CHAPTER FOUR

THICH NHAT HANH’S CONCEPT OF PEACE

To study the life of a famous and important person is very essential and valuable. Especially life of the person whose thought and action are the same and concrete. This is because such important person is very rare. It takes long time to have him born on earth. His thought’s study is not only highly rewarding; spreading his thought and his way of practice is a noble task. On the other hand, it is a chance to take an advantage of his knowledge and to preserve it from vanishing.

An effort to understand peace and practical approaches to peace, apart from studying from peace concepts, peace theories and sciences in general. But peace can be also studied from life and works of a particular person who is outstanding.

Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh is one such prominent person in the world. He is esteemed as a world spiritual leader in this age. He is even regarded as a living Buddha. If his concept of peace would be put into study it would be useful and interesting. Apart from being praised his name was nominated for the noble peace prize; his approach to peace is quite concrete, practical, and effective. Therefore, it is very important to study his life and his concept of peace.

In the previous chapter, the Buddhist concept of peace in general was presented. In this chapter, the study will specifically focus on the concept of peace of a Buddhist peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh; he is well-versed in Dhamma study and applies it establish peace in the world. Firstly, it highlights his life and social and thought backgrounds that influenced his concept of peace. Secondly, it discusses his concept of peace. The study aims at definition of peace; his perspective on
classification of kinds of peace; and his peace activities. Finally his approaches to peace are presented.

4.1 Thich Nhat Hanh: Life

The Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced "Tick Naht Hahn) is a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, teacher, author, poet and peace activist. He lives in the Plum Village Monastery in the Dordogne region in the South of France, travelling internationally to give retreats and talks. He coined the term Engaged Buddhism in his book Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire. After a long-term exile, he was given permission to make his first return trip to Vietnam in 2005.

Nhat Hanh has published more than 100 books, including more than 40 in English. Nhat Hanh is active in the peace movement, promoting non-violent solutions to conflicts.

4.1.1 Biography

Thich Nhat Hanh was born with the name Nguyen Xuan Bao in 1926 in the province of Quang Tri in Central Vietnam. Vietnam, at that time, was under French colonial rule. His own first memory of discovering the Bhagavan goes back when he was nine years old. He was looking at a picture of the Buddha seated in meditation on the cover of a Buddhist magazine. The beauty and peacefulness of this image deeply moved him, and it has remained with him ever since. This experience was an important factor in his decision to devote his life to monasticism.¹ At the age of twelve, he was inspired by the ideal of the hermit who retires from the world in order to devote himself to a life of spiritual practice. At this time he went to school on a mountain where a hermit was known to live. He left the place in order to seek this hermit but only to find his cave

empty. But then he heard nearby a wonderful sound like the most beautiful piano music. It was coming from a spring of fresh water. Thirsty from his climb, he was able to drink from this cool source. It was much more than a source of water. It was the source of life and the source of understanding and happiness. In that source he found the true holy man. Though at the time he was perhaps not able to fully conceptualize this insight, he remembers remarking to himself, “I have drunk at the source of life.” Such an experience, though it goes far beyond conceptualization, has the power to change forever the direction of one’s life. Afterwards he shared with his school friends his intention to become a monk, and he was joined by five other boys in this resolution.\(^2\)

At the age of 16 he entered the monastery at Tu Hieu Temple near Hue, Vietnam, where his primary teacher was Dhyana (meditation Zen) Master Thanh Quy Chan That. A graduate of Bao Quoc Buddhist Academy in Central Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh received training in Zen and the Mahayana school of Buddhism and was ordained as a monk in 1949.\(^3\)

In 1956, he was named editor-in-chief of *Vietnamese Buddhism*, the periodical of the Unified Vietnam Buddhist Association (Giao Hoi Phat Giao Viet Nam Thong Nhat). In the following years he founded La Boi Press, the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon, and the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS), a neutral corps of Buddhist peace workers who went into rural areas to establish schools, build healthcare clinics, and help re-build villages.\(^4\)

Nhat Hanh is now recognized as a Dharmacharya and as the spiritual head of the Tu Hieu Temple and associated monasteries. On May 1, 1966 at Tu Hieu Temple, Thich Nhat Hanh received the “lamp

\(^2\) Ibid, p. 3
\(^3\) BBC “Religion&Ethic- Thich Nhat Hanh” http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/people/thichnhathanh.shtml, accessed: 01-10-2012
\(^4\) Ibid
transmission", making him a Dharmacharya or Dharma Teacher, from Master Chan That.  

**During the Vietnam War**

In 1960, Nhat Hanh came to the U.S. to study comparative religion at Princeton University, subsequently being appointed lecturer in Buddhism at Columbia University. By then he had gained fluency in French, Chinese, Sanskrit, Pali, Japanese and English, in addition to his native Vietnamese. In 1963, he returned to Vietnam to aid his fellow monks in their non-violent peace efforts.

Nhat Hanh taught Buddhist psychology and Prajnaparamita literature at the Van Hanh Buddhist University, a private institution that focused on Buddhist studies, Vietnamese culture, and languages. At a meeting in April 1965 Van Hanh Union students issued a *Call for Peace* statement. It declared: "It is time for North and South Vietnam to find a way to stop the war and help all Vietnamese people live peacefully and with mutual respect." Nhat Hanh left for the U.S. shortly afterwards, leaving Sister Chan Khong in charge of the SYSS. Van Hanh University was taken over by one of the Chancellors who wished to sever ties with Thich Nhat Hanh and the SYSS, accusing Chan Khong of being a communist. From that point the SYSS struggled to raise funds and faced attacks on its members. The SYSS persisted in their relief efforts without taking sides in the conflict.

Nhat Hanh returned to the US in 1966 to lead a symposium on Vietnamese Buddhism at Cornell University and to continue his work for peace. He had written a letter to Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1965 entitled: "In Search of the Enemy of Man". It was during his 1966 stay in the U.S. that Thich Nhat Hanh met with Martin Luther King, Jr. and urged him to publicly denounce the Vietnam War. In 1967, Dr. King gave a famous

---

speech at the Riverside Church in New York City, his first to publicly question the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. That year Dr. King nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize. In his nomination Dr. King said, "I do not personally know of anyone more worthy of (this prize) than this gentle monk from Vietnam. His ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity". The fact that King had revealed the candidate he had chosen to nominate and had made a "strong request" to the prize committee, was in sharp violation of the Nobel traditions and protocol. The committee did not make an award that year.

In 1969, Nhat Hanh was the delegate for the Buddhist Peace Delegation at the Paris Peace talks. When the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973, Thich Nhat Hanh was denied permission to return to Vietnam and he went into exile in France. From 1976-1977 he led efforts to help rescue Vietnamese boat people in the Gulf of Siam, eventually stopping under pressure from the governments of Thailand and Singapore.

Establishing the Order of Interbeing

In 1966, Nhat Hanh created the Order of Inter-Being. He headed this monastic and lay group, teaching Five Mindfulness Trainings and Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. In 1969, Nhat Hanh established the Unified Buddhist Church in France (not a part of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam). In 1975, he formed the Sweet Potatoes Meditation Center. The center grew and in 1982 he and his colleague Sister Chan Khong founded Plum Village Buddhist Center (Lang Mai), a monastery and Practice Center in the Dordogne in the south of France. The Unified Buddhist Church is the legally recognized governing body for Plum Village (Lang Mai) in France, for Blue Cliff Monastery in Pine Bush, New York, the Community of Mindful Living, Parallax Press, Deer Park

---

Monastery in California, and the Magnolia Village in Batesville, Mississippi.  

He established two monasteries in Vietnam, at the original Tu Hieu Temple near Hue and at Prajna Temple in the central highlands. Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing have established monasteries and Dharma centers in the United States at Deer Park Monastery (Tu Vien Loc Uyen) in Escondido, California, Maple Forest Monastery (Tu Vien Rung Phong) and Green Mountain Dharma Center (Dao Trang Thanh Son) in Vermont both of which closed in 2007 and moved to the Blue Cliff Monastery in Pine Bush, New York, and Magnolia Village Practice Center (Dao Trang Moc Lan) in Mississippi. These monasteries are open to the public during much of the year and provide on-going retreats for lay people. The Order of Interbeing also holds retreats for specific groups of lay people, such as families, teenagers, veterans, the entertainment industry, members of Congress, law enforcement officers and people of color. He conducted a peace walk in Los Angeles in 2005, and again in 2007.

**Return to Vietnam**

In 2005, following lengthy negotiations, Nhat Hanh was given permission from the Vietnamese government to return for a visit. He was also allowed to teach there, publish four of his books in Vietnamese, and travel the country with monastic and lay members of his Order, including a return to his root temple, Tu Hieu Temple in Hue. The trip was not without controversy. Thich Vien Dinh, writing on behalf of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (considered illegal by the Vietnamese government), called for Nhat Hanh to make a statement against the Vietnam government's poor record on religious freedom. Thich Vien Dinh feared that the trip would be used as propaganda by the Vietnamese

---

government, suggesting to the world that religious freedom is improving there, while abuses continue.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite the controversy, Nhat Hanh again returned to Vietnam in 2007, while two senior officials of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) remained under house arrest. The Unified Buddhist Church called Nhat Hanh's visit a betrayal, symbolizing Nhat Hanh's willingness to work with his co-religionists' oppressors. Vo Van Ai, a spokesman for the UBCV said "I believe Thich Nhat Hanh's trip is manipulated by the Hanoi government to hide its repression of the Unified Buddhist Church and create a false impression of religious freedom in Vietnam." The Plum Village Website states that the three goals of his 2007 trip back to Vietnam were to support new monastics in his Order; to organize and conduct "Great Chanting Ceremonies" intended to help heal remaining wounds from the Vietnam War; and to lead retreats for monastics and lay people. The chanting ceremonies were originally called "Grand Requiem for Praying Equally for All to Untie the Knots of Unjust Suffering", but Vietnamese officials objected, saying it was unacceptable for the government to "equally" pray for soldiers in the South Vietnamese army or U.S. soldiers. Nhat Hanh agreed to change the name to "Grand Requiem For Praying". He has returned regularly since.

4.1.2 Approach

Nhat Hanh's approach has been to combine a variety of traditional Zen teachings with insights from other Mahayana Buddhist traditions, methods from Theravada Buddhism, and ideas from Western psychology—to offer a modern light on meditation practice. Hanh's presentation of the Prajñāpāramitā in terms of "interbeing" has doctrinal

antecedents in the Huayan school of thought, which "is often said to provide a philosophical foundation" for Zen.\(^\text{11}\)

Nhat Hanh has also been a leader in the Engaged Buddhism movement (he coined the term), promoting the individual's active role in creating change. He cites the 13th-century Vietnamese King Tran Nhan Tong with the origination of the concept. Tran Nhan Tang abdicated his throne to become a monk, and founded the Vietnamese Buddhist school in the Bamboo Forest tradition.

### 4.1.3 Names applied to him

The Vietnamese name *Thich* is from "Thich Ca" or "Thich Gia", means "of the Shakya (Shakyamuni Buddha) clan." All Buddhist monks and nuns within the East Asian tradition of Mahayana and Zen adopt this name as their "family" name or surname implying that their first family is the Buddhist community. In many Buddhist traditions, there are a progression of names that a person can receive. The first, the lineage name, is given when a person takes refuge in the Three Jewels. Thich Nhat Hanh's lineage name is Trung Quang. The next is a Dharma name, given when a person, lay or monastic, takes additional vows or when one is ordained as a monastic. Thich Nhat Hanh's Dharma name is Phung Xuan. Additionally, Dharma titles are sometimes given, and Thich Nhat Hanh's Dharma title is "Nhat Hanh".

Neither *Nhat* nor *Hanh*—which approximate the roles of middle name or intercalary name and given name, respectively, when referring to him in English—was part of his name at birth. *Nhat* means "one", implying "first-class", or "of best quality", in English; *Hanh* means "move", implying "right conduct" or "good nature." Thich Nhat Hanh has translated his Dharma names as Nhat = One, and Hạnh = Action. Vietnamese names follow this naming convention, placing the family or surname first, then the middle or intercalary name which often refers to

the person's position in the family or generation, followed by the given name.\textsuperscript{12}

Thich Nhat Hanh is often referred to as "Thay" (Vietnamese: \textit{Thay}, "master; teacher") or Thay Nhat Hanh by his followers. On the Vietnamese version of the Plum Village website, he is also referred to as Thien Su Nhat Hạnh which can translated as "Zen Master", or "Dhyana Master". Any Vietnamese monk or nun in the Mahayana tradition can be addressed as "Thay" ("teacher"). Vietnamese Buddhist monks are addressed "Thay tu" ("monk") and nuns are addressed "Su Co" ("Sister") or "Su Ba" ("Elder Sister").

\subsection*{4.1.4 Awards and honors}

Nobel laureate Martin Luther King, Jr. nominated Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. Nhat Hanh did not win it (as of 2012, the peace prize was not awarded 19 times including that year). He was awarded the Courage of Conscience award in 1991. He has been featured in many films, including \textit{The Power of Forgiveness} showcased at the Dawn Breakers International Film Festival.

\section*{4.2 Thich Nhat Hanh: Background}

The background presents the social background and the thought background that Thich Nhat Hanh’s concept of peace is grounded.

\subsection*{4.2.1 Social background}

The social backgrounds here present the French-Indochina War, the Vietnam War and religious oppression that Thich Nhat Hanh had experienced and they influenced his idea and peace activities.

1) The French-Indochina War

The *French Indochina War* or the *First Indochina War* (also known as, *Anti-French War, Franco-Vietnamese War, Franco-Vietminh War, Indochinese War, Dirty War in France*, and *Anti-French Resistance War* in contemporary Vietnam) is said to have begun in French Indochina on 19 December 1946 and to have lasted until 1 August 1954. Fighting between French forces and their Viet Minh opponents in the South dates from September 1945.

The conflict pitted a range of actors, including the French Union's French Far East Expeditionary Corps, led by France and supported by Emperor Bao Dai's Vietnamese National Army against the Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap. Most of the fighting took place in Tonkin in Northern Vietnam, although the conflict engulfed the entire country and also extended into the neighboring French Indochina protectorates of Laos and Cambodia.

Following the reoccupation of Indochina by the French following the end of World War II, the area having fallen to the Japanese, the Viet Minh launched a rebellion against the French authority governing the colonies of French Indochina. The first few years of the war involved a low-level rural insurgency against French authority. However, after the Chinese communists reached the Northern border of Vietnam in 1949, the conflict turned into a conventional war between two armies equipped with modern weapons supplied by the United States and the Soviet Union.¹³

French Union forces included colonial troops from the whole former empire (Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese ethnic minorities), French professional troops and units of the French Foreign Legion. The use of metropolitan recruits was forbidden by the governments to prevent the war from becoming even more

---

¹³ Fall, Bernard, *Street Without Joy*, p. 17.
unpopular at home. It was called the "dirty war" by supporters of the Left intellectuals in France (including Sartre) during the Henri Martin Affair in 1950.14

While the strategy of pushing the Viet Minh into attacking a well defended base in a remote part of the country at the end of their logistical trail was validated at the Battle of Na San, the lack of construction materials (especially concrete), tanks (because of lack of road access and difficulty in the jungle terrain), and air cover precluded an effective defense, culminating in a decisive French defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu.

After the war, the Geneva Conference on July 21, 1954, made a provisional division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel, with control of the north given to the Viet Minh as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh, and the south becoming the State of Vietnam under Emperor Bao Dai, in order to prevent Ho Chi Minh from gaining control of the entire country.15 A year later, Bao Dai would be deposed by his prime minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, creating the Republic of Vietnam. Diem's refusal to enter into negotiations with North Vietnam about holding nationwide elections in 1956, as had been stipulated by the Geneva Conference, would eventually lead to war breaking out again in South Vietnam in 1959 – the Second Indochina War or the Vietnam War.

2) The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was a Cold War-era military conflict that occurred in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1 November 1955 to the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975. This war followed the First Indochina

War and was fought between North Vietnam, supported by its communist allies, and the government of South Vietnam, supported by the United States and other anti-communist countries.\(^{16}\) The Viet Cong (also known as the National Liberation Front, or NLF), a lightly armed South Vietnamese communist common front directed by the North, largely fought a guerrilla war against anti-communist forces in the region. The Vietnam People's Army (North Vietnamese Army) engaged in a more conventional war, at times committing large units into battle. U.S. and South Vietnamese forces relied on air superiority and overwhelming firepower to conduct search and destroy operations, involving ground forces, artillery, and airstrikes.

The U.S. government viewed involvement in the war as a way to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam as part of their wider strategy of containment. The North Vietnamese government and Viet Cong viewed the conflict as a colonial war, fought initially against France, backed by the U.S., and later against South Vietnam, which it regarded as a U.S. puppet state.\(^{17}\) American military advisors arrived in what was then French Indochina beginning in 1950. U.S. involvement escalated in the early 1960s, with troop levels tripling in 1961 and tripling again in 1962. U.S. combat units were deployed beginning in 1965. Operations spanned international borders, with Laos and Cambodia heavily bombed. American involvement in the war peaked in 1968, at the time of the Tet Offensive.\(^{18}\) After this, U.S. ground forces were gradually

---


\(^{18}\) The Tet Offensive was a military campaign that was launched on January 30, 1968 by forces of the People's Army of Vietnam against the forces of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), the United States, and their allies. The purpose of the offensive was to utilize the element of surprise and strike military and civilian command and control centers throughout South Vietnam, during a period when no attacks were supposed to take place.
withdrawn as part of a policy known as Vietnamization.\textsuperscript{19} Despite the Paris Peace Accords, signed by all parties in January 1973, fighting continued.

U.S. military involvement ended on 15 August 1973 as a result of the Case–Church Amendment passed by the U.S. Congress.\textsuperscript{20} The capture of Saigon by the Vietnam People's Army in April 1975 marked the end of the war, and North and South Vietnam were reunified the following year.

The war exacted a huge human cost in terms of fatalities. Estimates of the number of Vietnamese soldiers and civilians killed vary from fewer than one million to more than three million.\textsuperscript{21} Some 200,000–300,000 Cambodians, 20,000–200,000 Laotians, and 58,220 U.S. service members also died in the conflict. Following the communist takeover, 1-2.5 million South Vietnamese were sent to reeducation camps, with an estimated 165,000 prisoners dying.\textsuperscript{22} Between 100,000 and 200,000 South Vietnamese were executed.\textsuperscript{23} R.J. Rummel, an analyst of political killings, estimated that about 50,000 South Vietnamese deported to "New Economic Zones" died performing hard labor,\textsuperscript{24} out of the 1 million that were sent. More than 3 million people fled from Vietnam, Laos, and

\textsuperscript{19} Vietnamization was a policy of the Richard M. Nixon administration, as a result of the Viet Cong's Tet Offensive, to "expand, equip, and train South Vietnam's forces and assign to them an ever-increasing combat role, at the same time steadily reducing the number of U.S. combat troops.\textsuperscript{20} Gabriel Kolko, \textit{Anatomy of War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience}, New Press, USA, 1994, pp. 457, 461 ff.


\textsuperscript{22} Anh Do and Hieu Tran Phan, Camp Z30-D: The Survivors, \textit{Orange County Register}, April 29, 2001

\textsuperscript{23} See also Nghia M. Vo, \textit{The Bamboo Gulag: Political Imprisonment in Communist Vietnam} (McFarland, 2004)

Cambodia, many as "boat people"²⁵. The number of Vietnamese boat people who died is estimated between 100,000 and 500,000. By war's end, American soldiers except being killed, more than 150,000 had been wounded, and at least 21,000 had been permanently disabled.²⁶ Approximately 830,000 Vietnam veterans suffered symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.

3) Religious oppression

In South Vietnam, a country where the Buddhist majority was estimated to comprise between 70 and 90 percent of the population in 1963, President Ngo Dinh Diem's pro-Catholic policies antagonized many Buddhists. Diem's policies generated claims of religious bias. As a member of the Vietnamese Catholic minority, he is widely regarded by historians as having pursued pro-Catholic policies that antagonized many Buddhists, since the Catholic community is virulently anti-Communist. Specifically, the government was regarded as being biased towards Catholics in public service and military promotions, as well as the allocation of land, business favors and tax concessions.²⁷ Diem once told a high-ranking officer, forgetting that the man was from a Buddhist background, “Put your Catholic officers in sensitive places. They can be trusted.” Many officers in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam converted to Catholicism in the belief that their military prospects depended on it.²⁸

The distribution of weapons to village self-defense militias intended to repel Viet Cong guerrillas saw weapons only given to

²⁵ Boat people is a term that usually refers to refugees, illegal immigrants, or asylum seekers who emigrate in numbers in boats that are sometimes old and crudely made. The term came into common use during the late 1970s with the mass departure of Vietnamese refugees from Communist-controlled Vietnam, following the Vietnam War.
²⁶ The War’s Costs. Digital History
Catholics. Buddhists in the army were often denied promotion if they refused to convert to Catholicism. Some Buddhist villages converted en masse in order to receive aid or avoid being forcibly resettled by Diệm's regime. The Catholic Church was the largest landowner in the country, and the “private” status that was imposed on Buddhism by the French, which required official permission to conduct public Buddhist activities, was never repealed by Diệm.  

Catholics were also de facto exempt from the corvee labor that the government obliged all citizens to perform; U.S. aid was disproportionately distributed to Catholic majority villages. Under Diệm, the Catholic Church enjoyed special exemptions in property acquisition, and in 1959, Diệm dedicated his country to the Virgin Mary. The white and gold Vatican flag was regularly flown at all major public events in South Vietnam. U.S. Aid supplies tended to go to Catholics, and the newly constructed Hue and Dalat universities were placed under Roman Catholic authority to foster a Catholic-skewed academic environment.

The regime's relations with the United States worsened during 1963, as discontent among South Vietnam’s Buddhist majority was simultaneously heightened. In May, in the heavily Buddhist central city of Hue, where Diệm's elder brother was the Catholic Archbishop, the Buddhist majority was prohibited from displaying Buddhist flags during Vesak celebrations commemorating the birth of Gautama Buddha when the government cited a regulation prohibiting the display of non-government flags. A few days earlier, however, Catholics had been encouraged to fly religious flags at another celebration. This led to a protest led by Thich Tri Quang against the government, which was suppressed by Diệm’s forces, killing nine unarmed civilians. Diệm and his supporters blamed the Viet Cong for the deaths and claimed the

---

protesters were responsible for the violence. Although the provincial chief expressed sorrow for the killings and offered to compensate the victims’ families, they resolutely denied that government forces were responsible for the killings and blamed the Viet Cong.32

The Buddhists pushed for a five point agreement: freedom to fly religious flags, an end to arbitrary arrests, compensation for the Hue victims, punishment for the officials responsible and religious equality. Diem labeled the Buddhists as “damn fools” for demanding something that, according to him, they already enjoyed. He banned demonstrations, and ordered his forces to arrest those who engaged in civil disobedience. On 3 June 1963, protesters attempted to march towards the Te Dam pagoda. Six waves of ARVN tear gas and attack dogs failed to disperse the crowds, and finally brownish-red liquid chemicals were doused on praying protesters, resulting in 67 being hospitalised for chemical injuries. A curfew was subsequently enacted.

The turning point came in June when a Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc, set himself on fire in the middle of a busy Saigon intersection in protest of Diem’s policies; photos of this event were disseminated around the world, and for many people these pictures came to represent the failure of Diem's government. A number of other monks publicly self-immolated, and the U.S. grew increasingly frustrated with the unpopular leader’s public image in both Vietnam and the United States. Diem used his conventional anti-communist argument, identifying the dissenters as communists. As demonstrations against his government continued throughout the summer, the special forces loyal to Diem’s brother, Nhu, conducted a brutal August raid of the Xa Loi pagoda in Saigon. Pagodas were vandalized, monks beaten, the cremated remains of

32 Gettleman, Marvin E., pp. 64–83
Quang Duc, which included his heart, a religious relic, were confiscated.\textsuperscript{33}

Simultaneous raids were carried out across the country, with the Tu Dam pagoda in Hue looted, the statue of Gautama Buddha demolished and a body of a deceased monk confiscated. When the populace came to the defense of the monks, the resulting clashes saw 30 civilians killed and 200 wounded.\textsuperscript{34} In all 1,400 monks were arrested, and some thirty were injured across the country. The U.S. indicated their disapproval of Diem's administration when ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. visited the pagoda \textit{ex post facto}. No further mass Buddhist protests occurred during the remainder of Diem's rule (which would amount to less than five months).\textsuperscript{35}

During this time, Diem's sister-in-law, Madame Nhu, a Catholic convert and former Buddhist, the \textit{de facto} first lady because of Diem's unmarried status, inflamed the situation by mockingly applauding the suicides, referring to them as “barbecues”, stating, “If the Buddhists want to have another barbecue, I will be glad to supply the gasoline.”\textsuperscript{36} The pagoda raids stoked widespread public disquiet in Saigon. Students at Saigon University boycotted classes and rioted, which led to arrests, imprisonments and the closure of the university; this was repeated at Hue University. When high school students demonstrated, Diem arrested them as well; over 1,000 students from Saigon's leading high school, most of them children of Saigon civil servants, were sent to re-education camps, including, reportedly, children as young as five, on charges of anti-government graffiti. Diem's foreign minister Vu Van Mau resigned, shaving his head like a Buddhist monk in protest. When he attempted to

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid
\textsuperscript{36} Spencer C Tucker, pp. 292-93.
leave the country on a religious pilgrimage to India, he was detained and kept under house arrest.\textsuperscript{37}

As the Buddhist crisis deepened in July 1963, noncommunist Vietnamese nationalists and the military began preparations for a coup. Bui Diem, later South Vietnam's Ambassador to the United States, reported in his memoirs that General Le Van Kim requested his aid in learning what the U.S. might do about Diem's government. Diem had contacts in both the embassy and with the high-profile American journalists then in South Vietnam, David Halberstam (New York Times), Neil Sheehan (United Press International) and Malcolm Browne (Associated Press).\textsuperscript{38} On 20 August 1963, Nhu's security forces raided the Xa Loi pagoda in Saigon. They chose to wear Army uniforms during the raid to make it appear as if the Army were behind the crackdown. Nhu's forces arrested more than 400 monks who had been sitting cross-legged in front of a statue of the Buddha. Thousands of other Buddhists were arrested throughout the country.

Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., the American ambassador to South Vietnam, refused to meet with Diem. Upon hearing that a coup d'état was being designed by ARVN generals led by General Duong Van Minh, and supported by the CIA, Lodge gave secret assurances to the generals that the U.S. would not interfere. Lucien Conein, a CIA operative, had become a liaison between the US Embassy and the generals, who were led by Tran Van Don. Conein provided a group of South Vietnamese generals with US$ 40,000 to carry out the coup with the promise that U.S. forces would make no attempt to protect Diem. Minh and his co-conspirators overthrew the government on 1 November 1963 in a swift coup.\textsuperscript{39} On 1 November, with only the palace guard remaining to defend Diem and his younger brother, Nhu, the generals called the palace offering Diem exile if he surrendered.


\textsuperscript{39} B. Diem and D. Chanoff, p. 102.
However, that evening, Diem and his entourage escaped via an underground passage to Cholon, where they were captured the following morning, 2 November. The brothers were assassinated together in the back of an armoured personnel carrier with a bayonet and revolver by Captain Nguyen Van Nhung, under orders from Duong Van Minh, while en route to the Vietnamese Joint General Staff headquarters.

4.2.2 Thought background

The thought background presents Mahāyāna Buddhism on some ideals, Yogācāra or Vijyanaavāda, Zen Buddhism, and Engaged Buddhism that influenced Thich Nhat Hanh’s concept of peace.

4.2.2.1 Mahāyāna Buddhism

Mahāyāna (literally the "Great Vehicle") is one of the two main existing branches of Buddhism and a term for classification of Buddhist philosophies and practice. Mahāyāna Buddhism originated in India, and is associated with the oldest historical sect of Buddhism, the Mahāsāṅghika.

According to the teachings of Mahāyāna traditions, "Mahāyāna" also refers to the path of seeking complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, also called "Bodhisattvayāna", or the "Bodhisattva Vehicle.

In the course of its history, Mahāyāna Buddhism spread from India to various other Asian countries such as China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, and Mongolia. Major traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism today include Zen/Chan, Pure Land, Tiantai, and

---

Nichiren, as well as the Esoteric Buddhist traditions of Shingon, Tendai and Tibetan Buddhism.

**Bodhisattva**

The Mahāyāna tradition holds that pursuing only the release from suffering and attainment of Nirvāṇa is too narrow an aspiration, because it lacks the motivation of actively resolving to liberate all other sentient beings from Samsāra. One who engages in this path is called a bodhisattva.

The defining characteristic of a bodhisattva is bodhicitta, the intention to achieve omniscient Buddhahood (Trikaya) as fast as possible, so that one may benefit infinite sentient beings. Sometimes the term bodhisattva is used more restrictively to refer to those sentient beings on the grounds. As Ananda Coomaraswamy notes, "The most essential part of the Mahayana is its emphasis on the Bodhisattva ideal, which replaces that of the arhat, or ranks before it." According to Mahāyāna teachings, being a high-level bodhisattva involves possessing a mind of great compassion and transcendent wisdom to realize the reality of inherent emptiness and dependent origination. Mahāyāna teaches that the practitioner will finally realize the attainment of Buddhahood.

Six perfections (Skt. pāramitā) are traditionally required for bodhisattvas:

1. dāna-pāramitā: the perfection of giving
2. śīla-pāramitā: the perfection on behavior and discipline
3. ksānti-pāramitā: the perfection of forbearance
4. vīrya-pāramitā: the perfection of vigor and diligence
5. dhyāna-pāramitā: the perfection of meditation
6. prajñā-pāramitā: the perfection of transcendent wisdom

---

Expedient means

Expedient means (Skt. upāya) is found in the Lotus Sutra, one of the earliest dated Mahāyāna sūtras, and is accepted in all Mahāyāna schools of thought. It is any effective method that aids awakening. It does not necessarily mean that some particular method is "untrue" but is simply any means or stratagem that is conducive to spiritual growth and leads beings to awakening and nirvana. Expedient means could thus be certain motivational words for a particular listener or even the noble eightfold path itself. Basic Buddhism (what Mahāyāna would term sravakayāna or pratyekabuddhayāna) is an expedient method for helping people begin the noble Buddhist path and advance quite far. But the path is not wholly traversed, according to some Mahāyāna schools, until the practitioner has striven for and attained Buddhahood for the liberation of all other sentient beings from suffering.

Some scholars have stated that the exercise of expedient means, "the ability to adapt one's message to the audience, is also of enormous importance in the Pāli canon."

In fact the Pāli term upāya-kosalla does occur in the Pāli Canon, in the Sangiti Sutta of the Digha Nikāya.

Liberation

“Devotional” Mahāyāna developed a rich cosmography, with various Buddhas and bodhisattvas residing in paradise realms. The concept of the three bodies (trikāya) supports these constructions, making the Buddha himself a transcendent figure. Dr. Guang Xing describes the Mahāyāna Buddha as "an omnipotent divinity endowed with numerous supernatural attributes and qualities ...(He) is described almost as an omnipotent and almighty godhead."

---

Under various conditions, the realms Buddha presides over could be attained by devotees after their death so, when reborn, they could strive towards Buddhahood in the best possible conditions. Depending on the sect, this salvation to “paradise” can be obtained by faith, imaging, or sometimes even by the simple invocation of the Buddha’s name. This approach to salvation is at the origin of the mass appeal of devotional Buddhism, especially represented by the Pure Land.

This rich cosmography also allowed Mahāyāna to be quite syncretic and accommodating of other faiths or deities. Various origins have been suggested to explain its emergence, such as “popular Hindu devotional cults (bhakti), and Persian and Greco-Roman theologies, which filtered into India from the northwest”.

**Buddha nature**

The teaching of a "Buddha nature" (Skt. tathāgatagarbha) may be based on the "luminous mind" concept found in the Āgamas. The essential idea, articulated in the Buddha nature sūtras, but not accepted by all Mahāyānists, is that no being is without a concealed but indestructible interior link to the awakening of bodhi and that this link is an uncreated element (dhātu) or principle deep inside each being, which constitutes the deathless, diamond-like "essence of the self". The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra states: "The essence of the Self (ātman) is the subtle Buddha nature..." while the later Lankāvatāra Sūtra states that the Buddha nature might be taken to be self (ātman), but it is not. In the 'Sagathakam' section of that same sutra, however, the Tathagatagarbha as the Self is not denied, but affirmed: 'The Atma (Self) characterised with purity is the state of self-realization; this is the Tathagata's Womb (garbha), which does not belong to the realm of the theorisers'. In the Buddha nature class of sūtras, the word "self" (ātman) is used in a way defined by and specific to these sūtras.

---

According to some scholars, the Buddha nature discussed in some Mahāyāna sūtras does not represent a substantial self (ātman); rather, it is a positive language and expression of emptiness (śūnyatā) and represents the potentiality to realize Buddhahood through Buddhist practices. It is the "true self" in representing the innate aspect of the individual that makes actualizing the ultimate personality possible.

The actual "seeing and knowing" of this Buddha essence (Buddha-dhātu, co-terminous with the Dharmakāya or self of Buddha) is said to usher in nirvanic liberation. This Buddha essence or "Buddha nature" is stated to be found in every single person, ghost, god and sentient being. In the Buddha nature sūtras, the Buddha is portrayed as describing the Buddha essence as uncreated, deathless and ultimately beyond rational grasping or conceptualisation. Yet, it is this already real and present, hidden internal element of awakeness (bodhi) that, according to the Buddha nature sūtras, prompts beings to seek liberation from worldly suffering, and lets them attain the spotless bliss that lies at the heart of their being. Once the veils of negative thoughts, feelings, and unwholesome behaviour (the kleśas) are eliminated from the mind and character, the indwelling Buddha principle (Buddha-dhātu: Buddha nature) can shine forth unimpededly and transform the seer into a Buddha.

Prior to the period of these sūtras, Mahāyāna metaphysics was dominated by teachings on emptiness, in the form of Madhyamaka philosophy. The language used by this approach is primarily negative, and the Buddha nature genre of sūtras can be seen as an attempt to state orthodox Buddhist teachings of dependent origination and on the mysterious reality of nirvana using positive language instead, to prevent people from being turned away from Buddhism by a false impression of nihilism. In these sūtras the perfection of the wisdom of not-self is stated to be the true self; the ultimate goal of the path is then characterized using a range of positive language that had been used in Indian philosophy previously by essentialist philosophers, but was now transmuted into a
new Buddhist vocabulary that described a being who has successfully completed the Buddhist path.45

4.2.2.2 Yogācāra or Vijñānavāda

Yogācāra (Sanskrit; literally: "yoga practice"; "one whose practice is yoga") is an influential school of Buddhist philosophy and psychology emphasizing phenomenology and (some argue) ontology through the interior lens of meditative and yogic practices. It developed within Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism in about the 4th century CE. Yogācāra discourse explains how our human experience is constructed by mind.

1. Tenets

Yogācāra is "meant to be an explanation of experience, rather than a system of ontology". It uses various concepts in providing this explanation: representation-only, the eight consciousnesses, the three natures, emptiness. They form a complex system, each of which can be taken as a point of departure for understanding Yogacara:

In the vast and complex system that is known as Yogācāra, all of these different approaches and categories are ultimately tied into each other, and thus, starting with any one of them, one can eventually enter into all of the rest."46

Yogācāra is usually treated as a philosophical system, but it is a school of practice as well: Yogācāra attaches importance to the religious practice of yoga as a means for attaining final emancipation from the

---

bondage of the phenomenal world. The stages of yoga are systematically set forth in the treatises associated with this tradition.\(^{47}\)

A) Representation-only

One of the main features of Yogācāra philosophy is the concept of *vijñapti-mātra*. It is often used interchangeably with the term *citta-mātra*, but they have different meanings. The standard translation of both terms is "consciousness-only" or "mind-only." Several modern researchers object this translation, and the accompanying label of "absolute idealism" or "idealistic monism". A better translation for *vijñapti-mātra* is *representation-only*.\(^{48}\)

According to Kochumuttom, Yogacara is a *realistic pluralism*. It does not deny the existence of individual beings:\(^{49}\)

What it denies are:

1. That the absolute mode of reality is consciousness/mind/ideas,
2. That the individual beings are transformations or evolutes of an absolute consciousness/mind/idea,
3. That the individual beings are but illusory appearances of a monistic reality.\(^{50}\)

*Vijñapti-mātra* then means "mere representation of consciousness:

The phrase *vijñaptimātratā-vāda* means a theory which says that the world *as it appears* to the unenlightened ones is mere representation


\(^{49}\) Ibid, p. 1.

\(^{50}\) Ibid, p.135.
of consciousness. Therefore, any attempt to interpret *vijñaptimātratā-vāda* as idealism would be a gross misunderstanding of it.\(^{51}\)

The term *vijñapti-mātra* replaced the "more metaphysical" term *citta-mātra* used in the Lankavatara Sutra. The Lankavatara Sutra "appears to be one of the earliest attempts to provide a philosophical justification for the Absolutism that emerged in Mahayana in relation to the concept of Buddha". It uses the term *citta-mātra*, which means properly "thought-only". By using this term it develops an *ontology*, in contrast to the *epistemology* of the term *vijñapti-mātra*. The Lankavatara Sutra equates *citta* and the absolute. According to Kochumuttom, this not the way Yogacara uses the term *vijñapti*: The absolute state is defined simply as emptiness, namely the emptiness of subject-object distinction. Once thus defined as emptiness (sunyata), it receives a number of synonyms, none of which betray idealism.\(^{52}\)

The term *citta-mātra* was used in Tibet and East Asia interchangeably with "Yogācāra", although modern scholars believe it is inaccurate to conflate the two terms.

**B) Consciousness**

Yogacara gives a detailed explanation of the workings of the mind and the way it constructs the reality we experience. Vasubandhu used the concept of the six consciousnesses, on which he elaborated in the *Triṃśikaikā-kārikā* (Treatise in Thirty Stanzas).

According to the traditional interpretation, Vasubandhu states that there are eight consciousnesses: the five sense-consciousnesses, mind (perception), manas (self-consciousness), and the storehouse-consciousness.\(^{53}\) According to Kalupahana, this classification of eight

\(^{51}\) Ibid, p. 5.
\(^{52}\) Ibid, p. 6.
consciousnesses is based on a misunderstanding of Vasubandhu's Triṃśikaikā-kārikā by later adherents.

C) Karma, seeds and storehouse-consciousness

According to the traditional explanation, the theory of the consciousnesses attempted to explain all the phenomena of cyclic existence, including how rebirth occurs and precisely how karma functions on an individual basis. It addressed questions that had long vexed Buddhist philosophers, such as:

- 'If one carries out a good or evil act, why and how is it that the effects of that act do not appear immediately?'
- 'Insofar as they do not appear immediately, where is this karma waiting for its opportunity to play out?'

The answer given by later Yogācārins was the store consciousness (Sanskrit: ālayavijñāna), also known as the basal, or eighth consciousness. It simultaneously acts as a storage place for karmic latencies and as a fertile matrix of predispositions that bring karma to a state of fruition.

The likeness of this process to the cultivation of plants led to the creation of the metaphor of seeds (Sanskrit: bīja) to explain the way karma is stored in the eighth consciousness. In the Yogācāra formulation, all experience without exception is said to result from the ripening of karma. The seemingly external world is merely a "by-product" (adhipati-phala) of karma. The term vāsanā ("perfuming") is also used, and Yogācārins debated whether vāsāna and bija were essentially the same, the seeds were the effect of the perfuming, or whether the perfuming simply affected the seeds. The type, quantity, quality and strength of the seeds determine where and how a sentient being will be reborn: one's race, gender, social status, proclivities, bodily appearance.

---

and so forth. The conditioning of the mind resulting from karma is called *samskāra*.

**D) Transformations of consciousness**

The traditional interpretation may be discarded on the ground of a reinterpretation of Vasubandhu's works. According to scholar Roger R. Jackson, a "fundamental unconstructed awareness" is "described [...] frequently in Yogacara literature."\(^{55}\)

According to Kalupahana, instead of positing additional consciousnesses, the Trimsikā-kārikā describes the *transformations* of this consciousness: Taking vipaka, manana and vijnapti as three different kinds of functions, rather than characteristics, and understanding vijnana itself as a function (vijñanatiti vijñanam), Vasubandhu seems to be avoiding any form of substantialist thinking in relation to consciousness.\(^{56}\)

These transformations are threefold:\(^{57}\)

Whatever, indeed, is the variety of ideas of self and elements that prevails; it occurs in the transformation of consciousness. Such transformation is threefold, namely,

The first transformation results in the *alaya*: The resultant, what is called mentation, as well as the concept of the object. Herein, the consciousness called alaya, with all its seeds, is the resultant.

The alaya-vijnana therefore is not an eight consciousness, but the resultant of the transformation of consciousness: Instead of being a completely distinct category, *alaya-vijnana* merely represents the normal flow of the stream of consciousness uninterrupted by the appearance of

---

\(^{56}\) Ibid, p. 137.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid
reflective self-awareness. It is no more than the unbroken stream of consciousness called the life-process by the Buddha. It is the cognitive process, containing both emotive and conative aspects of human experience, but without the enlarged egoistic emotions and dogmatic graspings characteristic of the next two transformations.\textsuperscript{58}

The second transformation is \textit{manana}, self-consciousness or "Self-view, self-confusion, self-esteem and self-love". According to the Lankavatara and later interpreters it is the seventh consciousness. It is "thinking" about the various perceptions occurring in the stream of consciousness.\textsuperscript{58} The alaya is defiled by this self-interest: It can be purified by adopting a non-substantialist (\textit{anatman}) perspective and thereby allowing the \textit{alaya}-part (i.e. attachment) to dissipate, leaving consciousness or the function of being intact.\textsuperscript{59}

The third transformation is \textit{visaya-vijnapti}, the "\textit{concept} of the object". In this transformation the \textit{concept} of objects is created. By creating these concepts human beings become "susceptible to grasping after the object": Vasubandhu is critical of the third transformation, not because it relates to the conception of an object, but because it generates grasping after a "real object" (\textit{sad artha}), even when it is no more than a conception (\textit{vijnapti}) that combines experience and reflection.\textsuperscript{60}

\textbf{E) Tathagata-garba thought}

The store consciousness concept developed along with the Buddha nature doctrine and resolved into the concept of mindstream or the "consciousness-continuity" (Sanskrit: \textit{citta-santāna}) to avoid being denounced as running counter to the doctrine of emptiness (\textit{śūnyatā}) and the tenets of selflessness (\textit{anātman}).

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, p. 138.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, pp. p. 141-142.
It may be ultimately traceable to the "luminous mind" mentioned once in the Āgamas, but according to Kalupahana, The concept of alaya is borrowed from Lankavatara; but it does not have the same characteristics nor does it function in the same way. It is neither "the originally pure mind" (prakṛti-prabhasvara-citta) nor "the location of the womb (of enlightenment)" (garbha-samsthanā).

F) Emptiness in Yogācāra

The doctrine of śūnyatā is central to Yogācāra, as to any Mahāyāna school. Early Yogācāra texts, such as the Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra and the Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra, often act as explanations of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. Related concepts as dependent arising (pratītyasamutpāda) and the doctrine of two truths are also central in Yogācāra thought and meditation.

But the Yogacara-school developed its own insights on the nature of sunyata: The Yogācāra thinkers did not simply comment on Mādhyamika thought. They attempted to ground insight into emptiness in a critical understanding of the mind, articulated in a sophisticated theoretical discourse.

Yogacara has a positive approach of emptiness: Although meaning 'absence of inherent existence' in Mādhyamaka, to the Yogācārins [emptiness] means 'absence of duality between perceiving subject and the perceived object.'

Each of the three natures has its corresponding "absence of nature":

---

63 Ibid
1. *parikalpita*, the "absence of inherent characteristic"
2. *paratantra*, the "absence of inherent arising"
3. *parinispanna*, the "absence of inherent ultimacy"

Each of these "absences" is a form of emptiness, i.e. the nature is "empty" of the particular qualified quality.

Yogācāra gave special significance to the *Lesser Discourse on Emptiness* of the Āgamas. It is often quoted in later Yogācāra texts as a true definition of emptiness.65

### 2. Meditation

As the name of the school suggests, meditation practice is central to the Yogācāra tradition. Practice manuals prescribe the practice of mindfulness of body, feelings, thoughts and dharmas in oneself and others, out of which an understanding of the non-differentiation of self and other is said to arise. This process is referred to in the Yogācāra tradition as "turning about in the basis" (Sanskrit: āśraya-parāvṛtti), the basis being the storehouse consciousness.

### 4.2.2.3 Zen Buddhism

Zen is a school of Mahayana Buddhism and originated in China during the 6th century as Chan. From China, Zen spread south to Vietnam, to Korea and east to Japan.

The word *Zen* is derived from the Japanese pronunciation of the Middle Chinese word *Dzyen* (Modern Mandarin: *Chan*), which in turn is

---

derived from the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, which can be approximately translated as "absorption" or "meditative state".\(^6^6\)

Zen emphasizes the attainment of enlightenment and the personal expression of direct insight in the Buddhist teachings. As such, it de-emphasizes mere knowledge of sutras and doctrine and favors direct understanding through zazen and interaction with an accomplished teacher.

The teachings of Zen include various sources of Mahāyāna thought, especially Yogācāra, the Tathāgatagarbha Sutras and Huayan. The Prajñāpāramitā literature and, to a lesser extent, Madhyamaka have also been influential.

**Zen in Vietnam**

Thien Buddhism (Thien Tong) is the Vietnamese name for the school of Zen Buddhism. Thien is ultimately derived from the Chinese *Chan Zong*.

According to traditional accounts of Vietnam, in 580, an Indian monk named Vinitaruci (Vietnamese: *Tì-ni-da-luu-chì*) traveled to Vietnam after completing his studies with Sengcan, the third patriarch of Chinese Chan. This, then, would be the first appearance of Vietnamese Thien Buddhism. The sect that Vinitaruci and his lone Vietnamese disciple founded would become known as the oldest branch of Thien. After a period of obscurity, the Vinitaruci School became one of the most influential Buddhist groups in Vietnam by the 10th century, particularly so under the patriarch Van-Hanh (died 1018).

Other early Vietnamese Zen schools included the Vo Ngon Thong, which was associated with the teaching of Mazu, and the Thao Duong, which incorporated *nianfo* chanting techniques; both were founded by

---

Chinese monks. A new school was founded by one of Vietnam's religious
kings; this was the Truc Lam school, which evinced a deep influence
from Confucian and Taoist philosophy. Nevertheless, Trúc Lâm's prestige
waned over the following centuries as Confucianism became dominant in
the royal court. In the 17th century, a group of Chinese monks led by
Nguyen Thieu established a vigorous new school, the Te, which is the
Vietnamese pronunciation of Linji. A more domesticated offshoot of Lâm
Te, the Lieu Quan school, was founded in the 18th century and has since
been the predominant branch of Vietnamese Thien.

Zen master Thich Thanh Tu is credit for renovating Thien Truc Lam in Viet Nam. He is one of the most prominent and influential figures
of Viet Nam zen masters currently alive. He was a disciple of Master
Thich Thien Hoa. The most famous practitioner of syncretized Thien
Buddhism in the West is Thich Nhat Hanh who has authored dozens of
books and founded Dharma center Plum Village in France together with
his colleague Chan Khong, Bhikkhuni and Zen Master.

Doctrinal background

Though Zen-narrative states that it is a "special transmission
outside scriptures" which "did not stand upon words", Zen does have a
rich doctrinal background. Most essential are "the most fundamental
teaching [...] that we are already originally enlightened"67, and the
Bodhisattva ideal, which supplements insight with Karunā, compassion
with all sentient beings.

A) Original enlightenment

The teaching of "Original enlightenment" in classical Chinese
Chan is expressed by a set of polarities: Buddha-nature - sunyata,
absolute-relative, sudden and gradual enlightenment.

---
67 Schlütter, Morten (2008), How Zen became Zen. The Dispute over Enlightenment and the
Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, p. 3.
i) Buddha-nature and sunyata

When Buddhism was introduced in China it was understood in terms of its own culture. Various sects struggled to attain an understanding of the Indian texts. The Tathāgatagarbha Sutras and the idea of the Buddha-nature were endorsed, because of the perceived similarities with the Tao. Sunyata was understood as pointing to an underlying essence, just as the Buddha-nature. It took Chinese Buddhism several centuries to understand that sunyata does not refer to a substance or essence underneath or behind the world of appearances. This realisation was discernable in the course that Chan took.

ii) Absolute-relative

The Prajnaparamita Sutras and Madhyamaka emphasized the nonduality of form and emptiness: form is emptiness, emptiness is form, as the Heart Sutra says. The idea that the ultimate reality is present in the daily world of relative reality fitted into the Chinese culture which emphasized the mundane world and society. But this does not tell how the absolute is present in the relative world. This question is answered in such schemata as the Five Ranks of Tozan and the Oxherding Pictures.

iii) Sudden and gradual enlightenment

In Zen Buddhism two main views on the way to enlightenment are discernible, namely sudden and gradual enlightenment. Early Chan recognized the "transcendence of the body and mind", followed by "non-defilement [of] knowledge and perception", meaning sudden insight into the true nature followed by gradual purification of intentions. In the 8th-century the Ch'an-history was effectively re-fashioned by Shenhui, who created a dichotomy between the so-called "Northern School", led

---

69 Liang-Chieh (1986), The Record of Tung-shan, Kuroda Institute, p. 9
by Yuquan Shenxiu, propagating "gradual teachings", and his own line of teaching, which he called the "Southern school", propagating "sudden awakening". According to the sudden enlightenment propagated by Shenhui insight into true nature is sudden; thereafter there can be no misunderstanding anymore about this true nature.

Once the dichotomy between sudden and gradual was in place, it defined its own logic and rhetorics, which are also recognizable in the distinction between Caodong (Soto) and Lin-ji (Rinzai) chan. But it also leads to a "sometimes bitter and always prolix sectarian controversy between later Chan and Hua-yen exegetes".\textsuperscript{71} In the Platform Sutra the dichotomy between sudden and gradual is reconciled. Guifeng Zongmi, fifth-generation successor to Shenhui, also softened the edge between sudden and gradual. In his analysis, sudden awakening points to seeing into one's true nature, but is to be followed by a gradual cultivation to attain Buddhahood. The need of cultivation after attaining insight is still recognized by the contemporary Rinzai-school and the Sanbo Kyodan.

**B) The Bodhisattva ideal**

An important, though easily overlooked aspect of Zen is the bodhisattva ideal. It supplements kensho and insight into the absolute with Karunā, compassion with all sentient beings. This ideal is reflected in the Bodhisattva vow and the Bodhisattva Precepts or jukai. The Bodhisattva-ideal is a central theme in the prajnaparamita-sutras. Buddhas and bodhisattvas such as Amitābha, Avalokitesvara, Manjusrī, Samantabhadra, and KSitigarbha are venerated alongside Gautama Buddha.

**Zen teachings and Zen Practice**

To point out 'essential Zen-teachings' is almost impossible, given the variety of schools, the extended history of 1500 years, and the

emphasis on suchness, reality just-as-it-is, which has to be expressed in daily life, not in words. But common to most schools and teachings is this emphasis on suchness, the Bodhisattva-ideal, and the priority of zazen.

A) Pointing at the moon

Zen teachings can be likened to "the finger pointing at the moon".\textsuperscript{72} Zen teachings point to the moon, awakening, "a realization of the unimpeded interpenetration of the dharmadhatu". But the Zen-tradition also warns against taking its teachings, the pointing finger, to be this insight itself:\textsuperscript{73}

Wujin Chang, a nun, asked the Sixth Zen patriarch, Hui Neng, for help in understanding the Mahanirvana Sutra. The master answered that he could not read, but if the nun would read it aloud for him, he would do his best to help her. The nun then asked, "If you can't even read the words, how can you understand the truth behind them?" "Truth and words are unrelated. Truth can be compared to the moon," answered Hui Neng, pointing to the moon with his finger, "And words can be compared to a finger. I can use my finger to point out the moon, but my finger is not the moon, and you don't need my finger in order to be able to see the moon".

B) Zen meditation

Central to Zen-practice is dhyana or meditation. The Zen tradition holds that in meditation practice, notions of doctrine and teachings necessitate the creation of various notions and appearances that obscure the transcendent wisdom of each being's Buddha-nature. This process of rediscovery goes under various terms such as "introspection", "a backward step", "turning-about" or "turning the eye inward".

\textsuperscript{73} Abe, Masao; Heine, Seteven (1996), \textit{Zen and Comparative Studies}, University of Hawaii Press, p. 19.
Sitting meditation is called *zazen* (lit. "seated meditation"), and in Chinese it is called *zuocha*, both simply meaning "sitting dhyāna". During this sitting meditation, practitioners usually assume a position such as the lotus position, half-lotus, Burmese, or seiza postures, using the dhyāna mudrā. To regulate the mind, awareness is directed towards counting or watching the breath or put in the energy center below the navel. Often, a square or round cushion placed on a padded mat is used to sit on; in some other cases, a chair may be used.

**C) Kōan practice**

A kōan, literally "public case", is a story or dialogue, describing an interaction between a Zen master and a student. These anecdotes give a demonstration of the master's insight. Koans emphasize the non-conceptional insight that the Buddhist teachings are pointing to. Koans can be used to provoke the "great doubt", and test a student's progress in Zen practice.

Responding to a kōan requires a student to let go of conceptual thinking and of the logical way we order the world, so that insight into sunyata arises naturally and spontaneously in the mind. But this does not mean that words are useless, as is demonstrated already by the mere fact that koans *are* words:

The way to Satori is not through dependence upon words, even if they be words of the Buddha or past Masters; however, one should not reject words, for, imperfect as they are, they are the only means we have of attaining enlightenment. They should use the words and ideas contained in the koans to reach satori, but they should never confuse the two. Conceptualizations, words, logic and reason are means whereby one attains enlightenment, but they must not be equated with enlightenment.74

---
Today, the Zen student's mastery of a given kōan is presented to the teacher in a private interview. Zen teachers advise that the problem posed by a kōan is to be taken quite seriously, and to be approached as literally a matter of life and death. While there is no unique answer to a kōan, practitioners are expected to demonstrate their understanding of the kōan and of Zen through their responses. The teacher may approve or disapprove of the answer and guide the student in the right direction. There are also various commentaries on kōans, written by experienced teachers, that can serve as a guide. These commentaries are also of great value to modern scholarship on the subject. Kōan-inquiry may be practiced during sitting meditation (zazen), walking meditation (kinhin), and throughout all the activities of daily life. Kōan practice is particularly emphasized by the Japanese Rinzai school, but it also occurs in other schools or branches of Zen depending on the teaching line.

4.2.2.4 Engaged Buddhism

The term “Engaged Buddhism” originates from a Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, who stood up against the Vietnamese war as a pacifist and was exiled to France during the 1960s. The term “Engaged Buddhism” is a phrase that has been applied to various Buddhist activities and movements. The essence of the term is the engagement of both the Buddhist clerics and the lay followers with various social and political issues and their work together to address those issues. Today engaged Buddhists can be found in many countries, including the United Kingdom, Africa, Sri Lanka, India, Tibet, Thailand, Taiwan, South Korea, Australia, Japan, and the United States.

There are many interpretations of what Engaged Buddhism means, each dependent on the action and movement existing within a particular Buddhist school. With each distinct school comes a way of accommodating and interpreting various sufferings and accordingly each practice, movement, and meaning differs. At the same time, “there are enormous differences in the various approaches to Engaged Buddhism
worldwide.” For example, the interpretative difference of the ideals of Engaged Buddhism between Mahayāna and Theravada Buddhists are remarkably varied in relation to their basic involvement in society because their ways to approach Buddhist practice are different. Moreover, there is also an undeniable difference between Asian Buddhist and Western Buddhist’s view of what constitutes Engaged Buddhism.

However “there are also a number of distinctive and defining characters, in terms of shared rules and common ways of working,” as explained by Thich Nhat Hanh, in engaged movements. This commonality is the response to the conditions and the sufferings of life, and aims to create a transformation of behavior using the Buddhist principle of self-reflection.

In general, the fundamental teaching of Buddhism is composed of the doctrine of dependent origination (pratītya-samutpāda), a teaching on causation and the ontological status of phenomena, and the Four Noble Truths; the four foundational propositions of Buddhist doctrine enunciated by the Buddha in his first sermon; the truth of suffering (duhkha), the truth of cause of suffering (samudaya), the truth of cessation of suffering (nirodha), and the truth of the path to cessation of suffering (mārga). Through contemplating these, one knows emptiness (śūnyatā) and brings its realization into one’s own life by practicing the Eightfold Noble Paths; right views, right thoughts, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation. To implement this, one leaves the worldly life and constructs a wall between society and the Buddhist community to concentrates on one’s own meditation. Therefore Buddhism is understood as individual experience, focused on one’s own quiet life style while avoiding being involved in extra problems as much as possible.

---

76 Jones, *the New Social Face of Buddhism*, p. 181.
Thich Nhat Hanh and Engaged Buddhism

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, poet, and peacemaker. Before being exiled from Vietnam in 1966, he was a cofounder of Van Hanh Buddhist University, An Quang Buddhist Pagoda, the School of Youth for Social Service, and the Order of Interbeing. Since that time, in Europe and North America, he has worked tirelessly for peace, chairing the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks, founding Plum Village, a Buddhist training monastery near Bordeaux, and lecturing and leading retreats worldwide on the art of mindful living.

The relation between Thich Nhat Hanh and “Engaged Buddhism” is centered in the background of the Vietnamese War.5 One of the many results of the war was that Vietnamese Buddhism had suffered under the Ngo Dinh Diem’s political forces and the South Vietnamese Catholic bureaucrats.

For example, one evening, a Buddhist radio program was planned but failed to be broadcast. Then, a crowd gathered at the radio station and protested. At the same time, government officials arrived there and suppressed the crowd. And, the army threw grenades into the crowd, but denied killing eight people. After this event, Buddhists demanded “legal equality with the Catholic Church, an end to arrests, greater freedom to practice their faith, and indemnification of the families of victims of [eight] shootings.”77 Diem ignored responsibility for this act.

From these events, we can infer the Vietnamese were suffering under Diem through the oppression of religion. Buddhists had been oppressed by Diem’s political power. Through the Buddhists’ demands,

---

his responsibility was highlighted, but he escaped again. In addition to his two escapes, he arrested many Buddhists and students who accused him.

Because of these realities, most Buddhist monks had to obey Diem’s political policies, which “destroyed many things, including [the Vietnamese] ability to stand on own feet economically,” and persuade the followers to live under harsh conditions. 78

However, Thich Nhat Hanh criticized their attitude. He showed his disappointment in Vietnamese Buddhism in those days. He states:

―Intellectuals and students became increasingly disillusioned with the Buddhist hierarchy. Vietnamese Buddhism, two thousand years old, was not offering a way out of the noose that was strangling the Vietnamese South.‖ 79

Moreover, his disappointment can be felt in the following:

For eight years, we tried to speak about the need for a humanistic Buddhism and a unified Buddhist Church in Vietnam that could respond to the needs of the people. 80

Thich Nhat Hanh lamented that Vietnamese Buddhism depended on the hierarchy and was losing sight of the focus on liberation from suffering, which is the central purpose in Buddhism. Thich Nhat Hanh’s idea of “Engaged Buddhism” would arise from these problems. With these thoughts, he started various actions. For example, he founded a public facility, Ung Quang Temple (An Quang Buddhist Institute), the foremost center of Buddhist studies in South Vietnam and a center of activism in the Buddhist struggle for peace and equality. Besides, a new monastic community, Phong Boi, School of Youth for Social Service, and Van Hanh University were established to fulfill his dream for Buddhist

79  Ibid., p. 139.
80  Ibid., p. 50.
higher education in Vietnam. However, because of these social Buddhist actions, he was exiled to France in 1966.

**Thich Nhat Hanh and the Concept of Engaged Buddhism**

Thich Nhat Hanh’s “Engaged Buddhism” comes from the French word “engagement,” meaning politics joined with deliberate action. Thich Nhat Hanh explains:

I started reflecting and writing of the possibility and practice of Engaged Buddhism in the 1950s, and in 1964 I wrote the book *Engaged Buddhism*. In an essay titled “The Basic Ideal of Buddhist Youth for Social Service,” I suggested how to apply Buddhist ideals to improve the conditions of life in a time of war and social injustice.81

In the above concern about “how to apply Buddhist ideals to improve the conditions of life,” we find the conceptual ideal of Engaged Buddhism. In addition, the phrase “in a time of war and social injustice” implies suffering, and follows the phrase “the conditions of life.” We can interpret this to mean that Engaged Buddhism is a means “to apply Buddhist ideals to improve” the sufferings. Thich Nhat Hanh also states the following:

We needed the teachings of the Buddha about self-protection and self-healing in our personal practice and then took them out into the world. This was Engaged Buddhism in its purest form.82

---


82 Thich Nhat Hanh, *Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community*, p. 95.
The purest form of Engaged Buddhism is based on “self-protection” and “self-healing.” In other words, it has the “self-reflection” component which tries to change selfish minds into selfless minds at its very foundation. Thich Nhat Hanh also explains:

From a very young age, I had a strong desire to put the Buddha’s teaching into practice in order to improve the lives of the people around me, especially those of the poor peasants. Many monks, including myself, had a deep desire to bring Buddhism into every walk of life. For us, taking action according to the principles of what I called Engaged Buddhism—Right action based in compassion—was the answer.  

Thich Nhat Hanh’s writings reflect his commitment and desire to help others. In turn, this living thought creates various individual and social actions, and is considered the core of his Engaged Buddhism. Sallie B. King explains “Consequently, an emphasis upon the necessity of meditative practice for the social activist is probably the most fundamental of Hanh’s teaching.” Thich Nhat Hanh himself states:

Engaged Buddhism does not only mean to use Buddhism to solve social and political problems, protesting against bombs, and protesting against social injustice. First of all we have to bring Buddhism into our daily lives.

For Thich Nhat Hanh, meditative practice is the Buddhist foundation of Engaged Buddhism. In other words, “engaging in ourselves” is the purest form of Engaged Buddhism. In this ideal, we can see the concept of “living thought” as its premise. That is, Engaged Buddhism as the concept at the center, responds to the sufferings in our

83 ibid., p. 94.
life, and accordingly creates action (movement) using the Buddhist principle of self-reflection (practice).

4.3 Thich Nhat Hanh’s viewpoint on meaning of peace

It is quite difficult to indicate as to what is peace according to Thich Nhat Hanh’s definition? Even though, he has written many books on peace and their titles themselves seem to refer specifically to peace such as “Being Peace”, “Peace is Every Step”, “Peace is Every Breath”, “Touching Peace”, “Peace Begins Here”, “Creating True Peace”, “Keeping Peace”. But it is not clearly stated as to what peace is. It seems it is well known or it is what people have understood. On the contrary, he always confirms that peace is available at this moment: “Peace is available in the here and the now”\(^86\); real peace is possible: “True peace is always possible”\(^87\); peace is everywhere, peace is with us: “Peace is all around us—in the world and in nature—and within us—in our bodies and our spirits”\(^88\); peace is there ready for us: “Peace is there for us in every moment”\(^89\).

However, there are some statements that directly mention peace in his viewpoint. Those statements are: “Peace is not simply the absence of violence; it is the cultivation of understanding, insight, and compassion, combined with action. Peace is the practice of mindfulness, the practice

---


\(^{89}\) Thich Nhat Hanh, *Creating True Peace*, p. 2.
of being aware of our thoughts, our actions, and the consequences of our actions”\(^{90}\); “Peace is a living substance we build our lives with.”\(^{91}\)

According to the above statements, like some other peace scholars, Thich Nhat Hanh does not agree with the definition of peace that defines peace as only the absence of violence or the absence of war. For him, peace is the cultivation of understanding, insight, compassion, combined with action in order to treat righteously fellow beings; peace is the practice of mindfulness leading to realizing thoughts, actions, and the results of actions that affect oneself, others, society, and the world; peace is a living substance that nourishes our lives.

Furthermore, according to him, peace is one of many seeds that already exist in our store-consciousness as he said: “The seeds of peace, joy, happiness are already in you, not outside you”\(^{92}\); “No one can give anyone else ideas about peace. Instead, I would like to offer you an opportunity to recognize the seeds of peace and joy that are already in everyone”\(^{93}\); “There are seeds of peace and joy within us. If we know how to take refuge in our in-breath, in our step, then we can touch our seeds of peace and joy and allow them to manifest for our enjoyment.”\(^{94}\); “You can touch peace just by breathing in or making a step. You touch the seed of peace inside you and remove the tension and conflict in your body, your feelings and your perceptions.”\(^{95}\)

---

\(^{90}\) Ibid, p. 5.
\(^{92}\) Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Begins Here*, p. 37.
\(^{93}\) Ibid
\(^{94}\) Ibid, p. 24.
\(^{95}\) Ibid, p. 25.
In the light of Thich Nhat Hanh’s perspective, we have the seed of everything in us.\(^96\) The seed includes positive ones like peace, joy, happiness, mindfulness, understanding, love etc. and negative ones like craving, anger, fear, hate, forgetfulness etc. Our minds are like lands planted with those seeds. The quality of our lives depends on seeds we water. We will get what comes out of the seed we have planted and watered. Peace will grow and give fruits to us as he said:

“Your mind is like a piece of land planted with many different kinds of seeds: seeds of joy, peace, mindfulness, understanding, and love; seeds of craving, anger, fear, hate, and forgetfulness. These wholesome and unwholesome seeds are always there, sleeping in the soil of your mind. The quality of your life depends on which seeds you water. If you plant tomato seeds in your garden, tomatoes will grow. Just so, if you water a seed of peace in your mind, peace will grow. When the seed of happiness in you is watered, you will become happy. When the seed of anger in you is watered, you will become angry. The seeds that are watered frequently are those that will grow strong.”\(^97\)

Moreover, Thich Nhat Hanh regards that peace is available only in the present moment.\(^98\) He said that we don’t need to wish our friends, “Peace be with you”. Peace is already with them. We only need to help them cultivate the habit of touching peace in each moment.\(^99\) To him, to practice peace, to make peace alive in us, is to actively cultivate understanding, love, and compassion, even in the face of misperception and conflict. Practicing peace, especially in times of war, requires courage.\(^100\) Also he said he does not want to talk about peace as an ideal or theory; but he wants to show how to be peaceful right here and now as

---

\(^{98}\) Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace Begins Here, p. 23.
\(^{99}\) Thich Nhat Hanh, Touching Peace, p. 9.
\(^{100}\) Thich Nhat Hanh, Creating True Peace, p.1
he said: “It is not my intention to give anyone ideas about peace; you already have plenty of Ideas. Our intention is to be peace right in the here and the now.”

From what has mentioned above, according to Thich Nhat Hanh’s perspective, it can be said that peace is a state of peacefulness that naturally exists and is available to everyone anywhere anytime; peace is the seed that is in our minds and needs the practice or the cultivation to allow it manifest.

4.4 Thich Nhat Hanh’s viewpoint on kinds of peace

It is well known that there are two main kinds of peace—external peace and internal peace; and they are interrelated. Thich Nhat Hanh accepts this classification. But according to his viewpoint, internal peace is very significant; it is the real peace. Peace will be possible if we have peace within ourselves, as he said: “When you have peace within, real peace with others will be possible.” He sets the question to make us think as to how we can create peace if we do not have peace inside ourselves as he questions “How do you want to create peace, if there is no peace inside yourselves?”

According to him, to have peace in the world we must have peace within ourselves first as he says: “To have peace in the world, we must first have peace within ourselves.”

In addition, Thich Nhat Hanh said that if we have peace in ourselves, we will become an instrument of peace and we can help other people to have peace as it is said: “If we have some peace in our body, our emotions, and our perceptions, then we can help another person to

---

101 Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace Begins Here, p. 20.
103 Quoted from “http://www.religioustolerance.org/quotes5.htm”, accessed: 14-10-2012
have peace. But we have to begin with ourselves. You cannot be an instrument of peace if you have no peace within yourself.”¹⁰⁵ That statement shares the similar essence is also found in his book, Being Peace as it is stated: “If we are not happy, if we are not peaceful, we cannot share peace and happiness with others, even those we love, those who live under the same roof. If we are peaceful, if we are happy, we can smile and blossom like a flower, and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace.”¹⁰⁶

Thich Nhat Hanh strongly believes that peace in oneself is peace in the world as he has written on the calligraphy stating “Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World.”¹⁰⁷ He also has a conviction that peace in us will affect even the cosmos as he said: “When we have peace and joy in ourselves, our peace and joy vibrate throughout the cosmos.”¹⁰⁸

Therefore, he gives much emphasis on creating peace in oneself rather than talking about theories or strategies of peace as his saying: “In Plum Village, we try to do things differently. We don’t discuss strategies of peace. We practice bringing peace into ourselves first.”¹⁰⁹ And when he refers to working for peace by the time when Iraq War was going on, he always stresses on working with peaceful heart and he never accepts the ideal of overcoming evil with evil as his saying, “Those who work for peace must have a peaceful heart. When you have a peaceful heart, you are the child of God. But many who work for peace are not at peace. They still have anger and frustration, and their work is not really peaceful. To preserve peace, our hearts must be at peace with the world, with our brothers and our sisters. When we try to overcome evil with evil, we are not working for peace. If you say, "Saddam Hussein is evil. We

¹⁰⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace Begins Here, p. 21.
¹⁰⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, Being Peace, p. 3.
¹⁰⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, Touching Peace, p. 73.
¹⁰⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace Begins Here, p. 15.
have to prevent him from continuing to be evil," and if you then use the same means he has been using, you are exactly like him. Trying to overcome evil with evil is not the way to make peace."  

4.5 Thich Nhat Hanh’s Peace Activities

Nhat Hanh was a graduate of Bao Quoc Buddhist Academy in Central Vietnam where Thich Tri Quang and Thich Thien Minh served as staff. With his immense intellectual and creative abilities and being younger, he found himself clashing with the older monks whom he labelled as the conservative elements of the Church. So unhappy was he with the Buddhist hierarchy that he and some of his close associates founded Phuong Boi meditation place in the highlands. Phuong Boi means fragrant palm leaves on which the teaching of the Buddha were written down in ancient times. This name expressed Nhat Hanh ideal to strengthen the roots of Buddhist culture. What exactly was the nature of the differences with the Buddhist elders was not clearly spelt out, but Nhat Hanh was bitter towards them. He said that the Church hierarchy had not accepted his group because it decided to speak the truth. He commented:

“Buddhism has much to contribute (to bring about social changes) but we cannot wait for the religious hierarchy to act. They are reluctant to bring about change and they have repeatedly neglected our efforts to create an Engaged Buddhism. Our proposals lie in unopened folders on their desks, gathering dust.”

---


112 Ibid., p. 150.
Nhat Hanh was outside the country on both occasions, when the Church confronted Diem and the U.S. However he contributed a great deal because he was the most successful monk in making the West understand the motives and actions of the Institute and the plights of the Vietnamese peasants. Since he was ten thousand miles away from the decision making of the Buddhist hierarchy, he could not be a party to the inner thoughts of the Church leaders.

In 1963 Nhat Hanh was in New York working in the Post Graduate School at Columbia University. When Ngo Dinh Nhu directed his special force to arrest all the activist monks, Nhat Hanh was busy translating documents on violations of human rights secretly smuggled out by none other than the Vietnamese Ambassador to the UN. On October 8, 1963, Nhat Hanh presented them to the U.N. General Assembly during the debate on President Ngo Dinh Diem’s suppression of the Buddhists. As a result the UN agreed to send a fact-finding delegation to Vietnam. No one doubted that Nhat Hanh was the best person representing the Buddhist Institute outside Vietnam to raise awareness in and support of, the West.

After Ngo Dinh Diem’s fall, Thich Tri Quang himself sent Nhat Hanh a telegram and a letter asking him to come back home to help the elders to rebuild the Church. Nhat Hanh hesitated. Columbia University then invited him to stay and establish the Department of Vietnamese Studies. His close confidant, Sister Chan Khong, revealed that in the past Nhat Hanh had received no support whatsoever from the UBC leaders. If he stayed in New York, he would not have to struggle with those conservative monks who had given him so much trouble in his efforts to renew Buddhism. It was a difficult choice for Nhat Hanh.

Tri Quang’s request was short, humble and straight to the point: "I am too old and too old-fashioned to take care of this big responsibility.

---

Please come back and help". Any one who knew Thich Tri Quang well would have realised this was an extremely rare action by this eccentric monk, but Thich Tri Quang, and along with other Elders obviously recognised Nhat Hanh’s enormous talent. Tri Quang was then only forty, and only three years older than Nhat Hanh, but a great deal more conservative in attitude. His cable moved Nhat Hanh and although in the past Tri Quang was one of the pillars of the conservatism he had struggled against. There was another hidden reason that made Nhat Hanh pack up and go home. In his thinking, whether he liked organised religious institution or not, as he saw it, the UBC could be a very effective means in the efforts to seek peace.114

Nhat Hanh flew home on December 16, 1963 and wasted no time in placing his ideas before his fellow monks. In January 1964 he submitted a Three Point Proposal to the Executive Council of the UBC. (This could have been one of the first items on the agenda which were discussed by the Executive Council because the Unified Buddhist Church was only officially formed on 13 January). Firstly, Nhat Hanh requested that the UBC should publicly call for cessation of hostilities in Vietnam. Secondly the UBC should help to build an institute for the study and practice of Buddhism to train future leaders and thirdly, a centre for training Buddhist social workers should be set up. Sister Chan Khong reported that in response the Church elders offered support only for the Buddhist Institute and rejected his proposals for social change.115

However, a little later on, the Executive Council set up the Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies and a School of Youth for Social Service on the 13 March 1964, and the first class started on 17 March 1993. The only proposal that the Church conclusively rejected was the setting up of the Tiep Hien (Inter-being) Order in which laity could be ordained as monks. The image of an ordained monk who was also a

married man or woman was just too much to contemplate on the conservative Sangha at that time.

The Buddhist Institute did not openly appeal to the two sides to cease hostilities in early 1964 either as Nhat Hanh proposed. But in the preamble to the Church Constitution it spelt out its long term objective: ‘in line with the ideal of World peace in the Buddha’s teachings, the UBC tried to actualise the people’s aspirations by bringing peace to every one, particularly to our people’. It was an unambiguous message proclaimed by the Church leaders about the new direction and actions in the days ahead. As Thich Tri Quang admitted, after Diem’s regime collapsed the Church faced more problems than it had encountered before; and when the tempo of the war heated up, the Church had no choice but to do all it could to stop the war. The Church’s tactics and approaches have been different from those of Nhat Hanh, but its main objective in the next few years was absolutely clear: to end the war. Sister Chan Khong commented that the Buddhist Church elders could imagine no way that worked for peace nor could social change succeed. But this may have been too harsh and an unjustified criticism. Sister Chan Khong believed that, if Nhat Hanh’s peace proposal had received the Buddhist Church’s support at that time, ‘we, Vietnamese, might have been able to solve many of our problems without such an escalation of the war and our country would have suffered much less.

If Sister Chan Khong knew the real reasons behind Pentagon’s decision to remove the Minh’s government, she would not have been that optimistic! The peace movement, whether inside or outside of Vietnam, was denounced quickly or suppressed brutally, because Johnson government was fixated on a military victory and would not tolerate any other solution. Apart from Nhat Hanh, a few monks who had studied in India and Japan also returned home and one of them, Thich Minh Chau, was to become Nhat

Hanh’s adversary in running the Buddhist Institute. Nhat Hanh’s charisma appealed to a large number of students who volunteered to help him to run the Higher Buddhist Studies Institute. On waiting for the Institute Campus to be built in a nearby suburb, a small temple was used as classrooms and an office. Nhat Hanh proudly described his first achievement, The Van Hanh University, saying:

“Van Hanh is an unusual university. It bears none of the distinguished marks normally associated with institutions of higher learning. When its rains, students have to wade through puddles to get to class, winding their way through the crowded market stalls!”

Nhat Hanh almost single-handedly set up the University, raising money from a network of friends and acquaintances. The administration was staffed with volunteers and the teaching staff in the first instance, was mostly monks who provided their service voluntarily. Nhat Hanh assigned himself a humble position in the publication section which was most suitable for such a creative and thoughtful person.

The syllabus focused on Buddhist studies, Vietnamese Culture and Languages. Nhat Hanh taught Buddhist psychology (Yogacarins) and Prajnaparamita literature, a principal trend in the Mahayana. The Chancellor was a senior monk, Thich Tri Thu whose position was purely ceremonial. The Vice Chancellor was Thich Minh Chau who had received a Ph.D. at Nalanda University in India. Thich Minh Chau had been married before he was ordained and after spending a long time in India, he wore Theravada robes and was fluent in Pali and Sanskrit. His ability to study sutras written in Pali made him an intellectual gem in the UBC. Van Hanh Buddhist University grew quickly and became the most prestigious private University—actually it was the first of its kind—in Vietnam. When it was moved to a new campus, Thich Minh Chau invited a former director of the Vietnam Press, Ton That Thien, to set up the

---

119 Ibid., p. 158
Faculty of Social Sciences with a syllabus similar to that of an American University. While Minh Chau’s efforts to transform the Van Hanh University into a modernised institution of higher education were warmly welcomed by students as well as by educators, his closeness to a former Diem protégée alarmed the Church leaders. Minh Chau was appointed Chancellor whose duties were equivalent to those of a vice chancellor in a Western University. Minh Chau developed a close relationship with the Asia Foundation, a cultural arm of the CIA, which provided most of the operating fund for Van Hanh University. Although the Church leaders were wary of this dubious action, by then Minh Chau had become a highly respected figure in academic circles, so the Executive Council of the UBC could do nothing. However they insisted in appointing academic staff loyal to the Church. Researchers in the West often give credit for the Van Hanh University to Nhat Hanh, but most are unaware of the rivalry for control of the University between the UBC and a pro-American group of academicians tacitly supported by Minh Chau’s faction.

It is believed that Minh Chau’s father, a provincial chief, was murdered by the communists during the Indochina war; so it was understandable that he was strongly anti-communist. Both Minh Chau and Nhat Hanh were gentle and charmed. Nhat Hanh was more charismatic and had an army of followers amongst young people and artists, while Minh Chau was a profound Buddhist scholar. Nhat Hanh was the founder of the Van Hanh University and Minh Chau was its Chancellor who was skillful in dealing with a hostile government and most importantly, he could muster the support from the American Mission in Saigon. Even so, there was a certain level of animosity between these two leaders, which grew. The rivalry was quite intense and when Nhat Hanh went on a peace tour, their relationship collapsed.

Apart from Van Hanh University, another institution that Nhat Hanh and his group were deeply involved in was the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS). Although the UBC agreed in principle to set it up, it was not until September 1965 that it was inaugurated. Nhat Hanh and
his associates were given a free reign to run this School which was legally a part of the Van Hanh University. Like any other novel projects of his, it was staffed by a dozen of volunteers and headed by a gentle, 24 year-old monk, who had entered the monastic life at the age of seven. He was Thich Thanh Van. Nevertheless Sister Chan Khong took responsibility in almost every area of the school and became sort of commander in chief.120 What worried Minh Chau was that the peace activists at Van Hanh Students Union, of which Sister Chan Khong was President might jeopardise his relationship with Asia Foundation, the main funding agency for Van Hanh University. At a meeting in April 1965, Van Hanh Union students issued a ‘Call for Peace’ statement. Its main call was: ‘It is time for North and South Vietnam to find a way to stop the war and help all Vietnamese people live peacefully and with mutual respect’.121 Nhat Hanh took this statement with him to Cornell. That was the opportunity Minh Chau had waited for. Only one week after Nhat Hanh left, Minh Chau, without the approval of the UBC, issued an order dissolving the Student Union and severing the link with the SYSS. Minh Chau also sent a copy to the National Police denouncing Sister Chan Khong as a communist. As Sister Chan Khong bitterly attested ‘calling some one a communist is akin to giving him or her a death sentence’.122

This was the time when Field Marshall Ky was about to send in the Marines to suppress the Buddhist Struggle Movement in Danang and Hue. In the eyes of many Buddhists, Minh Chau ‘s actions were nothing short of a betrayal act to the UBC. From then on Minh Chau changed the direction of the Van Hanh University transformed it into a learning institution with the logo ‘We can only understand our karma with wisdom’. He would not allow any political activities to be held on campus, and he expressly forbade students to bring politics into the
learning centre. Ironically, this policy was adopted by Premier Tran Van Huong when confronting the Buddhists in early 1965 and only three years after the Buddhists had engaged in a political campaign to topple President Ngo Dinh Diem.

After the Struggle Movement collapsed, the Americans hatched another scheme to break up the UBC a year later. The UBC was substantially weakened and Minh Chau tested the idea of an autonomous Van Hanh University, taking control away from the UBC. Thich Thien Minh, just recovered from an assassination attempt by Premier Ky’s associates, was furious. An insider of the UBC recounted that, it was the first time Thien Minh had been so upset that he wanted to use his walking stick to rap Minh Chau’s knuckles, a symbolic act of Lin Chi Zen masters to wake up their disciples. Somehow Minh Chau backed off and agreed to let the UBC appoint some academic monks to a number of important positions, on provision that they promised not to incite street demonstrations on the campus, and so threaten his pro-American stance. Sister Chan Khong retold an incident which may have explained why Thich Minh Chau wanted to distance himself from Nhat Hanh’s activities. In June 1966 after Nhat Hanh made a peace appeal in America and Europe, a U.S. private organisation approached the Director of the SYSS, Thich Thanh Van, offering the school a grant of 100,000 US dollars to build a dormitory for students if he denounced Nhat Hanh’s peace activities overseas and severed any links with him. Being one of Nhat Hanh’s closest confidants, Thich Thanh Van refused. But conversely, Minh Chau accepted this offer and agreed to issue a press release, saying ‘the Rector of Van Hanh University declares that Thich Nhat Hanh has no responsibilities whatsoever in connection with this university”. In the same newsletter, Thich Minh Chau offered thanks to the same US private organisation that had approached Thanh Van before, for their generous donation of $100,000 to build a library at Van Hanh University.\textsuperscript{123} The Administration used every means possible to

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 94-95
undermine Nhat Hanh’s call for peace and to discredit him personally. It is not unreasonable to presume that those members of the ‘private’ organisations shadowed him during his peace talks and challenged Nhat Hanh’s connection with Van Hanh University and SYSS, as a part of the attempt to discredit him. Minh Chau had already denied the legal status that caused numerous problems for Nhat Hanh’s group.

Nhat Hanh often blamed the Church Elders for their conservatism, but this time his adversary, Minh Chau, was his contemporary. Minh Chau was not in any way a villain, but students did not give him the same affection as they did to Nhat Hanh. He was respected as a profound Buddhist scholar. After the Struggle Movement was broken up, Minh Chau secretly harbored many Buddhist cadres hunted down by the police. He gathered many talented scholars under his wing and he used his good relationship with the American Mission to seek funding to expand Van Hanh University and to support a program to send students to the best universities in America. Credit should be given to him for his efforts to transform Van Hanh University into a modern higher learning institution which could be the envy of many public Universities. Minh Chau has never written any thing related to the time he was the Chancellor and there is no way to know exactly what was the deal he had made with Asia Foundation, the Van Hanh University main funding body, in return for the act of denouncing Nhat Hanh and other peace activists. As Sister Chan Khong speculated, he may have feared losing the University and his position as a Chancellor if he supported the Unified Buddhist Church’s determination to end the War. The monk with a gentle smile similar to that of the future Buddha, Meitreya, as he was called by students at that time, caused more controversy after the communists victoriously marched into the Independence Palace in April 1975. Minh Chau agreed to cooperate with the new regime and was one of the go-betweens monks.

---

124 Ibid., p. 93
that the new regime needed, to rally the former leaders of the UBC to form a new, pro government Buddhist Church.\footnote{Do Trung Hieu, \textit{Xay Dung Magazine}, Issue 67, March 1995, pp. 4-21.}

The American Embassy in Saigon skillfully applied their policy of divide and rule and eventually penetrated almost every politically active group. The Unified Buddhist Church was no longer unified. The Northern Group led by Tam Chau seceded and formed a rival Church. Student activists who staged anti-American street demonstrations side by side with the Buddhists were also deeply divided. The Embassy spared no efforts and resources to form a pro-American youth group called the Summer Program (Acronym in Vietnamese is CPS). Perhaps Minh Chau and his pro-American faction at Van Hanh University unwittingly served to neutralise or silence peace activists, including the Institute leaders, who trained, ordained and sent him to \textit{Nalanda} University. We will never fully learn of his motives unless he decides to reveal them. However his decision to revoke the legal status of the SYSS caused enormous damage to Nhat Hanh’s group. The fact that the SYSS was in limbo, no doubt, helped incite violent attacks and murders of young and innocent social workers. Sister Chan Khong always tried hard to subdue her hatred, even of the murderers of her staff, but she openly showed her contempt of Minh Chau: \‘Thay Minh Chau’s hostile act toward us proves his moral values are not worthy of our association with him.\’\footnote{Chan Khong, \textit{Learning True Love}, p. 90}

When Nhat Hanh was on peace tour, he was introduced to audience as the founder of two grassroots Vietnamese institutions namely Van Hanh University and School of Youth for Social Services SYSS). People in the West failed to notice that Van Hanh University had been hijacked by the pro-American group with only the SYSS deserving the status of a grassroots organisation.

Nhat Hanh’s SYSS project was approved by the UBC in 1964, but there were two pioneer villages in an outer suburb of Saigon. The School
was only officially opened in September 1965. At the time the sustained bombings had been already authorised by President Johnson and 53,500 more troops had been landed. Legally the School was part of Van Hanh University although Nhat Hanh was given a free reign to administer it. He served as a Director of the Board of Trustees while Thich Thanh Van was appointed the Director. Nhat Hanh expressed his novel ideas of a grassroots movement:

*My friends and I are convinced that a movement to rebuild our country must be based on entirely on different foundation. We want to initiate a war on poverty, ignorance, disease and misunderstanding.*

The social workers were volunteers who neither worked for money or power, but with love and awareness. These young men were motivated by spirit of self-help and they were to build many self-help villages around the country. They rejected a life based on materialism but sought only the happiness that a life of service could bring. Nhat Hanh believed there were ‘ten of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands’ ready to join a new kind of ‘university’, one that would train community development workers. Nhat Hanh admitted that his group had no money but he had an objective, good will and a lot of energy.

As a grassroots organisation, the School relied on donations from ordinary people in 1960 and 1961 Sister Chan Khong had already worked in slum areas in the central part of Saigon City. The students’ welfare work was conducted on a much smaller scale than that of normal sized program for rural development. In student days, welfare work was considered as a way to practise giving and nurture compassion, rather than what gave to the poor and the unfortunate. The aim was to follow the footsteps of a living Bodhisattva named Bac Sieu, who had been riding a bicycle for fifty years to bring rice and care to thousands of destitute in the city of Hue. Sister Chan Khong then asked her friends to donate a

---

127 Thich Nhat Hanh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves*, p. 149.
fistful of rice every week and they gladly to be obliged. However, when running the SYSS, she had to feed three hundred young trainees, on top of normal running costs of the School. Nevertheless, one thousand and two hundred Buddhist Youth groups came to the rescue by making a monthly donation. Furthermore, the Inter-Being Group befriended thousands small peddlers, cigarette, vegetable and food vendors on the city footpaths as well as rich families who saw it as a way to practise meritorious work. Sister Chan Khong proudly claimed that the SYSS was the only social movement that was funded by public donation rather than by the Government. Not until 1968 when both Nhat Hanh and Sister Chan Khong worked with the peace movement outside Vietnam, the School was funded by certain peace organisations in Europe. However the two main fundraisers were Sister Chan Khong and Nhat Chi Mai. Nhat Chi Mai later burned herself to death in an appeal for a peaceful end to the war in Vietnam. When Nhat Hanh was still in the country, money flowed in because of his enormous appeal but as soon as he left Vietnam, particularly when he openly appealed for a cease-fire, a financial crisis arose. The wealthy families started withdrawing their financial support, probably because they were fearful of being harassed by the government. Sister Chan Khong described the effects of this:

In July 1966 when our SYSS was at its lowest ebb financially, we were at the beginning of the second and final year of training 300 students, who had arrived without knowing that we had only $1.00 in the bank account. Most of the money that our supporters had given to us had been used for the construction of the forty-room student dormitory on the new campus. When the semester started we ate just rice. Even though we were vegetarian, we could not even afford tofu, mushroom, bean sprouts, or gluten. Two hundred and forty one students slept in the meditation hall and on the verandah around the hall.130

130 Chan Khong, *Learning True Love*, p. 93
They had to ask wealthy and generous friends to contribute rice. This way 37 200lb-bags were donated. Market gardeners donated two truck loads of old cabbages and mustard greens to make pickles so at least the school was able to feed a large number of young and hungry trainees for a month. Relatives also helped out! At the same time the School started some self-help projects, like growing mushrooms and raising chickens on a small farm as well as selling rice and soap to supplement its financial shortfall. It was not known if and how the students got their allowances or expenses when practising social work in the villages, but it seems highly unlikely they did so in the circumstances.

In 1964 two pioneer villages were set up in outer suburbs of Saigon, ten kilometres from the GPO. At a later stage a few more villages were chosen as pioneer centres, one in Binh Phuoc, a district about 50 kilometres from Saigon, and a few more in Central Vietnam, one in Khanh Hoa, one in Thua Thien and another one in the demilitarized zone, Quang Tri. They were called self-help villages where citizens shared collective responsibility for developing the local economy and provide for education and health care. The main objective of these programs was to get rid of old attitudes of passivity- i.e. waiting for someone else to make a difference. While government rural development staff were mostly concerned with ‘lining their own pockets’, trying to siphon off as much foreign aid as they could, the SYSS workers did not work for wages or power, but with devotion and dedication. Workers stayed in the villages and lived and worked with the peasants until they were accepted. In theory the ideal was sound, but in reality, the war made Nhat Hanh’s dream impossible and brought only death and despair to the social workers.

When Minh Chau revoked the School’s legal status and particularly when Nhat Hanh left, SYSS students became the shooting targets for both sides. Sensing that the School was unprotected like ‘a baby abandoned in the middle of a market’, staff and students were harassed, threatened and cold bloodedly murdered. In June 1966 a group
of unknown men threw grenades into a campus dormitory, causing seriously injuries to two students, one was permanently paralysed. A grenade was tossed into Nhat Hanh’s room but fortunately, he had left the country two weeks earlier. In February 1967, grenades were again tossed into a school dormitory and two more students died. A student was hit by 600 fragments and another had her liver damaged. In July 1967, five students who worked at Binh Phuoc Village were taken by a group of militiamen to a riverbank and shot in cold blood. Four died instantly and only one young monk survived because he was unconscious and the terrorists thought he was dead. The surviving monk recounted that before executing them, the leader of the militia asked: 'Are you SYSS students?' When the students answered in the affirmative, he said: ‘I am sorry but I have to kill you’. Also Tra Loc village, near the demilitarised zone, where some SYSS lived and worked, was bombed three times. Each occasion students tried to help rebuild houses, a school, a medical centre and an agricultural co-operative. However when it was bombed the fourth time, villagers began picking up the guns and retaliating.

However, the greatest loss and tragedy was the death of Sister Nhat Chi Mai who burned herself in an appeal for peace. In 1963, Thich Quang Duc was the first monk to self-immolate and before the regime collapsed, another eight monks followed suit, but none of the laity were allowed to sacrifice. In the struggle for peace, before Nhat Chi Mai, there were fourteen people who took this drastic action, and despite the ban, at least five laymen took their lives to protest the escalation of the war. In one of her poems, Nhat Chi Mai mentioned the self-immolation of an American:

Why did an American self-immolate? Why did the whole world protest against the war? Why have the Vietnamese been silenced? And would not dare to call for peace?

---

131 Christopher Queen & Sallie King, Engaged Buddhism: The Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia, State University of New York, USA, 1996, p. 122.

She was referring to the burning of an American Quaker, Norman Morrison on November 2, 1965. On that day Morrison took his infant daughter to the Pentagon. He scaled a retention wall, chose a spot, which was only forty feet away from the window of the Minister of Defence, Robert McNamara and proceeded to burn himself to death. What made his act so horrifying but memorable was that he held his child in his left arm while he soaked himself in petrol and ignited a match with his right hand. Even now nobody really knows if Morrison intentionally released the child before striking a match or if he did so in panic, just as the flames were licking up from his shoes’ top. The next morning, when the Herald Tribune’s headline read, "Human Torch at Pentagon-Baby in Arms" shocked the whole country. It had been only a few months before, in the same city, Baltimore, that President Johnson had addressed the nation about his peace initiative. When the news spread to Vietnam, the South Vietnamese government tried to hide Harrison ’s motives and paint him as a mentally disturbed man. The Vietnamese knew the reason for Morrison ’s act. Only a week after the Morrison incident, a twenty-year old Catholic, Roger LaPorte set himself on fire at sunrise in front of the United Nations. These young men had brought the war home to the U.S. The impact of these deaths was vastly different from the burning of young people and monks in Saigon. These incidents were right in the heart of America, on the doorstep of the Pentagon. The whole of America was shocked including Defence Minister, Robert McNamara who, it is believed, then urged the President to temporarily cease the bombings to induce the Communists to come to the negotiation table. Eventually McNamara resigned when his advice no longer reached the President’s ears The Vietnamese pacifists were also shocked. Morrison ’s last words to his wife were translated into the Vietnamese language and widely circulated: ‘ Dearest Anne. For weeks, even months, I have been praying only that I be shown what I must do. This morning, with no warning, I was shown as clearly as I was shown in August 1955, that you must be

\[^{133}\text{Ibid., p. 88.}\]
my wife...Know that I love you but must act for the children of the priest’s village’. 134

The pictures of children of the priest’s village, burned to death by napalm dropped by American bombers, were printed in Paris Match. This magazine also recorded the priest’s testimony: ‘I have seen the bodies of women and children blown to bits. I have seen all the villages razed. By God, It’s not possible! They must settle their accounts with God’. By emulating the drastic actions of the Vietnamese monks, Morrison was demonstrating his belief that God wanted him to let the world aware of the suffering endured by the Vietnamese people. Fortunately, in the case of Nhat Chi Mai, she had the opportunity to live and to work with Nhat Hanh in social change projects. She herself witnessed her compatriots suffering and the murders of her co-workers. She was one of the first six ‘cedars’ ordained by the Inter-Being Order and one of the main fundraisers for the School. Coming from an affluent family she did not see the connection between social activism and peace, and she did not seem to grasp the underlining philosophy of social activism. To her, working with the SYSS was just another charitable act to help the poor and less fortunate, so that when asked about Nhat Hanh’s appeal for peace in the U.S., Nhat Chi Mai hesitated and finally chose words to reassure Sister Chan Khong: "Phuong (Sister Chan Khong), you know I love and respect Thay (Nhat Hanh), especially his vision of social service, but his political activities worry me! 135

Out of respect and love to Nhat Hanh, Nhat Chi Mai quickly became active amongst the pacifists. She joined the Van Hanh Students Union’s underground peace activities, distributed anti-war literature, such as The Lotus in A Sea of Fire written by Nhat Hanh during his peace tour in the U.S. From a comparatively politically naive girl, she became more a radical and determined to act to make others aware of her people’ suffering. Being a child from a rich family and insulated from the brutal

134 Henrickson, Paul, The Living and The Death, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1996, p. 188.
135 Ibid., p. 215
outside world, she was somewhat the innocent in dealing with difficulties and crises. Sister Chan Khong recounted that Nhat Chi Mai had many unrealistic approaches to raising fund as well as many novel approaches to attract world attention to Vietnamese plight. She proposed that Sister Chan Khong organise a fast and at the end of which they would declare a statement to call for peace then disemboweled themselves. In her own words, ‘our act could reach many people and it might move them to end this dreadful war! Her novel ideas about fundraising and peace activities sometimes unnerved sister Chan Khong but whether others agreed with her proposals or not, she always seemed refreshed and in touch with her deeper self.’  

Sister Chan Khong refused to go along with the proposal of disemboweling citing her reason there were a few of the ‘cedars’ remaining with the SYSS who were needed to keep the School running. No one know how much Morrison ’s burning effected on her thinking and similar to Morrison’ s last days, she showed no sign that she was going to take drastic action. Perhaps there might have been some subtle indication but her friends in Inter-Being order failed to notice. Here is Sister Chan Khong’s account: of Nhat Chi Mai’s supposed state of mind in her last days:

On one Saturday in April, when it was Mai’s turn to read the Precepts of the Order of Inter-being, her voice faltered as she said. "Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and build peace: From that moment on, she spoke so softly so that it was nearly impossible to hear her. As we were putting the precept books back on the shelves, a member of the group, Uyen, asked:"What happened, Mai?" And I added: "You seemed to lose your concentration during the recitation". Are you all right?" Mai just smiled and asked to return to her room early that evening.  

On the day before her self-immolation, when practicing meditation with her group, she wore a beautiful dress as if she were going to get

---

137 Ibid., p.100
married. She also brought a banana cake to share with her friends. She cheerfully invited Sister Chan Khong to join her to celebrate the Vesak on the next day at the nunnery. She promised that ‘there would be something interesting happening there’.

None of her friends picked up any sign of emotional disturbance. She was as calm as ever. She camouflaged her emotions very well. As Nhat Hanh commented, those nuns and laymen who self-immolated, were like Bodhisattvas who willingly endured the greatest of suffering in order to protect other people.\[^{138}\] Nhat Chi Mai’s mind was lucid and calm as she sat down and wrote ten letters, five personal and five public ones, addressing the leaders of the North and South Governments, the leaders of the UBC, the Vietnamese people and finally President Johnson. She chose Tu Nghiem nunnery for her action where she had received her traditional five precepts, and Vesak day, when the UBC celebrated the Birth of the Buddha and on that year, organised a week of Prayer For Peace. Before striking a match, Nhat Chi Mai sat down in a lotus position, in front of two statutes of the Virgin Mary and Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. A banner hung behind her saying:

\[
\text{Kneeling down with my lotus shaped hands} \\
\text{I ask Virgin Mary} \\
\text{And Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara} \\
\text{To help me to have my wish fulfilled.} \\
\text{I offer my body as a torch} \\
\text{To repel darkness} \\
\text{To awaken human beings} \\
\text{To bring peace to Vietnam.}
\]

She had also written a few poems. The two lines following express fully the frustration of the peace activists in South Vietnam at the time:

\[
\text{When alive, I was not allowed to call for peace}
\]

\[^{138}\] Ibid., p. 101
Only death can allow me to say it.

In an open letter to the leaders of South and North governments, Nhat Chi Mai wrote:

Our people do not need ideologies, we only want peace. I beg you to look for a way out for the Vietnamese people, by negotiating to end the war, by granting the Vietnamese self-determination. Please have a compassionate heart.\textsuperscript{139}

She then explained why she chose self-burning:

I decided to burn myself to appeal for Peace, for human compassion and understanding, as did Mr Morrison and Bodhisattva Thich Quang Duc. I hope all human beings will be living in Buddha’s loving-kindness and the love of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{140}

In a poignant letter addressing President Johnson, Nhat Chi Mai said she wanted to speak out on behalf of ordinary Vietnamese, to express horror of, and disgust at the devastating destruction of the war conducted by a country which had the mightiest military machine in the world. She begged the President to have compassion both for the Vietnamese as well for the American soldiers, sent to Vietnam to fight in a meaningless war. She pleaded with the U.S. government to stop bombing and start negotiating with North Vietnam, requesting that they withdraw troops gradually. Finally she called for a free election under U. N. supervision to help the Vietnamese to rebuild their country.

In a letter to her parents, Nhat Chi Mai asked them to forgive her and allow her to follow in the footsteps of Bodhisattvas. She hoped her death would contribute a great deal to the efforts to bring peace to Vietnam and affirmed that, she was neither insane nor fanatical. At the


\textsuperscript{140} Thich Thien Hoa, \textit{Fifty Years Of Vietnamese Buddhism Revival}, International Institute of Buddhist Studies, California, 1987, p.193.
end of the letter she joked with her parents that they could have some of her crystallized pearl-like remains after the cremation.

Writing to Nhat Hanh, her letter was to the point and gently reassuring as well as optimistic: "Teacher, Don’t you worry too much. Peace will come soon".  

After Nhat Chi Mai’s death, the government strictly censored news of her self-immolation, so newspaper editors marked her death by the appearance of a large black band on the front page. The police were ordered to quickly remove the corpse. But news of her death was spreading like wild fire. Students rushed to Tu Nghiem nunnery to guard and prevent her corpse from being snatched away while her parents resisted pressures to have her buried quietly and quickly. Instead they asked the UBC to organise her cremation.

Nhat Chi Mai’s sacrifice moved the hearts of people from all walks of life and helped to swell the peace movement. Her death made people forget their political differences for a time. Students, merchants, well off families who previously accused her group of being pro-communist and withdrew their financial support for the School, now all flocked to her funeral. Representatives from different religions attended as did progressive Catholic factions who also offered help to have her poems and letters published. The Institute leaders, who were previously caught between the pro-peace elements of Thich Nhat Hanh and the pro-American faction of Thich Minh Chau, now jointed to organise her funeral procession which stretched for five kilometres along the way.

Nhat Hanh must have been devastated by Nhat Chi Mai’s and other students’ death. In 1963, on hearing the burning of a young monk during

---

the struggle against Diem, he composed a poem, The Fires That Consume
My Brother

The fire that burns you
burns my flesh
with such pain
that all my tears are not enough
to cool your sacred soul. 142

On that occasion Nhat Hanh had not personally known the young
monk, but he did know others and was devastated by their deaths. On
hearing of the murder of four SYSS students, he cried. A friend consoled
him, saying: ‘Thay (Teacher), you should not cry. You are a general
leading an army of non-violent soldiers. It is natural that you suffer
casualties”. Nhat Hanh answered: "No, I am not a general. I am just a
human being. It is I who summoned them for service and now they have
lost their lives. I need to cry". 143

When a group of unknown men had attacked the SYSS dormitories
and killed two students, Sister Chan Khong admitted it was very hard not
to hate the murderers while Nhat Hanh felt responsible for the death of
those young men because he was the one who summoned them for
service. But even so he refused to condemn the murderers and showed his
followers that the roots of hatred and anger lie in everyone:

But there are more grenades
than those that burst last night.
There are more grenades
captured in the heart of life.
Do you hear me?
There are more that are yet to burst.
They remain

still

in the heart of men

Unknown, the time of their detonation;
unknown, when they will desecrate our land;
Unknown, when they will annihilate our people.\(^{144}\)

In a play, *The Path Of Return Continues The Journey*, in which ‘all the characters were based on real people, and all the events had happened, Nhat Hanh let Nhat Chi Mai repeat what he had been proclaiming for a long time:

**Mai**: Men kill because, on the one hand, they do not know their real enemy, and on the other, they are pushed into a position where they must kill. So men kill unjustly and in turn, are killed unjustly, and it is their own compatriots who kill them. There were some responsible for the massacre of our people, but they think they have nothing to do with it, because it is not they who hold the guns and pull the triggers. Who are really killing us? It is fear, hatred and prejudice.\(^{145}\)

People’s emotion were likely to overflow into violence, Nhat Hanh never departed from the non-violent approach that he and his followers had strictly adhered to since he returned to Vietnam in 1964 and which was expressed so cogently in his Peace Manifesto:

**Our faith is not built on shaky ground or esoteric understanding. It is the faith in the strength of unconditional love. It asks nothing in return and cannot be shaken even by betrayal. If you take your deepest questions into the core of your being, into your blood and marrow, one day, quite naturally, you will understand the connection between thought and action…. This love arises from the individual psyche, and yet the gradual**


eroding or sudden destruction of that psyche cannot diminish this love. It is transcendent love.\(^{146}\)

His followers adopted this non-violent manifesto, not merely as a strategy of action, but also as an ethical guideline. As Gandhi always maintained the most powerful approach to move an opponent’s heart was to endure their mal-treatment and only hate the deed, not the doer. In less than ten years, SYSS workers were strictly adhering to this principle as they faced betrayal, abduction, murder and rejection...When students were killed, maimed or incapacitated by fanatical groups, the Director of the School always held out the olive branch: "I do not know why you attacked us. I think you are mistaking our position". Once a young monk, while participating in a street demonstration for peace, had his head spat on by a G.I standing on an army truck In Vietnamese culture, one’s head is considered as a sacred part of the body not to be touched. The young monk was humiliated and furious and wanted to abandon his non-violent principles to join the communists so he could retaliate against American soldiers. Only after a long discussion, was the young monk persuaded by Nhat Hanh to let his anger go and stay a monk.

In 1964 when joining Van Hanh students doing the flood relief work in a remote area Nhat Hanh learnt first hand how much the Vietnamese peasants suffered. Again here is Sister Chan Khong’s account:

\begin{quote}
We stopped at the most devastated villages, distributed gifts, and stayed the day with people. At night, we slept on our boats after a simple meal on plain rice. The smell of dead bodies was everywhere, polluting the air. Although this was a remote mountain area, there was fighting between the nationalists and the guerrillas even up there. When we saw
\end{quote}

\(^{146}\) Thich Nhat Hanh, \textit{Love in Action}, p. 32.
wounded soldiers, from either side, we helped them without discrimination.  

The most touching story retold by Sister Chan Khong was when she and students of the SYSS tried to pick up corpses in the Tet Offensive in 1968. The communists had attacked every single city in the South, and as a result, the casualties were extremely high for both sides. Sister Chan Khong decided to come out of the school area to collect the corpses because the Red Cross workers were shot at by the guerillas. The Buddhist flag was safer than the Red Cross’ flag because both warring sides respected the Buddhist flag and so would not fire on the monks and nuns. Sister Chan Khong wrote of the horrors of that time saying:

*It was an extraordinarily difficult task. The bodies smelted terribly! At that time, there were no gloves, work clothes, or chemicals to neutralise the smell, so we put peanut oil on our noses, but that didn’t help at all. That stench followed me for months so that the smell of anything organic brought back the nauseating smell of rotting corpse, and I could only eat plain rice, salted rice for many months.*

Buddhist youth became an army of non-violent soldiers, and in the Buddhists’ eyes, they were an army of Bodhisattvas who would go wherever there was human suffering. They practised non-violent action for social change in extremely difficult, if not impossible, conditions. Nhat Hanh assessed results of their efforts at this time:

*Despite the results-many years of war followed by years of oppressive and human rights abuse-I cannot say that our struggle was a failure. The conditions for success in terms of a political victory were not present. But the success of a non-violent struggle can be measured only in terms of the love and non-violence attained not whether a political*

---

147 Thich Nhat Hanh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves*, p. 199.
victory was achieved. In our struggle in Vietnam we did our best to remain true to our principles. We never lost sight of that.\textsuperscript{149}

When invited by Thich Tri Quang to return home in 1963, Nhat Hanh hesitated. Never did he spell out what sort of problems he had had with the elders. He only said vaguely that they had never supported his group in their efforts to create an Engaged Buddhism. Before heading home, he composed a poem expressing his hope as well as his disappointment and pain in the Buddhist hierarchy

\textit{Here are my hands}  
\textit{brought back to you}  
\textit{unhealed beneath their bandages}  
\textit{I pray}  
\textit{they will not be crushed again.}  
\textit{And I beg}  
\textit{the stars}  
\textit{to be my witness.}

It was strange that Nhat Hanh called the leaders of the Buddhist Church Elders. In fact Thich Thien Minh was only five years older and Thich Tri Quang, three. However, this time they fully supported Nhat Hanh’s projects, among them Van Hanh University and the School of Youth for Social Services. When Nhat Hanh decided to go home probably he had two things in mind: one was to set up a self-help program like that of Sarvodaya, a Buddhist activist group in Sri Lanka and the other was to modernise the UBC. He did not envisage that the tempo of the war would increase so quickly. Certainly the NLF had been formed a few years earlier and the guerrillas worried the South Vietnamese Government. But nobody thought the war would escalate with the lightening speed it did in less than twelve months. In 1963 the Americans were only humble advisers to the RVNA but by 1965 they had almost taken over the combat role from the Vietnamese. Admittedly the

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., p. 112
self-help projects did not attract many students in time of war. From 1964 until Nhat Hanh left Vietnam, only six cedars were ordained in the Inter-being Order who worked closely with the SYSS. Sister Chan Khong had to admit that ‘we are too few’ and used this reason to try to persuade Nhat Chi Mai not to disembowel herself. 150 Although the life and work of these modern Bodhisattvas was so admirable, the urban students would rather participate in the peace movement in the cities than join the epic, but desperate journey, of the SYSS social workers.

When Nhat Hanh took up the peace cause, not every SYSS student supported his activities in the States. They feared that his appeal for peace would harm the School politically and financially. As Sister Chan Khong disclosed, some even refused to go to the war zone to provide services. When doing relief in remote areas, Sister Chan Khong had to work under the name of Van Hanh Students Union of which she was the President, because lack of support of SYSS students. Not only were students confused about the mix of social work objectives with peace activities, but also the School Director, Thich Thanh Van, who asked Sister Chan Khong before she left for overseas, to relay his worries to Nhat Hanh: ‘Please tell Thay Nhat Hanh that we have been cut off from the UBC and Van Hanh University, and tell him that we need to re-establish our legal status. If he keeps making statements calling for peace, we will never be recognised by this regime. Tell him he has to decide between advocating peace and doing social work’. 151 (41) The pro-American faction of Thich Minh Chau dissociated the SYSS from Van Hanh University probably because they were wary that Nhat Hanh’s peace activities might harm their chances of securing funding. Little wonder why the School Director silently disapproved the peace efforts and wanted to concentrate on social work. 152

150 Thich Nhat Hanh, Love in Action, p. 4
152 Ibid., p. 127
Nhat Hanh’s enormous appeal, however, was not in his rural development project, but in his creative abilities. His writings on Engaged Buddhism were well received by young students and artists. At that time a few monks trained at overseas universities, including Japan, India and America returned home. But these were either too academically or too monastically inclined, and none could be as responsive to the intellectual needs of the younger generation as Nhat Hanh could. He was first and foremost a thinker and an artist. He established *La Boi* (Fragrant Palm Leaves) publisher and his first two books on Buddhism, *Modernised Buddhism* and *Buddhism In Every Day Life* were the best sellers and made him the most authoritative ‘new wave’ scholar. He became a household name and inspired a ‘back to tradition’ movement in which people again studied Asian traditional philosophies and religions. In the colonial period the Vietnamese were brain-washed into believing that Buddhism was a religion of death which no longer played any significant in national affairs. So many Buddhists lost faith in ‘old values’ and were partly to be blamed for Catholics’ patronising attitudes like that of Ngo Dinh Nhu: ‘They (Buddhists) played no part in the intellectual, military or economic progress of the country. The Buddhists are only an obstacle. They have contributed nothing’. Nhat Hanh’s books and essays presented Buddhism in different light that influenced a younger generation who felt that they need not feel ashamed of their traditional heritage for it was in no way negative, withdrawn, pessimistic or superstitious. Nhat Hanh debunked the myths fed by colonialists and made Buddhism relevant for young people. Another work of his, *Zen Keys* became a classic work on Zen Buddhism. Nhat Hanh also moved into an area where he performed best namely creative writing. He edited a weekly magazine entitled, *Sound of the Rising Tide*, which became an official herald of the UBC. It had a huge circulation and fifty thousand copies were produced.

However, as the tempo of war accelerated, both the warring sides reached a point of no return. Nhat Hanh changed his focus accordingly to one of how to stop the war. As Nhat Hanh said at the time, he always valued peace and human life above everything else, including the existence of the UBC. His dream of reforming the Buddhist Church and conducting rural development had to take second place. Within two years, with General Westmoreland’s policy of ‘search a and destroy’, ‘body count’ and ‘bombing them back to the stone age’, there would be no more rural area to be developed and no more peasants to work with in the self-help projects! Peasants quickly became urban refugees. It was estimated that in 1966, more than a million and a half people fled to the cities and lived in camps.

When working with a team of students in flood relief in 1964, Nhat Hanh had a first hand account of the peasants’ living conditions in remote areas. This effected him deeply.

After finishing the work, we stayed a few days with the people. The shooting was directly above our heads. One disciple of mine jumped into the water, he was so nervous. The suffering was overwhelming. I bit my finger and let a drop of blood fall into the river, saying: ‘this is to pray for all of you who have perished in the war and the flood. The day we left, many young women standing along the shore tried to hand their babies over to us, but we knew we could not take care of them. We felt so helpless, we cried.’

Published in *The Sound of Rising Waves*, a poem of Nhat Hanh relating to what he witnessed, shocked the whole country. Many young people, who were inspired by this poem, joined him in the anti-war movement. The images of the peasants’ unfortunate life touched even urbanite whose war was more distant and less catastrophic:

*Please come here*

---

and witness
the ordeal of all the dear ones.
A young father
whose wife and four children died
stares, day and night, into empty space.
He sometimes laughs
a tear-choked laugh.
Her husband is dead,
her children dead,
her land ruined,
her heart cold.
She curses aloud her existence,
"How fortunate," she says,
"those families who died together.

Nhat Hanh saw how the peasants lived and what they thought about the war. When asked which side they supported, they did not hesitate desiring only peace and harmony for themselves and their families:

I hate both sides
I follow neither
I only want to go
where they will let me live
and help me live.155

This was Nhat Hanh’s and the UBC ‘s stance in the struggle for peace for many years to come. Then Nhat Hanh declared his intention to go on a journey for peace. As a consequence, he was forced to live in exile from 1966.

I have come with you

155 Nhat Hanh, Call Me By My True Name, p.14
to weep with you
for our ravaged land
and broken lives.
We are left with only grief and pain,
but take my hands
and hold them, hold them
I want to say
only simple words
Have courage. We must have courage
if only for the children,
if only for tomorrow.\textsuperscript{156}

Nhat Hanh was undoubtedly the leader of anti-war artists who both overtly and covertly challenged government censorship simply ignoring the publishing regulations. Many successive South Vietnam Governments tried to silence Nhat Hanh and other anti-war intellectuals and artists by proclaiming a state of emergency. Anyone viewed as a threat to national security could be arrested without trial. Interestingly even the head of state, Phan Khac Suu, could not express his peace aspiration and had to twist his tongue to use a different word \textit{Thanh Binh} (quietness), instead of \textit{Hoa Binh} (peace) to avoid censure.\textsuperscript{157} Artists and intellectuals took great risks to publish anti-war materials. Despite the risk, Nhat Hanh invited five distinguished writers and intellectuals to write bilingual letters addressing six famous counterparts in the West. The book, "\textit{Dialogue: The Key to Peace in Vietnam}" was an open challenge to the government. Nhat Hanh wrote a letter to Martin Luther King entitled "\textit{Searching for the Enemy of Man}" which moved the pacifists in the West and secured an audience with Martin Luther King when Nhat Hanh went to the States. After explaining the symbolism of the self-immolation of monks, he asked Luther King to help voice the plight of the Vietnamese in the United States:

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 10.
...Hundreds and perhaps thousands of Vietnamese peasants and children lose their lives everyday, and our land is unmercifully and tragically torn by a war which is already twenty years old. I am sure since you have been engaged in one of the hardest struggle for equality and human rights, you are among those who understand fully, and who share with all their heart, the indescribable suffering of the Vietnamese people. You yourself cannot remain silent. You cannot be silent since you have already been in action, and you are in action because in you, God is in action, too.\(^{158}\)

According to Nhat Hanh, when they met a year later, King came out openly against the war in Vietnam in a press conference, even though King’s associates thought it untimely and unwise. By then he was a giant figure in both intellectual and literary circles and probably would have been a huge backlash if he had been arrested for anti-war literary works. A number of musicians inspired by Nhat Hanh’s poems composed anti-war music and formed groups, going from town to town to seek support from audiences. The best known musician was Trinh Cong Son whom Nhat Hanh praised as the finest musician Vietnam had produced in years.

With a guitar, Son and his partners sang ballads before thousands of students and youths, telling sad stories of the devastating war. In the opening line of a book written for the young, "Dialogue with the Twenty Year-Old Generation", Nhat Hanh wrote about Trinh Cong Son: ‘I have never cried when listening to music. But I cannot help crying when listening to Son’s songs”. One of Son’s songs included in the following:

I have a lover who died at Chu Prong  
I have a lover who died floating in a river.  
Died on the rice field,  
As if he were dreaming.  
When peace comes back to my country  
Mother will climb up the mountains to look after her son’s skeleton.

Nhat Hanh also won the heart of another talented composer, Pham Duy, who was moved by Nhat Hanh’s poems. Composer Pham Duy wrote "Ten Songs of The Heart", using the words in Nhat Hanh’s poems as his lyrics. One of the ten songs, "Our Enemy Is Not Man", could be heard on every street corner in big cities:

Our enemy is not men.
If we kill men, with whom shall we live?
Our enemy wears the colors of an ideology.
Our enemy wears the label of liberty.
Our enemy carries a fancy appearance.
Our enemy carries a big basket full of words.

Getting the support of Pham Duy was a plus for the Peace Movement because, unlike Trinh Cong Son, Pham Duy was known as a pro-American.

Another poetic work causing controversy was "Let Us Pray for the White Dove To Appear". It was a collection of twenty-four poems written by Nhat Hanh initially printed by zerox and circulated internally among students. Some of the students were quite impressed by them and proposed publishing and circulating them among a larger number of readers. Realising that this collection could never been passed by the government censorship agency, the Buddhist Students Union requested Thich Tri Quang tried to submit it to the Censorship Office in Hue, where Tri Quang still commanded high respect. Three weeks later Tri Quang returned the manuscript and said it could not be passed for publication. He also said if he insisted, the person responsible for censorship would have to obey, but this officer would certainly lose his position. "I do not want to break his pot of rice". Tri Quang said apologetically. The Buddhist Students’ Union had to submit the poems to the censorship office in Saigon. Predictably only seven out of twenty four poems passed uncensored. However with Nhat Hanh’s approval, the book was still printed and distributed as underground literature. Five thousand copies
were sold within a month. These poems became the first underground anti-war literature.

The poems were well received by Buddhists, students and, according to Sister Chan Khong, received congratulations from the leftists connected with the NLF. Surprisingly, but not unexpectedly, they were severely criticised by writers on the clandestine NLF radio and Hanoi radio. At first, Nhat Hanh was denounced as an ‘indecisive’ person who could not differentiate between friends and foes. Later stronger words were used to label him such as ‘the lackey of imperialists’. The Front classified Nhat Hanh in the same category as the military junta! To some extent, the Front was smarter than the bureaucrat-writers in the South. The hidden motives of the NLF were to discredit an artist whose charisma and talent appealed to thousands of young intellectuals in South Vietnam and more importantly, because Nhat Hanh was not one of them. In the previous year Nhat Hanh had written an article in a review, exposing the difference between Buddhism and Marxism. He criticised what he saw as the Marxist narrow approach in literature.\(^\text{159}\) The NLF also detected the subtle anti-communist tone throughout Nhat Hanh’s work. The term "Vietcong" was invented by an American historian, Douglas Pike, as was the term Bac Viet, North Vietnam. Their meaning is similar but both imply derogatory overtone. The leftists having connection with the NLF never called themselves Vietcong, but rather they referred themselves as "people of the Front". Nhat Hanh used these terms repeatedly in his books which annoyed "people in the Front" so much. In one of his poems, Nhat Hanh denounced the "revolutionary war" initiated by the Front:

{}\textit{Whoever is listening, be my witness:}
\textit{I cannot accept this war.}
\textit{I never could, I never will.}

\(^{159}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 110.\)
In the meantime the Communists paid attention and understood well the Buddhists’ message which clearly expressed the peasants’ sentiments: "We do not follow either. We follow the one who can end the war and guarantee that we can live".\textsuperscript{161}

The Buddhists’ stance was now clearly spelt out. The Front understood that they could no longer expect to secure the support or cooperation from the Buddhist Institute and its leaders, even though the two sides were advocating peace. The NLF also saw the danger that, the Buddhist Church, not the NLF, with its desire to put an end to the suffering of the powerless, would win over the hearts and minds of millions of ordinary Vietnamese, the real victims of the war. That is why the Front kept on attacking Nhat Hanh personally and during his peace tour in the U.S. in 1966. Politically, the Front saw the Buddhists as a real threat in the race to win the support of the people. While urban youth and students wholeheartedly supported the peace protests led by the Buddhist Institute, only a few middle-class professionals, so called armchair politicians, supported the Front, as protest against Diem and successive military governments, rather than of the Front’s ideology. Urban youth’s support for the NLF was negligible. Truong Nhu Tang, one of the Front’s organisers confessed that most of the youth, high school and university students, had not supported, nor were they controlled by the Front, and the cadres had to avoid using any terms or objectives related to socialism, otherwise urban youth flatly rejected it:

\textit{In 1965 we had resurrected the name Vanguard Youth for what was envisioned as a militant organisation of young people recruited from}

\textsuperscript{160} Chan Khong, \textit{Footprints On The Sand}, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{161} Nhat Hanh, \textit{Call Me by My True Name}, p. 37.
the high schools, universities and factories ... This effort, however, had failed to generate much enthusiasm and had been allowed to lapse.

On the other hand, the Generals clearly saw the Buddhists as the real threat to their power, because the main objective of the Buddhist Struggle Movement was to have a democratically elected government. The military governments were unrepresentative and installed by the American Mission in Saigon and so no Generals would be elected in any fair and free elections. The Americans neither seemed nor wanted to understand the UBC’s motives or position. In February 1965, when McGeorge Bundy, a National Security adviser, was sent to Vietnam for a fact-finding trip, he brought with him biographical data on Tri Quang and Tam Chau, and other Buddhist activists. In a meeting, according to his aide, McGeorge Bundy felt ‘reeling’ because Tri Quang played the mystic and his pronouncements went beyond Bundy’s Western logic! It was time the Buddhist Institute sent a representative overseas, who could explain clearly how the Buddhists viewed the war and how a solution could be found to the conflict. In their view only one person could fit that role namely Nhat Hanh.

Nhat Hanh was essentially a thinker and writer. Besides there was so much he could do at home. The voice of Vietnamese peasants representing by the UBC needed to be heard beyond Vietnam. With a background both as a graduate student and a teaching member at Columbia University, he was the most appropriate candidate as "messenger" of the Church, a person who could match men like McGeorge Bundy in Western logic and so enable them to understand the UBC Church’s motives and actions. Then an appropriate occasion presented itself for Nhat Hanh. A team from the Fellowship of the Clergymen’s Emergency Committee that earlier had appealed to both side to stop the war, went to Vietnam in the summer of 1965 to instigate a dialogue with indigenous religious groups, particularly Buddhists. This

---

group believed that in history and in present conflict, Buddhism had remained loyal to the Vietnamese. The delegation was impressed with Nhat Hanh’s poems and essays, which deepened their understanding and respect for the Buddhist Institute’s concern for human lives. Delegation members were also deeply moved by Nhat Hanh’s letters, addressing Martin Luther King, which contained a moving and persuasive explanation of the monks’ self-immolation able to be grasped by Western minds. At that stage it was extremely difficult for any church leader to get a visa to go abroad so it was almost a year later that a group of friends at Cornell University invited Nhat Hanh to lecture on "The Revival of Vietnamese Buddhism". This was to be an innocuous academic tour and such that would not raise any disquiet in the Vietnamese government. From a three-week lecture trip, however it extended to almost three months. Not only did Nhat Hanh travel across the United States, but almost every country in Western Europe invited him to tell the world about the terrible suffering and disillusion of the Vietnamese people and about the meaning of the Buddhist led demonstrations against the Thieu-Ky government. Nhat Hanh explained that the monks were driven to take their actions by their profound compassion for the people’s suffering, and by the fact that there was literally no one who could speak for the war-weary people and their longing for peace. Nhat Hanh’s message was echoed by clergymen, priests, rabbis and other religious leaders in a plea for peace which appeared in the New York Times on January 23, 1966, calling for both sides to stop the war:

We, who is various ways have assumed the terrible responsibility of articulating the human conscience, must speak or, literally, we should expect the very stones to cry out.\(^{165}\)

In the United States, Nhat Hanh was interviewed on television and radio and in print media wherever he went. He met with prominent religious and community leaders, notables in the world of literature and


\(^{165}\) Nhat Hanh, *The Lotus In The Sea Of Fire*, p. 197.
arts, high officials in the United Nations, members of the Senate and House of Representatives and with Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara. Arranged by the Fellowship’s International Committee of Conscience on Vietnam, he had an audience with His Holiness, Pope Paul VI. One person he did not meet was President Johnson. A spokesman for the President, who recently declared that he would meet any one to discuss a solution for the Vietnam War, had designated a lesser official to see Nhat Hanh. The lesser was no one else but William Bundy, whose brother, McGeorge Bundy, had complained that the UBC leaders were too mystic for him to understand. William Bundy, in turn, designated another lesser official to see Nhat Hanh. Interesting enough, on the day Nhat Hanh was supposed to see the President, Johnson was busy taking a group of passing tourists around the White House!

The Fellowship Committee was extremely efficient in promoting Nhat Hanh tour with the public, concerned politicians and other religious groups. Nhat Hanh left for the United States on May 22. On June 1 he was immediately introduced to the public in a press conference in Washington and presented his Proposal for Peace, which was reprinted in the Congressional Record on the next day. On June 9 his article on underground literature in Vietnam appealing for peace was printed in the New York Review of Books. He was introduced to influential spiritual leaders like Martin Luther King and Thomas Merton who persistently supported the Buddhist objective to end the war. In his Memoirs, McNamara did not record the meeting with Nhat Hanh. Johnson and William Bundy refused to see Nhat Hanh and it proved that the Administration had made up their mind to seek a military victory. What chance did Nhat Hanh and the Buddhist Church have when the White House ignored all the international efforts for peace? But it is necessary to make a content analysis from Nhat Hanh’s proposals in order to understand how the Vietnamese and the Buddhist Institute see the war.

Called A Proposal for Peace, Nhat Hanh mainly tried to address issues that worried the United States the most. On the day that Nhat Hanh
conducted a press conference in Washington, June 1 1966, there was a student demonstration in front of the American Consulate in Hue in which students turned out to be violent and burned down the American Library. Nhat Hanh quickly reassured the Americans that the Buddhists were not anti-American. They were only against U.S. policies of war. On the contrary, most of Vietnamese ‘do have a great respect and admiration for America for her democratic and freedom tradition. The Vietnamese just showed their frustration of being excluded from participation in the determination of their country’s future. If anti-American sentiments were simmering because the American Administration continued to support the unrepresentative and submissive Saigon government to govern without a popular mandate and to follow policies contrary to the people ‘s aspirations’. 

At the time Nhat Hanh presented his proposal for peace, the U.S. Mission in Saigon provided Ky with tanks and logistics support to brutally suppress the Buddhist-led Struggle Movement, Nhat Hanh’s mind was naturally occupied with this event and tried to persuade the U.S to withdrew support for Ky.

The United State chooses to support those elements (ie Thieu Ky. government) in Vietnam that appear to be most devoted to the U.S. ‘s wishes for Vietnam future. However, the Vietnamese people have never accepted these military leaders as their representatives. Diem was not, nor were Diem’s successors. Thus, it has been the U.S. government’s antipathy to popular government in South Vietnam, together with its hope for an ultimate military solution, that has not only contradicted the deepest aspirations of the Vietnamese people, but actually undermined the very objective for what we believe Americans to be fighting in Vietnam. 

---

166 Ibid., p. 109.
167 Nhat Hanh, Love in Action, p. 50.
As a graduate from a U.S. University, Nhat Hanh had faith in the American commitment to defend democracy and freedom for South Vietnam. Apparently the American objectives in Vietnam were to preserve an free and independent South Vietnam and to help the South Vietnamese to guide their own country in their own way as affirmed by President Johnson in his Johns Hopkins University Speech. But in fact, there were other objectives that the American public was never told. The Assistant Secretary of Defence, McNaughton, in a memorandum to the President, weighted the U.S. objectives in Vietnam as follows:

70% ‘to avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat’,
20% to keep South Vietnam territory from Chinese hands, and
10% to permit the people of South Vietnam to enjoy a better and freer way of life.\(^{168}\)

Secondly Nhat Hanh wanted clarity the political stand of Buddhist activists. The fight to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people was a trio contest: the NLF, the anti-communists and the non-communists. It was convenient for the military governments to label the Buddhists, the urban intellectuals, students as neutralist or pro-communist because these activists openly challenged the military authority and wanted the unrepresentative and corrupt generals replaced by a democratically elected government. But the peace activists were truly nationalists who dared to speak their mind and had been subject to persecution and arrest by Diem and successive governments. These activists may come from different political spectrum from urban intellectuals, self esteemed politicians who refused to identify with anti-communists elements, students, anti-war artists and of course Buddhists.

Nhat Hanh believed this group would play an important role in confronting with the NLF when the final show down would come: the election time:

---

The force of Vietnamese nationalism is such an alternative. Indeed, this is the sole force that can prevent the complete disintegration of South Vietnam and it is the force around which all Vietnamese can unite.\textsuperscript{169}

But unfortunately the truly nationalists could not develop its potential in the current political climate, where if they joined the opposition to the government, they would be persecuted; if they identified with the corrupt and unrepresentative government, they would be discredited in the eyes of the people. That was why they did not like to call themselves "anti-communist", but non-communist or just nationalist. The repressive measures used by Diem and successive junta governments actually drove them into the arms of the Front even though they were wary of hard liners manipulated behind the scene. One of the Vietcong who was the first organiser to establish the NLF admitted that ‘had Ngo Dinh Diem proved a man of breadth and vision, the core who filled the NLF and its sister organisations would have rallied to him.’\textsuperscript{170} A majority of Buddhists chose to stay back because they maintained strong faith in their religious values. Except for a minority Catholics from the North, most of urban activists chose religions over the Front. This was true with most believers in religious sects that showed an anti-colonialist past, like Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, particularly Buddhism. The UBC in the struggle against Diem and the Generals could mobilise thousands of faithful members from all walks of life and social strata at will, and up until 1966 the Buddhists were an influential political force as opposed to military governments and the NLF. Most of urban activists answered the call for peace under the Buddhist banner, rather than to the NLF. In 1968 when the NLF attacked all the cities in South Vietnam, uprising that the communists expected to happen, never materialised: Buddhism became a symbol of hope:

Today, the mean for nationalist expression rests mainly with the Vietnamese Buddhists, who alone command sufficient popular support to

\textsuperscript{170} Thich Nhat Hanh, Love in Action, p. 52.
spearhead a protest for popular government. This is not a new role for Vietnamese Buddhism, for in the eyes of the Vietnamese peasants, Buddhism and nationalism are inseparably entwined. The historic accident that made the mass conversion to Catholic in Vietnam coincident with France’ subjugation of Vietnam created this image.\textsuperscript{171}

It was quite clear now that there were three forces participating in the struggle to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. While the junta government and the anti-communists backed by the Administration, the NLF backed by Hanoi and the UBC and the non-communists representing the hopes and aspirations of the majority of the Vietnamese people.

The Americanisation of the war inevitably brought social upheavals in South Vietnam. When the American GIs flooded the cities, hundreds of services were needed to satisfy a new and unexpected demand in housing and recreations. In turn thousands of job were created for the whole army of American employees and contractors who saw the war as a profitable business. Actually the most vocal anti-communists were the ones who made huge profits from the war. In other words, anti-communism had become Vietnam’s most profitable business. The military commanders, who were supposed to kill more Vietcong as requested by president Johnson, busily lobbied positions for themselves and their own cronies and used these positions to conduct big businesses like heroin traffic while their wives ran open-secret businesses selling rice, medicines for the NLF. The Catholics moved to South Vietnam in 1954, clustered in ghettos on the fringe of Saigon, which was a well-known protection heaven for those who wanted to dodge the draft. Those who possessed wealth and power could afford to buy off the draft or send their children overseas. Nhat Hanh summed up this irony:

\textit{The most vocal anti-communists in fact, are doing very little against Communism. On the contrary, by their support of the existing}

government and the American effort, they succeed in perpetuating the situation that strengthens Communism. Thus the people with whom the government deals with as ‘good’ anti-communists are in fact those who causes much hatred of government and contribute more than any one else to support of the NLF.  

The longer the war dragged on, the richer they became. They were comfortably housed and lived safely in the big cities, had neither desire to give up their way of life or to end the war which was the source of their wealth.

The urban activists were well educated enough to understand what went on in Russia and China. If they come from the North, they probably heard or experienced the short reign of orthodox communism. Obviously they did not like Marxism yet they did proclaim themselves anti-communists, simply because they did want to be identified with the parasitic elements who benefited from the war. The pacifists saw the struggle movement led by the Buddhists was the only chance of grouping non-communists who were able to fight the NLF in the political front on an equal footing. They were able to rally the support of peasants because they were determined to end the roots of their suffering. They would appeal to a majority of people, from the urban activists to peasants, the third force, to form a government that combined the genuine will of the people for independence with the profound aspirations for peace. This group could unite the whole spectrum of a non-communist force which would gather enough political strength to negotiate with the Front and Hanoi for a peaceful solution. In order to win the war on the political terms, instead of supporting the corrupt and incompetent government, and a vocal group of anti-communists, the United States should have supported this non-communist force.

Nhat Hanh’s mission in the States was now much clearer. He came to the States to persuade the Johnson Administration to support the non-

---

172 Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action*, p. 53
communist elements rallying in the Buddhist Struggle Movement. Supporting the corrupt and unrepresentative military government and the anti-communists was backing the wrong horse. He re-assured the U.S. government that the Buddhists did not consider Americans as their enemies, but as friends, as an ally for peace not for war. Nhat Hanh articulated so well the UBC’s policies and objectives. That was the third possibilities that the Buddhist had been pursuing for at least three years from 1964 to 1966. The UBC had tried to build up a politically strong non-communist force that could negotiate with the NLF on an equal footing.

They (the Vietnamese People) do not agree that there is no alternative to a military dictatorship. The force of nationalist Vietnamese is such an alternative. Indeed, this is the sole force that can prevent a complete disintegration of South Vietnam, and it is the force around which all Vietnamese can unite. But nationalism cannot attain its effective potential in the present Vietnamese political climate, where opposition to the government invites open persecution upon oneself and identification with it (corrupt military dictatorship) discredits oneself in the eyes of the people.173

The Buddhist Struggle Movement during the years of 1964 and 1966 used their grass roots support to bring down, or to boost up many governments, not because they wanted to grasp naked power, but their main concern was the legitimacy of the South Vietnamese Government. Or as in Nhat Hanh own words, a government that combines the genuine will of the people for independence with their profound aspiration for peace.174 Had there been an popular elected government, this coalition government would command respect from every one and the NLF had to reason to refuse to negotiate with it. If it did, the NLF would lose the support of a majority of Vietnamese peasants and urban activists who longed for nothing but peace. Nhat Hanh optimistically predicted that if

173 Thich Nhat Hanh, Lotus in the Sea of Fire, p. 80.
174 Ibid., p. 80.
such a democratically elected government came to power, it would have the support not only of the vast majority of non-communist Vietnamese, but of those who supported the Front and even of many who were in the Front.

In a press release on June 1, 1966 Nhat Hanh revealed a five-point proposal which addressed directly Johnson Government. In the first three items he requested that the Administration to cease bombings, reduce military actions, or declare a cease-fire and if the NLF responded positively, later the U.S would show intention to withdraw troops in the future. The fourth item Four was the core of Nhat Hanh’s proposal:

4 - A clear statement by the U.S. of its desire to help the Vietnamese people to have a government truly responsive to Vietnamese aspirations, and concrete U.S. actions to implement this statement, such as a refusal to support one group over another.\(^{175}\)

What Nhat Hanh insisted was Johnson government should stop support the parasitic elements like Ky who, ironically, with tanks and logistics provided by the Americans, was about to suppress the Buddhist Struggle Movement in Danang and Hue in the summer of 1966.

Nhat Hanh did not mention the NLF and seemed to continue annoying the NLF analysts by calling them the derogatory term, Vietcong. Neither did he talk of negotiations because the NLF and the non-communists which he saw it as a ‘internal affairs’ of the Vietnamese people. He advised the American Administration to sidestep the issue and let the Vietnamese people exercise their right of self-determination. Only at the end of the peace tour, he took some time out and wrote The Lotus in the Sea Of Fire to sum up his proposal and the Buddhists’ political stand in details.

Nhat Hanh said it was time for the U.S. government to change its policies. Americans could not win the war militarily, because the root of

the problem was in the heart of the Vietnamese peasants. The undiscriminating bombings and killings intensified the hatred of the peasants for the Americans and the longer the war went on, the more the Vietnamese would support the NLF. But if the U.S government sought a negotiated settlement, which acceptable and legitimate South Vietnamese Government would come to the negotiating table with the communists? The negotiation must be conducted between the Vietnamese themselves and the South Vietnamese at large must be included in any negotiations. The incumbent military leaders represented no one. They were there because the U.S. wanted them to be there. The urgent task must be done was (1) to establish an interim government that would represent the religions and political parties with national stature, because these were almost the remaining centres of loyalty of the population. (2) The interim government would request both sides to accept a cease-fire, or at least to cease offensive actions, until a popularly elected government comes to power. (3) The elected government would request the U.S government to withdraw a number of small units as a token of good faith to the Vietnamese people and the communist side. The new government would ask the NLF to form a coalition government for South Vietnam and also request the North Vietnam withdraw a token of their troops and (5) the coalition government would negotiate with North Vietnam to establish normal relations of trade and diplomacy. The discussion for reunification would be held but there was no rush, the two Vietnams would be re-unified whenever both sides felt comfortable with each other, in the distant future perhaps.176

Nhat Hanh humbly admitted that he was not a politician, nor his proposal was a rigid blue print, but these were first steps toward a peaceful solution, or at least, it could offer a chance for the adversary sides to sit together for preliminary talk. Indeed it could have saved

thousands of lives if Johnson Administration at least listened to this gentle monk. And at least Johnson did not have to anywhere to talk to any person about peace, as the President promised in his Baltimore address. This gentle peace-loving monk came to Washington and requested an audience with the President. What would have happened if the President, instead of taking the tourists around the White House on that day, could have granted Nhat Hanh some time to present him the Buddhist viewpoint? Or at least the National Security Adviser, William Bundy, could have seen Nhat Hanh to find out whether this graduate from Columbia did have a logic that his brother, McGeorge Bundy could understand. The Secretary of Defence, Robert, McNamara did see Nhat Hanh, but his proposal for peace left no trace in his memoir, *In Retrospect, The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. Only one person saw Nhat Hanh’s vision of peace and did not hesitate to nominate Nhat Hanh as a candidate for Nobel Peace Prize, it was Martin Luther King. Perhaps these two people, Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King, communicated with each other by the same language, the spiritual language. Perhaps the White House advisers used different kind of logic which George Ball, the Under Secretary of State called ‘logic on its head’. What the President and his men did was history: more bombings were ordered, more troops were sent in, more bodies were counted. Until one day they realised what Nhat Hanh said was prophetic: the continuance of the war was more likely to spread communism in Vietnam rather to contain it.\(^\text{177}\) And two weeks after Nhat Hanh had presented his proposal for peace, the U.S. government provided tanks, ammunitions and logistics for Ky’s troops to suppress the Buddhist Struggle Movement in Danang and Hue. The last hope for the non-communist Vietnamese to restore peace was finally dashed.

4.6 Thich Nhat Hanh’s approaches to peace

Thich Nhat Hanh totally agrees with the state of Gandhi and A. J. Mute: “There is no way to peace, peace is the way.”\textsuperscript{178} He himself said: “Peace itself is the way to peace.”\textsuperscript{179} It means only peaceful means leads to real peace. The following practices are the approaches to peace proposed by him:

4.6.1 Practising mindful living

Mindfulness is the foundation of happiness. A person who is unhappy cannot make peace. Individual happiness is the foundation for creating peace in the world. To bring about peace, our hearts must be peace.

Mindfulness is the practice of stopping and becoming aware of what we are thinking and doing. The more we are mindful of our thoughts, speech, and actions, the more concentration we develop. With concentration, insight into the nature of our own suffering and the suffering of others arises. We then know what to do and what not to do in order to live joyfully and in peace with our surroundings.\textsuperscript{180}

Two important practices that help us cultivate the energy of mindfulness are mindful breathing and mindful walking. Our breath and our steps are always with us, and we can use these simple everyday acts to calm our emotions and nourish our joy.

**Mindful Breathing**

To breathe in mindfully is to be aware that air is entering our body,

\textsuperscript{179} Thich Nhat Hanh, *Calming the Fearful Mind: A Zen Response to Terrorism*, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{180} Thich Nhat Hanh, *Creating True Peace*, p. 18.
and to breathe out mindfully is to know that air is leaving our body. The moment our mind is attentive to the contact between our body and the air, we are also in contact with our mind, just as it is. It takes only one conscious breath to be in touch with ourselves and the world around us. Then, with each mindful breath; ease is restored to our body and mind.

To practice mindful breathing, just observe the natural rhythm of our breath. Do so without forcing it to be longer, deeper, or slower. With attention and a little time, our breath will deepen naturally on its own. Occasionally, our mind will wander off. Our practice is simply to take note of this distraction and to bring our attention gently back to our breath. If we like, we may use the sentences listed here to help in focusing our attention. During the duration of several in and out breaths, follow our breath from beginng to end. Use the keywords at the end of each pair of sentences to help us maintain our awareness.\textsuperscript{181}

1. Breathing in, I am aware only of my in breath. Breathing out, I am aware only of my out breath ... In, Out

2. Breathing in, I am aware that my in breath grows deep. Breathing out, I am aware that my out breath grows deep ... Deep, Deep

3. Breathing in, I am aware that my in breath goes slowly. Breathing out, I am aware that my out breath goes slowly … Slow, Slow

Practice mindful breathing can be done in any situation: while sitting, lying down, standing, driving, or working. Breathing consciously will bring more awareness and concentration to whatever we are doing.

**Mindful Walking**

Mindful walking is the simple act of being aware that we are walking. Instead of being carried away by our thinking, worries, or anxieties about the future or regrets about, the past, dwell fully in the

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid, p. 19.
present moment, fully aware of each step; arrive in the present moment. We have already truly arrived, why are we still running? Whether we are walking down a street, into a building, or just from one side of a, room to the other, be aware of the contact between our feet and the ground. Notice how many steps we make comfortably during an in breath and during an out breath. As we breathe in, say to ourselves; “In,” with each step we take. As we breathe out, say to ourselves, “Out,” with each step we take. We can practice walking meditation anytime during the day.  

Mindful breathing and mindful walking are concrete way to bring the practice of peace into our life. Using them helps us to defuse harmful emotions, calm and concentrate our mind, and bring ourselves back to the present moment, where life is truly available.

4.6.2 Practising Deep Relaxation: Restoring Body and Mind

Stress accumulates in us every day. If we do not know how to protect ourselves, stress will overcome our mind and our body. All parts of our body – our liver, heart; lungs, kidneys – send us SOS signals constantly, they are suffering, and we are often too busy to listen. We have become alienated from our own body and rarely allow it to rest or restore itself. We continue to eat, drink, and work in ways that deplete our body of its well-being. We need to learn how to listen to our bodies again. With the practice of mindfulness, we reunite our body and mind.

Deep relaxation is a wonderful mindfulness practice that lets us take care of our body. It allows us to embrace our body and gives it the rest and relaxation it needs to heal itself. Breathing in and out, we become aware of each part of our body, releasing any tension we find. We take time to send love and gratitude to the different parts of our body – this can be done in only fifteen or twenty minutes.

182 Ibid, p. 20.
183 Ibid, p. 47.
In the beginning we may use an audiotape, but after practicing a short while we will develop our own version of Deep Relaxation Practice.

Allowing our body to rest is very important. When our body is at ease and relaxed, our mind will also be at peace. Please take the time to do this practice often. Although the following guided relaxation may take us thirty minutes, we may feel free to modify it to fit our situation. We can make it shorter – just five or ten minutes. We can use it when we wake up in the morning, before going to bed in the evening, or during a short break in the middle of a busy day. We can also make it longer or more in-depth if you like. The most important thing to remember is to be fully present and to enjoy it.

- Lie down comfortably on your back on the floor or on a bed. Close your eyes. Allow your arms to reset gently on either side of your body, and let your legs relax, turning outward.
- As you breathe in and out, became aware of your whale body lying down. Feel all the areas of your body that are touching the floor or the bed. you are lying on: your heels, the backs of your legs, your buttocks, your back, the backs of your hands and arms., the back of your head. With each out breath, feel yourself sink deeper and deeper into the floor, letting go of tension, letting go of worries, and not holding on to anything.
- As your breathe in, feel your abdomen rising, and as you breathe out, feel your abdomen falling. For several breaths, just notice the rise and fall of your abdomen. Now, as you breathe in, become aware of your two feet. As you breathe out, allow your feet to relax. Breathing in, send your love to your feet, and breathing out, smile to your feet. As you breathe in and out, know how wonderful it is to have two feet that allow you to walk to run, to play sports, to dance, to drive, to do so many activities throughout the day. Send your gratitude to your two feet for always being there for you whenever you need them.
- Breathing in, become aware of your right and. left legs. Breathing out, allow all the cells in your legs to relax. Breathing in, smile to your
legs, and breathing out, send them your love. Appreciate whatever degree of strength and health is there in your legs. As you breathe in and out, send them your tenderness and care. Allow them to rest, sinking gently into the floor. Release any tension you may be holding in your legs.

- Breathing in, become aware of your two hands lying on the floor. Breathing out, completely relax all the muscles in your two hands, releasing any tension you may be holding in them. As you breathe in, appreciate how wonderful it is to have two hands. As you breathe out, send a smile of love to your two hands. Breathing in and out, be in touch with all the things your two hands allow you to do to cook, to write, to drive, to hold the hand of someone else, to cradle a baby, to wash your own body, to draw, to play a musical instrument, to type, to build and fix things, to pet an animal, to hold a cup of tea. So many things are available to you because of your two hands. Just enjoy the fact that you have two hands and allow all the cells in your hands to really rest.

- Breathing in, become aware of your two arms. Breathing out, allow your arms to relax fully. As you breathe in, send your love to your arms, and as you breathe out, smile to them. Take the time to appreciate your arms and whatever strength and health is in them. Send them your gratitude for allowing you to hug someone else, to swing on a swing, to help and serve others, to work hard – cleaning the house, mowing the lawn, doing so many things throughout the day. Breathing in and out, allow your two arms to let go and rest completely on the floor. With each out breath, feel the tension leaving your arms. As you embrace your arms with your mindfulness, feel joy and ease in every part of your two arms.

- Breathing in, become aware of your shoulders. Breathing out, allow any tension in your shoulders, to flow out into the floor. As you breathe in send your love to your shoulders, and as you breathe out, smile with gratitude to them. Breathing in and out, be aware that you may have allowed lot of tension and stress to accumulate in your shoulders. With each out breath, allow the tension to leave your
shoulders, feeling them relax more and more deeply. Send them your tenderness and care, knowing that you do not want to put too much strain on them but that you want to live in a way that will allow them to be relaxed and at ease.

- Breathing in, become aware of your heart. Breathing out, allow your heart to rest. With your in breath; send your love to your heart. With your out breath, smile to your heart. As you breathe in and out, get in touch with how wonderful it is to have a heart still beating in your chest. Your heart allows your life to be possible and it is always there for you, every minute, every day. It never takes a break. Your heart has been beating continuously since you were a four-week-old fetus in your mother’s womb. It is a marvelous organ that allows you to do everything you do throughout the day. Breathe in and know that your heart, also loves you. Breathe out and commit to live in a way that will help your heart to function well. With each out breath, feel your heart relaxing more and more. Allow each cell in your heart to smile with ease and joy.

- Breathing in, become aware of your stomach and intestines. Breathing out, allow your stomach and intestines to relax. As you breathe in, send them your love and gratitude. As you breathe out, smile tenderly to them. Breathing in and out, know how essential these organs are to your health. Give them the chance to rest deeply. Each day they digest and assimilate the food you eat, giving you energy and strength. They need you to take the time to recognize and appreciate them. As you breathe in, feel your stomach and intestines relaxing and releasing all tension. As you breathe out, enjoy the fact that you have a healthy stomach and intestines.

- Breathing in, become aware of your eyes. Breathing out, allow your eyes and the muscles around your eyes to relax. Breathing in, smile to your eyes, and breathing out, send them your love. Allow your eyes to rest and roll back into your head. As you breathe in and out, know how precious your two eyes are. They allow you to look into the eyes of someone you love, to see a beautiful sunset, to read and write, to move around with ease, to see a bird flying in the sky, to watch a movie – so
many things are possible because of your two eyes. Take the time to appreciate the gift of sight, and allow your eyes to rest deeply. You can gently raise your eyebrows to help release any tension you may be holding around your eyes.

- Here you can continue to relax other areas of your body, using the same pattern.
- Now, if there is a place in your body that is sick or in pain, take this time to become aware of it and send it your love. Breathing in, allow this area to rest, and breathing out, smile to it with great tenderness and affection. Be aware that there are other parts of your body that are still strong and healthy. Allow these strong parts of your body to send their strength and energy to the weak or sick area. Feel the support, energy, and love of the rest of your body penetrating the weak area, soothing and healing it. Breathe in and affirm your own capacity to heal, breathe out and let go of the worry or fear you may be holding in your body. Breathing in and out, smile with love and confidence to the area of your body that is not well.

- When you fed a great deal of pain and sickness in your body, you may also call on your ancestors to support you. You know that all your ancestors are present in every cell of your body. Identify one of your ancestors who was strong and healthy. Breathing in, call on the strength and vitality of your ancestor to support you. Breathing out, you will feel his or her energy and presence in you, helping you to restore your strength and well-being.

- Breathing in, become aware of the whole of your body lying; down. Breathing out, enjoy the sensation of your whole body lying down, very relaxed and calm. Smile to your whole body as you breathe in, and send your love and compassion to your whole body as you breathe out. Feel all the cells in your whole body smiling joyfully with you. Feel gratitude for all the cells in your whole body.

- If you are guiding other people, especially children, and if you are comfortable doing so, you can sing a relaxing song or lullaby.

- To end, bring your awareness back to the gentle rise and fall of your abdomen. Slowly stretch your body and open your eyes. Take your
time to sit up slowly and peacefully. Now you can carry the energy of calm, mindfulness, and peace you have generated into your next activity and throughout the day.\textsuperscript{184}

4.6.3 Living in the Sangha

To build community, it is important to accept the insight of interbeing, of interconnectedness. We must realize that happiness is not an individual matter. Finding happiness through our separate, individual self is impossible.

The family is a sangha, society is a sangha, and the Earth and all life are a sangha; this is why we have to learn to live as a sangha, not only with other human beings but with other species as well. We have to accept animals, plants, and minerals as our partners, as members of our community.

As we cultivate and keep alive the insight of non-self and interconnectedness in our daily, life, we free ourselves from the prison of individualism. We open our eyes to the reality that the happiness of our family and the larger community is also our own happiness. With this insight we will no longer feel separate and we will know how to behave in a way that brings harmony and happiness to our family, our society, and our mother Earth.\textsuperscript{185}

We have been imprisoned for so long and have suffered so much from our individualistic way of living. Our practice for the new century should be to transform the notion that we are separate selves and to liberate ourselves from the prison of the individual. The most meaningful practice we have today is to learn how to live as a sangha.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, pp. 48-53.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid, p. 175.
The Sangha River

If we are a drop of water and we try to get to the ocean as only an individual drop, we will surely evaporate along the way. To arrive at the ocean, you must go as a river. The sangha is river. In our daily practice, we learn how to be part of this river. We learn how to look with sangha eyes, how to walk with sangha feet, how to feel with a sangha heart. We have to train ourselves to see the happiness of our community as our own happiness and to see the difficulties of our community as our own difficulties. Once we are able to do this, we will suffer much less. We will feel stronger and more joyful. As members of a sangha, we can develop our individual talent and our individual potential, and at the same time contribute to and participate in the talent and happiness of the entire group. Nothing is lost; everyone wins: A sangha has the power to protect and carry us, especially in difficult times. We have a better chance to develop our potential and protect ourselves when we participate in the work of sangha building:

The Sangha River is a community of friends who practice the way of harmony, awareness, and compassion. In the sangha we practice mindful walking and breathing. The sangha radiates a collective energy that can support us and make us strong. The sangha is a boat that transports us and prevents us from sinking into the ocean of suffering. This is why it is so important that we take refuge in the sangha. Allow your community to hold you, to transport you. When you do, you will feel more solid and stable and will not risk drowning in your suffering. Taking refuge in a sangha is not a matter of belief. “I take refuge in the Sangha” is not a statement of faith; it is a practice. As a river, all the individual drops of water arrive together at the ocean.186

Practice Centers Offer Protection

In daily life there is a lot of danger. During as little as a half hour in

186 Ibid, pp. 176-177.
a city, for instance, multitudes of toxic images and sounds enter your senses. A practice center offers true refuge. In a practice center you can restore your balance very quickly.

Children and young people generally do not live in practice centers or monasteries, and their environments can be highly toxic. What they see, hear, and touch every day can water the seeds of violence and their animal nature. This is why establishing a peace place or breathing room in your home is so important for you and your children. The sangha, too, can help you create peace places for children and families.

As a mindfulness practitioner and a sangha member, you can influence other parents and show them ways to protect their children from their anger. You are a sangha for them, helping nonviolence take root in their families. You can teach both mother and father to sit and listen compassionately to each other and to practice loving speech. You can teach them mindful breathing and walking for inner peace. You may begin with the intention to protect the children, but soon you find yourself embracing the entire family. With skillful means, you can intervene in any situation. This is engaged practice.

The sangha can also offer protection to couples. As a lay person, you are exposed to many temptations. Without a sangha to protect you, you may suffer from inner conflict and the desires of your animal nature. The sangha helps you remember your Buddha nature. The sangha helps people handle their sexual energy and honor their commitments, strengthening the bands of marriage.

In a spiritual community, you have plenty of opportunities to serve within and outside the sangha, to help people suffer less, to make them smile again. You can practice loving everyone as your brother or sister. You can study and live in accordance with the teachings and express yourself in the language of love and understanding. When inappropriate sexual energy arises, you can transform it into other kinds of energy; like the energy to study; to practice, or to work. According to Vietnamese
wisdom, the most difficult form of practice is lay practice. Living in a temple is more supportive, because even if you stray one step, a brother at a sister will be there to help. A sangha can help you in the same way.

It may seem that in living an individual, separate life you are freer than when you are involved in a community, but this freedom can be a disguise for being lost. When you are caught up in desires, you lose all your freedom, and freedom is the very foundation of happiness. When you get entangled in an inappropriate love affair, you are no longer free and you suffer very much. You also make other people and your sangha suffer. The loss of freedom is the loss of happiness.  

Sanghas Relieve Suffering

In Plum Village, we do our best not to be trapped in our own small world. Although we take care of the daily needs of our community engaging in working meditation, hosting retreats, and many other activities we remain in touch with the suffering of the children everywhere in the world, and this connection helps us to stay healthy.

Plum village sponsors schools in Vietnam where children learn to read and write and at lunchtime are offered a meal which includes a glass of soy milk. Many of these children come from poor families and suffer from a lack of protein.

One day I was looking at a picture of children from Ha Trung Village, the village where my mother was born and raised. When I looked deeply and mindfully at the faces of the little girls in the village, I saw each one as my mother. My mother was exactly like them, nourished with the same kind of food, accustomed to the same kind of climate.

If a young girl in this village does not receive a glass of milk each day, she may grow up and give birth to an undernourished boy. I did not have enough protein growing up. If had, I might be taller than I am now.

Ibid, p. 178.
If you want to take care of me, then you must take care of the little girl in the picture. You must make sure that every child in the village has a glass of soy milk for lunch.

When people come into contact with a sangha, they have a chance to get in touch with the reality of the world. In doing so, their seeds of compassion and loving-kindness will be touched. Everyone comes with pain inside. The sangha not only helps them embrace their suffering but also helps nourish their seeds of compassion and understanding. They suffer much less when they allow these positive seeds to be watered. It is important, when we touch suffering, to preserve our own peace. In order not to be overwhelmed, discouraged, or pessimistic, we must balance an event to do this. They practice true peace even in the midst of war.  

4.6.4 Beginning Anew: The Practice of Reconciliation and Renewal

As human beings, we all make mistakes. Our unskillful thoughts, words, and actions cause harm to ourselves and those around us. Often, when we hurt others or are hurt by them, because of our pride we make no effort to reconcile or renew our relationships. Without reconciliation, we cannot deepen our understanding and we only cause more suffering.

Our practice is to renew our relationships on a regular basis. Every week we have time to go to ‘concerts, cinema, shopping, and many other activities, but we rarely find the time to renew our relationships with the people who are close to us, our family members, friends, and colleagues.

The practice of Beginning Anew is a practice of reconciliation. Beginning Anew can be practiced between two people or as a group. As one person speaks, the other person practices deep listening without interrupting, allowing the first person to speak from the depths of her

\[188\]

Ibid, p. 179.

The second step of Beginning Anew is expressing regret. We take thisopportunitytosharewiththeotherpersonouregretsforthethings wehavedoneorsaidthatmighthavecausedhimpain.Thisrequires humilityandthewillingnessletgowourownpainandpride.

InthethirdstepofBeginningAnew,weexpressourownhurthouseful,lovingspeech,withoutblamingorcriticizing.Wespeakinsuch awaythattheotherpersoncanlistenandreceiveourwords.Ifweblame andcondemntheotherperson,hisheartwillcloseandhewillnotbeable tohearus.Weasktheotherpersontohelpustounderstandwhyhehas spokenasheshas,actedasheshastocauseussomuchpain.Perhapsatalater timehecansharewithussothatwcancounterstandmoredeeply. If astrongemotionsarisesinuswhileweareexpressingoursuffering,weshouldsimplystopandcomebacktoourbreathinguntiltheemotion subsides. The other person can support us by following his breathing until
we are ready to continue.

We can enjoy practicing Beginning Anew with our partner, our family, or our colleagues regularly. By doing this practice we will prevent small misunderstandings from accumulating. Rather, we will take care of them as they arise. At the same time, we cultivate our awareness and appreciation for the positive qualities our loved ones bring to our life. With understanding, all things become possible.\(^{189}\)

### 4.6.5 Practicing Peace treaty

This Peace Treaty was developed by Thich Nhat Hanh and members of Plum Village. It may be used as a tool of anger resolution and peace-making. Nhat Hanh encourages communities to add articles that suit their needs. The 24-hour limitation is imposed because according to Nhat Hanh waiting for a longer period can become poisonous to the angry person and to the persons around him or her.

Although the treaty was developed within a Buddhist meditation community, I believe that similar peace treaties can be used within many communities from different backgrounds. The form and the practice are as follows:\(^{190}\)

**The Peace Treaty**

In Order That We May Live Long and Happily Together,

In Order That We May Continually Develop and Deepen Our Love and Understanding,

We the Undersigned, Vow to Observe and Practice the Following:

\(^{189}\) Ibid, pp. 117-119.

\(^{190}\) Thich Nhat Hanh, Touching Peace, pp. 60-62.
For the one who is angry

I, the one who is angry, agree to:

1. Refrain from saying or doing anything that might cause further damage or escalate the anger.
2. Not suppress my anger.
3. Practice breathing and taking refuge in the island of myself.
4. Calmly, within twenty-four hours, tell the one who has made me angry about my anger and suffering, either verbally by delivering a Peace Note.
5. Ask for an appointment for later in the week (e.g. Friday evening) to discuss this matter more thoroughly, either verbally or by Peace Note.
6. Not say: "I am not angry. It's okay. I am not suffering. There is nothing to be angry about, at least not enough to make me angry."
7. Practice breathing and looking deeply into my daily life — while sitting, lying down, standing, and walking — in order to see:
   o a. the ways I myself have been unskillful at times.
   o b. how I have hurt the other person because of my own habit energy.
   o c. how the strong seed of anger in me is the primary cause of my anger.
   o d. how the other person's suffering, which waters the seed of my anger, is the secondary cause.
   o e. how the other person is only seeking relief from his or her own suffering.
   o f. that as long as the other person suffers, I cannot be truly happy.
8. Apologize immediately, without waiting until the Friday evening, as soon as I realize my unskillfulness and lack of mindfulness.
9. Postpone the Friday meeting if I do not feel calm enough to meet with the other person.
For the one who made the other angry

I, the one who has made the other angry, agree to:

1. Respect the other person’s feelings, not ridicule him or her, and allow enough time for him or her to calm down.
3. Confirm the other person’s request for a meeting, either verbally or by note, and assure him or her that I will be there.
4. Practice breathing and taking refuge in the island of myself to see how:
   o a. I have seeds of unkindness and anger as well as the habit energy to make the other person unhappy.
   o b. I have mistakenly thought that making the other person suffer would relieve my own suffering.
   o c. by making him or her suffer, I make myself suffer.
5. Apologize as soon as I realize my unskillfulness and lack of mindfulness, without making any attempt to justify myself and without waiting until the Friday meeting.

Signatures

We Vow, with Lord Buddha as Witness and the Mindful Presence of the Sangha, to Abide by These Articles and to Practice Wholeheartedly. We Invoke the Three Gems for Protection and to Grant Us Clarity and Confidence.

Signed, _____________________________
the _______ Day of __________________
in the Year _______ in ________________
**Peace Note**

Date:

Time:

Dear ________________,

This morning (afternoon, etc.), you said (did, wrote, etc.) something that made me very angry. I suffered very much. I want you to know this. You said (did):

_______________________________________________

_______________________________________________

_______________________________________________

Please let us both look at what you said (did) and examine the matter together in a calm and open manner this Friday evening.

Yours, not very happy right now,

_____________________

**Example of a verbal notification**

"My dear friend, what you said (did) this morning (afternoon) made me very angry. I suffered very much and I want you to know it. I hope that by Friday evening both of us will have had a chance to look deeply into this matter."

**4.6.6 Preserving the Five Mindfulness Trainings**

The Five Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings, below, are Thây’s interpretation of the five basic precepts as taught by the Buddha who
offered them to both his ordained and lay followers so that they could have clear guidelines to lead mindful and joyful lives on the path to awakening. They are not commandments. In his book entitled “For a Future to be Possible”, Thây describes in detail how the Five Mindfulness Trainings can be used by anyone in today’s world to create a more harmonious and peaceful life. However, with the help of the monastic community and the lay Sanghas, he has recently (2009) updated these precepts so that they are beautifully appropriate and relevant in today’s society.

**Reverence For Life**

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.  

**True Happiness**

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after

---

wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming. 192

**True Love**

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future. 193

**Loving Speech and Deep Listening**

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness

---

192 Ibid, p. 20.
193 Ibid, p. 29.
or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness. 194

**Nourishment and Healing**

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriments, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and

---

194 Ibid. p. 44.
consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth. 195

The Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha’s teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world. To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the path of a bodhisattva. Knowing we are on that path, we are not lost in confusion about our life in the present or in fears about the future.

195 Ibid. p. 62.