

SOME FEATURES ON VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM IN THE LÝ DYNASTY

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Abstract: *It is said that the Lý dynasty was historical time when Buddhism reached bright height. The Ly dynasty kings believed and supported Buddhism, even the third king of the Ly dynasty, Lý Thánh Tông, is a founder of Tsao T'ang Zen in Vietnam. Conversely, monks also participated actively and effectively in the affairs of state even though they do not hold an administrative position as well as in the field of religion. The influence of Buddhism in the Ly dynasty to the development of Dai Viet civilization was manifested in literature, thought, politics, and so forth. The monks' ideology influenced world outlook of people. Their ideology contributed to impulse the development of Vietnamese ideological history. It satisfied contemporary social need. It was in harmony with Vietnamese patriotic tradition and defense of national independence.*

Vietnamese Buddhism in the Lý dynasty continued to develop Vietnamese Buddhism of the period of domination by Northern invaders and continued the prosperity of Vietnamese Buddhism since Vietnam gained independence during the Ngô, Đinh and pre-Lê dynasties. But the development of Vietnamese Buddhism of the Lý dynasty had more powerful vitality than Vietnamese Buddhism of the other dynasties. The prosperousness of the Lý dynasty Buddhism was related to the cause of building Đại Việt civilization. This cause of building Đại Việt civilization helped Vietnamese nation to achieve good results in aspects of economy, politics, culture and ideology. Specially, Buddhism of the Lý dynasty had many important contributions in the task of building Đại Việt civilization, not only in politic ideology but also in art literature.

In the Lý dynasty, Buddhism advanced a new step in its development. It had connection with the feudal state of centralization of power which was building and consolidating. Lý Thái Tổ's ascension to the throne was partly due to the support of Buddhist circles and the person who made the great contribution to this was the

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monk Vạn Hạnh. He not only advised Lý Công Uẩn to come the throne but also used oracle scripts in people to prepare public opinion for making the Lý dynasty's appearance. Lý Công Uẩn respected much monk Vạn Hạnh and appointed him to be Teacher of Prince. After monk Vạn Hạnh there were many monks who were invited to participate in discussing state affairs by the court. For listening opinions on state affairs Lý Thái Tổ invited monk Đa Bảo to come to the capital. Monk Đa Bảo conversed with king Lý Thần Tông about prosperity and decadence of country (1128-1137). Such bonzes as Đạo Hạnh, Minh Không, and Giác Hải also were treated well by the Lý dynasty. Monk Nguyễn Thường advised king Lý Cao Tông against sad music. Furthermore, many monks of the Lý dynasty had the friendly relation to noble class. Monks Viên Chiếu and Quảng Trí were members of the Imperial family. Monks Mãn Giác, Huệ Sinh, and Trí Bảo came from noble class. Almost kings of the Lý dynasty believed in and supported Buddhism. Lý Công Uẩn was grown up in pagoda so he admired Buddhism; he favored monks and nuns and attached much important to cast statues and build pagodas. Such kings as Lý Thái Tông, Lý Thánh Tông, Lý Nhân Tông, Lý Anh Tông, and Lý Cao Tông felt sympathy with Buddhism and helped Buddhist development. King Lý Thánh Tông was the founder of Tsao T'ang sect.

It is said that the monks' participation in state affairs was active and effective. However, this participation had given limitation. They only put forward a great many ideas on consolidating the feudal state. Because of carrying out Buddhist disciplines, monks could not undertake the positions of the court as well as of region; they were not commanders in the troops of the feudal state though they were talent persons. If monks were appointed to be Sangharaja or Tăng Lục they were only officials to manage Buddhist monks and nuns, believers and all activities of pagoda.

When monks discussed and put forward their ideas on politics, they did not use Buddhist dogmas and principles in Buddhist canon, but they used principles and the conceptions of Confucian doctrine. For advising Lý Công Uẩn to come the throne, monk Vạn Hạnh used the Confucianism conception of *nhân* and *thứ*. When discussing the origin of prosperity and decadence of country, monk Niên Thông used the conceptions on *honorable man* and *small-minded man*; these conceptions were used by *Confucius* and *Mencius*. When putting king Lý Cao Tông off, monk Nguyễn Thường also quoted the words in *Book of Poetry* (Shih Ching). During the Lý

dynasty kings and noblemen attached much importance to Buddhism; people believed fervently in Buddhism, but kings of the Lý dynasty used ideology of Confucius and Mencius as well as Confucian education for managing the country because Buddhism had some weak points on politics.

The influence of the Lý dynasty Buddhism towards Đại Việt civilization was manifested clearly in literature. Literature of the Lý dynasty was the advanced step in Vietnamese literary history. Comparing to the last centuries the literature of the Lý dynasty was more plentiful. The literary works had the depth of ideology. The monks' poems, statements took part in developing literature of the Lý dynasty. Besides the well-known works of celebrities and of the Lý court as *Chiếu dời đô* (Royal edict on the transfer of the capital), *Nam quốc sơn hà* (Mountains and Rivers of the empire of the South), *Văn lộ bố khi đánh trống*, *Di chiếu lúc lâm chung* (King's last will at point of death), etc. There were many Zen poems in the literature of the Lý dynasty. Almost poets and writers in the Lý dynasty were Zen masters. The philosophy of Zen ruled literary feeling and aesthetic conceptions of Zen masters, but the Zen masters of the Lý dynasty were the true patriots and they had responsibility to build Đại Việt civilization. The content of Zen poems made the Lý literature have unique features different from the other stages in Vietnamese literary history.

In the Lý dynasty, kings and aristocrat built many pagodas and carved many statues so at the moment art of architecture and sculpture in Vietnam achieved many noticeable achievements. The famous pagodas were built in the Lý dynasty were Giạm pagoda, Phật Tích one in Bắc Ninh province, Thầy pagoda and Một Cột pagoda (One Pillar pagoda) in Hà Nội, Đọi pagoda in Nam Hà province, etc. However, these either undamaged or damaged pagodas still leave vestiges of creation of architecture and sculpture art of the Lý dynasty.

Especially, monks' voices not only influenced world view of people but also contributed to impulse development of the history of Vietnamese ideology.

On ideology, the Lý monks were interested in releasing human from pain. By explaining the way of getting out of desires and sufferings, monks brought out the view on present people and the secular life. According to monks the secular life, body of human and landscape was in circle of birth and extinction and ruled by the law of *Anàtman* (no self) and *Anityatà* (impermanence). Human could not exist

permanently. All values connecting to real human aimed to affirm *true mind*, *absolute truth*, *wisdom* that existed permanently. This true existence was essence of all things in the universe including human. The monks who followed the guideline of Zen sect thirsted for realization of this essence.

According to the Lý monks all those who wanted to release from suffering had to realize Buddhist discipline and see their own natures. The common say of Chan was “anyone can see his own nature to reach the Buddhahood”, he could release from suffering.

The true mind, absolute truth, was common actions. Human could realize true mind, absolute by intuitional wisdom which called *Prajna*. Because true mind formerly existed in every man so “to see one own nature to become Buddha” was carried out in the contemporary life. All those were realizing the path of religion while they were connecting to real life. They also took part in political activity and contribute to the cause of founding and defending the country.

Through Zen poems the Lý monks spoke their ideology. They dealt with the substance of human and the nature of phenomenon in the universe. They thought that the ability and means of subjects would discover substance. Their explanations on the developing matters of Zen helped us including contemporary intellectuals to study deeply profound and subtle aspects of spiritual activities.

In the Lý dynasty, Buddhism not only connected to noblemen but also to common people. Buddhism was faith of all people. Buddhism had some changes to meet the need of material and spiritual life and as well as beliefs of people. The urgent needs were the anti- natural calamity for good harvest and treatment of diseases for the maintenance of health. So many pagodas of the Lý dynasty became the place where king or people prayer for rain, an heir and long live. The monks were good at treatment of disease. Many pagodas in villages became the places for examining and treating of people.

In order to win the sympathy of people many monks were not only good at sutra, teaching and Buddhist discipline but also highly able sorcerers. They had many miracles, they could invoke spirits. If the Lý dynasty Buddhism would like to exist and develop it had to combine with Zen sect and Mantrayana sect.

Zen sect considered the world as fictitiousness; it only recognized unique and permanent reality that was called true mind, Buddha nature... The most outstanding feature of Zen sect was that the monks concentrated in “To see one’s own nature to reach the Buddhahood”. Because Buddha was at heart, Zen sect thought highly of taking spiritual exercise. The regulations of meditation asked monks to firm inner feelings.

Mantrayana was the sect of Buddhism; it was born in India in the 4th century. The monks of this sect thought highly of the mystical religious rites in particular the rite of receiving sacred water. They based on the power of deities and used magic words to enlighten everybody. They read *Usnisavijaya dhàranì* and many magic words when they prayed for rain, for an heir and treated disease. The monk Maha and Từ Đạo Hạnh often repeated famous magic words of Mantrayana *Dai Bi Tam Da la ni*. The eminent bonzes as Vạn Hạnh, Thiền Nham, Không Lộ, Nguyên Học were also influenced by Mantrayana.

Among the Buddhist sects, Mantrayana was closer to Taoism. Because of having some elements of Manatravana, Chan sect of the Lý dynasty was influenced by Taoism. The way of driving out demons, going into a trance, hermetic art... had many elements resembling the witchcraft of Mantrayana which were carried out by monks Từ Đạo Hạnh, Không Lộ, Maha...

In the Lý dynasty, Buddhism combined with traditional beliefs in people. In the old times the level of production was low; Vietnamese often deified the natural phenomenon as cloud, rain, thunder, lightning, and storm. Flood... They worshipped these natural phenomena as deities; they hope these deities to help them in production and life, especially the deity who helped people to fight against drought, flood. The worship of deities was carried out in pagodas. According people’s conception, Buddha was considered super ordinary power; he had many miracles to assist people in misfortune. For example, Buddha was in the story of Tấm Cám.

Buddhism of the Lý dynasty thought highly of the combination of liberation from sufferings by own strength and by the strength of another that is asking for the help of Bodhisattvas, special Avalokitecvra.

The cult of liberation from the sufferings by the strength of another made Chan sect to harmonize with Pure Land sect. The believers of this sect often chanted

Amitabha and prayed Bodhisattavas; special Avalokitevara helped them arrive in the Western Heavens (Nirvana). The cast of Amitaba statue in Quỳnh Lâm pagoda and building of One Pillar pagoda for worship of Avalokitevara in Thăng Long showed that Pure Land sect was considerable sect in contemporary Buddhism because it corresponded to the beliefs of the masses.

Tsao T'ang sect which was born in the Lý Thánh Tông reign clearly manifested the tendency of beliefs of the Lý dynasty's Buddhism Tsao T'ang sect was founded in Khai Quốc pagoda by monk Thảo Đường and king Lý Thánh Tông. Monk Thảo Đường was a Chinese monk but he led a religious life in Champa. He was arrested when king Lý Thái Tổ attacked Champa. He became servant of Tăng Lục (the second office after Sangharaja). Later, Monk Thảo Đường read stealthily and corrected book of Tăng Lục so king Lý Thánh Tông appointed monk Thảo Đường to be the Teacher of Prince. King Lý Thánh Tông himself became the first disciple of Tsao T'ang sect. The documents of Tsao T'ang sect were too few to understand all characteristics of this sect. But the activities of king Lý Thánh Tông and other believers of Tsao T'ang sect helped us to know that in this sect the combination of Chan sect with Pure Land sect and Mantrayana and the combination of Buddhism with Confucianism were elevated higher.

It is said that the Lý dynasty was historical time when Buddhism reached bright height. Buddhism met all needs of contemporary society of Vietnam. First of all, Buddhism corresponded with the task of building Đại Việt civilization. Buddhism rooted in the spiritual life of people from the noblemen to the common people in Vietnamese villages. At that time Buddhism really harmonized with nation, patriotic tradition. In the Lý dynasty the nationalization of Buddhism presented clearly so Buddhism of the Lý dynasty presented national vitality. Buddhism made great contributions in the cause of developing the country on aspects of economy, culture, art, politics and ideology. /.