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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTRODUCTION OF ENGLISH INTO BUDDHIST SCHOOLS OF VIETNAM: PROBLEMS AND ITS SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism is very popular in Vietnam, a South-East Asian country. From the past to modern age, Vietnamese Buddhism has developed considerably in various aspects including organization, education, and social welfare and so on. In this paper, I try to examine problems of introduction of English into Buddhist schools of Vietnam and give a suggested solution to that issue. I shall cover briefly the formation and development of Buddhism in Vietnam and then find out the causes and reasons why there are lots of difficulties for introducing English as the main language in Buddhist schools of Vietnam. As a result, various possible solutions to this problem will be given for development of English into Buddhist schools. Many opportunities and benefits of this process shall be analyzed for development of Vietnamese Buddhist education in globalization age

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INTRODUCTION

Buddhism in Vietnam is predominantly of the Mahayana form; the Theravada tradition is well recognized and is experiencing a growing interest especially in the practice of meditation since 1920. Buddhism entered Vietnam in two significant waves. The first was a missionary wave of Mahayana scholars from India in the first century CE. From olden days, the South China Sea border, known as Indochina, had commercial links with India and it was a popular place visited by many Indian Buddhist missionary monks on their way to China. By the end of the 2nd century, Vietnam developed a major Buddhist center, called Luy-Lau center. A number of Mahayana sutras and the Agamas were translated into Chinese script at that center. The second wave of Buddhist thought occurred about two hundred years later when Theravada was introduced in the region. Both of these schools of Buddhist thought co-existed throughout Vietnam. In the 6th and 7th century Mahayana flourished, and century reached to the peak in the 12th. When Vietnam was established as an independent state in 939 at the fall of the T'ang dynasty, it was the Buddhist monks who, being the sole true holders of knowledge, helped the first dynasties to consolidate their power.

Under the earlier Le and Ly dynasties, Vietnamese literature was constituted a great deal of learned poetry and of Buddhist inspiration composed by monks. The monk Van Hanh helped king Ly Cong Uan to get rid of the Dinh decadents and found the Ly dynasty (1009-1225). Van Hanh was not only a talented politician but also a poet. The Ly dynasty owed its rise to the influence and counsel of this monk, which explained why Buddhism would become the state religion. Many of the sovereigns of this dynasty belonged to the sects Thien (Ch'an in Chinese). They granted great favors to Buddhism, in particular Lý Thái Tôn, who, in 1031, after his victory over Champa, had over one hundred fifty monasteries built. In spite of the beneficial influence of Buddhism, for the needs of a methodical organization and an effective administration of the country, the Ly dynasty had to adopt the Chinese model at all echelons of administration. The predominant form of Buddhism in Vietnam is a combination of Pure Land and Zen. Zen practice, with its emphasis on meditation is mostly pursued among the monks and nuns, while Pure Land philosophy and practice is preferred by the lay-people. The 11th to the 15th century, unlike its South East Asian neighbors to follow the Theravada tradition, Vietnam was strongly impacted by the Chinese and is first one to integrate Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian traditions.

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As a result, many Taoist symbols and meditation tools became mainstreamed into Vietnamese Buddhist thought. The most part of Vietnamese scholars at that time were only Buddhist monks who knew Chinese and Sanskrit perfectly well. Buddhism continued to exert a dominating influence under the Tran dynasty. Even one of them, king Trần Nhân Tông, after having abdicated and retired to a monastery, founded a new sect Thiền (Zen) or that of *Forest of Bamboo* that continue to exist up to now. Buddhism declined and yielded to Confucianism only at the end of 13th century. One continued to see the decline of Buddhism until 1963. In the 1920s and 1930s, there were a number of movements in Vietnam for the revival and modernization of Buddhist activities. This includes the re-organization of Mahayana and a growing interest in Theravadin meditation and Pali Canon. In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of Vietnamese bhikkhus were sent overseas for further training, mostly in Thailand and some in Sri Lanka and India. Nowadays, Buddhists are located almost everywhere in Vietnam, from North to South. Buddhism is the single largest religion in Vietnam. However, English books on Vietnamese are still modest in number. The most important reason for this can be seen by the limitation of “Buddhist English” in Buddhist schools of Vietnam. It meets lots of difficulties for the introduction of Buddhist English in Buddhist Schools nowadays. This paper will be done for the attempt of finding out various problems of the introduction of English into Buddhist Schools of Vietnam and then making the relevant solutions. Besides that, I also make a good interaction of education between Vietnamese Buddhist Schools and other Buddhist Schools abroad, especially for the useful link among these schools.

Content

Buddhist schools in Vietnam

School here means an educational institution, not a sect in Buddhism. Buddhist schools in Vietnam can be classified into four main levels: elementary class, Buddhist high school, college and university. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Congregation now has four Buddhist Universities in Hanoi, Hue, Ho Chi Minh City (Mahayana tradition) and Can Tho (Theravada tradition), six Buddhist colleges, thirty Buddhist high schools and hundreds of elementary classes which enrol tens of thousands of monks and nuns. Nearly two hundred Buddhist graduates earned doctorates abroad. Nowadays, Vietnam has a strong development of the Buddhist education and training. Thanks to these training programmes, Buddhist monks and nuns' qualification has been raised, helping to strengthen the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Congregation, develop and protect traditional cultural values of Buddhism in Vietnam. During the past twenty five years, Vietnamese Buddhist schools have developed constantly to meet the increasing demand for training qualified Buddhist personnel for the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Congregation chapters across the country. All Buddhist monks and nuns work harder to build a stronger the Buddhist Sangha and actively participate in patriotic emulation movements for national development and construction under the motto “Dhamma-Nation-Modern”.

Curriculum of the syllabus

a. Elementary Class: The elementary classes of Buddhist Studies are organized in most districts of all provinces in Vietnam. The educational program has spent two year with the basic attention of elementary level in Buddhist doctrines as well as rules. In the first year: little monks and nuns will study important subject as follows:

- Essential Regulations in daily life.
- Standard Activities in daily life.
- Basic Buddhist teachings.
- Life of the Buddha.
- Dhammapada.
- Selected Jataka Stories.
- Moral Stories in Great Sage Discourse (in Chinese version of Agama Sutra), not found in Pali Tipitaka.

In the second year, little monks and nuns will focus on important subject as follows:

- Dasa Sikkhapada (The Ten Training Rules) and its commentary.
- Wisdom Words of Most Venerable Qui Son.
- Basic Buddhist Teachings.
- Short history of Buddhism in India.
- Discourse on Last Words of The Buddha (in Agama Pitaka)
- Discourse on Eight Enlightenments of Great Man.
- Bodhicitta Commentary.
- Selected Jataka Stories.
- Chinese Language.
- Vietnamese Language.

b. Buddhist High School: In Vietnam, there are thirty Buddhist schools. Different schools give different academic programs in terms of structure of subject and time of study. Here, I just mention about common subject taught in these schools. In the first year, monks and nuns will study the following disciplines:

- Discourse on Last Words of The Buddha.
- Discourse on Ten Good Actions.
- Wisdom Words of Most Venerable Qui Son.
- Discourse on Eight Enlightenments of Great Man.
- Dharmagupta Vinaya
- Buddhist Epistemology.
- Elementary Buddhist Textbooks in Chinese language.
- Basic features of Buddhist Philosophy.
- History of Indian Buddhism.
- A study on Only-Consciousness doctrine.
- Bodhicitta Commentary.
- Chinese language.
- Vietnamese language.

In the second year, basic subjects should be studied as follows:

- Dhammapada.
- Nagasena Sutra (Chinese version of the Pali counterpart: Milindapanha).

- Sutra of Forty Two Chapters.
- Introduction to Pali Sutta Pitaka.
- Introduction to Agama Pitaka.
- Amitabha Sutra.
- Introduction to Vinaya Pitaka.
- A study on Only-Consciousness doctrine.
- History of Chinese Buddhism.
- Chinese language.
- Vietnamese language.
- The program of the third year is as below:
- Majjhima Nikaya.
- Majjhima Agama.
- Dharmagupta Vinaya Pitaka.
- History of Vietnamese Buddhism.
- Life of Sangha.
- Vijnaptimatra Siddhi Sastra.
- Chinese language.
- Vietnamse language.

c. Buddhist college: The educational program of the first year will teach students the following subjects:

- Surangama Sūtra.
- Majjhima Nikaya.
- Abhidhammakosastra.
- History of World Civilizations.
- Vijnaptimatra Siddhi Sastra.
- Chinese language.
- Vietnamese language.
- The second year of program:
- Saddharmapundarika sutra.
- Avatamsaka sutra.
- History of Western Civilization.
- History of Buddhism in South-East Asia.
- History of Chinese Buddhism.
- Vijñaptimatratāsiddhi Sastra.
- Mahāyānaśraddhotpādaśāstra (The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana).
- Chinese language.

The program of the third year of Buddhist colleges as follows:

- Vimalakirti Nidesa Sutra.
- Surangama Sutra.
- Vinaya Rules.
- Satyasiddhisastra.
- Introduction to Buddhist logic.
- Abhidhamma Pitaka.
- Buddhist Psychology.
- Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra.
- History of Vietnamese Buddhism.
- Literature of Ly-Tran Dynasty.
- Chinese language.
- Introduction to Pali language.

d. Buddhist University

First Year: The Life of the Buddha.

- The Heart of Buddha's Teachings.
- Meditation: Theory and Practice.
- Vietnamse Writing.
- Research Methodology.
- Mandarin Chinese.
- History of Vietnamese Buddhism.
- Indian Philosophy.
- History of Vietnam.
- History of Indian Buddhism.
- History of Chinese Philosophy.
- Mandarin Chinese.

Second Year: A Critical Study of Buddhist Philosophy.

- Western Philosophy.
- Marxist-Leninist Philosophy.
- Environmental Science.
- Sociology.
- Mandarin Chinese.
- History of Chinese Tripitaka Literature.
- History of Pali Literature.
- History of Sanskrit Literature.
- Introduction to Management.
- Introduction to Psychology.
- Mandarin Chinese.

Third Year: A Critical Study of Digha Nikaya.

- Buddhist Ethics.
- Abhidhammatthasangaha.
- Abhidharmakosabhasya Sastra.
- Mahayana Buddhist Thought.
- English.
- Classical Chinese.
- Mahayanaasraddhotpada Sastra.
- Buddhist Epistemology.
- Buddhist Socio-Political Philosophy.
- Introduction to Buddhist Logic.
- English.
- Classical Chinese.

Fourth Year: A Critical Study of Saddharmapundarika Sutra.

- Philosophy of Religions.
- Vijnaptimatra Siddhi Sastra.
- Samayabhedopakaranacakka Sastra.
- Classical Chinese.
- A Critical Study of Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra.
- A Critical Study of Mulamadhyamikakarka Sastra.
- A Critical Study of Satyasiddhi Sastra.
- Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.
- Classical Chinese

Lacuna/Demerits

All these programs have reflected the whole discipline in early Buddhism as well as in Mahayana Buddhism. However, this system of education has still various demerits which should be corrected. It is necessary to deal with some main lacunas in

curriculum of the syllabus. First of all, it is a fact that there are lots of repetitions of subjects in a Buddhist school in particular and in all levels of Buddhist schools in general. Many discourses are taught again and again from the level of elementary class to Buddhist high school, even in level of university. It can be said that one can study in Buddhist high schools without attending elementary classes. Two levels of Buddhist levels of high school and university are similar in aspects of numerous discourses. Thus, in Vietnam, a monk can study in a Buddhist university after finishing the level of Buddhist High School, needless to study in Buddhist colleges. Besides that, Vietnam was a part of Imperial China for over a millennium, from 111 BC to 938 AD. The Vietnamese became independent from Imperial China in AD 938, following the Vietnamese victory in the Battle of Bạch Đằng River. Therefore, Vietnam had a great impact by Chinese culture as well as language. Chinese language is compulsory in all Buddhist schools of every level. Most of Mahayana Sutras in Chinese language are translated into Vietnamese and then recited in common people. Even in names of Buddhist pagogas are also written in Chinese. This leads to the difficulties for the popularization towards common people. In addition, most of disciplines are taught in Sino-Viet, a kind of ancient Chinese script with pronunciation of Vietnamese. It is a difficult language for common people. It is only used in system of Buddhist education and secular scholars. Thus, Chinese has a predominant place in Buddhist educational system. Moreover, in terms of an aspect of generalization of the academic program, these schools have not given the full syllabus for all subjects. In Vinaya Pitaka, most of rules are focused on Chinese monk's rules and regulations. In Sutta Pitaka, the program only pays attention to two main parts Digha Nikaya (Digha Agama) and Majjhima Nikaya (Majjhia Agama) along with Dhammapada and Jatakas. Thus, the rest of Sutta Pitaka will be lack. As for Abhidhamma Pitaka, it is only studied in Theravada University whereas Mahayana schools only deal with the content of Dhammasanghani with analysis of Citta, Cetasika, Rupa and Nibbana. It can be said that it is very repetition of the program that students can jump to Buddhist high school and then Buddhist university without studying in the level of Buddhist college. Besides that, lots of difficult subjects are applied in the level of high school and university. And the most deferential problem in Vietnmes Buddhist schools is the lack of making popular English in the level of elementary and high school. Nowadays, some Buddhist high schools have been taken English into consideration. However, it is only in the step of secular English but much more on Buddhist english.

Importance of English in Vietnamese Buddhist schools

English may not be the most spoken language in the world, but it is the official language in a large number of countries. It is estimated that the number of people in the world that use in English to communicate on a regular basis is two billion. In recent years, English is more and more popular in the world. It attracts people due to the interestingness in its tune and structure. However, beside the tune and the structure, this language is learned and studied by a higher number of people with every passing day because of its importances in this modern world: a mean to communicate. Nowadays, English is

called International Language and it is also the second language of many countries in the world. Therefore, we can realize the importance in communication of this language. When we know English, we can come to and communicate with the citizens of most of counties in this globe, without any confusion in expressing our feelings and thinkings. In brief, we cannot deny the importances of English language in this modern world. This language helps us to express thinkings and feelings, to talk, to exchange views, and to contract between person and person though wherever we live. Furthermore, in the world that English is considered as the main language. Hence, we can predict that English language will continue to develop and bring us more advantages in the near future, English will be the only language in the world. Language is the source of communication. It is the way through which we share our ideas and thoughts with others. There are uncountable languages in this world. Because every country has their own national language, then they have different local languages spoken and understood by their people in different regions. There are several factors that make us to learn English Language to go through in the current time. First of all, it has International Standard, that is why everyone needs to learn English in order to get in touch on International Level. If we see Educational field, we will find much of the syllabus is written in English. Children are taught and encouraged to learn English on starting levels. And accordingly, as they promote to the next levels they study almost all the subjects in English. We see the Internet and finds more than 90% of websites written and created in English. And even when we see some sites in other languages, they also give you the option to translate in English. All the research and studies you find will be written and typed in English. All the information regarding each and everything contains English Language. There is another factor that make English very important in this world is that it is the easiest language of the world to learn. With good understanding and communication in English, we can travel around the globe. We get assistance and help in English in every part of world. The purpose of education is to better a person's life through knowledge and assist them later in life. English is an excellent means to introduce Vietnam, its land, people and culture and the history and development of Vietnamese Buddhism and fostering the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha's integration into the international Buddhist community.

Personality and their effort

a. Thich Nhat Hanh (1926 - now)

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is widely regarded as one of the great spiritual teachers of the 20th century Vietnam in particular and over the world in general. He was born in 1926, in central Vietnam, and he felt drawn to monkhood even as a child. Aged 16, he entered Tu Hieu monastery and received the name Thich Nhat Hanh. In the monastery, he underwent a thorough training in Zen and the Mahayana school of Buddhism. He received full ordination in 1949 and a year later he co-founded the An Quang Temple in Saigon. In 1956 he was appointed editor-in-chief of Vietnamese Buddhism – the periodical of the All Vietnam Buddhist Association. In 1959 he left Vietnam to study Buddhism at Columbia University in

New York. But he was summoned to return home after two years to assist in the Buddhist peace effort. During the next few years he founded La Boi Press, and established Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon as well as the School of Youth for Social Service. This movement trained groups of Buddhist peaceworkers in rural areas. In 1964 he founded the Tiep Hien Order (The Order of Interbeing) based on the principles of Engaged Buddhism which emphasises social responsibility and peacework. He settled in Paris and established the Buddhist Peace Delegation. He is considered as the first person who gave a plan to apply foreign languages in Van hanh Buddhist University, especially English and French. However, at that time, this idea is not accepted by some of subjective reasons. Most of venerables wanted to protect the old ways of teaching and learning through ancient Chinese language and Vietnamese only. This made the limits of development of Vietnamese Buddhism later. He has published more than hundred books, including more than forty in English and lots of Dharma talks. It plays a very important role in spread of Buddhism over the world as well as Vietnamese Buddhism.

b. Thich Minh Chau (1918 - 2012)

Most Venerable Maha Thera Thích Minh Châu was born Đình Văn Nam in 1918 at Kim Thành Village, Quảng Nam Province. His father got his doctoral degree at the age of 21 (in 1913, under King Duy Tân). Influenced by the family's educational and academic tradition from early childhood, he was an avid and hard-working learner whose wisdom developed beyond his age. While studying the Tripitaka in Chinese, he found that there were various ways to represent the Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist terminology, which made the texts more difficult to understand. That was why he consulted his Master and the Buddhist Studies Association in Central An nam, and asked for their permission, so that he could go abroad and study the Tripitaka in Sri-lanka and India. He vowed to translate the original Tripitaka into Vietnamese to contribute to Vietnam Buddhism. In 1952 with the Sangha's and his Master's permission, he left Vietnam for Sri-Lanka to study Pali and English in Colombo. Three years later the University of Sri-Lanka gave him the title Dharma Teacher (Saddammcariya). After that he went to India and received further training at Bihar University, which belongs to the famous Nava Nalanda Mahavihara. In 1958 he completed his Bachelor's degree in Pali and English, and finished his Master of Arts degree in Pali and Abhidhamma as his class valedictorian. Three years later in September 1961, he became the first Vietnamese monk to earn his Doctoral degree in India with an excellent thesis, *The Chinese Madhyama Agama and the Pali Mahajjhima Nikāya - A Comparative Study*. The Indian President at the time conferred the degree to him with a lot of admiration. From 1962 to 1963 he was teaching at Bihar University. During these years he wrote three works in English: *H'suan T'sang, The Pilgrim and Scholar; Fa-Hsien, the Unassuming Pilgrim; and Milindapanha and Nāgasenabhikkhusūtra - A Comparative Study*. In 1964 he returned to Vietnam. To express his gratitude to Buddha, and his Master and other teachers, he dedicated his life to Buddhist tasks, such as translating the Tripitaka from Pali into Vietnamese, opening a Buddhist University named Van Hanh, and much more. He was assigned many positions: Vice-President of the Saigon

Buddhist Studies College (1964-1965), Rector of Van Hanh University, Chairman of the Culture and Education Task Force in the United Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (1965-1975). When Vietnam became a united country, between 1975 and 1976, he passed on his responsibilities about Van Hanh University to the Ministry of Education. In 1976 he retreated to the University second site located in Phu Nhuan District, and turned it into Van Hanh Buddhist Studies Institute. It was then at this Institute that he wholeheartedly focused on his translation the Tripitaka from Pali into Vietnamese. He also resumed teaching Buddhist Dharma to monks, nuns and laypeople. Thanks to his suggestion, for the first time after Vietnam became a united country, regular Dharma classes for Buddhists had become available for everyone after the hours and on Sunday mornings. Since then the Buddhism studies movement started to warm up, and developed with Sunday morning classes. Although he was very busy with the Sangha tasks, Congress responsibilities, and training monks and nuns, he continued to translate and give Dharma talks. Since his return to Vietnam, he had never neglected writing and translating, and was a prolific scholar. His works include: The Pali-Vietnamese Translations of the following Pali Suttas: Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Samyutta Nikāya, Anguttara Nikāya, Khuddaka Nikāya (Dhammapada; Udāna; Itivuttaka; Vimanavatthu; Theragāthā; Therīgāthā; Jātaka) and Pali-Vietnamese Translation of Abhidhamma Atthasangāha. He is considered as Xuan Zang of Vietnam. However, during his time, Van Hanh Buddhist University is not found the department of English as well as the department of International Buddhist Studies. This leads the lack of foreign students to come and study Buddhism in Vietnam.

English introduced into Buddhist schools: problems and its solutions

The official national language of Vietnam is Vietnamese (*Tiếng Việt*). In its early history, Vietnamese writing used Chinese characters. In the 13th century, the Vietnamese developed their own set of characters, referred to as Chữ nôm. The folk epic *Truyện Kiều* ("The Tale of Kieu", originally known as *Đoạn trường tân thanh*) by Nguyễn Du was written in *Chữ nôm*. Quốc ngữ, the romanized Vietnamese alphabet used for spoken Vietnamese, was developed in the 17th century by the Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes and several other Catholic missionaries. Quốc ngữ became widely popular and brought literacy to the Vietnamese masses during the French colonial period. Vietnam's minority groups speak a variety of languages, including Tày, Mường, Cham, Khmer, Chinese, Nùng, and H'Mông. The Montagnard peoples of the Central Highlands also speak a number of distinct languages. A number of sign languages have developed in the cities. The French language, a legacy of colonial rule, is spoken by many educated Vietnamese as a second language, especially among the older generation and those educated in the former South Vietnam, where it was a principal language in administration, education and commerce; Vietnam remains a full member of the Francophonie, and education has revived some interest in the language. Russian – and to a much lesser extent German, Czech and Polish – are known among some Vietnamese whose families had ties with the Soviet bloc during the Cold War. In recent years, as Vietnam's contacts with Western nations have

increased, English has become more popular as a second language. The study of English is now obligatory in most schools, either alongside or in many cases, replacing French. Japanese, Chinese and Korean have also grown in popularity as Vietnam's links with other East Asian nations have strengthened. However, there are still various difficulties for the introduction of Buddhist English into Buddhist schools due to the fact that on the one hand majority of Buddhist schools are influenced by Chinese Language or domination of Chinese in all discourses and on the other hand the prejudice towards English that it has brought benefits into translations of Buddha teachings and spread of Buddhism. Nowadays, it can be said due to lack of Buddhist English in Vietnamese Buddhist schools the attraction of Vietnamese Buddhism towards foreigners is regarded as a limited level. Therefore, the most relevant solution for the development of Buddhist English in Buddhist schools is to compose special textbooks of Buddhist English for all levels of Buddhist Schools in Vietnam.

Conclusion

With the spirit of engaged Buddhism, Vietnamese Buddhism has a tendency to engage into all activities of society as well as in worldly life. English is regarded as a common language to communicate and contact among nations, peoples, countries, religions and so on. Buddhist English should be a compulsory subject in all Buddhist schools in Vietnam to improve the language skills for the spread of Vietnamese Buddhism towards the world in particular and all other aspects in general. It can be said that Buddhist English is an essential need for the study of Buddhism based on the most popular language nowadays. It will create the similarities of the aspect of languages leading to the harmony of Buddhist International community. In brief, a textbook on Buddhist English is the most necessary duty for the Buddhist educational teachers to popularize Vietnamese Buddhism. Through this aspect, people over the world shall understand deeply and profoundly Vietnamese Buddhism.

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