



EARLY BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT:

Here explores the significant influence of Buddhism on Vietnam's cultural identity and educational system, spanning thousands of years. Buddhism has significantly influenced Vietnam's history, including society conventions, educational systems, and individual beliefs. This abstract presents an engaging tale by examining the fundamental principles, varied teaching techniques, and the developmental path of Buddhist education in Vietnam. This text explains how Buddhism has impacted the educational system and played a significant role in developing the moral principles and values deeply rooted in Vietnamese culture. Gaining insight into the complex relationship between Buddhist teachings and Vietnam's cultural ethos provides a perspective to grasp the country's historical past, socioeconomic structures, and intellectual legacy. It aims to elucidate the profound impact of Buddhist education on Vietnam, highlighting its continuing significance in creating the country's identity and socioeconomic progress.



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KEY WORDS: *Buddhism, Education, Vietnam, Buddha teaching, Buddhist system.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Buddhism has profoundly and has impacted Vietnam's identity throughout history. Throughout thousands of years, this spiritual concept has been deeply integrated into the cultural fabric of Vietnam, producing a lasting impression that influences its educational system and social values. When examining Buddhist education in Vietnam, one discovers a deep and complex history characterized by fundamental ideas, varied teaching methods, and intriguing development throughout time. This exploration of Buddhist education documents its impact on educational models and reveals the cultural standards, moral values, and personal beliefs deeply embedded in Vietnamese society. Embedded within the complex interplay of history, philosophy, and pedagogy is a reservoir of profound knowledge, fundamental principles, and profound understandings that have moulded and still have a powerful impact on Vietnam's cultural core. Exploring the extensive realm of Buddhist education in Vietnam is critical to understanding the profound depths of the country's past and the complex layers of its social structure. It offers a pathway to unraveling the subtle complexities that shape Vietnam's historical and intellectual legacy.

2. BUDDHIST EDUCATION CONCEPTS:

Education as “*Sikkha*” means teaching, guiding, training, researching, learning¹ etc. In Vietnam, Buddhist education focuses on comprehending the core aims of the Buddha’s teachings, with a particular emphasis on enlightenment, compassion, and the mitigation of suffering. The core of Buddhist education in Vietnam is understanding the fundamental objectives included in the teachings of the Buddha. Essentially, this educational concept focuses on the quest for knowledge, empathy development, and pain and hardship reduction. Enlightenment is the highest point of Buddhist aspirations, including the profound realization of the genuine essence of being and the freedom from ignorance and suffering. In Vietnamese Buddhist education, the quest for enlightenment is a guiding principle, leading people towards a more profound comprehension of oneself and the universe.

Furthermore, compassion occupies a position of utmost importance in the teachings of the Buddha. It is a moral guide that promotes empathy, benevolence, and selflessness towards all conscious entities. Buddhist education in Vietnam cultivates and fosters the virtues of kindness and selflessness, stimulating a society centred on these values among its followers. The recognition and mitigation of suffering are at the core of the Buddha’s teachings. Vietnamese Buddhist education emphasises comprehending suffering (*Dukkha*) as an innate aspect of life and seeks to provide instruction on how to transcend it. This feature is a crucial foundation in the quest for personal growth and spiritual development within the framework of Buddhist education in Vietnam. These primary objectives enlightenment, compassion, and the relief of suffering form the cornerstone of Buddhist education in Vietnam, leading people towards self-realization, empathy, and the amelioration of the human condition.

The essence of Buddhist education in Vietnam is on fundamental principles such as impermanence, interconnectedness, and the Four Noble Truths. These ideas serve as a roadmap for individuals to attain self-realization and cultivate spiritual development.² Central to Buddhist education in Vietnam is a profound reflection and complete engagement with the basic principles of the Buddha’s teachings. These guiding principles act as a compass for achieving self-awareness and advancing spiritually. Impermanence is a fundamental concept in Buddhist philosophy, emphasizing life’s fleeting and constantly changing character. Vietnamese Buddhist education stresses that all things, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, are susceptible to change. This consciousness acts as a catalyst for accepting the ups and downs of life with calmness and developing the ability to bounce back in the face of unavoidable changes in circumstances.

Interconnectedness, a crucial notion, clarifies the interdependent relationship between all entities and occurrences. Vietnamese Buddhist education emphasizes acknowledging the interconnectedness of all things, promoting a feeling of oneness and mutual reliance. Gaining an awareness of this interdependence fosters empathy, compassion, and a sense of duty towards all living beings, cultivating a harmonious connection with the planet. Moreover, the Four Noble Truths succinctly embody the fundamental structure of Buddhist doctrines. Vietnamese Buddhist education presents four truths, suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the way to the end of suffering as a guide for human growth and change. Their role is to direct people towards comprehending the essence of pain, its origins, the potential for its termination, and the pragmatic route to achieve release from suffering.

The central tenets of Vietnamese Buddhist education are impermanence, interconnectedness, and the Four Noble Truths. These concepts serve as the foundation, leading practitioners on a transforming path towards self-discovery, knowledge, and spiritual development. By thoroughly examining these concepts, humans may effectively traverse the intricacies of life and develop a comprehensive understanding of themselves and the surrounding universe.

¹ *Pali – English Dictionary*, Eds. T. W. Rhys Davids & W. Stede, London: Pali Text Society, 1996, pp. 1921 – 25.

² Acariya Buddhaghosathere, *Last Days of the Buddha*, Lily De Silva, 1970, pp. 158-247.

3. METHODS OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION:

3.1. VERBAL METHOD:

Buddhist education relies heavily on transmitting information via oral teachings from learned monks and practitioners. The verbal method is a fundamental strategy in Buddhist education that emphasizes conveying information and wisdom via oral teachings.³ This practice has played a crucial role in spreading and safeguarding Buddhist teachings over successive generations in Vietnam. Experienced monks, respected instructors, and skilled practitioners of Buddhist philosophy have a crucial responsibility as guardians of knowledge, transmitting their understanding, teachings, and interpretations via spoken communication. These knowledgeable people share the profound teachings of Buddhism with students via lectures, sermons, storytelling, and dialogues, fostering a direct and personal relationship between the teacher and the learner.

This approach simplifies the transmission of concepts and principles and enhances comprehension and integration of the teachings. The oral tradition guarantees the authenticity and conservation of the teachings, enabling a direct conveyance of knowledge, insights, and spiritual direction from one generation to another. Within the framework of Vietnamese Buddhist education, the verbal approach functions as a vibrant storehouse of information, cultivating a dynamic and engaging atmosphere for learning. It facilitates sharing ideas, resolving uncertainties, and developing a personal connection between the learner and the teachings, enhancing the educational experience and promoting a more profound comprehension of Buddhist concepts.

3.2. SELF-CONSCIOUS METHOD:

Promoting introspection and self-reflection is a potent technique for achieving personal enlightenment in the context of Buddhist education. The self-conscious approach plays a significant role in Buddhist education by promoting personal introspection and self-reflection as powerful instruments for transformation on the journey to enlightenment. Within Vietnamese Buddhist education, this approach promotes directing one's focus within, engaging in deep introspection to foster self-awareness and self-comprehension. It entails attentively and introspectively watching one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Through this practice, practitioners strive to understand the essence of the individual, the mechanisms of cognition, and the origins of distress.

This approach encourages people to scrutinize their perceptions, ideas, and ingrained habits, thus cultivating a more profound understanding of oneself and the world. By engaging in activities such as meditation, contemplation, and mindfulness, persons in Vietnamese Buddhist education acquire an elevated level of consciousness, enabling them to go beyond the constraints of the self and attain a more lucid perception of reality. The self-conscious approach functions as a catalyst for human growth, fostering inner tranquillity and spiritual advancement. It enables people to explore their inner thoughts and emotions, cultivating a stronger connection with their authentic selves and developing empathy, insight, and emotional balance.

In Buddhist education in Vietnam, this approach promotes individuals to undertake a self-exploration voyage, recognising life's transient and interdependent essence. It acts as a beacon, directing people towards self-discovery and reducing suffering by obtaining a profound understanding of their nature and the universe.

3.3. EDUCATIONAL METHOD FROM PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE:

Participating in tangible manifestations of Buddhist principles via rituals, meditation, and social activities enhances the educational journey. The educational approach based on experiential learning plays a crucial role in Buddhist education, especially in Vietnam, by highlighting the practical implementation of Buddhist teachings in everyday life. In Vietnamese Buddhist education, this approach promotes active involvement in several practical facets of the teachings. Rituals, rituals, and community activities are suitable for acquiring and implementing Buddhist precepts. Engaging in these

³ The Shurangama Sutra with commentary by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua – New, Edition ISBN, [0881399493](#).

rituals fosters a firsthand encounter with the teachings, enabling people to integrate and comprehend them more deeply.

Meditation, an essential element of Buddhist practice, is pivotal in this teaching method. In Vietnam, individuals engage in meditation to delve into the profound aspects of their consciousness, fostering the development of mindfulness, focus, and insight. By directly seeing their thoughts and feelings, people can undergo personal change and spiritual growth. Collective rituals, such as recitation, devotional gatherings, and collaborative dialogues, provide a nurturing atmosphere conducive to acquiring knowledge and exchanging profound understandings. These joint endeavours foster a feeling of cohesion and common objective among participants, strengthening the lessons and enabling reciprocal motivation and assistance on the spiritual journey.

Vietnamese Buddhist education goes beyond academic knowledge by incorporating practical experiences into the educational system, allowing learners to embody the teachings in their everyday lives. This methodology promotes a comprehensive comprehension of Buddhism, enabling adherents to use its principles to manage life's difficulties with sagacity, empathy, and composure.

3.4. METHOD OF EDUCATING BY BODY TEACHER:

Revered professors and monks significantly impact pupils' comprehension and implementation of Buddhist ideas. The pedagogical approach of physical instruction, often shown by esteemed Buddhist monks and educators in Vietnam, significantly impacts pupils' comprehension and application. Respected professors and monks in Vietnamese Buddhist education exemplify Buddhist teachings as a tangible demonstration for practitioners. These revered individuals embody the teachings via their behaviour, mannerisms, and lifestyle. Their embodiment of compassion, wisdom, mindfulness, and other Buddhist characteristics provides a powerful and palpable demonstration of the teachings in practice.

Students acquire knowledge through these esteemed individuals' verbal or instructional guidance and by closely studying their behaviours and demeanour. The presence and behaviour of these respected professors provide a tangible illustration of how to incorporate Buddhist precepts into one's everyday life. Their supervision goes beyond just giving instructions via words; it is shown by their attitudes, actions, and relationships, serving as a tangible example for pupils to imitate.

This pedagogical approach, facilitated by a knowledgeable instructor, cultivates a more profound comprehension and assimilation of Buddhist principles and rituals. These famous personalities serve as role models for students, inspiring and motivating them to live by the teachings and qualities of Buddhism. The impact of body instructors in Vietnamese Buddhist education goes beyond simple teaching; it profoundly influences the spiritual development of practitioners, acting as a beacon of guidance and motivation on their quest for self-realization, enlightenment, and compassionate existence.

4. BUDDHIST LANGUAGE OF EDUCATION:

4.1. DIRECT LANGUAGE:

The teachings are transmitted directly from the instructor to the pupil, preserving the validity and substance of the Buddha's message. In Buddhist education, straightforward and precise language is an essential aspect that represents the transfer of teachings in their unadulterated and genuine form from the teacher to the pupil. Within the framework of Vietnamese Buddhist education, this approach maintains the fundamental nature of the Buddha's teachings by guaranteeing a lucid and straightforward transmission of insight.

Direct language stresses the oral tradition, in which the teachings are directly passed from a skilled teacher or monk to their pupils. The purpose of this direct transmission is to preserve the genuineness, clarity, and wholeness of the Buddha's teachings, guaranteeing that they stay uncorrupted by any interpretation or modification. In Vietnamese Buddhist education, this approach facilitates an immediate and individualized bond between the instructor and the learner, enabling a deep interchange of knowledge, understanding, and direction. The teachings are transmitted

intergenerationally, safeguarding the legacy of sagacity and guaranteeing the perpetuity of the Buddha's message.

Utilizing straightforward language while conveying Buddhist teachings preserves the profoundness and intricacies of the teachings, enabling a complex comprehension beyond simple verbal expression. It cultivates a close and individualized learning encounter, promoting a profound connection with the core principles of the teachings and enabling an authentic evolution in the learner's comprehension and application. In Vietnamese Buddhist education, straightforward language is fundamental in safeguarding the genuineness and integrity of the Buddha's teachings, guaranteeing its perpetuity and significance for future generations.

4.2. REMEMBERED LANGUAGE:

Within Buddhist education, the concept of remembered language plays a vital role, relying on oral traditions and recitations to safeguard and convey teachings via memory and oral transmission. In Vietnamese Buddhist education, this strategy functions as a way to protect and preserve the knowledge and teachings of Buddhism. Remembered language refers to committing religious texts, sutras, and teachings to memory and reciting them. This transmission occurs via oral tradition, with teachers passing the knowledge to their students. Disciples diligently memorize these teachings, ensuring their preservation with excellent precision and faithfulness. This approach guarantees the transfer of the teachings in their unaltered state, preserving their integrity and genuineness.

In Vietnamese Buddhist education, remembering language fosters a profound comprehension and preservation of the teachings using memory and repetition. Students diligently acquire and commit to the memory of religious writings, allowing them to assimilate the tremendous knowledge in these scriptures deeply. Oral transmission guarantees the conservation of the teachings and cultivates a strong feeling of camaraderie and uninterrupted lineage within the Buddhist heritage. Orally transmitting lessons from a teacher to a pupil establishes a lineage of knowledge, enabling the teachings to be passed down through successive generations. The utilization of memorized language in Vietnamese Buddhist education is a potent instrument for the conservation, propagation, and infinity of Buddhist doctrines, fostering a deep bond between adherents and the sacred scriptures while safeguarding the fundamental nature and genuineness of the teachings.

4.3. WRITTEN LANGUAGE:

Scriptures and writings are essential for transmitting knowledge and safeguarding the teachings of Buddhism. The use of written language is crucial in Buddhist education, especially in Vietnam, where scriptures and writings are of utmost importance for transmitting knowledge and safeguarding the teachings of Buddhism. It has written language functions within Vietnamese Buddhist education as a reservoir of profound knowledge, including a wide range of Buddhist scriptures, sutras, and commentaries. The written books include the profound teachings of the Buddha, providing detailed explanations of several facets of philosophy, ethics, meditation, and enlightenment.

The written writings function as primary sources for acquiring knowledge and comprehending the fundamental concepts of Buddhism, providing a thorough and intricate examination of the teachings. In Vietnam, monasteries, temples, and educational institutions own libraries with a vast compilation of these sacred texts, providing students and practitioners abundant access to valuable information. Furthermore, safeguarding written materials guarantees Buddhist teachings' uninterrupted transmission and genuineness across different periods and locations. These manuscripts have been protected and handed down through centuries, preserving their original essence and purity, thanks to scribes and monks' careful copying and preservation efforts.

In Vietnamese Buddhist education, the written language is a repository of information and a structure for academic examination and reflection. Students actively interact with these materials, scrutinizing, deciphering, and enhancing their comprehension of Buddhist theory and practice. The written language is crucial in preserving, spreading, and studying Buddhist teachings. It creates a diversified and abundant environment for learning and spiritual discovery.

4.4. TRANSLATED LANGUAGE:

Adapting and translating Buddhist literature facilitates broader accessibility and comprehension across many cultures. In Buddhist education, the translated language is crucial in making Buddhist teachings accessible and understandable to other groups. In Vietnam, as in several different areas, the translation of Buddhist writings functions as a means of connection, allowing a broader audience to access and understand the deep knowledge of these teachings. The translations of Buddhist scriptures into other languages, such as Vietnamese, aim to enhance the accessibility of the teachings to a broader audience beyond the limitations imposed by language and culture. Proficient translators and academics strive to communicate the fundamental principles and significance of the original writings, guaranteeing the preservation and precise transmission of the actual teachings.

Translated materials in Vietnamese Buddhist education facilitate access and understanding of Buddhist teachings for persons with different language backgrounds. These translations encourage the exploration of the Buddha's wisdom by practitioners and academics, promoting a more comprehensive comprehension and admiration for the profound principles contained in the teachings. Translated literature promotes cross-cultural interaction and communication, increasing mutual comprehension and concord across diverse populations. They provide access to persons from many cultural origins to the profound intellectual legacy of Buddhism, fostering tolerance and mutual respect. In Vietnamese Buddhist education, translating is crucial in spreading and promoting Buddhist teachings. It helps create a worldwide community of individuals who may study and practice Buddhism, regardless of their language or cultural background.

5. GOALS AND EVOLUTION OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN VIETNAM:

5.1. INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM TO VIETNAM:

The origins of Buddhism in Vietnam may be traced back to ancient times when Indian merchants first imported it. Over time, it gained significant importance over several kingdoms. The arrival of Buddhism in Vietnam constitutes a crucial chapter in the country's history, extending back to ancient times. The origin of its creation may be attributed to the advent of Indian merchants and missionaries, who introduced Buddhist doctrines to Vietnam via marine channels.

Initially, Buddhism was introduced to Vietnamese culture via engagements with Indian merchants along the maritime Silk Road.⁴ Nevertheless, it achieved considerable eminence and sway throughout the reign of many dynasties, especially in the first years of the Common Era when Vietnam was under the dominion of the Han Dynasty in China. Buddhist teachings increasingly infiltrated Vietnamese culture, resonating with the general population and capturing the interest of the governing class. As a result, monasteries, temples, and centres of study were established, providing the basis for the expansion and assimilation of Buddhism within the cultural framework of Vietnam.⁵

Throughout its development, Buddhism underwent modifications and adjustments to conform to the specific customs and traditions of the local populace, assimilating with native spiritual beliefs and practices. Its arrival marked the beginning of a revolutionary journey, affecting not just religious activities but also art, literature, ethics, and government in Vietnam. The arrival of Buddhism in Vietnam, initially introduced by Indian merchants and then adopted and nurtured over several ruling eras, established the foundation for its significant and long-lasting impact on Vietnamese culture, education, and society.

5.2. BUDDHISM IN THE GOLDEN AGE:

During Vietnam's prosperous periods, Buddhism thrived, gaining support from emperors and exerting a substantial influence on art, culture, and education. Vietnam has had several prosperous periods in its history, characterized by the flourishing of Buddhism and its substantial impact on all facets of society. This effect was most prominent when monarchs supported and sponsored Buddhist

⁴ Truong Huu Quynh & et al, *General Vietnam History*, Ha Noi, 1998, p. 60.

⁵ Tran Van Giau, *The Deveelopmet of Vietnam Thought from XIX to XX*, Vol.1, 2016, p.57.

institutions and teachings. The Ly and Tran Dynasties (11th to 14th century) was a significant period of prosperity for Buddhism in Vietnam. During this period, rulers embraced Buddhism and promoted its dissemination, resulting in a thriving development of Buddhist education, art, and culture. Monastic establishments were founded, and Buddhist intellectuals flourished, significantly contributing to the conservation and propagation of Buddhist doctrines.

With the support of these ruling families, Buddhism had a crucial influence on the spiritual aspects of life and a lasting impact on Vietnamese culture. Temples and pagodas were built, serving as education and spiritual counselling hubs. The Buddhist art and architecture thrived, with elaborate sculptures and paintings that portrayed many Buddhist motifs. Furthermore, Buddhist education flourished throughout this prosperous era, focusing on erudition, intellectual discussions, and the construction of educational establishments. Monks and academics dedicated themselves to scholarly endeavours, namely translating and interpreting Buddhist literature, enhancing Vietnamese Buddhism's intellectual milieu. A seamless integration of religious fervour, artistic creativity, and scholarly endeavours marked the zenith of Buddhism in Vietnam. The endorsement and sponsorship from monarchs permitted the widespread dissemination of Buddhist teachings, resulting in a long-lasting heritage that continued to influence Vietnam's cultural and educational terrain for generations to follow.

5.3. THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM IN EARLY DAYS IN VIETNAM:

During its first stages, Buddhism spread across Vietnam, forming temples, monasteries, and educational institutions, therefore firmly establishing its presence in Vietnamese society. The first phase of Buddhism in Vietnam was characterized by a substantial spread and development of the religion, firmly establishing its position within Vietnamese culture. The dissemination of Buddhism in Vietnam occurred progressively after its original introduction, resonating with many sectors of the populace. Monks, academics, and merchants were instrumental in spreading Buddhist teachings and actively contributed to developing temples, monasteries, and educational facilities throughout the area.

As Buddhism was established, these temples and monasteries were central locations for religious rituals, meditation, and social assemblies. These establishments functioned as hubs of knowledge dissemination, where monks conveyed teachings and participated in intellectual endeavours, fostering the expansion of Buddhist education. The propagation of Buddhism throughout its first stages established a cultural and spiritual environment in Vietnam that was intricately interwoven with the precepts of Buddhism. The general population widely embraced the teachings, exerting influence on religious rituals and societal conventions, moral principles, and intellectual perspectives.

In addition, the creation of educational facilities inside temples and monastic organizations established the basis for disseminating Buddhist knowledge and principles. These centres provided a favourable atmosphere for study, enabling people to actively participate in the lectures, partake in intellectual dialogues, and enhance their comprehension of Buddhist ideas. The first diffusion of Buddhism in Vietnam during its early stages signified a pivotal era during which the religion became firmly established and ingrained inside Vietnamese culture. Temples, monasteries, and educational facilities were central locations that facilitated the spread and incorporation of Buddhist teachings, resulting in a significant and enduring influence on Vietnamese culture, education, and spirituality.

6. CONCLUSION:

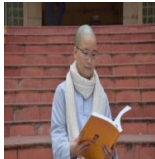
When examining the development of Buddhist education in Vietnam, it becomes clear that Buddhism has deeply integrated itself into the core of its cultural, educational, and spiritual legacy. Throughout thousands of years, Buddhism has had a lasting impact on Vietnamese culture, starting with its introduction by Indian merchants, prospering during prosperous periods, and spreading across the country. The fundamental tenets of Buddhist education, including enlightenment, compassion, and the mitigation of suffering, have functioned as illuminating principles, influencing the educational approaches and objectives within the Vietnamese setting. Buddhism has disseminated knowledge and

fostered a spiritually oriented lifestyle using oral communication, reflective self-awareness, practical implementation, embodiment by respected instructors, and different languages.

Throughout history, Buddhism in Vietnam has played a significant role in spreading knowledge and establishing religious institutions such as temples, monasteries, and educational institutes. It has left a lasting cultural impact and is highly regarded for wisdom. During prosperous eras, financial support from monarchs stimulated its expansion, fostering the thriving of art, culture, and education. By demonstrating tenacity in the face of difficulties, adapting to local traditions, and translating teachings into easily understandable languages, Buddhism overcame obstacles and became an essential component of Vietnamese society. It had a profound impact on religion and art, philosophy, government, and ethics, fundamentally moulding the core of Vietnamese identity. Ultimately, the development of Buddhist education in Vietnam is a tale of perseverance, enlightenment, and assimilation of cultural elements. The monument witnesses the lasting impact of wisdom, compassion, and the quest for enlightenment, which still profoundly reverberate in Vietnamese culture, providing significant insights and guiding ideals for future generations.

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