

**A STUDY OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SRI LANKA
BUDDHISM TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THERAVADA
BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM IN EARLY TIMES AND ITS
PRESENT STATUS**

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Introduction:

Vietnam is now a predominantly Mahāyāna Buddhist country but with some influences from Theravāda Buddhism. There are two Theravāda traditions in Vietnam, namely Khmer Theravāda and Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism. The growth of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam has been slow, however, due to the lack of well-educated Buddhist monks with the ability to propagate Theravāda Buddhist education. Sri Lanka and Vietnam have been related through Buddhism from the distant past and, from time to time, Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism has had a great impact on Vietnamese Theravāda Buddhism both directly and indirectly. It is well-known how Buddhist practice suffered during the long Vietnam War but it has been recovering again since the war ended. As a Theravāda Buddhist country, Sri Lanka has a great obligation to extend a helping hand to those who are upholding Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam.

Materials & Method:

Drawing on historical records and literary sources as well as personal experiences, this research will investigate the present status of the Buddhist relationship between the two countries.

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Result:

Sri Lankan Buddhist Authorities will be informed of the importance of promoting such ties between the two countries and the development of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam with positive results for this relationship.

Discussion:

Sri Lanka is a centre of Theravada Buddhism and has contributed much to the preservation, propagation and interpretation of Theravāda Pāli Canon. This is the main reason why many foreigners choose to study Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The illustrious Buddhist monk in Vietnam, Ven. Hue Diem, also lived in Sri Lanka and studied Buddhism there in the 7th century.

Theravāda Buddhism developed rapidly in Vietnam during the 12th century, in the late Angkorian period. In 1180 C.E, a Cambodian prince named Tamalinda was ordained as Theravāda bhikkhu in Sri Lanka with the result that, ever since, Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism has been the predominant religion of Cambodia. The Mekong Delta, which belongs to southern Vietnam today, was a part of Cambodia in those times. The Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism which prevailed in Cambodia consequently spread throughout the Mekong Delta. The Khmer Theravāda Buddhism of the Mekong Delta in Vietnam still bears a close relation to Sri Lankan Buddhism today.

Later, in 1930, Venerable Narada from Sri Lanka crossed to Vietnam and planted young Bodhi trees brought from Sri Lanka in many places around the country. During his subsequent visits in the 1950s and 1960s, he attracted large numbers of Buddhists to the Theravāda tradition. A number of his Buddhist books, including *The Buddha and His Teachings*, *Buddhism in a Nutshell*, *Satipatthana Sutta*, *The Dhammapada*, and *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, etc. were translated into Vietnamese and had a great impact in propagating Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. In 1951, Vietnamese Buddhists joined the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), which was founded in Colombo in 1950. In 1952, Ven. Thich Minh Chau, who established the Vietnam Buddhist University, came to Sri Lanka to study Pāli and English and, in 1955, he obtained the Saddhammācariya degree. In 1994, Sri Lanka monks offered two scholarships for Theravāda monks in Vietnam. This became the opportunity for Ven. BuuHien and Ven. Brahmopalita, both

Theravāda monks in Vietnam, to come to Sri Lanka to study Pāli and Buddhism. Ven. Brahmāpalita now works as a lecturer of Khmer Theravāda Academy for Buddhist Studies in the Mekong Delta and Ven. BuuHien is a PhD researcher at the University of Peradeniya.

In the early years of the 21st century, two Vietnamese Theravāda monks and one Vietnamese Theravāda nun received the PhD degree in Buddhist Studies from the University of Kelaniya. One of them is the Most Venerable Indacanda (Truong Dinh Dung), who still lives in Sri Lanka and has been translating Pāli Tipitaka into Vietnamese, being in residence at Sri Jayavardhanarama Temple in Colombo. He has completely translated nineteen of the fifty eight books of Pāli Tipitaka in Sri Lanka. Nine books in Vinaya and ten in Sutta have been published by the Buddhist Cultural Center Publication in Colombo. On 20th of June, 2013, Ven. Indacanda Mahāthero was awarded the Pariyatti Visārada degree by Kotte Sri Kalyāni Sāmagrī Dharma Mahā Saṅga Sabhā.

Since 2010, the numbers of Vietnamese monks and nuns who come to study in Sri Lanka have been gradually increasing. Presently, there are thirty two Vietnamese monks and nuns from Vietnam. Nine are Theravāda, ten Khatsi and thirteen Mahāyāna. They are studying in various universities of Sri Lanka, such as BPU, SIBA, the University of Kelaniya, and the University of Peradeniya. Today, some Sri Lanka meditation masters travel to Vietnam to teach meditation in Hanoi; others have joined in Kathina ceremonies and offered Buddhist flags from Sri Lanka at Theravāda temples in Vietnam.

Sri Lankan universities have granted generous access to university-level study without any entrance examination. This is a big opportunity for Vietnamese students to study Pāli and Buddhism and also improve their command of English language. However, the Buddhist monks and nuns who come from Vietnam do still face many difficulties in Sri Lanka regarding residential arrangements because it is not easy to rent rooms or houses or find suitable and conducive accommodation when they first arrive in the country. Besides, the Vietnamese students are generally not proficient in either Pāli or English to begin with. Solutions do need to be found. One way might be to build a hostel for Buddhist monks and nuns with appropriate

fees. An institute should also be established to improve their basic knowledge of Pāli, English and Buddhism.

Conclusion

Throughout history, Sri Lanka Buddhism has made rich contributions to the development of Theravāda Buddhism and propagation of Theravāda doctrines in Vietnam. As a result, Vietnamese monks now come to Sri Lanka and even translate Pāli Tipitaka into Vietnamese, and the number of Vietnamese monks and nuns who are studying Buddhism in Sri Lanka has increased rapidly. If Sri Lanka Buddhist authorities can now find new ways to foster Vietnamese Buddhism by providing the necessary facilities, this could lead to the better propagation of Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam. This is an initiative which needs to come from Sri Lanka because so few countries in the world practice Theravāda Buddhism today.

Keywords: Buddhist relationship, study Pali, Buddhism, difficulties

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