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BUDDHISM AND SPIRITUAL REPARIATION IN THE LATER LIFE OF VIETNAMESE AUSTRALIANS

***Abstract:** This study focuses on the phenomenon of Vietnamese Australians returning to Vietnam, particularly Ho Chi Minh City, to practice Buddhism after years of living abroad. Over the past decade, a considerable number of individuals who have acquired Australian citizenship and reached retirement age (55–60 years old) have chosen to repatriate to their homeland in search of a spiritual life. While they do not take full monastic vows, they primarily maintain the role of lay Buddhists, with a profound attachment to Buddhist teachings reflected in their daily practices. The research was conducted through qualitative interviews with these individuals, aiming to explore their motivations, the spiritual values they pursue, and the ways they apply Buddhist teachings to create meaning and peace in later life. The findings reveal that Buddhism plays a vital role as a source of spiritual support, fostering connected communities while offering a sense of fulfillment and serenity to returnees. This phenomenon clearly reflects the transnational dynamics of religion within the Vietnamese diaspora and contributes to enriching the contemporary landscape of Buddhism in Vietnam and simultaneously opens new directions for further research on lay Buddhist groups in the context of globalization.*

***Keywords:** Buddhism, practice, Vietnamese Australian, Ho Chi Minh City.*

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Introduction

Before and after the Unification of Vietnam in 1975, many Vietnamese chose to settle permanently in developed countries such as Australia in pursuit of better living conditions. Over the years, they gradually established stable lives with favorable material conditions and modern conveniences. Living in a developed environment

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provided them with opportunities to access quality education, healthcare, and social security, creating a solid foundation for personal development and family support. However, many continue to look toward their homeland with the desire to contribute and connect more deeply with Buddhist teachings. Having satisfied their material needs, the spiritual needs of the Vietnamese diaspora in Australia, particularly those at retirement age, began to gain urgency. They chose to return to Vietnam to live a simplified life, focusing on spiritual values and Buddhist practice. This phenomenon is currently observed in Ho Chi Minh City, with approximately 11 individuals residing in three separate groups across three houses. Some of these individuals own their homes, while others rent. They primarily concentrate on practicing Buddhism and limit their participation in economic or social activities outside the Buddhist sphere. Studying the phenomenon of Vietnamese Australians returning to Vietnam to practice Buddhism will contribute to clarifying the spiritual motivations, the process of value transformation, and specific spiritual practices within this segment of the overseas Vietnamese community. Concurrently, this research offers a deeper understanding of the supportive role of Buddhism in the spiritual life and communal engagement of the elderly in contemporary Vietnam.

Previous research on the overseas Vietnamese community has primarily focused on migration dynamics, social integration and economic adaptation. For instance, (Tri Minh Nguyen, 2023: 103–120) analyzed the adaptation processes and cultural interactions of the Vietnamese community in Australia. Similarly, Viviani (1997: 54–57) provided a preliminary demographic analysis of the Vietnamese community in Sydney and Melbourne based on the 1996 census data. Furthermore, Kawakami (2003: 48–67) conducted a comparative study on the livelihood and ethnicity of Vietnamese in Australia and Japan, emphasizing issues of resettlement and border crossing. In the Vietnamese context, studies such as Thích Nữ Liên Hiền (2022), which examines the development of the development of the Vietnamese Pure Land tradition in the 20th century, provide essential theoretical and historical context for understanding the practice. This is complemented by other publications addressing Pure Land Buddhism both domestically and internationally. However, the phenomenon of Vietnamese Australians returning to Vietnam specifically to engage in Buddhist practice—a newly emerging trend within the context of globalization—remains largely unexplored in academic literature.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the motivations, the journey of Buddhist practice, and the resultant influence of Buddhism on the group of Vietnamese Australians who have repatriated. Specifically, the research emphasizes understanding their personal narratives, the process of their spiritual commitment, and their social impacts following their return to Vietnam.

The author raises two central research questions:

1. What factors motivate Vietnamese Australians to return to Vietnam to practice Buddhism?
2. How does engaging in Buddhist practice in Vietnam impact their social life?

This research focuses on a contemporary social phenomenon and is primarily conducted through in-depth, quantitative interviews with the repatriating individuals and their Buddhist groups. Additionally, the study integrates theoretical frameworks from previous scholars to clarify the underlying issues, aiming to thoroughly explore the lives of this group—an area that has received little prior academic attention.

The main objectives of this study are threefold: firstly, to identify and clarify the motivating factors for Vietnamese Australians to return to Vietnam for Buddhist practice; secondly, to analyze the specific process and forms of their lay Buddhist practice; thirdly, to evaluate the supportive role of Buddhist communities in the spiritual life of this group.

1. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates perspectives from community approach (Tô Duy Hợp & Lương Hồng Quang, 2000:15), migration and return dynamics (Russell King, 2000: 7–55), and the theory of spiritual needs (Pargament, 1997: 48). The community theory distinguishes between “community as essence” (referring to shared emotions, spirit, and consciousness) and “community as entity” (referring to specific social groups). Pargament’s theory emphasizes the shift in human motivation from material needs to spiritual needs once basic living conditions are met. This perspective is crucial for explaining the observed lay Buddhist practice as a primary source of meaning, connection, and spiritual fulfillment for the returnees. Collectively, these integrated theories provide a comprehensive and robust lens for analyzing the multifaceted phenomenon of Vietnamese Australians returning to Vietnam to engage in Buddhist practice.

2. Research Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach, consistent with the methodology proposed by Patton (Patton 2015: 86; 98). The data collection primarily involved semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation to thoroughly explore the experiences, spiritual values, and Buddhist practices of Vietnamese Australians who have returned to Vietnam. A total of 11 participants were interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City between 2022 and 2025. The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This combination of methods -

interviews providing rich, detailed narratives and observations offering contextual understanding – significantly enhanced the study’s credibility and depth, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the participants’ journey of practice and repatriation.

3. Motivating Factors for Return Migration and Buddhist Practice

In the context of globalization and transnational migration, the phenomenon of Vietnamese Australians returning to Vietnam specifically to engage in Pure Land Buddhist practice has emerged as a noteworthy social issue. This study explores the motivations, circumstances, and spiritual significance underpinning this unique journey of return.

A distinctive feature of the interview participants is their shared background: all had taken refuge in the Three Jewels under Master Tịnh Không, a renowned teacher of the Pure Land school. They had the opportunity to study key scriptures such as the *Amitabha Sutra* and the *Infinite Life Sutra*, which describe the Pure Land as a serene and blissful realm presided over by Amitabha Buddha, who made 48 great vows to save all sentient beings. The Pure Land teaching emphasizes universal salvation and equality, asserting that anyone who sincerely recites the Buddha’s name and upholds pure precepts can be reborn in the Pure Land, thereby escaping the cycle of *samsara* and suffering. The availability of these sutras in Vietnamese made the teachings highly accessible, enabling participants to engage in practice through recitation, listening to Dharma talks, and community activities. Their involvement with the Pure Land Learning Association of Australia provides a cohesive community context, fostering faith and joy while uniting practitioners in the pursuit of liberation.

After many years of establishing a materially comfortable life in Australia, many individuals still reported a profound sense of spiritual lack. This unmet need for inner peace and a virtuous life served as the primary motivation for their decision to return to Vietnam for a more intensive spiritual practice. For this group, Vietnam is not only their homeland but also perceived as a favorable environment for the flourishing of the Pure Land tradition.

In Vietnam, these returnees discovered a diligent community of fellow practitioners, with a strong focus on the Pure Land tradition. Even while residing in Australia, many had previously traveled back to Vietnam to attend retreats led by lay practitioner (Diệu Âm, 2010: 65-78) and to seek guidance from eminent monks at temples such as Vạn Đức, Giác Minh, and Di Lạc. These experiences, which included maintaining regular Buddha-recitation practice and mutual support in cultivation, were regarded as precious karmic conditions. Such repeated encounters became a crucial

catalyst for their eventual decision to repatriate permanently for long-term practice. Specifically, at Di Lạc Pagoda, interviewees reported meeting many like-minded practitioners. Through shared encounters, these individuals formed Dharma connections and became spiritual companions, encouraging one another on the path to enlightenment. Amidst the urban pressures of city life—where the pursuit of wealth, fame, and status often prevails—these communities represent a space where individuals wholeheartedly turn to the Triple Gem. Together, they cultivate the Bodhi mind, nurture seeds of compassion and wisdom, and support each other in overcoming afflictions, thereby facilitating a return to their true, pure nature. What makes Dharma friendships unique is their difference from worldly relationships such as companionship in marriage or social circles. While worldly friendships often arise from shared interests, benefits, entertainment, or even material desires, Dharma friends come together for a deeper vow: to practice the Dharma side by side and progress on the path of liberation. Spiritual companions do not meet to talk about worldly affairs, money, or gossip; instead, they remind one another to uphold the precepts, encourage wholesome deeds, let go of greed, anger, and ignorance, and engage in meditation and Buddha-recitation. Above all, they inspire each other to persevere on this challenging yet profoundly peaceful journey of awakening.

A true Dharma friend never criticizes or belittles others to elevate themselves. When offering advice, they always come from a place of compassion, gently reminding and guiding with subtlety, using love as the foundation to help one another correct speech and behavior. Everyone understands that they are still on the path of practice and far from perfect, so they are willing to listen and improve. Through the sincere and loving guidance of Dharma friends, each person gradually perfects themselves, lets go of bad habits and attachments, and moves toward a life of greater peace and happiness each day. In the past, friendships in Australia or during my university years mostly revolved around hobbies, studies, entertainment, or casual chatter, sometimes even involving gossip, comparisons, and relationships sustained only by mutual benefit. At that time, I too was ignorant, chasing superficial values while neglecting inner cultivation. But since returning to Vietnam, especially at Vạn Đức Pagoda, I have met true Dharma companions who together seek to return to the pure original mind. Each chanting session, recitation of the Buddha's name, or simple tea gathering has become an opportunity to remind one another to live according to the Dharma. Dharma friends serve as mirrors, inspiring effort and diligence, offering comfort in times of affliction, and practicing not only for themselves but also to support others on the path. I believe that Vietnam, especially its temples and fellow practitioners, is fertile ground for sowing the seeds of Bodhi. In this vibrant

atmosphere of practice, each Dharma companion becomes a mirror, a reminder to return to mindfulness, and a companion on the spiritual path. Spiritual friendship is entirely different from worldly or social relationships, as it is not bound by rivalry, gain and loss, or expectations. Practitioners meet with a single aspiration: to advance together on the path, leaving no one behind. This is the boundless compassion of genuine Dharma companions. I am deeply grateful to my fellow practitioners and the venerable monks in Ho Chi Minh City, who have taught me humility, attentive listening, patience, and letting go. Through them, I have learned that practice begins with the smallest acts of daily life, and I firmly believe that although the path to enlightenment is long, it becomes lighter and more peaceful when shared with true companions.

In the interviews, most Vietnamese returnees from Australia believed that coming to the Pure Land practice was a special karmic connection formed over many lifetimes. While acknowledging that all Buddhist paths can lead to liberation, they felt that the practice of reciting the Buddha's name was the most suitable and accessible, bringing peace, helping them let go of greed, anger, and delusion, and reducing suffering in life.

Interview Excerpt 5: She shared that all of the Buddha's teachings and practices are good and worthy of respect, as each path can bring benefit to practitioners if followed correctly. However, during her first year of exploring and practicing Buddhism, she realized that the Pure Land method was particularly well-suited to her own capacity. This practice not only brought her peace and deep faith but also helped her maintain a steady routine of cultivation and strengthen her connection with the Triple Gem. She expressed that she could clearly feel the joy arising from the teachings on the infinite life and infinite light of Amitābha Buddha. Through this, her faith in the path of liberation became even firmer, enabling her to persevere with determination and move forward without hesitation or doubt.

For this group of Buddhists, the Pure Land Learning Association of Australia was the place where the seed of Dharma was planted, bringing them closer to the Pure Land practice and shaping their faith in cultivation. There, they regularly attended Dharma talks, engaged in Buddha recitation, and participated in community activities with fellow Vietnamese in Australia. They learned methods of practice, listened to sutra lectures, performed repentance prostrations, and practiced Buddha recitation in all postures according to the teachings of Master Tịnh Không. Many shared that, thanks to this guidance, they came to clearly understand the essence of the Pure Land practice, learned how to make the vow for rebirth, and nurtured steadfast faith. This foundation became a crucial support that kept them engaged and enabled them to

advance further on the path of cultivation. In Australia, although there is a Buddhist community and the Pure Land Learning Association, the long geographical distances and busy work schedules make it difficult to meet and practice together regularly. Time for exchanging Dharma, attending lectures, or joining long retreats is almost impossible, and they can only share briefly over the phone. Seeking guidance from monks and nuns or attending Dharma talks in person also faces many obstacles due to distance and limited time.

In Australia, although families do not hinder their practice, living together makes it difficult to chant the Buddha's name aloud or devote much time to cultivation; most can only practice outside of working hours, amidst household duties and responsibilities, so daily practice time is minimal and cannot yet be continuous and concentrated. When returning to Vietnam, they found the conditions much more favorable for practice: they could join cultivation groups, meet with monks and nuns, listen to teachings, and attend multi-day retreats. The temple environment allowed them to chant the Buddha's name aloud with the community. They could also devote most of their day to practice without the pressure of work or family responsibilities.

Interview Excerpt 7: In Vietnam, finding Buddhist scriptures for study is very convenient, as she can easily purchase and consult various Dharma materials. Opportunities to listen to teachings from venerable monks and senior masters are also abundant, helping her gain a deeper understanding of the teachings. In addition, fellow practitioners often share and exchange their experiences in practice. Social media and online platforms also provide many Dharma talks, creating favorable conditions for her learning and cultivation. Thanks to this, she has more opportunities for study and practice. However, each person has their own way of understanding, and the environment in Vietnam allows her to learn and exchange more than in Australia.

They shared that their methods of practice—from chanting sutras, reciting the Buddha's name, and meditation, to Buddhist rituals—were all learned from the Pure Land Learning Association in Australia. However, what they lacked was the environment and time to engage in deeper practice, which Vietnam now provides. Here, they can devote an entire day to listening to the Dharma, reciting the Buddha's name, engaging in cultivation, and living simply without the pressures of material concerns. After many years of practice in Australia, they realized that returning to Vietnam was the right choice, aligning with their spiritual aspirations. This decision was not merely a geographical move, but a significant spiritual step forward. The environment in Vietnam enables them to concentrate fully on their practice, let go of worldly worries, and live in accordance with the ideal of “single-mindedly reciting the Buddha's name and vowing for rebirth in the Western Pure Land.” Their practice at

the Pure Land Learning Association of Australia provided them with a solid foundation, but the need for deeper cultivation and a more supportive environment urged them to return to Vietnam, where they believe they can fully realize their spiritual ideals for the rest of their lives.

Interview Excerpt 1: She shared that in Australia, despite having material comfort, her heart always felt empty, constantly chasing work and money without knowing the purpose of life. Returning to Vietnam, listening to sutras, chanting Buddha's name, and meeting fellow practitioners brought her true happiness. The group shared the view that wealth ultimately cannot be taken along, and only chanting Buddha's name and listening to Dharma stabilize the mind, reducing greed, anger, and delusion. In Vietnam, the supportive environment, teachers, and fellow practitioners make it easier to uphold precepts and practice according to the Buddha's teachings.

A notable aspect of the spiritual return of Vietnamese Australians is their process of personal transformation, which carries deep significance not only in religious practice but also in spiritual life, values, and overall life orientation. After many years of stability in Australia, most had achieved stable jobs, financial security, adequate housing, and their children had integrated well into society. Yet, despite these accomplishments, they experienced a profound spiritual emptiness. Material abundance could not satisfy the deep yearning for meaning, prompting them to seek a more spiritual path. Initially, they encountered Buddhism through books, online lectures, and activities at the Pure Land Learning Association of Australia. Maintaining a disciplined practice proved challenging, as their time was dominated by work, family, and social obligations, and geographical distance to temples along with busy schedules made consistent practice difficult. The social environment in Australia rarely encouraged group practice, leaving them without the companionship, sharing, and encouragement necessary for sustained spiritual growth. This combination of inner longing and practical obstacles gradually led them to aspire to return to Vietnam, where they believed conditions would better support their spiritual journey.

Vietnam offered a rich environment for learning and practice, a simple lifestyle, lower living costs, and a vibrant Buddhist community. Temples were accessible, monks and nuns provided teachings, and dharma groups created favorable conditions for reciting the Buddha's name, observing precepts, and practicing Dharma. Returning home allowed them to participate in fellow practitioner groups, attend multi-day retreats, and engage fully in temple life, where they could chant aloud, listen to Dharma talks, and live in a focused, minimally distracted manner. Immersion in a community of like-minded practitioners, sharing experiences and mutually encouraging one another, fostered motivation, joy, and a sense of spiritual connection.

Practicing in Vietnam helped them transform their minds, gradually reduce distracting thoughts, and cultivate a focus on liberation and the ideal of rebirth in the Western Pure Land. They experienced joy and faith through chanting sutras, reciting the Buddha's name, listening to teachings, and observing precepts, which strengthened their ability to face impermanence, suffering, and daily challenges with equanimity. In the process, they learned humility, patience, and detachment, while cultivating unconditional love, compassion, and a deeper understanding of their spiritual path. The environment in Vietnam, coupled with supportive companionship and dedicated time for practice, enabled them to engage more deeply and steadily in their spiritual journey than had been possible in Australia, fulfilling both their personal aspirations and long-held religious intentions.

4. The Spiritual Life of Vietnamese Australian Buddhists in the Community

In Vietnam, Buddhist chanting retreats are very diverse, with the Pure Land practice being particularly prominent under the guidance of Dharma Masters, especially following the lineage of Master Tịnh Không. Major temples in Ho Chi Minh City, such as Di Lạc Temple, Vĩnh Nghiêm Temple, and Giác Viên Temple, regularly hold large community retreats. These renowned practice centers attract hundreds to thousands of practitioners from across the country. Retreats at Di Lạc Temple are organized in diverse formats, such as the Three-Session Recitation, Midday Heart Recitation, One-Day, Three-Day, and periodic Buddha Recitation retreats, designed to make participation accessible for everyone. Each retreat has its own characteristics but all aim to maintain a focused mind and continuous recitation of the Buddha's name throughout the practice period. The Three-Session Chanting Retreat (Tam Thời Hệ Niệm) is divided into three sessions: morning, afternoon, and evening, during which practitioners continuously recite the Buddha's name "Amitabha" to maintain unwavering concentration. This retreat is highly favored by many Buddhists for its intensity and effectiveness in training the mind. Meanwhile, the Trung Phong Midday Chanting Retreat (Trung Phong Tâm Thời Hệ Niệm) focuses mainly on the middle of the day, making it suitable for those with busy schedules who still wish to preserve mindfulness within a shorter timeframe. Single-day and regular retreats, held weekly, monthly, or quarterly, are also popular, helping practitioners sustain long-term practice habits. These formats are particularly convenient for busy individuals, allowing them to connect with the community while accumulating merit and progressing in their cultivation.

At Di Lạc Temple, retreats are organized on a large scale, each gathering between 300 and 500 participants or even more, creating tremendous collective strength. When hundreds or thousands of people simultaneously chant "Amitabha" in

unison, the atmosphere resonates with profound peace and extraordinary inner power. This harmony of collective chanting elevates the mind, bringing serenity and renewed strength to every participant.

Many practitioners at Di Lạc Temple share that practicing together in this environment greatly enhances their diligence, alleviates fatigue and worries, and fills them with joy and inner peace. The collective energy surpasses individual effort, elevating the mind and bringing purity and strength to everyone. The retreats at Di Lạc Temple are notable not only for their size but also for quality, guided methodically by the Dharma Masters, especially Master Tịnh Không. Profound Dharma talks, continuous meditation, and chanting create a disciplined yet loving and supportive learning environment. Through these retreats, many regain inner peace, genuine joy, and confidence in the path to liberation. They cultivate mind transformation, adhere to the Dharma, and support each other on the path to enlightenment, forming a strong community of fellow practitioners. Practitioners maintain regular chanting retreats, creating a continuous practice flow, persevering diligently, and fostering a strong, enduring community. Di Lạc Temple becomes a special spiritual place, offering peace, faith, and moral support on the path of cultivation. They affirm that only chanting Buddha's name, listening to sutras, observing precepts, and living simply can release worries and reduce greed, anger, and ignorance. In the practice environment, daily listening to Dharma, chanting, learning from teachers, and sharing with fellow practitioners makes life meaningful, gentle, and joyful. Beyond practice, practitioners engage in charitable activities, printing scriptures, distributing free meals, supporting the poor, homeless, and patients. After Covid-19, amid greater difficulties, they actively share and assist the disadvantaged, embodying compassion and the vow to relieve suffering. Practitioners distribute gifts, essentials, and medicine to the homeless, going into alleys and night markets, offering small yet meaningful aid. This ensures the disadvantaged feel remembered in society while providing moral support and encouragement.

Long-term charitable activities such as building homes, providing scholarships, free medical care, and disaster relief allow practitioners to practice compassion and deeply understand the Buddha's teaching of "giving joy and relieving suffering." In the practice environment, practitioners connect with like-minded peers, print scriptures and Dharma recordings to spread Buddhism, create merit, and cultivate compassion. They feel companionship, encouragement, and support on their spiritual path, immersed in a flow of positive energy. Through diverse practice and charitable activities, practitioners not only follow the Buddha's teachings in temples but also extend compassion to society, beautifying life, warming the lives of the less fortunate, and fostering faith and love within the community.

Excerpt from Interview 2: In Australia, I never saw children wandering the streets asking for money as I did in Vietnam. When I returned, I witnessed a 12-year-old boy selling vegetables by the roadside, with his 3-year-old sibling beside him, which brought me to tears. The boy said, "My parents are selling vegetables a few kilometers away." This scene made me realize the many hardships in my homeland and motivated me to help the community. Although living in Australia with material comfort, I had few opportunities for charity work. Returning to Vietnam and seeing elderly and children in need made me feel a strong responsibility toward my country. Now, in old age, having enough for myself, I still dedicate time and resources to help the poor, distribute charity meals, give gifts, and assist vulnerable children. Every contribution, large or small, brings immense joy and happiness in my spiritual practice and charitable journey.

In general, the group of Vietnamese Australians believes that practicing Buddhism helps them release burdens, reduce anxiety, and find deeper meaning in life. They feel that, no matter where they are, if they have a sincere heart for practice and observe precepts correctly, they can attain inner peace, though the environment in Vietnam greatly supports their spiritual journey. They are grateful for the opportunity to return to their homeland, live within a diligent Buddhist community, listen to Dharma talks, and recite the Buddha's name daily. This is the true happiness they have always sought; following the Buddha's teachings is the highest fulfillment in life. Returning to Vietnam allowed them to find a community environment that aligns with their spiritual ideals. They live together in small groups, contribute financially fairly to sustain their monastic lifestyle, follow a vegetarian diet, recite the Buddha's name, and listen to Dharma according to a regular schedule. All activities revolve around reciting "Amitabha Buddha" and practicing the Dharma, avoiding worldly entertainments like movies, music, or casual chatting, so that the mind remains focused and oriented toward liberation. In Vietnam, they can more easily find a community of fellow practitioners. In Australia, the vast geography and the small number of Pure Land practitioners make it difficult to meet, practice together, and encourage one another, and time for practice is limited by work and family obligations. In Vietnam, they participate in collective practice sessions at major temples such as Di Lac Temple, reciting Buddha's name, listening to Dharma talks, exchanging learning experiences, and encouraging each other along the spiritual path. Living in this environment, they clearly feel the "power of the group," the collective strength that helps each individual remain steadfast in practice. When facing obstacles or fatigue, reminders and encouragement from fellow practitioners serve as a precious resource to overcome challenges. Their determination to practice is stronger, less prone to laziness or giving up as it might be in Australia, as each day

they hear the recitation of Buddha's name and witness everyone practicing with one heart. The vibrant atmosphere of practice allows people from all walks of life to find empathy and encouragement within this large community.

In addition, in Vietnam, they have more opportunities to seek teachings and listen directly to the precious guidance of venerable monks, abbots, and dharma teachers. In particular, they can easily access renowned works by esteemed masters, such as *The Way to Pure Land* (Thích Trí Tịnh, 2008:23;43) and *Ten Essentials of Buddha Recitation by Venerable* (Thích Thiện Tâm, 2007 28;34), as well as other writings by Venerable Thích Trí Tịnh on the Buddhist canon. These books not only carry profound doctrinal value but also serve as guiding references, helping practitioners better understand the Pure Land practice and the path to liberation. They can also attend Dharma talks, retreats, and large Buddhist gatherings regularly held at various temples and practice centers across Vietnam. These opportunities help them broaden their knowledge of Buddhist teachings, gain a deeper understanding of the Dharma, and learn how to apply it in daily life. Through this, they transform their minds, cultivate compassion, let go of attachments, and gradually attain inner peace and liberation.

Excerpt from Interview 6: On one occasion, we visited a remote area in the South, where there were small, simple temples, some of which had decayed over time. When it rained, water would leak directly into the main hall, and the novice monks had to use buckets to catch the rain so the floor wouldn't get wet. The temple's scriptures were old and damaged, the number of copies very limited, and the ritual instruments for ceremonies were lacking. Witnessing this scene, our hearts were deeply saddened. After the trip, we pooled our money to support repairs to the main hall roof on our next visit, and also purchased additional scriptures, Dharma lectures, ritual items, and ceremonial robes to provide the monastic community with better conditions for practice and teaching. As a result, visitors to the temple now have scriptures for chanting, ritual implements for practice, and ceremonial robes to wear during ceremonies or retreats.

We realized that only in Vietnam are there abundant opportunities to offer essential items for Buddhist practice, whereas in Australia, practitioners usually already have sufficient resources. Contributing to support the monks and fellow practitioners in Vietnam is not only a joy but also a way to accumulate merit and cultivate wholesome deeds on the path of practice. Even though they regularly participated in Dharma talks, Buddha recitation, and community activities at the Pure Land Buddhist Association in Australia, most participants felt that their inner transformation was still limited. They learned meditation methods and basic concepts but had difficulty applying Buddhist

teachings to daily life. Life in Australia, while materially comfortable, is dominated by work, family, and social responsibilities, leaving little time to listen to Dharma, study scriptures, or practice the teachings. The living environment and fast-paced lifestyle also limit opportunities for discussion and deep engagement with the Dharma, keeping them entangled in worldly concerns. After returning to Vietnam, they experienced profound changes in mind and lifestyle. The practice environment, with a diligent community of practitioners, a strong Pure Land tradition, and simple material conditions, created an ideal space for following the Buddha's teachings. They could participate in extended retreats, attend daily Dharma talks, chant sutras, recite Buddha's name, and live in an environment focused on liberation from suffering and rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

The group of Australian practitioners realized that after spending some time practicing in Vietnam, they clearly felt greater inner peace and fewer worldly worries. Concerns about finances, work, and social status no longer dominated their minds as before. Instead, they focused on letting go: gradually releasing negative thoughts, anger, greed, and selfishness, while slowly reducing attachment to social relationships and worldly desires.

A profound transformation they emphasized was practicing moral precepts at the highest level possible, even though they were not monastics. They diligently observed the five basic precepts: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming alcohol. At the same time, they extended their practice to supplementary precepts, such as limiting luxury consumption, moderating material desires, and maintaining a simple lifestyle. For them, observing precepts was not only about following religious rules but also a means to cultivate the mind, nurture compassion, and transform their consciousness.

Excerpt from Interview 3: She believes that personal transformation does not depend entirely on the environment, but on each individual's effort and perseverance in practice. By keeping precepts, diligently reciting Buddha's name, and practicing correctly, one can achieve transformation anywhere. The environment only serves as a supportive factor, making the practice more convenient. However, the transformation of the mind is the responsibility and effort of oneself—no one can practice for another. Therefore, she emphasizes that spiritual cultivation requires self-effort and patience.

The values of Buddhism have become the foundation for all their decisions: from how they spend, how they treat others, how they respond to adversity, to how they face illness, suffering, and death. Whenever they encounter difficulties in life, they remind themselves of the Buddha's teachings, examine their thoughts, and adjust their actions to maintain a calm mind, free from anger, resentment, or blame. More importantly,

they affirm that this profound inner transformation truly occurred only after returning to Vietnam. The environment of practicing together, the intensive meditation and study sessions, and the spiritual space in Vietnam allowed them to deeply hear and understand the Buddha's teachings, grasp the nature of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and non-self, and genuinely experience the joy of letting go. They realized that by releasing worldly attachments, their minds became peaceful, serene, and filled with joy in each session of reciting Amitābha's name, chanting sutras, or even simply preparing meals and discussing the Dharma with fellow practitioners.

Conclusion

Through this in-depth interview study offers a novel perspective on Vietnamese diaspora research, specifically addressing the underexplored phenomenon of return migration for spiritual reasons. By examining the Pure Land Buddhist practice journey of Vietnamese Australians, the research demonstrates that their motivation for repatriation is not solely driven by material or familial considerations. Rather, it stems from a profound aspiration for inner peace, simplicity, and a deeper connection with Vietnamese Buddhist culture. Participants articulated that while living conditions in Australia offer material comfort, the environment and pace of life there are not conducive to consistent Dharma practice and sustained mindfulness. Returning to Vietnam, they discover a highly supportive environment for spiritual cultivation, enabling them to attend daily Dharma talks, engage in communal chanting, and immerse themselves in a devoted Buddhist community. The study also highlights a significant shift in values within this group: from prioritizing material wealth, work, and family to embracing a simpler, spiritually focused lifestyle oriented toward liberation. Although they are lay practitioners, they diligently uphold the Five Precepts, commit to the Pure Land method, live within a supportive community of fellow practitioners, and discover genuine happiness in their engagement with the Buddha's teachings. This finding affirms the value of lay Buddhist practice and demonstrates that spiritual needs can be a major factor influencing return migration decisions. The participants' experiences shed light on how, once basic needs are met in Vietnam, a life centered on spiritual growth and the Dharma becomes both a motivation and a source of fulfillment.

However, this study has certain limitations. The small sample size (11 participants) does not allow for generalization to the broader Vietnamese-Australian community. Furthermore, the focus exclusively on Pure Land practitioners does not reflect the diversity of Buddhist traditions, such as Zen or Vajrayana. Additionally, the research is geographically restricted to Ho Chi Minh City, future studies should expand to other provinces and cities for a more comprehensive understanding. Moreover, the

study did not delve deeply into how participants integrate the Dharma into their daily lives, an important gap that future research could address. Despite these limitations, this study successfully opens a new direction for both migration and Buddhist studies by highlighting spiritual return migration-an important yet underexplored topic. The research ultimately affirms that Buddhist practice is not merely a religious activity but a conscious lifestyle choice, a path to sustainable happiness, and a vital means of inner liberation for overseas Vietnamese in the modern transnational context./.

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Tóm tắt**PHẬT GIÁO VÀ CUỘC HỘI HƯƠNG TÂM LINH CUỐI ĐỜI
CỦA NGƯỜI ÚC GỐC VIỆT****Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai***Trường Đại học Khoa học Xã hội và Nhân văn**Đại học Quốc gia Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh*

Nghiên cứu này tập trung vào hiện tượng người Úc gốc Việt trở về Việt Nam, cụ thể là Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, để thực hành Phật giáo sau nhiều năm sống ở nước ngoài. Hơn một thập kỷ qua, có một số lượng đáng kể những người đã nhập tịch Úc và đến tuổi nghỉ hưu (55-60 tuổi) đã chọn hội hương để giải quyết nhu cầu tâm linh. Mặc dù họ không hoàn toàn xuất gia, nhưng chủ yếu duy trì vai trò của một Phật tử tại gia, thực hành hằng ngày giáo lý Phật giáo hằng ngày. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện thông qua các cuộc phỏng vấn định tính với những trường hợp này, nhằm tìm hiểu động lực, các giá trị tôn giáo mà họ theo đuổi, và cách họ áp dụng giáo lý Phật giáo để tạo ra ý nghĩa và sự bình an trong cuộc sống sau này. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy Phật giáo đóng một vai trò quan trọng, là nguồn hỗ trợ tinh thần nuôi dưỡng sự gắn kết giữa các cộng đồng, đồng thời mang lại cảm giác viên mãn và thanh thản cho những người hội hương. Hiện tượng này phản ánh rõ nét sự năng động xuyên quốc gia của tôn giáo trong cộng đồng người Việt hải ngoại, góp phần làm phong phú thêm bối cảnh Phật giáo Việt Nam đương đại, đồng thời mở ra những hướng nghiên cứu mới về cộng đồng Phật tử tại gia trong bối cảnh toàn cầu hóa.

Từ khóa: Phật giáo, thực hành, người Úc gốc Việt, Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh.