Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam resembles these Dhamma supporters and always present when the Sangha needs service. The most particular work they do is to preserve the BuddhaDhamma by the process of spreading it. The important role of the laity mentioned above is the support in financial matters, to look after monks and nuns and building temples as well as monasteries and stupas. All these activities are commonly called making merit. In the Thai language, it is “tham bun” and “làm phước” in the Vietnamese language.

What we have known of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is that the Khmer laity together with Khmer monks ready to sacrifice a great deal for preserving and propagating the Buddha-Dhamma. The Khmer laity always cares for every single meal of the monks, though their income is very little. Most of them are peasants. Nevertheless, where Khmers live, there is a Theravāda temple. Even farmers who live in remote areas they not only look after the monks and build temples, but also give land to the temples and raise money for rebuilding old temples. The Khmer’s tradition of making merit has its roots in ancient generations and it passes on to the present one.

One example is Mr. Tram Be, a Director of the Triều An, a hospital in HCMC, who had supported and financed the building of the Khmer Theravāda Buddhist College in the Trà Vinh province. He was also the principal donor for rebuilding an old temple at Trà Cú District in

the Trà Vinh province. In short, he is one of the Khmer laities who contributed a very important part to Khmer Buddhism of this time.

In addition, some lay people, who were monks earlier, continue to be teachers of Buddhism in Dhamma classes in order that they can maintain and develop the knowledge of the Dhamma. Some of them are Mahā Kiên in the Trà Vinh province and many other persons who have contributed their knowledge of the Dhamma to monk students of which there are a few female students who also do this. It is said that after they finished their Dhamma-Pāli study, the girls become Pāli teachers of Dhamma classes and they also participate in Buddhist activities such as Ms. Su Jea in the Trà Vinh province.

So making merit in the Khmer tradition is not only to support the Sangha financially or to give property to Buddhism temples, but also to contribute to the propagation of the Buddhasasana. The laity does not only serve Buddhism in their homeland but also contribute finances to pay for the course fees of monks of their motherland who are studying at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. From 2005 up to now, there were 60 monks who studied at that university. Perhaps, the amount of money contributed is not so much for businessmen but actually, it is a big amount for farmers.

Lay people are like that! The Khmer laities support Buddhism with all their heart. Their making merit is not just to gain merit as they do, but also to preserve and develop the Buddhasasana to last long as well.

As for the Vietnamese Theravāda laities, they are great Sasana supporters. This happened from the early time when Theravāda Buddhism spread to Vietnam. There was Mr. Nguyễn Văn Hiếu (1896-1979) who not only encouraged Vietnamese Theravāda monks to return from Cambodia to Vietnam to propagate Theravāda Buddhism but he also requested the Cambodian Sangharaja the Venerable Chuon Nath and 30 other Bhikkhus to come to Vietnam to establish a Sīma boundary for the first Vietnamese Theravāda temple. Moreover, it was recorded in the Vietnamese Buddhist history that in the late 1930, Mr. Nguyễn Văn Hiếu when reading the book *La Sagesse du Buddha* (The Enlightenment of the Buddha) he realized the real worth of Buddhism. Hence, he desired to establish a mission for the Theravāda doctrine. He, together with his friends, practiced Buddhist meditation. In 1935, after meeting with Mr.

Lê Văn Giảng, he told him of his aspiration and asked Mr. Lê Văn Giảng to go to Cambodia to study the Theravāda doctrine and he himself found a suitable land to build a temple.

It was a golden opportunity when he met the family of Mr. Bùi Nguơn Hứa. Mr. Hứa offered a piece of land to establish the Bửu Quảng temple. Mr. Hieu sold his house and offered half of the amount of money the house was sold for to build more temples. The Kỳ Viên temple, which is a center of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism, also got support from him. It can be said that Upāsaka Nguyễn Văn Hiếu was a great donor and a pioneer in the missionary work of Theravāda Buddhism of Vietnam. Although Mr. Nguyễn Văn Hiếu was a lay disciple, his fame was recorded in the History of famous Vietnamese monks⁹⁵.

All his making merit was not only to get merit for himself or his family but also to propagate the Theravāda doctrine to the Vietnamese people in Vietnam.

Yes, from past times it was like that. Those great people have made many lay people to become later Buddhist followers. Today the laities also support Buddhism with all their heart. Their making merit does not have any racial discrimination. They have contributed finances to both Khmer and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism for a long time up to today. An example is the Buddhist family of Nhân-Thủy who supported the building of a big sala at the Bothisomrom temple as well as being the principal donor for the Kathina ceremony offering in 2008⁹⁶.

Also at my Cái Đôi village, the lay people usually visit Khmer temples to make merit. Although they are very busy with their daily life, they really take part in the service of monks at examination time as well as in Buddhist ceremonies. When speaking about making merit by the laity, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism cannot forget a special member of the laity who contributed her whole life to the propagation of the

⁹⁵ Thích Đồng Bổn, (ed.), op cit., p.971.

⁹⁶ Đại Đức Thiện Minh (ed.), “Khánh Thành Trai Đường và Dâng Y tại Chùa Bothisomrom, Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy, (Opening Ceremony of Sala and Kathina Offerings at Bodhisomrom Temple, **Theravāda Buddhism Magazine**, No 11, Nov, 2008.

Abhidhamma doctrine in Vietnam. That is Ms. Cô Bảy Vĩnh Phúc⁹⁷. She was a student of the most Venerable Tịnh Sự, an Abhidhamma teacher. She studied Abhidhamma for 20 years from the early time of the Venerable Tịnh Sự who came back from Thailand. When understanding the high teachings of the Abhidhamma, she decided to take refuge in the Triple Gem according to Theravāda Buddhism.

To support the missionary work to spread the Buddhasasana, she bought a piece of land in HCMC to build the temple named Paramaṭṭharama (Siêu Lý temple) and offered it to the Most Venerable Tịnh Sự and his disciples. This temple usually opens Abhidhamma classes for monks, nuns and lay people. After her teacher's passing away, she continued his work of spreading the Abhidhamma doctrine in HCMC. She had become an Abhidhamma teacher of monks, nuns and laities. For 30 years⁹⁸, she not only taught the Abhidhamma but also took care of monks and nuns when they were sick. I am myself one of her students.

One more example is Mr. Nguyễn Thiện Đông and Ms Nguyễn Thị Cúc who live in Huế and after listening to the Most Venerable Giới Nghiêm, who was the first Theravāda monk of the Ancient capital of Huế, they went to take refuge in the Triple Gem. Seeing that in Huế, there was a presence of Theravāda monks but no Theravāda temple; they asked the most Venerable Giới Nghiêm for permission to establish a Theravāda Buddhist temple in Huế for the Sangha⁹⁹.

Therefore, by their support, the Tăng Quang temple was built in 1954. This was to help the propagation of the Buddhasasana, and make Theravāda Buddhism to be established in the Thừa Thiên–Huế province. From that time, it has gradually developed up to now several Theravāda temples have come to existence there. In addition, a particular point in the progress of Theravāda Buddhism in Huế is the establishment of the Theravāda Buddhist College (Intermediate level). It is really a great success. Perhaps, we all recognize that making merit by the laity in

⁹⁷ Vĩnh Phúc is her name, Cô is used to show woman. Bảy is the seventh person in her family. This is called both name and rank in the family.

⁹⁸ Lê Thị Mỹ, Cư Sĩ Lê Thị Lộc” Upasika Lê Thị Lộc (Vĩnh Phúc), Retrieved 31 August 2008, <http://www.budsa.org/unil/u-gioithieu-pgnt/gioithieu-3/.htm>.

⁹⁹ Nguyễn Văn Sáu, **Beginning Study of Theravāda Buddhism in Ancient Capital of Hue**, op cit., pp.48-49.

Buddhism is a wonderful success for the missionary work of the Sasana and the growth of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is very lively.

Some figures of the Theravāda laity in Vietnam make us understand the feeling of the laity in Vietnam for Theravāda Buddhism. Their making merit is not only financial, but also supports all conditions that Buddhism needs. Another particular point is that, the laities themselves are Theravāda missionaries.

3.3.2 Sīla Day

Besides making merit by offering food or something else to monks, the believers do a holy duty by the observation of eight precepts each month. Those days are called sīla days and they are as follows according to the lunar calendar the 5th, 8th, 14th, 15th, 20th, 23rd, 29th, and 30th. On every Sila day, lay people come to their temple to offer food to the monks and to stay there the whole day for their chanting and practice. They are old women and men. Each person brings a tray holding incense a lamp, betel and areca nuts, tobacco and water to do a ceremony of vowing for keeping the eight precepts. They have thus done this according to the cultural tradition. Despite of what the weather is, rainy or sunny, the believers still come to the temple for their observing Sīla days.

Vietnamese Theravāda lay disciples are not so lively and traditional as Khmer lay disciples. They are instructed by the monks. They observe eight precepts on Sīla days, but in reality, only a few persons do it. Usually, they vow at home to keep eight precepts, but they do not stay in the temple for the whole day. However, at some temples, such as the Kỳ Viên temple in HCMC, and the Siêu Lý temple in the Vĩnh long province, they often give eight precepts to lay disciples on Sīla days to practice but after that, the laities return home. Only at the Siêu Lý temple in the Cần Thơ province where there is a Theravāda nun temple, Miss Sư Cô Ngọc Duyên, who is the abbot and her nun disciples have observed eight days each month for the lay people to observe the Eight Sīla days and to practice meditation for the whole day at the temple. Later she changed those eight days to the following days, the 14th, 15th, 16th, 29th, 30th, 1st, for lay people who can stay at the temple for three days at each time. A particular point in Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism is that during the rainy season retreat, there are a lot of people who come to vow to observe the eight-sila days for three months in the presence of the monks. This act is considered diligent practice of the Dhamma observed

together with the monks in the rainy season retreat that the monks usually advise their lay disciples to observe.

3.4 Temple

3.4.1 Managing temples

A Khmer temple is the place for all the ceremonial, and the educational activities to take place. It is considered as an important centre of the Khmers. The method of management of the Khmer temples is very perfect. It includes the abbot, and other skillful observers. This administrative system consists of able persons who have good behavior, and are good practitioners and popular with the monks and Buddhist laity and cooperate with the abbot. They are chosen by monks and the Buddhist lay people. The observers are also assigned with particular duties, such as being the president, vice president, or secretary and so on.

For whatever works, activities or functions related to culture and the temple, such as repairing old buildings, celebrating Khmer New Year, Phchum Penda, Ok Om Bok, organizing Kathina and so on, a meeting will be held to discuss the general ideas between the Abbot and the observers.

In spiritual unison the Khmer people make offerings to the Temple of much property and land for building temples and supporting Buddhist monks. The observers and the abbot are responsible for the temple's funds. Every three months or every year in each temple, the incoming funds and the expenditure of the temple is declared clearly to the public. That method of administration creates a very good relationship between the temple administrators and the lay people supporters. This method of management has lasted for a long time.

One more thing to be observed is that from the beginning there was no nunnery, nor nuns in Khmer Buddhism. Actually, if any Buddhist woman would like to learn Pāli and the Buddhadhamma, they will be accepted. They learn in the same class together with the monks and have the right to be students in the class. They are very welcome to take part in training courses like the monks. The numbers of female Buddhist students are smaller than the number of monks, but the educational program is equal for women and monks.

In brief, the management of a Khmer Temple is organized very well for protecting the Temple, maintaining the monks who are studying and practicing Dhamma and creating a peaceful place for lay Buddhists who are in the area of the temple.

Vietnamese Theravāda temples are different from the Khmer temples. There is no administrative board in the temples of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism. They manage their temples depending on each individual abbot. They do not have a general rule on how to run a temple. The abbot has his full right to decide all works at his temple. However, he can do this in close relationship with the monks and the lay disciples of the temple. This practice is not popular, because the people of the Vietnamese Theravāda laity are not too many, and they are considered disciples of the Triple Gem but do not belong to any temple. They can come to any Theravāda temple they like. They regard the sangha as general teachers. Therefore, managing a Vietnamese Theravāda temple depends only on the abbot.

3.4.2 Temples as schools

A Khmer Temple is not only a place for the religion and social activities, but it also exists for the propagation of the Buddhist Canon (Tipitaka), the Dhamma and Khmer literature. It is considered also as a school for classes of Buddhist Studies and Pāli Literature for monks and also Khmer Course for the Khmer people. Teachers of these Courses have been educated and graduated from Buddhist courses in their own Province. Every Khmer Temple is a training place and a cultural centre of the area. Khmer people have grown up with Buddhist morality. Therefore, a Temple is also a school as mentioned above. By this way, they could protect their national culture, and classes have existed for generations up to now, temples have been officially recognized by the Vietnam Government. Thus! Khmer Temples have become schools for the Khmer people.

Perhaps, Vietnamese Theravāda temples are similar to Khmer temples as they are also schools. However, their activities are limited for the learning and teaching of the Dhamma. Khmer temples teach the Dhamma, the Khmer language and Khmer traditions.

3.5 Traditional ceremonies

3.5.1 Theravāda Buddhist tradition.

A ceremony is one of the important factors in the religion. It presents the religion and it increases the beauty of it. Theravāda Buddhism is also a religion, of paying respect to the Buddha. Theravāda Buddhist traditional ceremonies are celebrated in accordance with historical facts in the Buddha's life. Moreover, some rituals for the Sangha were based on the Vinaya Pitaka. They are as follows: Maghapūjā, Visakhapūjā, Asaḥapūjā and Kaṭhina.

3.5.1.1 Māghapūjā

The term Māghapūjā is in the Pāli language. It comprises of Māgha + pūjā. Māgha is the name of the third month in the lunar calendar used in ancient India. The word "Pūjā" signifies homage, devotional offering. So Māghapūjā means the homage on the full moon of the Māgha¹⁰⁰.

According to Theravāda Buddhism, Māghapūjā Day is known as the day of the great assembly of saintly monks that happened at Veḷuvana in the presence of the Buddha. It contained four extraordinary features, namely:

- 1- On the full moon day of the month Māgha.
- 2- 1,250 monk disciples assembled to see the Buddha, all on their own accord, without an appointment.
- 3- All these monks were Arahants who had attained the six fold super knowledge.
- 4- All of them were the Buddha's immediate disciples, having been ordained by the way of Ehi Bhikkhu.
- 5- Occasionally, the Buddha gave an important discourse, which summarizes his teachings into three main principles to the monks. It is known as the Ovadapatimokkha, recorded in the Dhammapada as follows:

¹⁰⁰ A.P. Buddhadatta Mahathera, **Pāli-English Dictionary**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. Private Limited. 1997), p.189.

Not to do any evil
 To cultivate good
 To purify one's mind
 This is the Teaching of the Buddha's ¹⁰¹.

Another aspect of Theravāda Buddhism today is that more significance is given to the Māghapūjā Day. At the time, the Buddha was eighty years old and Buddhism had been firmly established. It was complete with the four assemblies of devotees, namely, monks (Bhikkhu), nuns (Bhikkhunī), male lay devotees (upāsaka) and female lay devotees (upāsikā). They would be able to carry on the teaching after his death. Thus on the full moon day of the month of Māgha, the Buddha announced he would pass away in three months. That day marked the Buddha's prediction of his own death. Just in a three-month's time, the Buddha will abandon the aggregates of his life. He would forever disappear from this world. This was a big shock for his disciples and the mind of his disciples was filled with sorrow and unhappiness. However, this incident caused the increase of diligence of his disciples in their Dhamma practice. So this event adds more significance to the Māghapūjā Day and makes it even more sacred for Buddhists.

In Vietnam, usually Theravāda temples celebrate one whole day and night on the full moon of the month Magha to remember the Buddha. It falls on the full moon day of the first month of the Vietnamese Lunar calendar. In the morning, there is the ceremony of offering food into the bowls of the monks. Monks are invited from many other temples. They will gather together at the center of the temple or in a big temple to receive something from the lay people, who directly put something into the bowl while the monks go for alms food around the temple. In the morning of the full moon day of the Māghapūjā Day, a feeling of happiness has filled the minds of the givers and the receivers and then the preaching of Dhamma and giving of the eight precepts for the lay people by the monks is done. At the end of that morning is a lunch for the monks, nuns and the lay people. That very night they practice the thirteenth Dhutanga, which means, no one would lie down. They all have to stay up to listen to the Dhamma and to practice meditation.

¹⁰¹ Dhp 183; Narada Thera, op cit., p.165.

Besides, there is another program at Dhutanga night, which is as follows. Meditating and paying respect to the relics of the Buddha, teaching Dhamma by questioning and answering between monks and lay people and discussing about Buddhism. Anybody can question anything about the doctrine, and then other layperson will answer according to their opinion and later, the monks will judge and find good answers and they give or add more explanations to the issues being discussed. Sometimes the lay people are divided into two groups. The first group would give questions and then, the other group will answer and they exchange each other's opinions to study the Dhamma in joyful manners when they understand the true meaning of the Dhamma. The Dhutaṅga night ends with a teaching of Dhamma to the lay people by the monks. Therefore, the Dhutanga night is not just a Dhamma night to make offerings to the Buddha, but also is an opportunity to develop the religious minds of the Buddhists.

All enjoy a Dhutanga night, with a mind filled with happiness. Everybody says goodbye and hopes to see each other again in the next Dhutanga night. The end of Māghapūja Day according to the Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is like that.

3.5.1.2 Visākhapūjā

Maybe when hearing Visākhapūja, all Buddhists will think of a great Festival in Buddhism. It is so particularly because it is the commemoration, which marks the three events in the Buddha's life. These are the birth, the enlightenment, and the parinibbāna of the Buddha.

According to the history of Buddhism, in the morning of Friday of the Visākha month, the fifteenth waxing day of the sixth lunar month 2631 years ago in 623 BC, a great baby was born in Lumbini Park, between the two cities, Kapilavathu and Devadaha of the Sakya Kingdom, in present Nepal. Later, that great baby became the Buddha Gotama.

It was really a special event, when Queen Sirimahamaya gave birth to her son. The newly born baby immediately looked to the north and then walked seven steps towards that direction and stated to say:

I am the chief in the world, supreme in the world, eldest in the world. This is my last birth; there will be no more are-becoming¹⁰²

Then there were many gods assembled there to pay respects to the newborn child. All devas and human beings were very happy to welcome him.

Prince Siddhartha grew up, and then was married to the Princess Bimba, at the age of sixteen. Together they lived for 13 years and had a son called Rāhula. One night He left the Royal Palace to renounce the world in search of the truth, and eternal peace. During his six years of great and ceaseless struggle, the monk Siddhartha became completely enlightened and became the Buddha at Uruveḷā in the Kingdom of Magadha, which is present-day Bodhagaya in India in the morning of Wednesday, the fifteenth waxing day of the sixth lunar month. After his enlightenment, the Buddha fasted for seven weeks, and spent a quiet time in deep contemplation under the Bodhi tree. At the end of the seventh week that the Buddha had peacefully passed under the Rājayatana tree, experiencing the bliss of emancipation he then stated the triumphal utterance as follows:

Through many a birth I wandered in saṃsāra
 Seeking, but not finding, the builder of the house
 Sorrowful is it to be born again and again.
 O house-builder! Thou art seen
 Thou shall build no house again
 All thy rafters are broken
 Thy ridgepole is shattered
 My mind has attained the unconditioned
 Achieved is the end of craving.¹⁰²

From the day of his enlightenment, for forty-five years He has expounded the Dhamma to beings who were able to receive his teaching. The Buddha does not prevent anybody from becoming a Buddhist or to enter the noble order of the Sangha. In Buddhism, no distinction of caste or race is made. Any person, being a fisherman, courtesans, warrior or Brahmin were freely admitted into the order and were also given positions or rank according to their achievements. The Buddha provided

¹⁰²Dhp 153-154; Narada Thera, op cit., p.140.

equal opportunities for all and raised rather than lowered the status of people. In Buddhism, one finds milk for the babe and meat for the strong, and it appeals to both the rich and the poor equally.

In Buddhism, the way to enlightenment was widely opened to all without any distinction. The Buddha spent forty-five years teaching Buddhism to his disciples and firmly established the “four assemblies of devotees” namely, Bhikkhu (monks), Bhikkhunī (nuns), Upāsaka (male lay devotees), Upāsikā (female lay devotees), who would, be able to carry on the teaching he had begun. The Buddha decided to pass away from this world. Before his parinibbāna, the Buddha gave a final exhortation to the disciples as follows:

Now, oh monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are of a nature to decay. _Strive on untiringly¹⁰³

On Tuesday, the full moon day of the Vesak month, at the age of eighty years, in the Malla Kingdom, present day Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, India he passed away. His Parinibbāna marked the beginning of the Buddhist Era, 543 years before the beginning of the Common Era.

To remember the great historical event in Buddhism, Khmer Theravāda monks organize in each temple a gathering of the laities at their temple for the whole day and night to perform the Visakhapūja rite. Usually after the gathering they did chanting and one representative of the Sangha delivers a sermon to the lay people. Some temples organize the talking of the Dhamma in the style of question and answer among groups of 2 to 5 monks. The topics which are often discussed are about the meaning of Visākhapūja Day. It can be celebrated overnight or until midnight.

Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is different because the Vietnamese people who follow Theravāda Buddhism are not many. Therefore, the Visākhapūja Day will be organized in a way similar to the Māghapūjā for a whole day and night. However, at the Dhutaṅga Night of the Visākhapūjā Day many programs are conducted based on the meaning of the Visakhapūja. They include chanting, worshiping the relics of the Buddha, practicing meditation, and preaching the Dhamma as well as

¹⁰³ **Digha Nikaya**, tr. Maurice Walshe, op cit., p.270.

Dhamma discussion. In addition, the monks are divided into three groups, corresponding to the 3 topics of the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana of the Buddha. The monks will explain the meaning of the verses relating to these three events.

A particular point is that the monks usually emphasize the different views between Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism about the Visākhapūja Day. According to the Mahāyāna school, Visākhā Day is a day on which the Buddha was born. In Vietnam, according to the Vietnamese calendar Visākhapūja Day falls on the fifteenth of April. The Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Congregations from the North to the South do have the same standard of “Kính Mừng Phật Đản”. It means, “We are very happy and respectfully welcome the Birth of the Buddha and another similar standard is “Phật thị hiện” meaning “The Buddha’s reappearance”. Theravāda Buddhists do not agree to this. On the contrary, they think that the Buddha is not born, but only the Bodhisatta¹⁰⁴.

If understanding based on that standart, means that the Buddha was already enlightened in his previous life. In his life, he only reappears in the world. This view is different from the Theravāda’s view. So Theravāda monks in Vietnam usually tell that only the Bodhisattva is enlightened and the Buddha attains parinibbāna to emphasize to the lay people to understand that the Buddha Gotama is the historical Buddha. Before his enlightenment, he was an ordinary person; the Kilesas were not cut off yet. He had a wife and a son. After his renunciation, he spent six years in the struggle, but he was enlightened at his age of thirty-five years having completely destroyed all defilements. From that time, he was called the Buddha. Why do Theravāda monks in Vietnam emphatically preach this view? Because, it is for the lay people to rightly understand the original teaching of Buddhism. What happened in Buddhism after the Buddha passed away? And why is Vietnam the land of the Mahāyāna school? The Vietnamese people followed Mahāyāna for a long time. The participants at the Dhutaṅga Night include Theravāda followers, Mahāyāna followers and lay people, of which only some have studied Buddhism. So! During the Dhutaṅga Night, many people are

¹⁰⁴ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **Nghi Lễ và Tự Viện, Phật Giáo Nam Tông Việt Nam. Ceremony and Temple, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism**, (Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh Publishing House, 2000), p.40.

initiated into Theravāda Buddhism. They became Upāsakas and Upāsikās in the Theravāda tradition.

To these persons, Theravāda Buddhist monks in Vietnam always explains and analyzes three Buddhist verses regarding the birth, the enlightenment and the Parinibbāna of the Buddha. Usually, it is found in the final words of the Buddha. “Strive on with diligence”. This calls all Buddhists to try to study and practice the Dhamma and pay respect in gratitude to the Buddha Gotama, our great teacher, who struggled very much in the practice of Pāramī for a long time in Saṃsaras until his enlightenment after which he had ended all of his defilements.

Nowadays we all received the Dhamma. We all understand what should be done and what should not, to get happiness in our life and to cut off all defilements in the future. We have gratitude for our Great Father and we respect our teacher, the Great Buddha Gotama.

To express one’s gratitude to him with the highest homage, Theravāda monks in Vietnam always repeat the Buddha’s word: Whatever Bhikkhu or Bhikkhunī, Upāsaka or Upāsikā lives in accordance with the Dhamma, they have to conduct themselves dutifully and act rightly. Anyone who respects, reveres, venerates, and honors the Tathāgatā with highest homage.

To sum up, Visākhapūjā in Vietnam is practiced by Theravāda followers aiming at two kinds of merit, namely giving food to the monks and the nuns (dāna) and practicing Dhutaṅga Night (no lying, but to study and practice Dhamma).

Visākha is celebrated in all Buddhist countries and by all Buddhist communities of the world. It is known as the Buddha Day as it commemorates the three important events in the Buddha’s life.

3.5.1.3 Āsāḷhapūjā

Every year, on the full moon day of Āsāḷha, the Theravāda tradition in the world will commence the rainy season retreat for the monks. Almost all people know it as “Khao Pansa” in Thai, “Vô hạ” in Vietnamese and “Chul Vassa” in Khmer. It means the monks have to remain stationed in a specific place and refrain from any traveling during

such times (three months). Because in this season, new seeds are cultivated in the land and many insects are born. So the Buddha on the request of the people of the Jain religion laid down the rule of three months of rainy season retreat. The monks and nuns have to stop journeying, but live in one place to train themselves and avoid disturbing the insects.

The Āsāḷhapūjā Day also marks the first important sermon the Buddha delivered to the five ascetics, Koṇḍañña, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji at the Deer park in Isipatana. It is called Dhammacakkappavattānasutta. Here, the Buddha preached the Four Noble Truths: which are suffering (Dukkha), the cause of suffering (Samudaya), the end of suffering (Nirodha), and the way to the end of suffering (Magga). These truths are universal and ever valid at all times and in all places in line with the previous Buddhas as well as the future Buddhas. After hearing the Dhamma of the Buddha, the group of ascetics requested to get ordination as his disciples. So they were the first disciples of the Buddha and from that time, the Sangha exists. Thus, it is the beginning of the Triple Gem - the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

Therefore, the importance of Āsāḷhapūjā Day includes three significant events. It is the day:

- 1- The Buddha gave the first sermon Dhammacakkappavattānasutta. It is called Dhamma Day
- 2- It was the day the Sangha was established. (Sangha Day)
- 3- It was the day that the Triple Gem was finally complete.

Although Āsāḷhapūjā Day marks important events in Buddhism, in Vietnam it does not have much significance. The Theravāda laity in Vietnam only knows it as the time the monks enter the rainy season retreat. But the Āsāḷhapūjā Day is special to the Theravāda Buddhist Khmer people. On the full moon day of Āsāḷha, the Khmer lay people gather at the temples. In the morning, they give food to the monks and practice chanting the Dhamma and observing the eight Sīlas. In the evening, the laity and the monks should be present at the shrine to recite the Asalha discourse in Pāli and Khmer in a verse style after which a monk preaches the meaning of Āsāḷhapūja and explains why we organize and observe the Āsāḷhapūjā Festival. The aim is to show gratitude to the Triple Gem and to get educated deeper on Buddhism, to remember

ourselves as Buddhist followers who seek refuge in the Triple Gem, and to perform the disciples' duties. What should be done and what should not be done to protect and develop the Khmer Buddhism.

In Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism, usually the Āsalhapūjā Day is concerned with the meaning of the rainy season retreat. However, in 1998, the Kỳ Viên temple (Jetavanavihāra), which is the center temple of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism at Ho Chi Minh City, has organized Āsāḷhapūjā Day practicing Dhutanga Night (no lying down, not sleeping for the whole night) for the monks, nuns, and lay people to remember the meaning of the day aiming to offer Dhamma practice and to sow good seeds leading to self liberation in the future¹⁰⁵.

3.5.1.4 Kaṭhina

Kathina in Pāli is a wooden frame used by the monks in the Buddha's time for sewing their robes¹⁰⁶. They thus are known as Kaṭhina robes. When talking about the Kathina ceremony, we should remember closely the Vassa-rainy season retreat because they relate to each other. The Kathina is only offered at the end of the Buddhist rainy season retreat. It means that within a three-month retreat, from the day following the full moon day of September until the full moon of October the monks are expected to dwell permanently in their temples and suspend all traveling. They must not break the rule of retreat by spending nights somewhere else without a valid reason according to the Vinaya. If it is an unavoidable circumstance that necessitates traveling, then they are allowed to leave their residences on the promise that they will return within a week (sattahakaraniya) they can do so even during the retreat. This requirement is only made obligatory for all fully ordained Bhikkhus. After each Vassa, the monks are allowed to add one more Vassa in their membership in the Sangha. If one breaks the Vassa, he will not be allowed to do so in that year.

The Kaṭhina robes offering ceremony can be traced back to the Buddha's day. One occasion, a group of thirty monks from Paṭha town was going to Sāvatti to see the Buddha, who was residing at Jetavana.

¹⁰⁵ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **Ceremony and Temple, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism**, op cit., p.82.

¹⁰⁶ PED.T.W. Rhys Davids (ed.), op cit., p.178.

However, when they had just come to Saketa, the rainy season was arriving and they were compelled to stop the journey for the three rainy months. When the rains ended, they continued to go on their journey. Coming to Savatthi, the thirty monks sought audience with the Master. At this situation, the Master perceived there must be a need for extra robes for monks after the rains retreat. The Buddha decided that the monks could accept the robes given by devotees within the one-month period from the first day after the end of rainy season retreat (between mid-October to mid-November)¹⁰⁷.

Since then, Kaṭhina has become a tradition for Buddhists devotees to help in the fulfillment of this special provision. In Vietnam, all Buddhists practice the same as in all the Theravāda countries in the world. Kaṭhina has become a great Festival of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

People call it “Kaṭhina robes offering season”. Different monasteries hold the Kathina ceremony on different days within this period. The main event in this ceremony is the offering of the special robes known as the Kathina civara to the Sangha. One of the monks who observed the retreat can be announced by the monastery to receive the Kaṭhina robe. But for the Khmer people in Vietnam the Kaṭhina ceremony is held for two or three days to offer food to monks at their house before offering Kathina robes at the temple. Then parties are offered by the lay people in a donor’s village. This is a special occasion to get merit for both the Sanghas and the donating laities. All lay people belonging to the temple are invited to the donor’s house to cook food to offer to the monks. They are all together happy to make merit, anumodana sādhu sādhu together with the donor. After some days of making merit at the house, the official donor’s family and the lay people in the village carry Kaṭhina robes and some other things to the temple. Usually, they put the robes and other things on their heads and walk in a three-column line from the donor’s house to the temple with drumming in the Khmer cultural tradition. Coming to the temple, they go around the main Shrine three times before entering the inside of the Shrine. Then the monks perform the ceremony of offering and receiving according to the Theravāda tradition laid down in the Vinaya. It is sure that the offering

¹⁰⁷ Sunthorn Plamintr, **Basic Buddhism**, (Bangkok: BuddhaDhamma Foundation, 1997), p.120.

and receiving of the robe is completely the same as in other Theravāda Buddhist countries in the world.

The Kaṭhina ceremony is performed by the Khmer people in this way, but for the Vietnamese people, there are some differences. The Kaṭhina ceremony lasts only one day at the temples. The monks from many other temples are invited. The lay people gather in the temple. They listen to the Dhamma-talk; they make offerings to the monks and their Dhamma friends with a big party. Before offering and receiving Kaṭhina robes and some other things are put on their heads and they proceed going around the main Shrine three times to express their respects to the Buddha. At the same time, they, together, recite poetry in the Vietnamese language describing the meaning of offering Kaṭhina to the Sangha, sharing merit with all beings and wishing them emancipation from all suffering. A particular point is that no drumming and dancing is done when the Buddhist ceremony is performed by Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhists.

To sum up, Theravāda Buddhist ceremonies in Vietnam are held very lively aiming at keeping and spreading the Theravāda doctrine to the public.

3.5.2 Tradition of the faith of the people

3.5.2.1 Chaul-Chnam-Thmay

New Year is a festival that is most popularly celebrated in the world. People celebrate to welcome the New Year in accordance with their cultural traditions. Here, the Chaul-Chnam-Thmay is the term used for the Khmer New Year both in Cambodia and in regions of the Khmer in Southern Vietnam. Perhaps, everybody would like to know what is so important and from where it has originated.

If we have participated in the New Year Festival of countries in Southeastern Asia such as Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Thailand it is sure that we can see their common characteristics. It usually falls around mid-April on the same days from April 13th to 15th. It is known by different names in the languages as Songkran in Thai, Pi mai in Laos, Thingyan in Burmese, and Aluth Avurudhu in Sinhalese. This also marks the end of the harvest and the beginning of spring. Rain enlivens the spirit of the nature and flowers bloom, trees get laden with fruits and

the stores of farmers are full. It does not only mark an agricultural season, but also marks the first day of the traditional Indian calendar. This proves that it was originally set by Indian astrological calculations. In Vietnam, although the Khmers usually live and work together with other people, on Khmer New Year, they go back to their families to visit ancestors, parents, and friends. They clean their house. They carry incense, candles, and flower to the temple. In temples, people erect a sand hillock on temple grounds. They mound up a big pointed hill of sand or dome in the center, which represents the Culamani Cetiya, the Stupa at Tavātiṃsa, where the Buddha's hair and molar are enshrined. The big stupa is surrounded by four small ones, which represent the stupa of the Buddha's favorite disciples, which are Sārīputta, Moggallāna, Ānanda, and Mahākassapa¹⁰⁸.

Sometimes people exchange the sand cetiya for a paddy cetiya aiming at both holding the ceremony and making merit to the temple. The Chaul-Chnam-Thmay Festival takes place for three days as follows:

On the First day in the early morning, the lay devotees bring incense, candles and food offerings to monks. Then they also have a meal with each other at the temple. After the meal, they listen to a Dhamma-talk, given by the monks. The monks recite the Jataka stories that record the Buddha's previous lives. There are five hundreds of these, which correspond to 500 of his former existences. One of them is a story about the last birth before he became the Buddha. It is called Dhosachiet in Khmer; which means ten lives or the Mahachart in Thai, to show the meaning of the Great Life. In this story, Prince Vessantara was a very virtuous and generous person and he had constantly made generous offerings to sick people and ascetics. He could give all what he had to anybody who needed his help. He was never once selfish. He lived solely for the needs of others. Prince Vessanta's self-sacrifices are known to all Buddhists up to now from the tradition of preaching Mahachart.

This ceremony takes place in a very happy atmosphere in each temple when each of the lay disciple groups represents his ancestors who draws lottery in a serial number. They will listen to the monk who has that corresponding number. This happens in many places in the temple. In

¹⁰⁸ Cambodia New Year, Retrieved 7 June, 2008. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambodian_New_Year.

each place is done very lively in preaching and listening to the Dhamma. All activities take place very solemnly and lively¹⁰⁹.

In the afternoon, the monks and members of the Board of the temple the director, and the old women, observe aṭṭhasīla. They walk around the main shrine three times to welcome Mahā Songkran. Before the delegation is a rickshaw carrying the Tipitaka text and the effigy of the head of MahāBrahma. This is a legend of Buddhism and Brahmanism. The story said that Dhammapāla who was a very wise man represented a Buddhist in an intellectual contest with Mahābrahma and won. So God Mahābrahma cut off his own head to offer it to Dhammapāla as promised. The legend shows the significance of the development of Buddhism defeating Brahmanism¹¹⁰.

A particular point is that this legend exists only in the Khmer culture and not in those of other countries. Therefore, based on this story, a delegation of monks and lay devotees pull the rickshaw having Tipitaka text and Mahābrahma's head and walk the Phumsrok (Phumsrok in Khmer language is the word to show the place where the Khmers live) with Khmer traditional music. In front of that delegation, are the girls in Khmer traditional clothes, taking flower baskets to welcome Songkran. Each Phumsrok prepares its place decorated with Buddhist flags. It looks very beautiful. All Khmers in that Phumsrok gather there to listen to the Dhamma and offer something to the monks. In return, the monks chant verses of excellent blessing for a Happy New Year for them.

On the second day, the lay people also come to the temple to listen and to make merit. At night, it is a time for amusement. They enjoy dancing and singing. All are very happy in their traditional culture.

On the third day, they have the celebration, which is called the Xron-Tuek-Phra ceremony. It means bathing the Buddha images. All monks and lay disciples chant sermons and pour out the perfumed water over the big Buddha image in the main shrine, and later are bathing the elder monks and the departed elders by tossing water at their pictures. A continuous ritual of chanting for the dead at the relic stupa at the temple and at the houses is done. The final part is bathing the Buddha image at

¹⁰⁹ Huỳnh Kim Lan, op cit., p.13.

¹¹⁰ Trường Lưu, op cit., p.78.

homes. Besides, the children of the family worship the parents and offer water, cakes and fruits to their passed-away parents. They request forgiveness for not having done their duties to the elders. This ritual shows high value for the training in gratitude due to the elders and the ancestors.

The three days of Chaul-Chnam-Thmay is done in happiness, joyfulness and making merit by the Khmers in Southern Vietnam¹¹¹.

3.5.2.2 Pchum-Pinda

In Buddhism, making merit and dedicating it to one's parents and relatives who have passed away is the noble duty of offsprings. Also! Pchum Ben is a Khmer cultural festival, which has the meaning of merit dedication. This festival falls on the first fifteen days of the tenth month in the Khmer calendar. The full moon day of the tenth month is the most important day. It is done at the temple. The lay people come to the temple to offer requisites to the monks and stay the whole day there to listen to the Dhamma. The last day is the time of amusement for Khmer children.

A particular point of Pchum Ben is that this ceremony is not only performed at the temple but also done at the houses of the laypeople. It begins before the fifteenth of the tenth month, and lasts about one to two weeks in the regions of the Khmers in Southern Vietnam. Each day in that period, the Khmer laities invite the monks to their home to make offerings to them with the aspiration of doing good deeds for the benefit of their dead ancestors. It is a very happy occasion for lay people when the monks come to their family to receive their offerings. All Khmer laities always want to have the presence of the monks in their houses. Responding to their wish, the monks come to each family. Each family will give food and some other things to the monks. Both the monks and lay people are very happy in the giving and receiving¹¹².

Moreover, Pchum Ben festival is the time of the end of the harvest. The houses are full of rice. Hence, it makes the mind of the laity joyful in making merit which the Khmer people in the Southern Vietnam

¹¹¹ Huynh Kim Lan, op cit., pp.14-15.

¹¹² Interviewed with Ven. Munojoto, a Khmer Theravāda monk in the Southern Vietnam, and he is a student of MCU, Jan 20, 2009.

have done for a long time. They all want richness for their temple and the monks. Besides, they visit and offer gifts to the elders in their family to honor them.

So! Pchum Ben festival has the signification of a great moral principle of Buddhism. The Khmers in Southern Vietnam live in accordance with this tradition. This gives rise a close relationships between the monks and the laity aiming at showing gratitude and honor toward the elders of the family and their departed parents. Pchum Ben festival certainly goes in line with the Buddhist traditions of the Khmers in Southern Vietnam.

3.5.2.3 Ok-Om-Bok

Ok-Om-Bok is the festival of the Khmer culture which means worshipping the moon. It falls on the 14th and 15th of the twelfth month in the Khmer calendar and on the first and second day of November. For the agriculture, this is the time of change from the rainy season to the dry season, or from the growing season to the harvest season. In the Khmer's belief, the moon is considered as a God in charge of the weather and the crops during the year. Therefore, they celebrate Ok Om Bok to express their gratitude and pray to this God to support them in the coming year with good weather and green crops. It is celebrated very lively at the Khmer people's homes and temples. Usually, on that day when the moon rises, the people worship with offerings which are farming products they have just harvested such as pounded rice, banana, sugar-cane etc... and put them before the spirit house. Then the village elders pick up a handful of pounded rice to put into the children's mouths with a wish for them to eat well and grow up rapidly. After finishing their ceremony, the Khmers come together to the temple to enjoy the ceremony at the temple. The uniqueness of this festival is in the way of eating pounded rice and therefore it is called Ok Om Bok¹¹³.

In the tradition of the Khmers, Buddhists are aiming at worshipping the Buddha. In one festival, people engage in flying lanterns. They are made off bamboo frames pasted with paper. The tinder is tied under the frame and then fired, which makes the lantern fly high in the air. This makes people remember one previous life of the Buddha when

¹¹³ Huỳnh Kim Lan, op cit., pp.16-17.

he was reborn as a rabbit; He gave up his life to the Deva King to practice danaparami. Later the Deva King expressed appreciation to the Bodhisatta (rabbit) and drew a rabbit picture on the moon. The second practice is similar to Loy Krathong of Thailand, which is called Loy Pratheep in the Khmer language. It means floating boats. A lantern is decorated with flowers, incense, candles, and other ornaments. Then, this lantern is put on a boat made of banana leaves and is floated along in the water. This is to remember the Buddha when he went to teach the Dhamma in the land of the Nāgas. The King of the Nagas became a devout follower and asked the Buddha to leave something behind to remember him. Buddha then left his footprint at the bank of the river¹¹⁴.

Perhaps, seeing the Khmer's folk ceremony, people usually consider it to have its origin in the Khmer's ancient beliefs. Of course it was influenced by the another religion as well, but, being Buddhists the Khmer Buddhist monk cleverly educate their followers inserting Buddhist tales into the ceremony aiming at ways to educate the Khmer community about Buddhism in all aspects of society. The Ok Om Bok Festival takes place in a very lively way and the people are very happy in the friendship between the monks and themselves in their houses and the temple.

3.5.3 Views of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism toward Folk Traditional Ceremony

What is known of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism is that it took its origin from Cambodian Buddhism and the elders from Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thailand contributed to its development. Therefore, it is clear that Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism came into existence due to friendly Theravāda Buddhist countries. A particular point of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism is that it was completely shaped by the Buddhist culture of other Theravāda countries. It is so, because the Vietnamese Theravāda missionaries mentioned earlier only taught and spread the Theravāda doctrine and educated their followers in the characteristics of Theravāda teachings. The Theravāda doctrine is considered the original teachings of the Buddha¹¹⁵. Hence, in Vietnam, Theravāda Buddhism is

¹¹⁴ Trường Lưu (ed.), op cit., p.85.

¹¹⁵ Interviewed with Ven. Pháp Nhiên, The abbot at Siêu Lý Temple, HCMC, Oct, 25, 2008.

called Original Buddhism (Phật Giáo Nguyên Thủy). It is also called Southern Buddhist School (Phật Giáo Nam Tông).

Maybe for these reasons, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism has no traditional folk ceremonies. However, in recent years, some Vietnamese Theravāda temples such as the Kỳ Viên in HCMC, the Phước Sơn and the Thiền Quang I at Đồng Nai province as well as the Siêu Lý at Vĩnh Long province, are all celebrating the Tết Nguyên Đán and Vu Lan Bồn festivals to comply with the lay people's wishes because on New Year Days, many Buddhists visit temples to pray for longevity, prosperity and good luck. On this occasion, the monks hold Dhamma-talks and meditation courses for Buddhists and others.

The other ceremony is Vu Lan Bồn. This is a Buddhist ceremony according to Mahāyāna tradition. It is also called Sat-Chin in Thai language. The original idea of this ceremony comes from the legend of Moggallāna, known as Mục Kiền Liên in Vietnam. He wanted to save his mother who was reborn as a hungry spirit. The Buddha told him that only the combined efforts of all Buddhist monks could soothe the suffering of the tormented. Arahāt Moggallana organized an assembly of monks and made offerings to them for the benefit of his departed mother. Therefore, the Buddhist holiday of Vu Lan in Vietnam has become exceedingly popular. It is traditionally considered a very important event in praising the mutual love between the mother and her children. Vu Lan, seems to be an opportunity for people to express their gratitude to their parents¹¹⁶.

Vietnamese Theravāda monks also celebrate the Vu Lan festival aiming at reminding people to show their gratitude to their parents, but the original idea of this ceremony does not come from Theravāda monks.

Actually, in these ceremonies, the monks only aim at preaching Dhamma to Buddhists and non-Buddhists so that they can understand more about the Theravāda doctrine. It is considered an opportunity for missionary work. And of course, there is no feature of any national faith tradition. Vietnamese Theravāda monks only celebrate the ceremony for focusing on two major programs, the preaching of the Dhamma and the offering of alms food, which is put into the bowls of the monks and nuns.

¹¹⁶ Reported by Diem Thu: "Vu Lan festival a Solemn Sharing", Retrieved 23 October 2008. <http://news.com/travel/?catil=7&newid=41216>.

To sum up, the ceremonies in Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism are done only to emphasize on preaching the Dhamma and have no elements of any national cultural faith tradition.

3.6 Concluding Remark

In chapter three, we show the characteristics of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. To see them in details, we give five points as follows:

-Sangha Activities: This part shows four active aspects of the life of monks, the system of education in the Sangha, the ordination name, and the going round for alms. These are similar to Theravāda monks in other Theravāda countries. They also practice in accordance with the Pāli Vinaya and study the Dhamma based on the Tipitaka. However, the system of education in the Sangha is weak and is not a unified educational program.

-Activities in the life of Theravāda nuns: It is similar to the life of Theravāda nuns in other countries today. We made three points in this part: The religious lifestyle, study, and changes, which have taken place. Nowadays, the monks and the lay people support them. Although they are not Bhikkhunis, they are recognized as ordained persons (nun) in doing the duties, which are study, practice, and missionary work to bring happiness and well-being to all beings.

-Laity: They emphasize on making merit and observing eight precepts on sīla days of each month. The life of Theravāda laities themselves in Vietnam can be considered to be Theravāda missionary work.

-Temple: Only two points are made: The management of the temple, and temples as schools. Both of them depend on the abbot.

-Traditional ceremonies: In this section, there are also two points, namely: Theravāda Buddhist tradition and national faith tradition, which are incorporated as Theravāda ceremonies. However, there is no ceremony of any national faith tradition in Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism.

Chapter IV

The Present Status and the Future of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam

4.1. Monks and Temples

There are presently 529 Theravāda Buddhist temples in total throughout Vietnam of which 452¹¹⁷ are Khmer temples and 77 are Vietnamese temples¹¹⁸.

All of the above temples appeared in different historical periods. Almost all Khmer Theravāda Temples in Vietnam were established by Khmer farmers. The Khmer people usually built Theravāda temples to practice Buddhism wherever they live. The special features of the region have often influenced the names of Khmer temples. Each Khmer temple has two or three names, a Pāli name, a Khmer name and a Vietnamese name. Normally the Khmer name is chosen firstly according to the area of the temple, because when a place is suitable to set up a temple the name is chosen depending on the features of the ground. Then a Pāli name has been honorably granted by the Cambodian sangharaja. The Pali name can also be translated from the Khmer name. For instance, the Pāli name Wat Salātiṭṭhāram, is translated from Wat Kampongtrang (Khmer name). In Khmer language, Kampong means tiṭṭhā in Pāli, a pier and Rang is the Sala tree. Therefore, the Pāli name of this temple is translated exactly from the Khmer name. The second case is that a Pāli name can also be given as a new name, which has a different meaning from the Khmer name. For example Wat Bodhivamsa Kampongdong. Bodhivamsa is a Pāli name. It means a stream of wisdom or enlightenment, and Kampongdong is a Khmer name. Dong means Coconut. Because this temple was near a pier where there was a coconut

¹¹⁷ This is statistic number taken in year 2008 from Hội đồng trị sự, văn phòng 2, **Báo cáo công tác triển khai thực hiện nghị quyết hội nghị chuyên đề Phật Giáo Nam Tông Khmer, (Report of Expanding Work to do Conference's Resolution about Khmer Theravāda Buddhist**, the third time on Oct, 06, 2008).

¹¹⁸ List of Vietnamese Theravāda temples taken from website:

<http://www.budsas.org/uni/u-gioithieu-pgnt/gioithieu-13.vn.htm>.

trade. So, it is called by a short name in Khmer language as Wat Kampongdong. Later, although the Khmer Campuchia Krom belonged to Vietnam, the tradition of naming Khmer temples is still based on this usage.

For the Vietnamese naming, usually it is done by the Vietnamese people. They named the temples according to their views. For example, Chùa Hang (Cave Temple) because the gate at the rear of the temple looks similar to a cave. Therefore, the Vietnamese people named this temple as Cave Temple. This is completely unrelated to the original Pāli and Khmer names. However, sometimes, some Vietnamese names are translated from Pāli names such as Chùa Hạnh Phúc Tăng. This name is translated from the original Pali name Wat Saṅghamaṅgala. However, some Khmer temples are called by the same name in both Khmer and the Vietnamese language. Such a case is the temple Wat Samrom Ek which in the Khmer language means a rambutan tree because this temple stands near a big rambutan tree. Or it is called by the same name in both Pāli and Khmer. Such case is the temple Wat Bodhisamron in Cần Thơ City where Buddhist classes of the Khmer Theravāda Academic for Buddhist Studies have been organized.

The Vietnamese Theravāda Temples, besides having their own Vietnamese names, they always have also a Pāli name. The Pāli name of the Vietnamese Theravāda Temples are translated into Vietnamese as is Chùa Kỳ Viên from its original Pali name (Jetavanavihāra) and Chùa Siêu Lý from the Pali name (Paramatthārāma). Usually, the Vietnamese people call the name of the temple by the Vietnamese name and not by its Pāli name. Nevertheless, the gate of each Temple shows always both of two names, the Vietnamese name and the Pāli name. Furthermore, all Vietnamese Theravāda Temples were not built by followers of Theravāda Buddhism. Some of them were built, originally as Mahāyāna Temples. Because when understanding clearly the Theravāda doctrine, some Mahāyāna followers offered their Temples to Theravāda monks, or Mahāyāna monks changed to Theravāda Buddhism. These cases were seen in the following temples, the Viên Giác, Siêu Lý, the Thiên Quang II, the Ngọc Đạt, the Quảng Nghiêm, the Bửu Đức and the Từ Quang and the Phước Huệ¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁹ Interviewed with Venerrable Pháp Nhiên, the abbot of Siêu Lý Temple (Paramattharama), HCMC, October 26, 2008.

The word “Chùa” in Vietnamese language means Temple. This word Temple is used nationally in the Vietnamese language and is used for all Buddhist temples. So the Vietnamese people always use the word Chùa for both the Khmer and the Vietnamese Temples. However, in the Khmer language, “Wat” is used for a Temple. It is then similar to the word “Wat” in Thai, meaning temple. The Khmers, therefore, still use the word “Wat” when speaking of a Khmer Temple.

Following the report of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in 2007, there were a total of 8. 919 Theravāda monks of which 8.574 were Khmer monks and 345 were Vietnamese Theravāda monks¹²⁰

All Theravāda temples in Vietnam are in the provinces of southern Vietnam. In my research, I found the number in statistics, which was recorded already in the book and in a report. Therefore, I only list the amount of temples in each City and Province.

¹²⁰ Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam, Hội Đồng Trị Sự, Báo Cáo, **Tổng Kết Công Tác Phật Sự Nhiệm Kỳ V (2002-2007) và Chương trình Hoạt Động Phật Sự Nhiệm Kỳ VI (2007-2012) Của Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam**, (The Report about Summary of Buddhist Works of term of office V(2002-2007) and the Programme of Buddhist Works of Term VI (2007-2012) of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha), (Ha Noi, Dec, 2007), p.8.

The List of Theravāda Temples in Vietnam

Zones		Temples	
		Khmer	Vietnamese
1	Hồ Chí Minh City	02	23
2	An Giang	64	0
3	Bà Rịa Vũng Tàu	01	07
4	Bạc Liêu	22	0
5	Bến Tre	0	1
6	Bình Dương	0	3
7	Bình Định	0	1
8	Bình Phước	2	2
9	Bình Phước	0	1
10	Cà Mau	7	0
11	Cần Thơ City	12	1
12	Đà Nẵng	0	1
13	DakLak	0	1
14	Đồng Nai	1	16
15	Hậu Giang	15	0
16	Huế City	0	6

17	Khánh Hòa	0	1
18	Kiên Giang	74	1
19	Quảng Nam	0	2
20	Sóc Trăng	92	0
21	Tiền Giang	0	4
22	Trà Vinh	141	1
23	Vĩnh Long	13	5
	Total	452	77
		529	

4.2 Education

At present, the education of TBV has been increasingly developed by two systems of Dhamma study, the KTB and VTB. This is because of the different language and the different management of each region. In Khmer Buddhism, there are a lot of advantages to open Dhamma classes for a large number of monks. The tradition to study has been practiced for a long time. According to the report on the expanding work, the resolution of Conferences of the KTB at the Bạc Liêu province on, Oct 6, 2008, included the Khmer Theravāda Academic Studies on Buddhism. This was officially established with the support of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and the government. This is the fourth Buddhist Academy in Vietnam, which is reserved for KTB. It was held in Can Tho City and the Most Venerable Danh Nhuong was appointed the first Rector on Dec 06 2006. This academy was presented provisionally at Wat Bodhisomrom, Chau Van Liem Ward, in the O Mon District at Can tho City. At present, there are 69 Khmer monk students of the second year (2008-2009), in class I of the 4 year period (2007- 2011). Besides, there is an increase of higher studies by Khmer monks at University level.

The Pāli Dhamma classes of the lower level were also consolidated¹²¹. In addition, almost all Khmer temples always hold Khmer language classes for children and students of the Khmer people in each region. It makes the development of the national tradition better and also increases the intellectual standard of the people in Vietnam.

The success of Buddhist classes contributed well to the education plan for the monk's and nun's education of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Besides, members of the Sangha of the KTB were educated in the Theravāda countries: Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and India. In Thailand there were 60 monks studying in the MCU and an additional 28 monks were studying Pali in Thailand. This was a golden opportunity for the development of Theravāda Buddhism in the future.

Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism does not have any opportunity to develop the education system of schools. Seeing this disadvantage, the monks and nuns of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism attend classes at the Vietnam Buddhist University and study Theravāda Buddhism's traditional doctrine at Theravāda temples. The official education in the Vietnam Buddhist University includes:

Class I	: 3 monks
Class II	: 4 monks
Class III	: 16 monks
Class IV	: 10 monks
Class V	: 3 monks and 2 nuns
Class VI	: 7 monks and 1 nun
Class VII	: 5 monks and 2 nuns

After graduating from the Vietnam Buddhist University, they can choose a higher study in India, Thailand, Myanmar, or Sri Lanka. Some of them take part in social activities. No matter where they study, their major concern is still to study intensely the Theravāda doctrine by themselves. The growing number of Vietnamese Theravāda monks and nuns in this situation increases day by day. Theravāda temples always

¹²¹ Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam, Hội Đồng Trị Sự, Báo Cáo, **The Report about Summary of Buddhist Works of term of office V(2002-2007) and the Programme of Buddhist Works of Term VI (2007-2012) of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha**, op cit., p.25.

hold Dhamma classes to educate their monks and nuns to get more knowledge on the Theravāda doctrine in the Abhidhamma class, the Dhammapada class and the Pāli class. Thanks to these help, Vietnamese Theravāda monks and nuns always know the basics of the Theravāda traditional views before they study in the Universities in Vietnam as well as in the Universities of other countries¹²². Besides, when the Vietnamese Theravāda monks and nuns who are studying abroad will return to their homeland they will increase the number of members of the Theravāda Buddhist College (Intermediate level) at Hue. In addition, in the future, this school will be upgraded to University Level¹²³. Nowadays, there are eight monks studying Pāli, Abhidhamma and Buddhist Studies at the MCU in Thailand; two at Myanmar and one in Sri Lanka. They all are members of Theravāda Buddhism at Hue. In addition, in the Southern part of South Vietnam, there are also monks and nuns who are studying at the International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University in Myanmar. Some members led by the Ven. Tuệ Dũng are studying in Myanmar. Due to the lack of a management council of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism, it is impossible to establish a detailed plan for the future. All is based on the diligence and responsibility of each monk and nun and also their abbot of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism.

To sum up, the education in Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam it is gradually increasing. As a tradition of Theravāda Buddhist followers, the monks and nuns of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam usually seek to study the Dhamma in traditional Theravāda countries. Therefore, they thereby observe the original teachings of the Buddha of the Pāli Tipitaka to improve themselves and also to help human beings to practice the true Dhamma.

4.3 Propagation

The propagation of the Buddhist Dhamma in present days in Vietnam is a lively work. The Internet has become a good means for religious missionaries. It works very effectively in towns and in HCMC because towns and HCMC have a lot of advantages. Day and night, Theravāda monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists talk about the Dhamma on the

¹²² Interviewed with Ven. Thích Thiện Minh, An abbot of Buu quang Temple, November 24, 2008.

¹²³ Interviewed with Ven. Viet Nhan, a monk at Hue and M.A Student of of MCU, April 24, 2009.

Paltalk. They preach and discuss many Buddhist topics and are ready to answer religious questions of Buddhist and non Buddhists. Thereby, it makes it interesting to many people. Through the international internet network, many people in Vietnam and overseas understand the Theravāda doctrine. The way of this propagation has helped the Vietnamese people to come to take refuge in the Triple Gem according to Theravāda Buddhism. Besides, the Theravāda monks have established a website to spread the Canon of the Theravāda doctrine and update hot news of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam to the Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist. This way is not only used by Theravāda monks in Vietnam but also by Vietnamese Theravāda monks overseas. With the heart of loving the original teachings of the Buddha, the Vietnamese Theravāda followers overseas also propagate the Buddhasasana to Vietnamese living all over the world. The websites are always updated with necessary information and news regarding Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

This is a new way of Dhamma propagation. Of course, it only has advantages for people who use the internet. However, in practice, the Dhamma talks at temples in the cities or in remote areas happen in a solemn atmosphere and are always the most successful feature for religious missionary work. The style of Dhamma talks makes it a familiar contact between an ordained person and lay people. A preacher can look at the listeners sitting in front of his eyes, but cannot see them on his computer. He can observe the listeners' attitude in order to change timing of the contents of the talk to suit the spiritual state of the listening people. In that way, the Dhamma listeners must try to listen to the Dhamma. For these benefits, each Theravāda temple in Vietnam often holds Dhamma talks on the Uposatha day of every month and also in any Buddhist ceremony. Besides, so-called Dhamma Sundays happen very lively every week depending on the condition of each temple. Even now at the Cái Đôi, Vĩnh Long province, a tranquil religious place, not officially organized as a temple, a group of Theravāda nuns organize Dhamma talks under the direction of the nun Su Cô Mỹ Hồng, regularly on Sundays and on Uposatha days. It is noted that Dhamma Sunday talks are not only for children but for adults as well. Adults usually go to the temple on weekends to relax in meditation practice or for seminars on the Dhamma or to study the Dhammapada, do Pāli chanting, or Abhidhamma studies. As far as the children are concerned, they usually learn Buddhist history.

They have to answer questions on Vietnamese Buddhism, such as why Buddhism appears in many different styles. These questions are

often asked by new students coming to Theravāda Buddhism. In Vietnam, the Mahāyāna Buddhist way of practice is known everywhere, whereas the Theravāda Buddhist way is seldom seen or known by many people. Mahāyāna Buddhist monks and nuns are all vegetarians, who eat only vegetarian food. It is difficult for them to accept Theravāda monks and nuns eating meat. People make the mistake thinking that Theravāda monks and nuns commit sins by eating the meat of animals. Therefore, the question about food becomes particularly interesting for lay Buddhists coming to Theravāda Buddhism.

Generally speaking, Dhamma propagation usually means Dhamma talks for listeners. However, only talking is not good enough to conquer all hearts. Buddhism is education, and its purpose is to educate human beings, to train their minds to gradually cope with the absolute Truth. Therefore, discussion or talking is not good enough. Therefore, the daily practice of the monks and nuns are also good ways to spread the Buddhasasana. The conduct of ordained persons going around in towns or villages can make the people to approach or go away from Buddhism. All depend on their good or bad conduct. For that reason, almost all Theravāda temples in Vietnam always practice chanting two times on each day. It usually is done from about 4 AM to 6AM and from 4PM to 6PM. This depends on the orders of the abbot in each temple. These practices are like a daily mental training to help the ordained persons to control their minds and their actions. Besides the preaching of the Dhamma, the monks also write several Dhamma books for spreading the Dhamma to the public. This Buddhist activity has been done by the Venerables Viên Minh, Hộ Pháp, Giới Đức, Pháp Tông, Minh Huệ, Hộ Chơn, Tăng Định, Giác Chánh, Giác Giới, Thiện Minh and Giác Nguyên.

To sum up, Dhamma propagation of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam has become an important duty of Theravāda monks and nuns in Vietnam. The propagation is practiced by their Brahmachariya way of life and by Dhamma talks. All ceremonies of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam take place as a means of spreading the Theravāda doctrine to the people. It aims at increasing the belief of Buddhists and to make Non-Buddhists to understand the Dhamma. Therefore, all Theravāda monks and nuns in Vietnam can be Dhamma missionaries according to their ability.

To see clearly the picture of the good results of propagating Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam, we have before our eyes the following

concrete proofs. The Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academic for Buddhist Studies in 2006 published the Khmer language Canon with the support of the government and confirmed 452 Foundations of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism¹²⁴. Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism during nearly seventy years has gained a large success. In the early time of 1940, there were only four Vietnamese Theravāda Bhikkhus but nowadays, there are a total of 400 monks and 300 nuns in Vietnam. This success is due to the Dhamma propagation of each member of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. All have contributed a very large part to the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha's power.

4.4 Meditation Activities

Meditation is the best way to purify our mind. The Buddha himself practiced it to get enlightenment. Meditation practice, therefore, is a requirement, which cannot be omitted in the life of Buddhists.

Yes! It is very right. The benefits and important role of meditation is one of the most important Buddhist measures, which are happening very actively in Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. As usual, each of the Khmer temples holds meditation practice courses every year for the monks and lay Buddhists. The people attending meditation courses are elder laymen and laywomen. They observe eight precepts through the meditation course and are eating food offered by non-practitioners. Non-practitioners have the duty of supporting them. This regulation has been followed at all Khmer Theravāda temples in Vietnam. This is a good opportunity for everybody to support each other in practicing meditation. The meditation activity has become the traditional feature of the KTB. It lasts for about one or three months each year according to the condition of the temple. The meditation practice course happens in a quiet atmosphere and in happiness.

It is called Samnakthor in Khmer language. Samnak means a place or a center; Thor means conduct the Dhamma. So the name Samnakthor is used to mean meditation practice. Usually, they say more often Samtha kammaṭṭhāna than Vipassanakammaṭṭhāna. It depends on

¹²⁴ Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam, Hội Đồng Trị Sự, **The Report about Summary of Buddhist Works of term of office V(2002-2007) and the Programme of Buddhist Works of Term VI (2007-2012) of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha** op cit., p.10.

the teachings of the meditation master. At present days Wat Somrom-Ek, sometimes, holds a Vipassana meditation practice course, by the Most Venerable Kim Ngân. He practiced the method of Vipassana meditation from Mahasīsayadaw’s teachings in Burma¹²⁵.

The Meditation activities of VTB gradually develop. From the beginning the Vietnamese come to Theravāda Buddhism through meditation practice, as we have shown in chapter two. The origin of the meditation practice has existed from then, up to now. The Chùa Phước Sơn at Đồng Nai province is considered a Vipassana meditation center which always holds a meditation practice course during the rainy season retreats. Each half-a-month retreat is for monks, nuns and lay people. The Chùa Kỳ Viên in HCMC does it on Sundays and on Uposatha days and also every evening during the three months of the rainy season. The Chùa Bửu Quang, the Chùa Bửu Long in HCMC, and the Chùa Siêu Lý at Vĩnh Long province do it in the same way. There is a special temple, which is the Chùa Nguyên Thủy in HCMC, where the abbot, the Venerable Pháp Chất invited meditation masters from other Theravāda countries to teach the method of meditation practice for monks, nuns and lay people. They are Ajahn Suphan, a meditation master from Chiangmai in Thailand in 2007¹²⁶ and the Venerable Dhammapāla from the Pa Auk meditation Centre of Myanmar who taught during the rainy season retreat in 2008¹²⁷.

In addition, there were the Vietnamese Theravāda nuns Su Cô Mỹ Hồng and Su Cô Mỹ Xuân who returned to Vietnam after six years of their meditation practice at Paṇḍitārāma in Burma. They had a deep experience in meditation. In 2008, they taught a Vipassana Meditation course at the Chùa Tâm Thành in Bến Tre province on the invitation of Miss Tâm, who built this temple¹²⁸.

¹²⁵ This information taken from Venerable Trần Văn Trà, who is a Pali Ajharn of Tra Vinh Province.

¹²⁶ Minh Tâm, “Học Đạo với Ajharn” (Learning Dhamma with Ajharn, **Buddhist Culture Magazine**, No 38, August, 2007), pp.27-28.

¹²⁷ Hành Giả, “Khóa Thiền Tứ Niệm Xứ, Mùa An Cư Kiết Hạ 2008 tại Chùa Nguyên Thủy”, (Vipassana Meditation Course during rainy retreated at Nguyên Thủy Temple in 2008), **Theravāda Buddhism Megazize**, No 11, Nov, 2008), pp.87-88.

¹²⁸ This information taken from Su Cô Mỹ Hồng, Nov, 20, 2008.

Generally speaking, the meditation activities of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam are today developing increasingly. Almost all Theravāda followers in Vietnam know about the life style of meditation practice. Meditation activities help a lot of people to reduce their stress and make their minds calm. Therefore, Meditation activities are important for Buddhists. It contributes to the development of the Vietnam Buddhism Sangha and of peace in the world.

4.5 Relation between Khmer and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

It is an important knowledge for the Khmer and the Vietnamese Theravāda followers in Vietnam to realize that the Vietnamese Theravāda elder missionaries originated from Cambodia. The origin of the VTB is closely connected with Khmer Buddhism. This fact has made the conjoining of the hearts and minds of the Khmer and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhists more and more solid. This is why there is a mutual support among the Khmer and the Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhists. Both of them have been developed in the land of Vietnam¹²⁹.

There is a close relationship of belonging to the same Theravāda Buddhist Sect of the same origin and living in a same country. The Vietnamese Theravāda monks and lay Buddhists in HCMC, in the Vĩnh Long province, go every year to the Khmer Theravāda temples in the provinces of Trà Vinh, An Giang, Rạch Giá, Hà Tiên and Cần Thơ City to offer Kaṭhina Robes to the Sangha¹³⁰.

Besides, there were Vietnamese Theravāda monks such as the Venerables Hộ Tịnh, Pháp Tông and Tuệ Tâm, who were ordained as Bhikkhus under the Kammāvācā, the Most Venerable Pháp Tuệ, who is a Khmer monk of the Trà Vinh province. Moreover, the Most Venerable Pháp Tuệ was also the Upajjahāya for the Venerables Tuệ Quyền, Pháp Nhiên and Tuệ Dũng when becoming Samaṇeras and also the Upajjhāya

¹²⁹ Interviewed with Most Venerable Đào Như, Deputy Director of Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academic for Buddhist Studies in Cần Thơ City, November 22, 2008.

¹³⁰ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **History of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism**, op cit., p.130.

for the Vietnamese Theravāda nuns such as Mỹ Hồng, Mỹ Xuân, Mỹ Thanh, Mỹ Nhung and Mỹ Thúy. In addition, the Most Venerable Meditation Master Kim Ngân, a Khmer monk of the Trà Vinh province, taught meditation practice for several years at the Phước Sơn Meditation Centre. At present, there are many Khmer monks being students of the Venerables Giác Sơn and Giác Giới, who are Vietnamese Theravāda monks at the Chùa Siêu Lý in the Vĩnh Long province. Another particular point in Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism is that it is usually called the Phật Giáo Nam Tông Kinh (Theravāda Buddhism of the Kinh group). It is because Vietnamese people are classified in ethnic groups, the Kinh (Lowlander) and all people in Vietnam are Vietnamese. This aims at conjoining the ethnic groups in Vietnam.

So! It is very clear to see that the Khmer and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism have supported each other in their missionary work to develop Buddhism. This is similar to a brotherhood drinking from the same feeding bottle. Hence, they have a close relationship. Yes! The relations between Khmer and Vietnamese Theravāda are like that.

4.6 Relation between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam

There were nine sects of Buddhism. Only three of them are popular, which are Mahāyāna, Theravāda and the Khất Sĩ Sects. In my research, I do not speak of the Khất Sĩ Sect because it was born in Vietnam, and its doctrine also follows the Mahāyāna doctrine¹³¹. Therefore, I only tackle the two large Buddhist Sects in the world, which are Mahāyāna and Theravāda.

According to the charter of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha established in 1981, it has executed unity based on the following regulations:

Unity of will power and action and unity of Leadership and Organization and at the same time with full respect for and

¹³¹ Tỳ Kheo Thiện Minh, **History of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism**, op cit., p.125.

maintaining the traditions of each Buddhist Sect as well as the schools and means to practice the True Dhamma¹³².

Supporting and helping each other sect. This strategy helps to make Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam relatively close to the common home of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha¹³³.

To support Theravāda Buddhism to gain good success in their Buddhist activities prescribed in the charter of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and the laws of the government, a committee of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has increased the number of Theravāda Buddhist members to enter the Vietnam Buddhist Organization in the term VI (2007-2012) as follows:

-Sixteen Khmer Theravāda members in the commission of demonstration.

-Thirty fourth Khmer Theravāda members in the Board of management.

-Nineteen Khmer Theravāda members in the Central committee.

4.7 Problems and their solutions in Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

The information in this part I took from the interviews I had with Venerable Theravāda monks in Vietnam and it is based on the program of Buddhist activities in the term VI (2007-2012) of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

According to the Deputy Director, the Most Venerable Thach Sok Xane and the Venerable Kim Khieu and the Vice Abbot of the Bothisalaraja Temple at Trà Vinh province, there are some problems in the Pāli Intermediate, and primary level education. At the present Theravāda monk students are facing difficulties in their studies in high schools, because there are no supplementary high schools in remote

¹³² This is recorded in Charter of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Ha Noi: Religious Publishing House, 2552 B.C -2008 A.C, p.3.

¹³³ Interviewed with Most Venerable Đào Như, Deputy Director of Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academic for Buddhist Studies in Cần Thơ City, November 22, 2008.

regions. This makes Khmer Theravāda monks to only study Pāli classes in the Khmer language and not in the Vietnamese language. This is caused by the lack of basic knowledge of the Vietnamese language. That is why many senior high school students are not fluent in the Vietnamese language, which leads to the disadvantage for students to continue their studies at University level. Therefore, the leaders of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism wish to have supplementary high schools in their areas of the regions where the temples are in order to serve the studies of the monks. If this succeeds, it will help increase the number of monk students entering University.

According to the Deputy Director, The Most Venerable ðào Nhu, abbot of Wat Bodhisomrom who is concurrently the first secretary of the Academy:

-For the entrance examination the students must have finished the Pāli Intermediate level and Senior High School Diploma. They then have to study Pali and Sanskrit in the Khmer language. This causes a problem because some subjects are done in the Vietnamese language only because of a lack of teachers who can teach these subjects in the Khmer language. Therefore, there is need for holding seminars to adjust the study program of the Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academic for Buddhist Studies.

-The financial support for the Ajharns teaching Pāli classes of all levels and university level and scholarships for Khmer monk students studying abroad, should be increased for the term VI (2007-2012) of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha plan as follows:

-Supporting to build a Buddhist Meditation Centre for Khmer Theravāda Buddhism.

-Vietnamese of Chinese decent are helping at remote areas the monks and nuns who are originally Khmer, to develop the ability of management, of teaching and studying Pāli Buddhism and the Vinaya according to all levels including the university level for Khmer Theravāda, in provinces and cities that have Khmer Theravāda Buddhist activities. They gradually change the Dhamma classes in the Buddhist schools and even published the Khmer language Canon to serve the research, teaching and studying.

-Increasing a close relationship within Khmer Theravāda Buddhists in their regions.

The present status of Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism has many problems. According to the Venerable Thiện Minh, they are as follows.

-There is no leader in the Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhist School to manage the Buddhist activities of VTB to solve problems which are arising in the schools.

-It has been for so many years that VTB did not have any meeting to report on the status of Vietnamese Theravāda monks and nuns.

-All these problems have occurred, because there are very few members of VTB and they are scattered and therefore the way of management of the VBS is limited in each region.

-This situation does not seem to have an opportunity to get unified. Therefore, in the future, if the regulations of VBS could change its way of management, VTB will develop stronger.

To sum up, in the period of global development of the twenty-first century, Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam will surely overcome the problems and the obstacles mentioned above in order to develop well. Then, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism will be able to take part in World Theravāda Buddhist activities so that together, we can make the world, a peaceful place to live in.

4.8 Concluding remark

To clearly know several aspects of the present status, we show its seven points as follows:

1- Monks and Temples: There nowadays are 529 Theravāda temples and 8.919 Theravāda monks in total throughout Vietnam.

2- For education a Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Academy for Buddhist Studies was officially established on 06, Dec 2006 in Can Tho City, and a Theravāda Buddhist College (Intermediate Level) in Hue.

3- For spreading Theravāda Buddhism the Khmer language Canon was published with the support of the government. The government has confirmed 452 Foundations of Khmer Theravāda

Buddhism. In the early time of 1939, there were only 4 Vietnamese Theravāda Bhikkhus and one temple, but nowadays there are 77 Vietnamese Theravāda temples in Vietnam. This is a large success in spreading the Buddhaddhamma.

4- In meditation activities there are a lot of developments, more than in previous time. The Nguyễn Thủy temple is now considered an official Vipassana Meditation Center in HCMC. The abbot invited Thai and Burmese meditation masters to come there and to the Phước Sơn temple to teach Vipassana meditation.

5- The relationship between Khmer and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is very close. Originally, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism is closely connected with Khmer Buddhism. Therefore, they have an excellent cooperation in the mental training and the propagation of Theravāda Buddhism.

6- The charter of the Vietnam Buddhism Sangha established in 1981 has implemented unity in relations between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam based on regulations:

The unity of will power and action. The unity of Leadership and Organization. At the same time commitment to upholding respect and maintaining the traditions of each Buddhist Sect as well as their schools and means to practice the True Dhamma¹³⁴.

7- Solution for the problems in Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam can be overcome. There are presently many difficulties, but the most important factors are the finances, the educational programs and the lack of teachers. It is sure that all problems will be overcome in unison with the development of the Vietnamese country.

¹³⁴ This was recorded in Charter of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, op cit., p.3.

Chapter V

Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1. Conclusion

What we have seen in the in the chapters 2, 3 and 4 in this research is the history of Theravāda Buddhism, its origin and development, its characteristics and the present status of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. Studying first the historical events of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam has helped us to recognize that there were two groups of Theravāda Buddhists, the Khmer Theravāda group and the Vietnamese Theravāda group. The characteristics of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam were also studied. They have been influenced by both cultures, the Vietnamese and the Khmer. The findings tell us about different periods in the Buddhist history of the two countries, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The present study shows that Theravāda Buddhism was adopted by Khmer people in Southern Vietnam before this land was transferred to Vietnam. It has happened when the southern part of South Vietnam was the Kingdom of Funan. Theravāda Buddhism in Funan therefore, was traced back to the period of Emperor Asoka in which the two elder monks Sonathera and Uttarathera had come there. This happened at the same time in history when missionary monks went to Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and to Thailand.

Going through the historical periods of the land, Theravāda Buddhism was practiced by the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta. It was recorded that the land was later integrated in the general homeland of the Vietnamese people and Theravāda Buddhism thereby came to Vietnam. Theravāda Buddhism became to be practiced by the Vietnamese people and became part of their culture. The Vietnamese people were interested in Theravāda Buddhism as practiced in Cambodia. We have seen that the progress and development of Theravāda Buddhism were clearly helped and supported by Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka. As a result, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism directly received the original Theravāda tradition. This has made Theravāda followers in Vietnam

interested to seek opportunities to study Buddhism in countries that follow the Theravāda tradition. It has become a matter of belief that only in countries having the original Theravāda Buddhism the Teaching of the Theravāda Doctrine can truly be understood. This research gave us good insight in chapter 2 of the historical development during the different periods, which are: The period of Funan, Chenla and Vietnam. The historical events gave us a beautiful historical picture about the development of the Theravāda Buddhist Sect that existed in the Mahāyāna Buddhist country of Vietnam up to now. This provides an excellent experience for Theravāda missionaries in Vietnam. The brave sacrifice of Khmer compatriots to save their Theravāda tradition, and lastly the skilful methods of Vietnamese Theravāda missionaries ipropagating the Theravāda doctrine to the Vietnamese people who had a Mahāyāna Buddhist culture for a long time.

Second, by analyzing the characteristics of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam we come to understand some common as well as some different characteristics in Theravāda Buddhism due to the difference of each national culture, the Khmer and the Vietnamese. In this regard, we easily recognize the similarities between Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam and Theravāda Buddhism in the five Theravāda countries. Moreover, the most special characteristic is that the faithful tradition of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is like the tradition of Theravāda Buddhism in other Theravāda countries. There are of cause differences in the faith of the Vietnamese and the Khmer cultures. This is because the Vietnamese people are influenced by the Mahāyāna culture. This has made Vietnamese Theravāda missionaries to have a new way of propagating the Dhamma. This means that helping the Vietnamese people to understand the Theravāda doctrines, they can no longer explain the Dhamma in the same way like explaining it to the Khmer people who are following Theravāda Buddhism as a national tradition. Due to these situations, almost all Theravāda followers in Vietnam know the basics of both, the Mahāyāna and the Theravāda Buddhist traditions. This is an important factor for Theravāda missionary work in Vietnam. The five following points are agreed upon by all.

- Monks' influences: In this part, we show the four aspects about the life of monks, the system of education in the Sangha, the ordination name and the way of going for alms rounds. They are similar for all Theravāda monks in Theravāda countries. They are also practiced in accordance with the Pāli Vinaya and the study of the Dhamma is based

on the Tipitaka. However, the system of education for the sangha is different and very weak.

- The activities of Theravāda nuns are similar to all Theravāda nuns today. We did a research and had three specific points in this part, which are the religious lifestyle, the study and changes, which have taken place. Nowadays, the nuns are supported by the monks and lay people in their religious lifestyle. Although they are not Bhikkhunis, they are recognized as ordained person (nun) doing their religious duties of study, practice, and missionary work for the Buddhadhamma to bring happiness and well-being for all beings.

- Laity: The lay people are happy to make merit and observe eight precepts on sila days of each month. The life of Theravāda laities in Vietnam can be considered to be Theravāda missionary work.

- Temple: Only two points are made, which are managing the temple and managing the temple as a school. Both depend on the abbot.

- Traditional ceremonies: In this part, there are only two points, the Theravāda Buddhist tradition and the popular Faith tradition. They are as in other Theravāda countries. However, Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism has no ceremonies of any national faith tradition.

Third, my study examines the seven different fields of the present status of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. They are: Monks and Temples, Education, Propagation, Meditation activities, Relation between Khmer and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam, Relation between Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam and Problems and their solution to Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

The whole of the seven issues have been examined in details by interviewing Theravāda monks in Vietnam. They shed light, for us to see the advantages and disadvantages Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam has in several aspects.

- It allows us to know clearly and in detail the number of Theravāda monks, nuns and temples in Vietnam. This number is a true factor that proves a large presence of the Theravāda Buddhist sect existing in the Mahāyāna country. This number itself reveals that there

are great hearts in Vietnam who love the original teachings of the Buddha.

- Two, the educational activities happen lively by trying to observe the Buddhasasana and to spread the Dhamma to the people, but they are not well established and don't have a united program.

- Three and four allow us to see the whole scene of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam today. Gradually it is trying to spread the Buddhasasana from the Cities to towns and remote areas.

- Five and six help us to see clearly the relationships of Buddhist in Vietnam.

- The last one solves all problems that Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam is facing.

5.2 Recommendation for Further Research.

As what we have seen, Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam has been practiced largely in the Southern part of Vietnam. A particular point is that there appear a lot of new religions in the Southern Vietnam. They are all connected with views on Buddhism such as the Caodai religion and the Hoahao religion.

1- Caodai is a relatively new, syncretistic, monotheistic religion. Its symbolism is the Divine Eye, specifically the left eye because Yang is the left side and God is the master of Yang. The teachings of Caodaiism include Buddhism, the Sages, Laozi, the Saints, Confucius and Jesus¹³⁵.

2- Hoahao is a religious tradition based on Buddhism. It is called Hoahao Buddhism. Hoahao Buddhism's symbol is a flag which is rectangular and brown in colour, but bears no characters or images.

¹³⁵From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, Retrieved on 20th June 2010.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cao_Dai

¹³⁵Information about Hoa Hao can be acquired from: Hoa Hao Buddhist Church, Overseas Office, P.O. Box 3048, Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670, U.S.A, Retrieved on 20th June 2010
<http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/seasia/hoahao.html>

Hoahao insignias are round and brown and contain the picture of a white lotus, the initials of the movement.¹³⁶

So! The issues what I would like to suggest for research are as follows:

1. A Study of new Buddhist Movements in the Southern Vietnam.

(Towards an understanding of Caodaiism and Hoahao Buddhism)

2. A Study of the different views on liberation of Religions in the Southern Vietnam.

3. Comparison of religious faiths in the Buddhist Religions in Southern Vietnam.

4. Comparison of the religious lifestyles of Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism in Vietnam.

5. A Study on the reasons why almost all Khmers in Southern Vietnam follow Theravāda Buddhism; and what the factors are that have made an appearance of new Buddhist Religions in the South of Vietnamese.

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Appendix

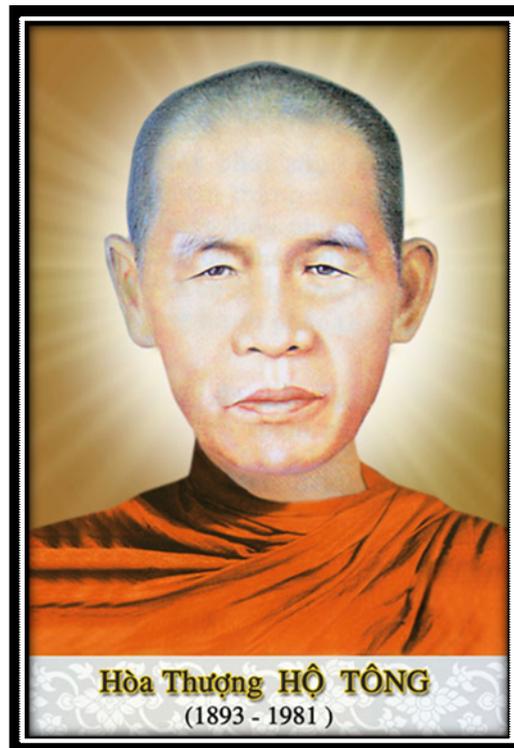
Some illustrative Photographs of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam



Bothisomrom Temple in Cần Thơ City
(Provisional Foundation of Khmer Theravāda Academic
For Buddhist Studies)



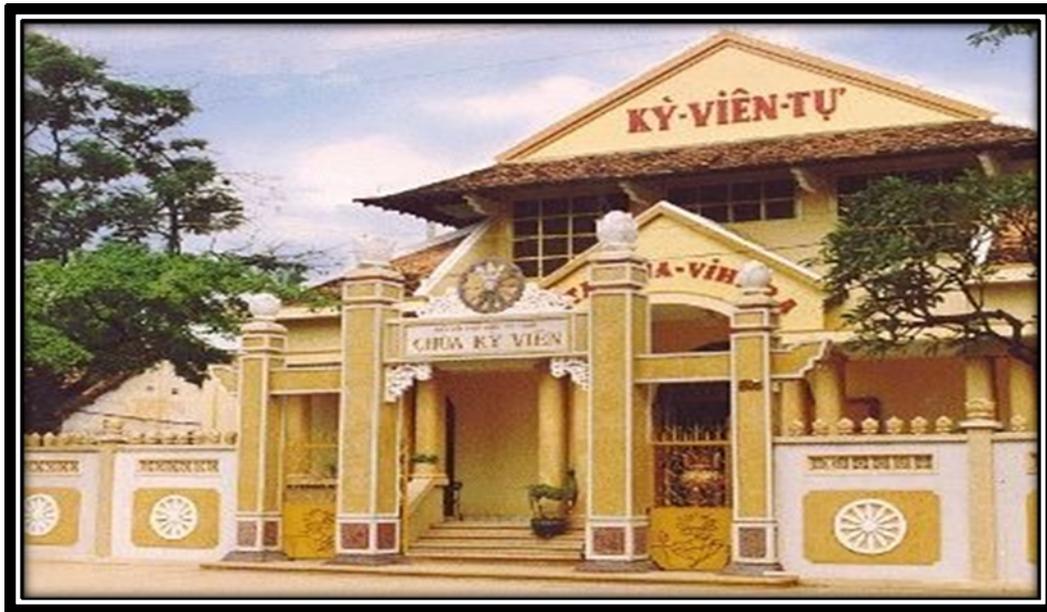
Khmer Theravāda Buddhist College at Trà Vinh



Most Venerable Hộ Tông (The first President of VTB)



Bửu Quang Temple (The first Vietnamese Theravāda Temple)



Chùa Kỳ Viên (Jetavana Vihāra) in HCMC
(The Centre of Theravāda activities in Vietnam)



Nguyễn Thủy Meditation Center in HCMC



Choul Thnam Thmay Festival



Ok- Om - Bok Festival



The Dhamma Class resered for monks
at Siêu Lý Temple, Vĩnh Long



Theravāda nuns are going around for alms food
at Siêu Lý Temple, Cần Thơ.



Theravāda nuns in Vietnam



Theravāda Buddhist family in Vietnam

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