

**BUDDHIST STUDIES IN VIETNAM
UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES:
25 YEARS REVIEW (1991-2016)**

Abstract: *The article presents the basic achievements of some researchers who had worked or are working in the Institute for Religious Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences over 25 years. These achievements are about Vietnam Buddhist history, Vietnam Buddhist philosophical thought, Vietnam Buddhist characteristics, brilliant monks and laymen (Upasaka) of Vietnam Buddhism, influence of Buddhist values on ethics and lifestyle of the Vietnamese people at present, etc. The results mentioned above do not only provide reliable documents but they also bring suitable methods for those who desire to study Vietnam Buddhism from history to the present.*

Keywords: *Achievement; Buddhism; study; Vietnam.*

Introduction

The Science of Religion or Religious Studies, as one discipline (or faculty) of humanities, was considered to be formally established in 1873 according to the book *Introduction of Religious Studies* written by Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900) - a German orientalist, British nationality. Since end of the 19th century this discipline has developed rapidly over the world, especially in Europe and America. Now religious studies have been taught as a formal subject in many famous Western universities.

In Vietnam, since early years of 90's of the 20th century religious studies had been being on with the establishment of centre or institute, where have concentrated in researching and training study on religion

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and belief, such as: The Institute of Religious Studies (IRS) (1993) (its former was the Department of Scientific Research of Religion (1991) belongs to Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS); The Institute for Belief and Religious Studies in 2006 (formerly were the Department of Believes and Religions (1995) and the Scientific Center for Belief and Religion (1998)), belongs to Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics; the two centers for Contemporary Religious Studies (2008), one in Hanoi National University, and another one in Hồ Chí Minh City National University; Faculty of Religious Studies (2016) (formerly was the Department of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Philosophy) belongs to University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi National University¹.

By considering the year 1991 as the time establishing the Centre of Religious Studies in the VASS, accordingly 2016 was the 25th anniversary of Religious Studies in Vietnam. During these 25 years, the field of religious studies has achieved hundreds of large and small projects on various issues that were published as books and magazines. This article introduces their typical issues, as the main achievements done by the researchers who have been or are working at the IRS while studying on Vietnamese Buddhism during 25 years.

1. Achievements of study on the history of Vietnamese Buddhism

In order to provide documentaris and data base for those who want to learn Vietnamese Buddhism, one of the important works done by religious researchers in the IRS was to contribute a general background of the history of Vietnamese Buddhism. However there were also other works mentioned the history of Buddhism in Vietnam, but they were from aspects of Buddhology or Philosophy, such as: *An Introduction of Vietnam Buddhist History* by Thích Mật Thể; *A Treatise of Vietnam Buddhist History* by Nguyễn Lang; *A History of Vietnamese Buddhism* by Lê Mạnh Thát; *A History of Buddhism in Vietnam* edited by Nguyễn Tài Thư. In the field of religious studies the researchers of IRS also have had their own significant imprints as considerable achievements about history of Buddhism in Vietnam.

Firstly, it is necessary to mention the achievements on dividing historical periods and clarifying the characteristics of each ones. In comparing with the other previous ways of dividing historical periods, such as: according to dynasties (by Nguyễn Lang), or centuries and dynasties (by Nguyễn Tài Thư), or according to historical events or national documents as well as religious figures (by Lê Mạnh Thát), the researchers of IRS have contributed their vision about the history of Buddhism not only connecting with history of the Viet, but also about the Cham and the Khmer; especially they concentrated on the important Buddhist milestones, the typical monks and the Buddhist scriptures of each Buddhist sects in Vietnam.

Nguyễn Duy Hinh had divided the history of Vietnamese Buddhism into: *The transmission period* (2nd - 5th centuries); *the development period* (6th - 10th centuries); *the period of prosperity* (9th -14th centuries) and *the period revival and renewal* (15th - 20th centuries).

Characteristics of the transmission period (2nd - 5th centuries): Buddhism was introduced directly from India into Vietnam, that constructed the Viet - Indian fundamental foundation, which was a mix or combination between Buddhism and folk belief of fertility, that created the system of Four Palaces pantheon and the worship of Holy Mothers, with praying magic for favourable weather. This period consists of two stages. The first stage was of the transmission of Jataka sutra, a famous mahayana scriptures about Dāna (the virtue of generosity, charity or giving of alms), Kṣānti (the virtue of patience, forbearance and forgiveness), and Mettā (the virtue of benevolence, loving-kindness, friendliness, amity, good will), that introduced Gotama Sakyamuni as Buddha. But there had been not any mention about Nagarjuna (150-250) and his famous thought of Madhyamika (the middle way, in Vietnamese: Trung quán) and the book Li Hou Lun (in Vietnamese: Lý hoặc luận) by Mouzi, or the Sutta of six Bodhisatva virtues (in Vietnamese: Lục độ tập kinh), so that it belonged to Mahayana Buddhism before Nagarjuna. The second stage appeared Mahayana sutras, in which Lotus sutra (in Vietnamese: Kinh Pháp hoa) was partially translated into Chinese, by Kumārajīva (Cưu

Ma La Thập) in about the sixth century and became popular in the Vietnam Buddhist sangha. The appearance of Mahayana sutras was the sign of academic Buddhism in Vietnam, its scholar characteristic rapidly grown².

Characteristics of the developing period (6th - 10th centuries): Zen sect of Chinese Buddhism largely influenced over Buddhism in North Vietnam. Therefore, Vietnam Buddhism entered the path of Zen Buddhism, that formed Sino - Viet superstructure, which developed further on the long history of cultural relations with ancient China. During this period Buddhism enlarged throughout the country, there were monks as great patriotic scholars of the three religions (Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism) engaging politics, such as Pháp Thuận and Khuông Việt. However, their contribution in political activities was mostly as Confucianism, not as Buddhism³.

According to Nguyễn Duy Hinh, characteristics of *The period of prosperity (11th - 19th centuries)*, as well as of *The period of revival and renewal (14th - 20th centuries)* were evident presented in Vietnamese Buddhist thoughts (in detail in later part).

Be different with Nguyễn Duy Hinh, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn divided the history of Vietnamese Buddhism into six periods, such as: *from BC to the beginning of AD; from the 1st to 4th centuries; from the 5th to 10th centuries; from the 11th to 14th centuries; from the 15th to 19th centuries; and the 20th century.*

Characteristics of the period from the 1st to 4th centuries: Buddhism was introduced into the North of Vietnam, while the early Taoism was doing its practices to become deities and nurturing method for immortality, that was prevailing among the upper classes. That situation forced Buddhism to deal with manifestations of Taoism by the tendency of “Buddhism of power”. The integration between Buddhism and indigenous religions⁴ had produced an unique religious pantheon of the Four Dharma Buddhas in comparing with other Buddhist countries in Asia in that time. However, in the South of Vietnam, Buddhism together with Jainism, Brahmanism were

intermingled and introduced into the Cham and the Khmer in ancient empires such as: Phù Nam and Lâm Ấp (later Chiêm Thành)⁵.

Characteristics of the period from the 5th to the 10th centuries: The Viet's Buddhism was deeply influenced by Chinese Buddhism. It existed in tandem with Taoism. Although there were a penetration of the three elements (as three branches) of Buddhism (Pure Land - Zen - Tantric), among them Tantric had a prominent position. At the same time, Buddhism and Brahmanism had affirmed its spiritual position in social life of the Khmer and Cham, they had outstanding achievements of religious masterpieces of Indian style, in comparing with the Việt ethnic's⁶.

Characteristics of the period from the 11th to 14th centuries: This is the most flourishing period of Vietnamese Buddhism under Feudalism in the national history. In this time Buddhism played a very important role in society; did not only frame itself as a religion, but also reached towards secular field of politics. The characteristic of *engaging in life* became the main tendency for Buddhist activities in this period. Since the Lý-Trần dynasties, the paradigm of Buddhism has become a traditional one for the later centuries. These two dynasties has not only been being the brilliant continuation of Vietnamese Buddhism, but also the extraordinary culmination of history of Buddhism in Vietnam⁷.

Characteristics of the period from the 15th to the 19th centuries: Buddhism clearly showed its vitality, with its deep and firm standing in contemporary society despite of many social and political changes. In this period, just inside Northern transmission Buddhism there had been clear difference among regions and ethnic groups relating to Mahayana or Primitive Buddhism, to the sects inside Mahayana Buddhism. During this period, Buddhism in Đàng Ngoài (North Vietnam) was devoted to preserving the Buddhist lineage from Ly - Tran dynasties, so that, the characteristic of sect lineage was rather "blur"; While Buddhism in Đàng Trong (South Vietnam), the distinguish of sect lineage and denomination were more clearly, such as: with the Zen sect, was especially the Lâm Tế (Lin ji) Zen sect; with Primitive Buddhism of the Khmer was the Pali texts; with Buddhism of the Chinese was

about sharing the same Chinese scriptures with the Vietnamese living there, but they were not of the same Buddhist sect lineage. These differences existed until the end of the 18th century and the early 19th century when the country was reunited⁸.

Characteristics of the period of 20th century: Buddhism has changed fundamentally from tradition into modern with impressive events, such as: Buddhist revival movement from the 1920 to 1951; The “Dharma disaster” in 1963 in South Vietnam; The unification of Buddhism in Vietnamese into a National Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam in 1981 has opened a new period with the most wide scale development than ever⁹.

The next meaningful contribution of the researchers of religious studies on the history of Vietnam Buddhism was that they did not agree with many previous researchers who went ahead to see Vietnamese Buddhism only as Zen Buddhism and called all monks as Zen masters. For this issue, Nguyễn Duy Hinh commented that Vietnamese Buddhism was not just a Mahayana tradition, but initially Theravada/Primitive Buddhism was imported directly from India, as the ancient Viet-India base, then later absorbed Zen sect from China as its superstructure of Vietnam Buddhism. But in Vietnam the characteristic of sect lineage has become a very deep tradition. Vietnamese monks of each Zen sect lineage had to keep abreast of sacred Buddhist scriptures to give specific explanations accordingly, unlike Chinese Zen masters, whose tradition was “mind to mind directly transference” by shouting, awarding koans, and without any writing letters... so that, in Vietnam, the number of real Zen masters were small, but many of them were influenced by Zen Buddhism from China, however they were distinguished into different degrees¹⁰.

According to standards of the Chinese Zen Buddhism, and having analyzed many documents related to Zen thought and its way of practice, Nguyễn Duy Hinh concluded that many of famous Vietnamese monks were not real Zen masters or not enough quality to be considered as Zen masters, such as: Thông Biện (1070-1134), Mãn Giác (1052-1096), Đạo Huệ (1109-1172), Bảo Giám (1110-1173),

Không Lộ (1040-1119), Đại Xả (1120-1180), Trí Bảo (1162-1190), Tịnh Giới (1158-1207), Giác Hải (1040-1128), Nguyên Học (1106-1175 / 1183), Quảng Nghiêm (1122-1190), Thường Chiếu (? -1203), Thông Sư (1203-1228), Hiện Quang (? -1221), etc.¹¹

Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn also did not agree with many previous researchers and Buddhologists, who asserted that Zen sect prevailed among other Buddhist sects in the period of Đại Việt's Feudal state. Because, among the three Zen sect lineages listed in the book *Famous Zen Masters in the Zen Garden (Thiền Uyển Tập Anh)*, except the Thảo Đường sect, which was not clear of its lineage and school, only Vô Ngôn Thông (Chinese: 無言通, 759?-826) sect was an accurate Zen sect, while Vinitaruci sect mainly cultivated Tantrism. Including many high ranking monks who belonged to Vô Ngôn Thông sect but their activities clearly showed the way of Tantric practicing, such as: Khuông Việt, Đa Bảo, Không Lộ, Tịnh Giới, Giác Hải,...¹².

2. Achievements of study on the history of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century

History of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century is about a modern period. This period has been being studied much by researchers of religious studies, because of the strong development of Vietnamese Buddhism in this period. On the other hand, their studies on Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century also contribute to fill the gaps remaining in many published works¹³.

The first stage in the development of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century studied by researchers of religious studies were those works on the Buddhist revival movement from various aspects, such as: The cause of the movement; Its basic contents; Its typical Buddhist figures; Its characteristics and roles.

The reasons for the Buddhist revival movement in Vietnam are divided into *objective reason/subjective one*, and *external reason/internal one*.

Regarding the objective reason, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn and Lê Tâm Đắc together have clarified the international context through the

academic and ideological East and West dialogues, between scientific disciplines and religions during the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century; the debates between Buddhism and other religions, especially with Catholic; the appearance of socialism with the birth of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union); The important role of some typical international Buddhist figures such as Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907, United States), Anagarika Dharmapala (1864 - 1934, Sri Lanka), T'ai Hsu (1889-1947, China), Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956, India). These two authors concentrated on domestic scientific circumstance, including issues: The patriotic Confucianism's perspectives about the role of religion for social development, the nation's self-reliance, and in which Buddhism was chosen as the unique case in that time; the appearance of many new religions, as Cao Đài religion (in the South); the important role of some typical Buddhist figures: Venerable Khánh Hòa and Thiện Chiếu (in the South), Venerable Giác Tiên, and lay Buddhists: Lê Đình Thám (in the Central), Trí Hải and Thiệu Chử (in the North).

Regarding subjective reason, these authors deeply analyzed the issues: the Buddhist adaptation of the water - rice farmer's traditional belief and spiritual ceremony; the moral degradation and no clear religious path for monks; the serious loss of solidarity among Buddhist sect lineages; the pride of Buddha's traditional doctrine and practice, and of national Buddhist tradition, especially the Buddhist thought of "engaging into life" under the Trần dynasty¹⁴.

While Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn presented his researches on the system of Buddhist revival movement in all three regions (three centers of the country: Nam Bộ, Huế and Hà Nội), not only up to 1951 - the year of establishment of Vietnam Buddhist General Association, but further until 1963 - the "Dharma disaster" in the South, Lê Tâm Đắc concentrated more on Buddhist revival movement in the Northern region in the period 1924-1954¹⁵.

The basic content of the Buddhist revival movement in the North was mentioned by Lê Tâm Đắc in four aspects: Revivals of Buddhist

teachings, methods for practice and the Sangha's living; Revival of the Sangha organization; Revival of Buddhist education; and Revival of rituals and worship places.

On the Revivals of Buddhist teachings, methods for practice and the Sangha's living, according to Lê Tâm Đắc, the fundamental contents of Buddhist teachings argued by Buddhologist in the North was about: comparing Buddhist teachings with natural sciences; re-explaining some contents of the Buddhist teachings; re-explaining the Buddha and Buddhism,... aiming to avoid all misunderstandings about Buddhism, thereby hope to correct and develop a new Buddhist background. According to Buddhist scripture and practice, the Buddhologist in the North did not only argued about the teachings, but also proposed solutions in order to escape the dogma existed in the long history of Vietnamese Buddhism, suggested new ways for practice, activities, enlightenment for sentient beings, that are suitable for the development and change of secular society¹⁶.

On the Revival of the Sangha organization, Lê Tâm Đắc emphasized that for the first time in history of Vietnam Buddhism there had been a fundamental renewal of the sangha organization. The traditional paradigm of sangha consisted of the commune sect (tổ đình) or monastic sect (son môn) which were all equal in religious practice and training monks. That sangha paradigm have existed trans-over administrative boundaries (communes and provinces). It would be called as "horizontal organization of Buddhist sangha". Today they are called as Buddhist Associations / Buddhist studies Association, which are divided into levels from high to low: the upper manages the lower levels, the subordinate depends on the higher levels, and each one belonged to certain administrative boundaries, but with multiplicity of both monks and laymen, even non-Buddhists. This is called as "vertical organization of Buddhist Sangha"¹⁷.

Regarding the Revival of Buddhist education, Lê Tâm Đắc asserted that thanks to the Buddhist revival movement, Buddhist education in Vietnam has not limited in monasteries or communes, or only during the *Varsa* (the three month period in rainy season), but

came to establish Buddhist schools in a new way systematically, from elementary to high school, including harmonious combination between teaching Buddhist and non-Buddhist scriptures, between Buddhist teachings and secular knowledge, between advance training and depth expertise training. Further, to serve Buddhist revival movement at present and for long-term, the Buddhist education in this period also aims at the new direction of training secular jobs for monks and nuns, and sending them abroad to study¹⁸.

Regarding the *Revival of Buddhist ritual and place of worship*, Lê Tâm Đắc thought that about those reforms of rituals done by Buddhist organizations in the North Vietnam, some of them were only in thought, some has been being into reality, but all of them aim to improve the popular understanding of Buddhism, the better Buddhist way of life, to repel the superstitions which were considered as one of the important reasons caused Buddhist degeneracy, with expectation to see Buddhism developing good and healthy. The revival of Buddhist organizations' worship places took place in the North Vietnam during that time, but not yet thoroughly, without high results as done by the Buddhist organizations in the Central Vietnam¹⁹; however, there have been some remarkable results, such as: pagodas and Buddhist structures were restored or newly constructed in the period of 1934-1954, thanks to the Venerable Thich Tri Hai's important role²⁰.

Having analyzed the above basic contents, Lê Tâm Đắc pointed out the characteristics and role of the Buddhist revival movement in the North Vietnam. Accordingly, there were three main characteristics of this movement: the first, the active and important participation of young monks, lay Buddhist and Buddhologist; the second, well manage the system of libraries, translations as well as dissemination of Buddhist scriptures; the third, the lack of thoroughness in the content for activities of the movement. These three characteristics are mainly depended on conditions of geohistory, geoculture, geopolitics of the North Vietnam in the first half of the 20th century, including the influence of international Buddhist revival movement.

The role of the Buddhist revival movement in the North Vietnam was reflected in two aspects: for the development of Vietnamese Buddhism, and for the common cause of nation liberation.

For the development of Vietnamese Buddhism, in comparing Buddhist revival movement among the three centers of the country (North, Central, South) on some fundamental contents such as the organization of the Sangha, the training monks, and the promotion of Dharma, it was necessary to emphasize that in the North there were some more prominent roles such as promoting the idea of “worldly Buddhism”, appreciating the position and role of Vietnamese Buddhism in international Buddhist arena, making a significant contribution to the event of Buddhist unification all over the country in 1951. For the cause of national liberation, the role of Buddhist revival movement in the North, in the early period (1924-1934) was expressed through wholehearted monks’ activities and speeches. Obviously that reviving Buddhism was a way for national salvation; as the social charities before 1945; especially their participation in the resistance war against French colonial in the period 1946-1954²¹.

Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn highlighted the role of Vietnamese Buddhism for the cause of national liberation and national construction in the 20th century. Besides, it is the role of participating in the resistance against foreign invaders and successful reunification of the Fatherland. In this period Vietnamese Buddhism also participated in national construction, social transformation and building a modern Buddhist lifestyle; participated in modernization of the country as a driving force for the development and improvement of human personality.

Regarding the first role, Buddhism fulfilled its mission for the Fatherland and the nation when it also shared its function in the national resistance against foreign invaders. During the resistance against the French colonial, many monks had contributed their parts, indirectly or directly, in the resistance. However, in that resistance their appearance as fighters with fighting guns was not as typical symbol of Vietnamese Buddhist monks. A large number of Buddhist monks had participated in the resistance indirectly, such as by

avoiding cooperation with foreign invaders; especially, in those military occupied areas, the Buddhist monks continued nurturing the resistance in the temples/pagodas secretly, or creatively cooperated with foreign invaders but for the aim to preserve the national religions and national souls. In the resistance against the US invader, the Vietnamese Buddhist monks had their own way to contribute to the nation. It was the movement against Ngô Đình Diệm's government, with many glorious examples who sacrificed their lives for the Dharma, for the Nation, typically, the most Venerable Thích Quảng Đức. There are also many monks who contributed to the national movement on behalf of the third force - the Vietnam National and Democratic forces in the South, typically the Venerable Thích Đôn Hậu²².

Regarding the second role, Buddhism has made its important contributions to national construction, social transformation, to establish and build a modern Buddhist lifestyle. The Vietnamese Buddhist achievements would be divided into stages with different characteristics, that depended on the political, social and cultural institutions of each region, and the internal efforts of each Buddhist sangha, especially the Viet's Buddhism and the Khmer's Theravada Buddhism.

In the North, before 1975 Buddhism had participated actively in the struggle for national independence and unification; while in the South, especially after the Buddhist event in 1963, Buddhism had become a social force that all governments in that time had to take it into account. The Buddhist participation in preserving the national tradition, upholding the moral examples, the ability to assemble the masses according to Buddhist standard is one of the dominant aspects. Since 1981, with the birth of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Buddhist monks in Vietnam have promoted their role in participating in national construction, social transformation and establishing a modern Buddhist lifestyle; and together with other religions, to contribute to creating and strengthening a moral life for society²³.

Regarding the third role, the participation of Buddhism in modernization of the nation as a driving force for the development and

perfection of human personality both for present as well as for future. Nowadays, in Vietnam society, there are two main aspects that Buddhism can contribute well: as a moral motive for development, Buddhist moral can contribute to perfect human personality. But this role requires Buddhism more harsh with itself. Specifically, Buddhism will have to innovate itself before it can engage in social construction²⁴.

By researching on Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century, Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc concentrates on the issue of organization and operation of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha from 1986 up to now. The authoress affirmed that the establishment of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha is indispensable as the synchronous progress of Buddhism along with the development of the country and the era. It is the first time Buddhism in Vietnam has a Sangha (church) with a complete system of administration from the central to the local level. Over time, its organization has been much improved, especially the development of departments inside the Central Committee of the Buddhist Sangha, with its coordination, both vertically and horizontally, between the Central and the local organizations, and among the Central Committee's departments,... met the requirements from reality, that brought many achievements for Vietnamese Buddhism today²⁵.

According to Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc, since 1986 all Buddhist activities have proven the maturity of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Buddhist thought has been penetrating deeper into the spiritual life of all classes of people. Vietnamese Buddhism has integrated with the common tendency of world development in the era of science-technology and information technology; effectively taken advantage of modern Media to propagate Vietnamese Buddhism to both local and foreign Buddhist communities, as well as to all Buddhists over the world. The system of Buddhist education has gradually improved and provided the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha many good generations of monks and nuns with their sufficient religious and worldly knowledges, in order to serve the Buddhist Sangha's affairs, as well as for the propaganda of Dharma nationwide. The Buddhist engaged-life activities (especially Buddhist social charities) have given more

effective influence in society, contributing its parts to the Party and the Government to solve pressing issues in the context of national economy with many difficulties²⁶.

Regarding foreign affairs, Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc mentioned that the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha's international exchange focused on the four main contents, such as: participating in activities for peace; participation in activities for culture, education, environmental protection and social charities; expanding international cooperation for mutual learning from each other; strengthen the connection with overseas Vietnamese Buddhists. These activities have helped the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha reinforce its role among the world Buddhist associations. After its establishment, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has close ties with socio-political organizations of the government, as a member of the Vietnam Fatherland Front. On the other side, according to its strategy of engaging into life, participating in socio-political organizations also helps Vietnam Buddhist Sangha advances in contributing its voice to solving social problems²⁷.

3. Achievements of study on philosophy of Vietnamese Buddhism

This tendency of fundamental study is specially considered by religious researchers "in order to find out the characteristics of Vietnamese Buddhism as its religious product formed on the basis of indigenous spirituality and beliefs mixed with imported religions"²⁸.

Nguyễn Duy Hinh asserted that during *the period Việt-India Buddhism (from the 2nd to the 5th centuries)*, there was a development on logical issue around the combination of Mahayana thought (before Nagarjuna) with beliefs of indigenous people and also with the Chinese thoughts on humanities (jien) and filial piety (xiao) that Chinese culture has popularized for centuries. And Compassion, human being Enlightenment, Zen, Mindfulness, and Divine are characteristics constructed on the vision of the "Single vehicle" (sa. Ekayana) of Mahayana Buddhism²⁹.

In the period of the Viet-Chinese Buddhism (from the 6th to the 10th centuries), according to the thought of *Nothingness* preached by Venerable Vinitaruci and Venerable Pháp Hiền Buddhism in Vietnam

began develop the ontology of Mahayana Buddhism; then according to the thought of “Mind sect” introduced by Zen masters Wu Yantong and Cầm Thành, Chinese Zen Buddhism was imported into and Zen Buddhism really started in Vietnam from here³⁰.

In the period of Đại Việt Buddhism (from the 11th to the 14th centuries), Buddhist thought of Prajna occupied the upper position and was sustainable, while other foreign systems of thoughts were also accepted. However, in Đại Việt time there was not only the Trúc Lâm Zen sect but also other Buddhist ones had formed and developed under the Lý dynasty. The Pure Land (Western paradise of great bliss) sect was mentioned in Buddhist scriptures as *Amitabha Sutra* and *Longevity Sutra*, but it was not outstanding enough to be a representative of an independent Buddhist sect in that time. It were the same with Tiantai (Ja: Tendai) and Huayan (Ja: Kegong) sects, they also did not become separated sects. Since Trúc Lâm Zen sect establishment, the thought of “Just in mind, becomes Buddha” has become the main stream, not only at that time, but also in later periods³¹.

The period of revival and renewal of Buddhism (from the 15th to the 20th centuries), Buddhist thought with the national spirit at different levels, in certain times expressed its characteristic of anti-aggression. Buddhism actively participated in the struggle for national liberation. The aim of peace and patriotism was the Buddhist main purpose in the 20th century, and even today. Buddhist thought of compassion, salvation for all sufferings expressing by the worshipping the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, Amitabha Buddha, and reciting their names (the Pure Land sect) were combined with the idea of building a rich country and strong nation for a good religion and happy life³².

In addition, Nguyễn Duy Hinh did not only study the Vietnamese Buddhist philosophy through historical periods, but he also clarified this issue with Buddhist sects, such as Dâu monastic sect, and Kiến Sơ monastic sect (Wu Yantong Zen sect), and Yên Tử monastic sect (Trúc Lâm Zen sect) through the philosophical thoughts of these three sub-sects’ famous Zen masters.

With the Dâu monastic sect's philosophy: Right from the beginning, the Dâu monastic sect's philosophy had been one of the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, so its ontology, epistemology, and theory of liberation were all from Northern transmitted Buddhist thought. However, there had been not any monks in this monastic sect mentioning about Mahayana Buddhist terms, such as: *Alaija vijnana* (the 8th consciousness), *Tathagatagarbha* (the nature of the Tathagata), *Atman* (small self/ego), *Brahman* (universal self/ego), *Sopadisesa Nirvana* (Nirvana in this life with remainder), *Anupadisesa Nirvana* (Nirvana without remainder, the final Nirvana), *Pure Land* (the celestial realm or pure abode of Amita Buddha or Bodhisattva). Later, some monks in the 11th century referred to the issue of *Birth - Death* (Samsara: endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth) as the natural law of all things, and *Mind* as the treasure of human beings. These terms were clearly bearing the mark of Chinese Zen Buddhism. Dâu monastic sect had proposed terms *Hồn* (soul), *Thiên* (God/Heaven); then later this sect had accepted both Zen Buddhist thought and Tantric Buddhist thought, but its thought did not completely stereotype the Chinese Buddhist thought. It was the characteristics of three-sect integration³³.

With the Kiến Sơ monastic sect's philosophy: the Kiến Sơ monastic sect's philosophy of Buddhist Zen sect (also called the *Mind* sect) was more clear than Dâu monastic sect's one. Before the 1st century, when the country was not independent, the influence of Chinese Zen Buddhism introduced by Wu Yantong was relatively developed and occupied the upper position in Kiến Sơ monastic sect. When Đại Việt was established, there was the integration of the Dâu monastic sect with Kiến Sơ monastic one. However under the further influence of the three sects (Zen, Pure Land, Tantrism), the Kiến Sơ monastic sect was no longer as a pure one of the Mind sect. The phenomenon of Three sects integration had become more and more obvious in the case of Trúc Lâm sect, although it was still influenced much by Ma-tsu Tao-I's thought about "Buddha just the Mind"³⁴.

With the Trúc Lâm sect's philosophy: Its ontology includes: Emptiness, Tathatā, Bhuūtatathatā (Chinese: 真如, Vietnamese: Chân

Như), and Mind; Its epistemology consists of: Prajñā, i.e. perception of “the whole ultimate Emptiness”; while accepting the Ma-stu’s thought about “Mind” Trúc Lâm sect proposed the term “Heart” which more concentrated the nature of human being, without stereotyping completely Ma-stu’s conception of “Buddha just the Mind”. According to the epistemology of Three-sect consistency (Tam giáo nhất trí), Trúc Lâm sect accepted the content of Prajna under the influence from Ma-stu and Lin-chi sects. Its theory of liberation includes: liberation from sufferings (caused by worldly regreed and desire) by keeping the pure good mind with good faith; life and death are all belong to the nature law, so no need to say about Nirvana; according to Buddhist Zen’s philosophy about non-duality, the Trúc Lâm sect considered both Nirvana and Hell as the same. By learning and practicing without dogma, the Trúc Lâm sect was much influenced by the Three-sects, but in clining to tendency of engaging into worldly life, although it also considered the monastic way of life influenced by Taoism (religion). It is impossible to say that Trúc Lâm belonged to Mind sect or Lin-chi sect. However, Trúc Lâm belonged both the Pure Land sect and the Buddhist Zen sect, in other word, it was the unification of Pure Land and Zen together. That was the Trúc Lâm sect’s characteristic and vitality, which made the Trúc Lâm sect different from those ones from India or China³⁵.

The philosophical thoughts of those three Buddhist sects mentioned above were the academic Buddhism. Popular Buddhism was not interested in philosophical contents in the scriptures, but more interested in a short conclusion with four words “save from sufferings, disasters”. Due to the such save from sufferings, so that in Vietnam Buddha is considered as saint/God, and Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara are worshiped more largely than Sakya Muni Buddha.

According to Nguyễn Duy Hinh, Buddhist philosophy has provided the Vietnamese people a super-abstract way of thinking quite different from Confucianism and Taoism, to broad the Vietnamese people vision and wisdom which can help them to escape from Confucianism, Taoism of the Northern feudalism. Vietnamese

Buddhism had trained a national intellectual class who contributed much to the independent Đại Việt Nation. Although influenced by Chinese Buddhism, but Vietnamese Buddhist intellectuals were always avoid dogma. Academic Buddhist intellectuals of Vietnam were not controlled by the abundant Chinese Buddhism. Vietnamese Buddhism did not transform to be a branch of Chinese Buddhism. Having gained the national independence, Lý - Trần Buddhism clearly expressed its nationality and its contributions for Đại Việt's politics, culture and arts, that produced a national cultural tradition. It is unshakable by any "globalized religion"³⁶.

4. Achievements of study on characteristics of Vietnamese Buddhism

While some major religions in the world, as Catholicism, has the unison in doctrine, canon, worship objects, worshiping facilities, rituals, etc. but Buddhism is not the same. Due to its particular characteristic of Pratīyasamutpāda (all dharmas (phenomena) arise in dependence upon other dharmas) and the perspective of engaging into the worldly life, Buddhism has changed to suit the social context in which Buddhism exists, and to suit indigenous conditions of different societies, countries, regions, locals and ethnic groups where it was introduced. Therefore, to clarify the Buddhist characteristics of each society, country, region, ethnic... in order to clear out its universal characteristics in the unity of Buddhism are always interested by researchers around the world. In Vietnam, this issue is particularly interested by researchers. From aspect of religious studies, Vietnamese Buddhism has the following basic characteristics:

Folk characteristic/"Folk Buddhism" written by Nguyễn Duy Hinh³⁷ or *Popular characteristic*/"Popular Buddhism" written by Nguyễn Quốc³⁸. These characteristics are more prominent in comparing with Chinese Buddhist characteristics, especially in the first period when Buddhism was preached and developed in China.

According to Nguyễn Duy Hinh, royal court Buddhism is a typical characteristic of Chinese Buddhism, because in the early stages, Indian monks were invited by the Chinese Emperors to the royal court to help them in Buddhist activities. Most of the activities of Chinese

Buddhism in this period, such as pilgrimage, building factory of translation and printing Buddhist scriptures were done by noble intellectuals under the Emperors' edicts. Therefore, Buddhism quickly developed in China as an academic movement. Buddhism is not only as an object for religious belief, but also as a subject for scientific research. Pagodas were in the style of royal court architecture. Monks also have philosophical manner. It means, the characteristics of Chinese Buddhism were academic, intellectual, noble, and would be more academic than pure religious³⁹.

Different from China, the period under Chinese domination, Buddhism was introduced into Luy Lâu (also called Dâu region) in Giao Châu. Sĩ Nhiếp (士變; 137 - 226) also called Sĩ Vương, or Sĩ Tiếp - a Confucian intellectual - did not invite Indian monks as the same way as Chinese emperors did. In Luy Lâu, Buddhism was directly introduced into the common people. Dâu (name of a pagoda) was name of the first Buddhist monastic sect, which was formed initially by a Vietnamese female believer called Man Nương together with an Indian venerable monk (upādhyāya) called Khâu Đà La (Sanskrit: Kaudinya). Product of this Vietnamese-Indian religious marriage made a system of all “female Buddha” including: Shining Stone Buddha, Dharma Cloud Buddha, Dharma Wind Buddha, Dharma Rain Buddha, Dharma Thunder Buddha. Female feature is overwhelming. It is the common characteristic of all kinds of indigenous belief in Vietnam, different from in India and China.

Nguyễn Duy Hinh emphasized that the Vietnamese Buddhist “characteristic of sacred fertility” which was recorded through the story about female follower (called Man Nương) had a child with an Indian Venerable (upādhyāya) called Kaudinya (Khâu Đà La). There was another similar case about Từ Đạo Hạnh with a female Buddhist believer. This characteristic was found neither in Indian Buddhism nor in Chinese Buddhism. The reason for this phenomenon was of the characteristic of matriarch / nature of Mother as the Viet's spiritual kernel spirit, which has been preserved in folk culture deeply. Accordingly, “the Viet's folk thinking had created a legend (Man

Nương - Kaudinya) which was really familiar for lay people, but not acceptable for the monastic ones”⁴⁰.

According to Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn, the Buddhist “method of flexible missionary”, especially done by the Mahayana Buddhist sects, was the fundamental reason for the characteristic of “common people” in Vietnam Buddhism, the typical cases as an Indian Venarable Kaudinya (Khâu Đà La) and female follower (Man Nương) at Dâu Pagoda in the early centuries AD. Based on the narrative of Kaudinya, as the same as other earlier legend of Chử Đồng Tử (Chinese: 褚童子), it is possible to generalize that Buddhism penetrated first in the low class of common people when Giao Châu was under foreign domination so that in the early period Buddhism was a common religion, and gradually it became getting more attention from the high classes of nobles and Chinese rulers in Vietnam⁴¹.

Further explaining the reason for the Buddhist characteristic of “popular / common”, and with his approval of Lê Mạnh Thát’s data and views Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn asserted that the early Buddhist scriptures available in Giao Châu, such as the *Cựu Tập Thí Dụ* (*Old Scripture of Various Examples*) and *Tập Thí Dụ* (*Scripture of Various Examples*), which were not specially for the Chinese ruling class, but just for the ordinary Vietnamese. On the other hand, the contents of the *Liudu ji jing* (Vietnamese: *Lục độ Tập Kinh*) (*A Scripture on the Collection of the Six Perfections*)), one of the first Buddhist scriptures in Vietnam, with the deep imprint of Mahayana Buddhism influenced by the ideal of Bodhisattva salvation not only for the ordained Buddhists but also for all sentient beings. In particular, the Bodhisattva teachings appeared for the Vietnamese people in the context of a country dominated by Chinese colonial. It was a synonym of the liberating ideal for the colonized people as their self-liberating internal power, so that it was easily accepted and deeply penetrated, because the colonized people had utilized that ideal to struggle against the Chinese colonial⁴².

The characteristic of unify: About this characteristic, Nguyễn Duy Hinh commented that Vietnam Buddhism is diverse in sects (Buddhist Zen sect, Pure Land sect, Tantric sect) and branches (Northern

introduced branch (Mahayana), Southern introduced branch (Theravada)), however the Buddhist follower, the common people or high educated one, the ordained Buddhist or layman, who belong to any sect or monastery, all of them were not much interested in concrete teachings. Only few high-ranking intellectual monks as leader of some special monastic sects should had clear understanding about the difference of Buddhist sects.

In China, the difference between Buddhist sects was an important problem, because the monks have been considered as a philosopher who was on behalf of his own Buddhist sect to discuss the Buddhist philosophical issue seriously. Even within Buddhist Zen sects, there were hard argues between the Lin-chi sect (臨濟宗), Cáo-dòng sect (曹洞宗), and Yún-mén sect (雲門宗). But there had not been such situation in Vietnam. Vietnamese Buddhists belonged to various sects, but the follower did not argue the doctrine, or fight for the doctrine, so that all those sects or monastic sects did not reflect as the internal division or disunity in the Sangha. Both Lin-chi sect and Cáo-dòng sect together belonged to Buddhist Zen sect which developed both in South Vietnam (Đàng Trong) and North Vietnam (Đàng Ngoài), but they did not struggle to have better influence than the other. Vietnam Buddhism there had never been any struggle for doctrine or for the power within a the same sect, but also never between different sects such as Zen, Pure Land and Tantra.

Generally, before the 20th century, Vietnam Buddhism was not a unity from the aspect of orthodox scripture, i.e. about its origin, but there was not any conflict about the organization, because at that time there had not been any unified organization, all sects and monastic sects together existed and developed independently. Since the beginning of the 20th century Buddhism has reformed and appeared the Buddhist social association, so that the issue of organization has become more important than the issue of original scripture. Therefore, in this period Buddhism was in the especial situation: unified but not a real unity, quite different from the previous period, it was not unified but in unity⁴³.

Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn thoroughly analyzed the characteristic of unity of Buddhism throughout Vietnam history, especially in the 20th century, in three aspects: on the basis of the unified country; on the basis of the unified Buddhist teachings; and on the basis of their social participation.

On the first aspect, in general, the unity of Buddhism always kept company with the Vietnam historical progress, and also with historical developments of ethnic groups, in particular. Generally, the path to unification of Vietnamese Buddhism is not flat and smooth. The premise for this unification has not always been clarified in its content and implemented immediately afterwards. The plan of unifying Vietnamese Buddhism in 1951 was an example. The six Buddhist organizations' desire of unifying Vietnamese Buddhism at that time was so obvious, but they had not concentrated on the specific content of unification, such as they did not mention the unification of all components within the country, because of the absence of some special sects, such as the Khmer Theravada Buddhism, the Viet Theravada Buddhism, The Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, and the Viet Collecting Alms sect. The important base for this unification of Vietnamese Buddhism was the unification of the nation in 1975. Six years after the national reunification, there was the most comprehensive unity of all Buddhist sects in the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha⁴⁴.

In the second aspect, the unification of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha on the basis of Buddha's teachings had become an urgent problem. Because, in its long history of more than 2,500 years, Buddhism had been being existed in its discrepancies leading to traditional disconnection while it was no longer within one country, even in ancient India there had been Buddhist argues that lead to great organizational divisions. Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn said that the Buddha's teachings are appropriate for all living condition, every human status, each social stratum. It encourages human to the utmost and positive attitude, unless the listener did exactly what he (or she) understood, self-enlightened and made others did the same. It encourages real action rather than reasoning or rationality. So, it helps people live together rather than tears them into pieces with hatred and discrimination⁴⁵.

In the third aspect, the Buddhist principle is nonviolence (Ahimsa) and acclimatization to the environment in which it exists. Buddhism is not a political ideology. Buddhism does not argue for a specific action aiming at governing the nation, but aiming at the individuals with their shortcomings and imperfections. However Buddhism is not a hard-to-dry thing. It is not involved in life, but engaging in life. Buddhism has been out of its doctrinal limitation to become itself as a religion without form, to be called the Human Being Buddhism. Buddhism will unify on the basis of participating society instead of run away from society. However, in order to participating society, Buddhism had to depend on the Buddha's teachings, which need to be updated, developed in the modern time, as well as corrected its own deficiencies in organization⁴⁶.

In addition to the above two basic characteristics, the religious researchers also pointed out some other ones of Vietnamese Buddhism. According to Nguyễn Duy Hinh, the other characteristics of Vietnamese Buddhism were Vietnam is the meeting place of the two branchess - the Northern transmission and Southern transmission from India abroad⁴⁷; unification of Zen and Practicing teachings; together in practice Zen and Pure Land; mix of Zen - Pure Land - Tantrism (that expressed through practice, worship, ritual,...)⁴⁸; deeply nationalistic (originally from folk and deeply ingrained in the masses)⁴⁹. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn concentrated on analyzing other characteristics of Vietnamese Buddhism such as Characteristic of local region - ethnic (the difference of Buddhism depending to specific region and ethnic)⁵⁰; heterogeneous complex (inside Buddhism itself from aspect of the social - ethnic background, that formed through long history, and the historical heritage; the relationship within Buddhist sects; the relationship between Buddhism and other religions)⁵¹.

5. Achievements of study on characteristics of the brilliant monks and great laymen in Vietnam

Along with the researchers on Buddhist studies, philosophy, history, literature,... the religious reasearchers were very interested in

studying the brilliant monks and laymen (Upasaka) of Vietnam Buddhism, especially during the 20th century, they had great contributions to the religion and the nation. Here are some typical achievements.

At the scientific conference on “*The Monk, Thiện Chiếu - A Communist Soldier (1898 - 1974)*” hosted by the Institute of Religious Studies, on May 9, 2003 in Hanoi, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn, in his presentation, studied two important periods in Thiện Chiếu’s life. The first period was of 1930-40, a very young Thiện Chiếu had abundant background of Buddhist knowledge, strong fighting ability but full of expressiveness. The second period was after 1954, when Thiện Chiếu engaged his life in anti-French activities with his desire to combine Buddhist “monastery life” with “worldly life” in order to build the nation and home country as wide for the world humanity.

Continuously, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn emphasized the same characteristic of monk Thiện Chiếu and layman Thiệu Chử - Nguyễn Hữu Kha, they were two outstanding figures in the Buddhist revival movement in the first half of the 20th century in two different regions in Vietnam. Accordingly, under the influence of international Buddhism, they both pointed out the key points for a new system of Buddhism: the unification of Northern transmission and Primitive Buddhism; reorganization of the Sangha; improvement of both Buddhist and scientific knowledge which can help to illuminate those modern problems of Buddhism in relation with science, such as interpreting scientifically about the Buddha’s historical life. By doing so, they both tried to break the negative misunderstand about considering Buddhism as a superstitious religion, alienated from life and lifeless. It is worth mentioning that they both wanted to adjust Buddhism to meet the nation’s demands, and for the nation it needs to be adjusted⁵².

In the Scientific conference on *Saman Trī Hāi with the Buddhist Revival Movement in Vietnam* hosted by the Institute of Vietnam Buddhist studies (Vietnam Buddhist Sangha) and the Institute of Religious Studies on June 25 on the occasion of Venerable Thích Trí

Hải's the 100th birthday, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn had pointed out two important contributions of this brilliant monk for the Buddhist revival in Vietnam in general, and in the North of Vietnam since 1920, in particular. The first one was his mobilization, establishment and leadership of Buddhist organizations which were only local organizations such as: the Lục Hòa Tịnh Lữ (means the association of people with six perfections of harmony and mindfulness (1930), Phật học Tùng thư (means the general library for Buddhist studies) (1932), Mahayana Buddhist Association (1934), Vietnam Buddhist Association (1946); including those national organizations such as the General Association of Vietnam Buddhism (Tổng hội Phật giáo Việt Nam) (1951), The Vietnamese Original Buddhist Sangha (Giáo hội Tăng già Nam Việt) (1952). The second one was his contribution in building the internal relationship of Buddhist Sangha and the relationship between Buddhist organizations and other social ones; especially his contribution for the cohesion of Vietnamese Buddhism with international Buddhism, typically the World Buddhist Fellowship (WFB)⁵³.

One year later, in another scientific conference the occasion of the 28th anniversary of Venerable Thich Tri Hai's Nirvana, hosted by Hải Phòng City Buddhist Association, Hải Phòng City Association of History and Sciences, Hai Phong City Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, and the Institute of Religious Studies, in Hai Phong city on July 17, 2007, Lê Tâm Đắc had introduced another remarkable contributions of the brilliant monks for the Buddhist revival movement in the North of Vietnam in the first half of the 20th century. It was his reform about the places of worship, mainly in pagodas designed and reconstructed or newly built by himself, typically the Quán Sứ pagoda in Hanoi (rebuilt in 1938) and Buddhism pagoda (now called Nam Hải pagoda) in Hải Phòng (built in 1954)⁵⁴. In addition to that, also according to Lê Tâm Đắc, Venerable Thích Trí Hải had four typical contributions for the Buddhist revival movement in the first half of the 20th century, such as actively mobilizing the movement of revive Buddhism in the North of Vietnam in the period 1924-1934⁵⁵; his significant contribution to reconstructions and new constructions of foundations of Buddhism; his effective participation

in social work of charity; his introduces, compilations and translations of Buddhist scriptures⁵⁶.

At the scientific conference on *Venerable Tổ Liên (1903-1977) for the Career of Constructing the Vietnamese Buddhism and the World Buddhism* hosted by the Institute of Vietnam Buddhist Studies, the Journal of Buddhist Culture (Vietnam Buddhist Sangha) and the Institute of Religious Studies on March 30, 2007 at Quán Sứ Pagoda (Hanoi), Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn highlighted the significant contribution of Venerable Tổ Liên for the resistance war against French colonial in the period 1945-1954 through his activities during the time visited India and attended the World Association of Buddhist Fellowships in Sri Lanka together with the Vietnamese Buddhist delegation in 1950; and his stay in the dangerous occupied area, for instance his living in Quán Sứ Pagoda, in Hanoi capital, in order to silently preserve the continuous Dharma of Buddhism during the harsh war time, as well as to support Hồ Chí Minh resistance government⁵⁷. Lê Tâm Đắc's presentation at this conference focused on the Venerable Tổ Liên's important contribution for the unification of Vietnamese Buddhism in 1951 as one of the founders of the World Buddhist Association (WFB)⁵⁸.

In a series of scientific conferences aimed to honor the brilliant Vietnamese monks with their contributions for the Dharma and the Nation in the 20th century, on May 18, 2009, at Vọng Cung pagoda in Nam Định province, the Executive Council of Buddhism in Nam Định province together with the Institute for Religious Studies and the Institute of Vietnam Buddhist Studies together hosted a conference on *The Most Venerable Tuệ Tạng (Thích Tâm Thi): The First Supreme Patriarch in The Vietnamese Original Buddhist Sangha*. In his presentation, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn clarified the fact that Venerable Tuệ Tạng was honored and voted to be the high chairman by all representatives of The Vietnamese Original Buddhist Sangha from the three regions of the country at the National Conference of The Vietnamese Original Buddhist Sangha held at Quán Sứ Pagoda in Hanoi in 1952. According to the author, the entire monks' and nuns'

votes for Venerable Tuệ Tạng were as their self-awareness and harmony honour for him, and their highly appraising for his virtue and immeasurable merit, as for the most superior Venerable. The base on which all monks and nuns throughout the country had voted for Venerable Tuệ Tạng the utmost leader in The Vietnamese Original Buddhist Sangha was the trustworthy qualities of a true Venerable monk expressed through his whole life of practice with really strict observance⁵⁹.

In the same scientific conference Lê Tâm Đắc's presentation also introduced the Venerable Tuệ Tạng's contribution for the cause of training Buddhist resources, not only for Mahayana Buddhism in the North but also for other Buddhist organizations in the whole country. His contributions in the positions as the Director of the Buddhist School, the Director of Buddhist Education, Teacher of Buddhist precepts, and the First Supreme Patriarch in The Vietnamese Original Buddhist Sangha were: proposing the program of Buddhist studies to be applied at Buddhist schools in the North of Vietnam; mobilizing funds for maintain the activities of training at Buddhist schools, especially in difficult times; harmoniously combining the traditional training methods with the modern ones in Buddhist schools, and between domestic training methods and overseas training methods; paying importance attention to training young monks, in which, besides basic training program, also aiming at advanced program, intensive program, secular vocational program; and his idea of building a school together with a lecture hall in each pagoda⁶⁰.

In addition to the above mentioned brilliant monks, the religious researchers also try to clarify other famous Vietnamese Buddhist figures that had important contributions for Buddhist Dharma and the nation. These were the writings of Nguyễn Duy Hình, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn, Lê Tâm Đắc about the monk Thiều Chửu Nguyễn Hữu Kha⁶¹; articles written by Võ Phương Lan, Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc, Lê Tâm Đắc about Venerable Kim Cương Tử⁶²; articles by Nguyễn Hồng Dương, Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn about Venerable Thích Đức Nhuận⁶³ etc.

6. Achievements of study on the Buddhist values and their impact

In the recent years, scientists of the Institute of Religious Studies (in VASS) have paid attention to study Buddhist values (compassion, tolerance, equality, filial, and national security, people protection) and the functions of Buddhism (social connections, social support, social adjustment) for Vietnam society; as well as to clarify the impact of Buddhism through these religious values towards social life, especially for building and improving the Vietnamese's morality and lifestyle today⁶⁴. This is another important approach when studying Vietnamese Buddhism from perspective of religious studies. However, these researches are not officially published or in process of completion, so that we do not mention them in this article.

Conclusion

It is possible to remind that, during the last 25 years, Vietnam Buddhism has been studied by religious researchers from various approaches with hundreds of published works. This article only introduces the fundamental achievements Vietnam Buddhism by some main religious researchers who had been or are working at the Institute of Religious Studies of the VASS. Notably, these contents are approached and interpreted from aspect of religious studies. It means, Vietnamese Buddhism has been studied and interpreted not only by methods of social sciences and humanities, but also by three typical methods of religious studies, such as: the method of diachronic is studying the history of Buddhism, in order to understand the origin, the process of change, the development status, thereby to realize the law of development of Buddhism. The method of synchronic is the study of Buddhism in comparing with other religions to see its nature and signification, with method of induction Buddhist forms and characteristics. The method of religious phenomenology focuses on internal comparison to find out its nature, type, and the similarities and differences between Buddhism and other religions. Besides, when studying Vietnamese Buddhism, the religious researchers also pay attention to the methods which relates to the social condition of Buddhism, it means both paying attention to the effects of Buddhist

development for the cultural and social development in Vietnamese, and emphasizing the effects inverse from Vietnamese culture and society towards the existence and development of Buddhism. In particular, the purpose of those researchers study on Buddhism were not to “discern”, not to focus on Buddhism of the Viet as has claimed by many previous and present published studies. Therefore, the studies on Vietnamese Buddhism by the religious researchers are clearly objectivity, diversity and holiness; not only study on Buddhism of the Viet, but also Buddhism of the Chăm, the Khmer, and the Chinese; providing both reliable documentation and appropriate methods for those who want to learn about Vietnamese Buddhism from history to present. /.

NOTES:

- 1 On the establishment and development of religious studies in the world and in Vietnam, please see: Trương Chí Cương (translated by Trần Nghĩa Phương, 2007), *What is Religious Studies?* Hồ Chí Minh City General Publishing House; Trác Tân Bình (translated by Trần Nghĩa Phương, 2007), *Religious Explanation*, Hà Nội Publisher; Lê Tâm Đắc (2009), “Is Religious Studies Only a Specialized Subject Belong to Philosophy (According to post graduate training in Vietnam Today)”, *Religious Studies*, N^o. 2; Nguyễn Đức Sự (2010), “Friedrich Max Muller and the Proposing Concept of Religious Studies” in: Nguyễn Hồng Dương (editor), *Some Issue on Religious Studies and the Teaching of Religious Studies*, Publisher of Encyclopedia, Hanoi; Trần Anh Đào (2010), “Friedrich Max Muller and His Contribution in the Introduction of Religious Studies”, in: Nguyễn Hồng Dương (editor) *ibid*; Nguyễn Đức Lữ (2010), “Outline of the Process of Formation and Development of Religious Studies in Vietnam Today”, in: Nguyễn Hồng Dương (editor), *ibid*; Lê Tâm Đắc (2015), “Institute for Studying on Religion and Belief: 20 years of Its constructing and Developing (1995-2015)”, *Religious Studies*, N^o. 2.
- 2 Nguyễn Duy Hình (2009), *History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, Publisher of Religion & Publisher of Encyclopedia, Hanoi: 52.
- 3 Nguyễn Duy Hình (2009), *History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, *ibid*: 88-89.
- 4 The concept of “indigenous religion” used by Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn was understood as the large meaning of the term “religion”, including types of the local people’s “belief” or “folk belief”, as the way of speaking by religious researchers and in other fields of social sciences in Vietnam today.
- 5 See: Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and Roles of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century*, Publisher of Encyclopedia, Hanoi: 17-18.
- 6 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and roles of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century*, *ibid*: 18-23.

- 7 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century*, ibid: 24-34.
- 8 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century*, ibid: 34-43.
- 9 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century*, ibid: 51-166.
- 10 Nguyễn Duy Hinh (2009), *History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, ibid: 7-8.
- 11 Nguyễn Duy Hinh (2009), *History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, ibid: 231-298.
- 12 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th century*, ibid: 44-46.
- 13 Most of the previous studies on the history of Vietnamese Buddhism stopped at the Buddhist revival movement in the first half of the 20th century or the struggle movement of Southern Buddhism in 1963. Please see: Thích Thiện Ân (1965), *Vietnamese Buddhism in the Past and Now*, Đông Phương Publisher; Thích Mật Thể (1970), *Vietnam Buddhist History*, re-published and released by Minh Đức, Đà Nẵng; Văn Thanh (1974), *The Brief History of Vietnamese Buddhism (through the Ages and the Origin of Buddhist Sects)*, published by the Buddhist Institutes and Buddhist Pagodas, Saigon; Nguyễn Tài Thư (editor, 1988), *History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, Publisher of Social sciences, Hanoi; Thích Đức Nghiệp (1995), *Vietnam Buddhism*, Publisher of Ho Chi Minh City; Trần Hồng Liên (1996), *Southern Buddhism from the 17th century to 1975*, Hồ Chí Minh City Publishing House; Nguyễn Lang (2000), *Treatise of Vietnam Buddhist History*, volumes 1-2-3, Publisher of Literature, Hanoi; Thích Hải Ấn, Hà Xuân Liêm (2001), *History of Huế Buddhism*, Hồ Chí Minh City Publishing House; Lê Mạnh Thát (2003), *History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, 3 volumes, Hồ Chí Minh City General Publishing House, etc.
- 14 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and Role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th Century*, ibid: 53-63; Lê Tâm Đắc (2012), *Buddhist Revival Movement in Northern Vietnam (1924-1954)*, Publisher of National Politics, Hanoi: 11-45.
- 15 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and Role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th Century*, ibid: 63-166; Lê Tâm Đắc (2012), *Buddhist Revival Movement in Northern Vietnam (1924-1954)*, ibid: 46-223.
- 16 Lê Tâm Đắc (2012), *Buddhist Revival Movement in Northern Vietnam (1924-1954)*, ibid: 109-147.
- 17 Lê Tâm Đắc (2012), *Buddhist Revival Movement in Northern Vietnam (1924-1954)*, ibid: 148-169. Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn had profound explanations for the organization of An Nam Buddhist Association, a Buddhist organization with the most strictly organizational structure among the other Buddhist Associations / Buddhist studies Associations in Vietnam in the first half of the 20th century (see: Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and Role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th Century*, ibid: 106-112). Later, there were also notable discussions on the organizational structure of An Nam Buddhist Association and its influence on the organizational model of the current Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (see: Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc (2014), *Vietnam Buddhist Sangha since 1986*, Phương Đông Publisher, p.76-80).
- 18 Lê Tâm Đắc (2012), *Buddhist Revival Movement in Northern Vietnam (1924-1954)*, ibid: 174-188.

- 19 Xem: Lê Tâm Đắc (2009), “Buddhist Recitation Hall: A feature of Huế Buddhism in the modern period”, *Religious Studies*, N^o. 12.
- 20 Lê Tâm Đắc (2012), *Buddhist revival movement in Northern Vietnam (1924-1954)*, ibid: 189-223.
- 21 Lê Tâm Đắc (2012), *Buddhist revival movement in Northern Vietnam (1924-1954)*, ibid: 224-280
- 22 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and Role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th Century*, Publisher of Encyclopedia, Hanoi, ibid: 250-257.
- 23 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and Role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th Century*. Publisher of Encyclopedia, Hanoi, ibid: 257-265.
- 24 Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (2012), *Characteristics and Role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 20th Century*, Publisher of Encyclopedia, Hanoi, ibid: 265-268.
- 25 Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc (2014), *Vietnam Buddhist Sangha from 1986 up to now*, Phương Đông Publisher, p. 41-135.
- 26 Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc (2014), *Vietnam Buddhist Sangha from 1986 up to now*, ibid: 136-258. Nguyen Thi Minh Ngoc (2014), Vietnam Buddhist Church from 1986 up to now: 136-258.
- 27 Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc (2014), *Vietnam Buddhist Sangha from 1986 up to now*, ibid 259-325.
- 28 Nguyễn Duy Hinh (1999), *Buddhist Thought of Vietnam*, Publisher of Social Sciences: 5. It needs more explain for two works: *Buddhist Thought of Vietnam* and *The Belief of Village Tutelary Gods in Vietnam* (Publisher of Social Sciences, Hà Nội, 1996). Assoc. Prof. Nguyễn Duy Hinh was awarded the State Prize for Science and Technology in 2005. This was the first award in the field of religious studies. This event reflects the significant contribution of the religious researchers in studying Vietnamese Buddhism. For more detail, see: Lê Tâm Đắc (2005), “Group of Works on Religious Studies Obtained the State Prize on Science and Technology in 2005”, *Religious Studies*, No 5: 66-70.
- 29 Nguyễn Duy Hinh (1999), *Vietnam Buddhist Thought*, ibid: 287.
- 30 Nguyễn Duy Hinh (1999), *Vietnam Buddhist Thought*, ibid: 291, 300.
- 31 Nguyễn Duy Hinh (1999), *Vietnam Buddhist Thought*, ibid: 645; Nguyễn Duy Hinh (2009), *History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, ibid: 463-464.
- 32 Nguyễn Duy Hinh (1999), *Vietnamese Buddhist Thought*, ibid: 785-786; Nguyễn Duy Hinh (2009), *History of Vietnamese Buddhism*, ibid: 591-592.
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