

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. An introduction and dissemination of Buddhism into Vietnam

Situated on the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, Vietnam is almost a geographical dot compared to India and China, the two ancient civilizations of the world. Being near two such large countries and ancient civilizations, it is only natural that Vietnam has been influenced immensely by both. Advent of Buddhism in Vietnam is no exception. Contrary to the generally held belief, Buddhism did not travel to Vietnam via China. Historical evidence indicates that Indians brought Buddhism to Vietnam much before it arrived from China. Indeed, it is most likely that Indian Buddhist monks arrived in Vietnam first before traveling to Southern China. Vietnam's geographical position has made it a prime candidate for transit and trade with India.

The Indo Chinese Peninsula was formed by several mountain ranges which span from Tibet in the Northwest to the Sea in the Southeast. Among these ranges lie the valleys of big rivers, most importantly the Mae Nam which forms the Thai delta, the Me Kong River, and northern Vietnam's Red and Da Rivers.

Buddhism entered Vietnamese when she was a small country and in course of time it became a religion of the nation. Its origin dates back to the third century B.C.E., when numerous Buddhist missions were sent abroad by Emperor Aśoka to disseminate Lord Buddha's Teachings (*Buddhavacana*) in distant lands such as Africa, West and Central Asia as well as South-East Asia including Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam which was known then as Giao Chau (modern Bac Ninh Province, North Vietnam).

#### I. Vietnamese Buddhism from Ancient Times to the Tenth century

It is believed that among the three large Buddhist countries of ancient China: (Lo-Yang, -Lac Duong, Peng Ch'eng-Banh Thanh and Lei Lou- Ly Lau) . Lei Lou Centre in Giao Chau (South China) was thereafter the first to be founded under the Han Dynasty (around the early part of the first century C.E.). It was built on the banks

of the Lac River to the South of the Yellow River in present day Hu Nan (Ho Nam) Province in china.<sup>1</sup>

Lo-Yang (Lac Duong) was the capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty. In the year 165, King Hoang De of the Eastern Han Seized power and organized the Veneration of Śākyamuni and Lao Tsu (Lao Su) in the same palace and had Buddhist classics translated from Sanskrit to Chinese. This work was done by Chinese bonzes who worked in collaboration with Indian and Central Asian bonzes, among them being two Iranians named An The Cao and An Huyen. In Lo-Yang there were two large pagodas, Bach Ma and Hua Xuong.<sup>2</sup>

Peng Ch'eng (Banh Thanh) situated in the lower basin of the Yang tzu (Jiangsu Province, China), from about 50 C.E. onwards counted among its population nobles who were followers of both Buddhism and Taoism. Prince Luu Anh of the So principality in China was the Son of the Han Dynasty, King Quang Vu; he migrated to Peng Ch'eng (Banh Thanh) where he established the Hoang Lao (a Buddhist Sect which wears yellow hats). He adopted a Vegetarian diet and made daily prayers of confession and repentance. By the year 65, there was a Buddhist Organization in P'eng Ch'eng (Banh Thanh) comprising foreign bonzes and Chinese Scholars living as recluses.

Lei Lou the main town in Giao Chi or Giao Chau, was situated in the centre of the Red River delta in what is now the province of Bac Ninh (North Vietnam). It was linked to Peng Ch'eng and Lo-Yang by road. Traders from India and Central Asia soon arrived there, followed before long by the bonzes. Chinese histories say little about this place; the reason may be that Lei Lou was still primitive, besides being very remote. However, it was at Lei Lou that one of the first books on Buddhism was written in Han Script entitled *the Ly Hoac Luan or Li Huoc Lun (Truth, Illusion, Metaphysics)* by Mou Tzu (Mau Tu) in the second century. It was also at Lei Lou that people such as Mou Tzu and K'ang Seng Hui (or Khuong Tang Hoi) matured in the practice of their faith. These religious men later went to China to disseminate the

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<sup>1</sup> *Buddhism in Vietnam*. The Gioi Publishers p. HN 1999, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

Buddhavacana.

## II. Lei Lou: A Buddhist Centre in the first few centuries CE

According to the book *Linh Nam Trich Quai (Strange Stories of the Linh Nam)* the following was written about Chu Dong Tu, the man, who was a follower of Buddhism:

“Dong Tu and his wife Tien Dung established trading streets and had commercial exchanges with foreigners. One day Dong Tu left his island with a foreign businessman. Their vessel landed at the foot of a mountain to take on fresh water. Dong Tu met on the mountain called Quynh Vien (Dao Giao Nguyen Luu called Quynh Vi) an Indian bonze. In his hut built at the foot of the mountain the latter taught Buddhist doctrine to Dong Tu. Dong Tu gave all his gold to the Indian trader, requesting him to use it to do business on his behalf and to pick him up on his return. When Dong took leave of his master to go home the Indian bonze offered him a stick and hat made of leaves, saying that they were talismans. Once back his native district, Dong Tu Communicated the Buddhist doctrine to his wife only. There after, the couple gave up their profession as traders and went to look for masters to learn preach faith.”<sup>3</sup>

The foreign trader in the tale was an Indian who shuttled between India and Vietnam. And the Indian bonze who had supernatural powers and the couple Dong Tu and Tien Dung, who left their professions as traders to preach the faith, all indicate towards the attraction of Buddhism among the masses in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup>

In the book *Ly Hoac Luan*, written before the end of the second century C.E, there was some corruption among bonzes in Giao Chau, including the foreign bonze. This corruption is criticized in the following terms: "There are among the bonzes persons who drink alcohol, take wives, hoard money and jewels, and love to deceive others". Thus in addition to murder, bonzes in Giao Chau committed four of the five

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<sup>3</sup> Nguyen Lang. *Vietnam Phat Giao Su Luan (History of Vietnamese Buddhism)* Volume 1 La Boi Publishing House – Paris, 1976 p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

injunctions of Buddhism. All this proves that Buddhism had been there for a long time. For instance, Master Khuong Tang Hoi (or K'ang Seng Hui), one of the bonzes (200-247 C.E.), became a priest in Giao Chau and acquired knowledge of Buddhism and thereafter went to Jiang-Dong in China to preach the faith.<sup>5</sup>

In the story *Luong Cao Tang*, the parents of Tang Hoi, natives of Khu'ong Cu in Central Asia and traders in Giao Chau, died when their child was only ten years of age. It is clear therefore that Tang Hoi entered the Buddhist religion in northern Vietnam and studied the Han script and Sanskrit in order to translate the Buddhist classics before going to China to preach the faith.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Buddhism was known in Vietnam much before it is normally believed to have existed. This is also indicated by the fact that some bonzes including Ma-Ha-Ky-Vuc (Mahājīvaka) Khuong Tang Hoi, Chi Cuong Luong Mau Bac and others had been preaching the faith there in a manner as if Buddhism was well-established.

According to the story of the Queen Mother Linh Nham (Y Lan) of the Ly Dynasty, one day she asked the bonze Tri Khong to explain how and when Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam. Tri Khong quoted the following answer given by the Chinese bonze Dam Then to Chinese Emperor Tuy Van: “Giao Chau is linked to India the cradle of Buddhism, by communication routes.”<sup>7</sup> Introduction of Buddhism had not yet taken place into China and it had not yet reached Jiang Dong by the time over twenty towers had been built at Luy Lau in Giao Chi, and over 500 bonzes had been assembled there for the translation of fifteen Buddhist texts.

It can be said that the establishment of a Buddhist Centre of Lei Lou dates back to the second century C.E. and had its origins in the Mahāyāna ideological movement in India and Buddhism from there had been brought to Giao Chau at the same times as to China. Buddhist temples were built, monks were ordained, and scripture were translated. Buddhism in Giao Chau already had a long and eclectic

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<sup>5</sup> M. Chi H. V. Tan – NG. T. Thu, *Buddhism in Vietnam*. The Gioi Publishers H.N. 1999 p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of Kang Seng Hui's life and activities. See Eric Zurcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China* (Leiden: E.) Brill. 1972), pp. 51-55.

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history of its own and during this time this place had become a centre of Buddhism and there existed well organized Buddhist communities in Giao Chau.

### **III. The First Foreign Bonzes into Vietnam in the first century**

During the first century the Giao Chau existed as a Buddhist centre in Vietnam and was very famous. It had many foreign bonzes living there and it is quite probable that the dissemination of the faith in Giao Chau was initially carried out by these foreign bonzes. The foreign bonzes were well-respected but their names are not mentioned in the history records and appear to have been gradually forgotten. Some of those whose names are still remembered were certainly not the first to have introduced Buddhism to this region. Two foreign bonzes known as Ma-Ha-Ky-Vuc (Mahajivaka) and Khau-Da-La (Kalacarya) are known to have arrived in Lei Lou (also called Giao Chau), the headquarters of Shi Xie (Si Nhiep in Vietnamese), who was governor of Giao Chau towards the end of the Han dynasty (181-226 CE) and is revered in later Vietnamese annals as a *Shaper of Giao Chau Culture and Promoter of Confucian Values*.<sup>8</sup> It seems that Buddhist monks from India and Central Asia formed a conspicuous part of Shi Xie's grand entourage.<sup>9</sup> Master Kālacarya remained in Giao Chau while Mahājīvaka continued his journey further on to China. "Chinese culture, diffused in Vietnam during its early centuries of Chinese rule was mainly the teaching of Confucian philosophy and Taoist doctrines. Buddhism had not become yet part and parcel of Chinese culture and was not officially propagated. But infiltrated into Vietnam from both China and other sources. However, no legend or history to pinpoint the first introduction of Buddhism into the country exists."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Shi Xie was hailed in Vietnamese history as Si Vuong or Si Nhiep (King Shi) See Toan Thu "Ngoai Ky" 3: 130 Ngo Si Lien, the royal historian of the Le and compiler of the Toan Thu, remarks, "Our country understood the Book of Open and the Book of History, Practiced the Rites and Music, and became a civilized state under King Si" see, Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, his biography records that "wherever he went accompanied by scores of Hu people bearing lighted incense". "Hu" was a term used by the Chinese to refer to foreigners, particularly those from India and Central Asia. Some modern scholars interpret the Hu people in Shi Xie's retinue as Indian or Central Asian Buddhist monks and take this as evidence that Buddhism was established in Giao Chau by Shi Xie's time. See *Hu Shib Wencun*, Vol. 4, book 2, Taipei: Yuandong Tushu Gongsi, 1932, p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhism in East Asia*, Indian Council for Culture Relations, New Delhi, 2010, p. 104.

Amongst the pioneers of Buddhism from China, we know the names of two Indian monks, Mahājīvaka and Kalyāṇarūci, one Tibetan monk Kang-Seng-Hui, and one Chinese monk, Meou Po. They all came from China by sea to what was then known as "Giao Chi" or Giao Chau (i.e., North Vietnam) then regarded by the Chinese as an outlying district of China. In the history of Vietnamese Buddhism we know of another famous Indian monk known as Vinītarūci (circa 580 C.E.). Not much is known about his personal life. He is said to have come to Changan from India in 593 C.E. and stayed at Konngang Teheon for six years where he engaged himself in translating a number of Buddhist works into Chinese. After his sojourn at Konngang Teheon, he proceeded to "Giao Chi" where he was nominated as the chief monk of the Phap Van Temple in Leo Lou and spent fifteen years in the country before passing away. He was affiliated to the Chinese Ch'an School of Buddhism whose foundations were laid in China by Bodhidharma. Vinītarūci's Vietnamese disciple Phap Hien is regarded as the first Patriarch of this school in Vietnam. This Buddhist school is prevalent to this day mostly in North Vietnam.

Vinītarūci was an Indian bonze; he was come to Vietnam to lay the foundations of the first order of the Buddhist Zen Sects. Vinītarūci left behind him a long line of famous monks and teachers of this school— Phap Hien (626 C.E.), Thanh Bien (686 C.E.), Dinh Khong (808 C.E.) and others.

Chinese monks during the periods of Tang and Sung in China broke their long and arduous journeys at some Vietnamese port before proceeding to their destination and their teachings spread among the common people of the locality. They were, as we may presume, exponents not of Chinese, but of Indian Buddhism, Mahāyāna or Sarvāstivāda.

There were besides two countries adjacent to Vietnam where Buddhism existed, viz. Champa and Cambodia. Buddhism was of ancient standing but Cambodia was converted to Theravāda Buddhism not earlier than in the thirteenth century. The Vietnamese and the Champans were always at enmity and the State of Champa, steadily whittled down by the Vietnamese was wiped out in the fifteenth century. Some Scholars, however, hold the opinion that Vietnam derived Buddhism from its

contacts also with Champa and the Champan– derived form of Buddhism is called by a special name "Lamap Buddhism" after Lamap the Vietnamese name for Champa (today the Southern Vietnam). The Cambodian were very friendly and they form a large minority group now in the population of Southern Vietnam, They adhere to the Theravāda School, and Theravādin Buddhists have a large number of establishments in South Vietnam and the chief establishment of these is the Jetavana vihāra at Saigon (Ho-Chi-Minh City). Now Southern Vietnam has comparatively modern establishments built by the Venerable Nagathera and Vam Sarakkhita.<sup>11</sup>

In *Thien Uyen Tap Anh (A Collection of Outstanding Figures of the Zen Garden)* is an important source book on the history of Vietnam by Master Khau Da la. (Kālācārya), Ma-Ha-Ky-vuc (Mahajivaka) Chi-Cuong-Luong, (Kalya-naruchi). Ty-Ni-Da-Luu-chi (Vinitaruci) was already well known in Giao Chau when Buddhism was introduced into China by these five bonzes. One of these was Chinese and the others came either from India or Central Asia. They contributed greatly towards the initial establishment of Buddhism in Vietnam and the subsequent development of growth of Vietnamese Buddhism.

#### **IV. Bonzes in Vietnam from the Middle of the Third Century to the fifth Century**

The conception of the Buddha as a Supernatural power as defined by Mou Tzu at the end of the second century C.E. met religious needs of the Viets at that time. Considering that during this period of aggression, such a concept greatly served the needs of the Vietnamese, Buddhism had a great opportunity to develop among the Viet's in the next few centuries.

From the third to the fifth century C.E. through extant archives, an attempt shall be made to shown how Buddhist monks having tendency or capacity of the Supernatural power were able to take advantage of the suitable conditions in Giao Chau from the middle of the third century to the fifth century. A large number of many bonzes successively perpetuated the work of their predecessors Mou Tzu and

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<sup>11</sup> See P.V. Bapat, *2500 years of Buddhism* Publication Division, Government of India, 1956, p. 439.

Kang Seng Hui. Some of these bonzes were foreigners and others Vietnamese, but all of them made great contribution to the dissemination and edification of Buddhism in this country.

In the middle of the third century a bonze by the name of Kālarūci, a native of Dai Nhuc Chi, translated Buddhist works of the Mahāyāna tradition of Giao Chau and Guangzhou. According to the Nanjo,<sup>12</sup> with the help of the Vietnamese bonze Dao Thanh, the bonze Kālarūci continued translating a great number of Buddhist works in North Vietnam (255-256 C.E.). Among these books were the *Phap Hoa Tam Muoi* (the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika Sūtra* or the *Discourse on the Lotus of Good Faith*), a prestigious book in the Mahāyāna tradition. Between and the Ngo and Tuy Dynasties, there were, all told, seven translations of this book, the one by Kālarūci and Dao Thanh being the most ancient. With the translation and publication of this book the cult of Avalokiteśvara<sup>13</sup> soon spread in China and Vietnam, this Bodhisattva representing mercy and compassion. The religious sect of Kālarūci and Dao Thanh belongs to the Mahāyāna tradition<sup>14</sup> with a leaning towards meditation. In fact, this fact believes that the Truth of Mahāyāna can be proved only through meditation and cannot be grasped by means of speech and logical thought. Master Kālarūci and Master Dao Thanh lived in the third century. No names of bonzes are mentioned in histories of the fifth century, but according to the *More Stories about Celebrated Bonzes (Tuc-Cao-Tang-Truyen)*, there were in Giao Chau in the fifth century two well-known bonzes Dat-Ma-De-Ba (Dharmadeva), a native of Giao Chau and Master Thich-Hue-Thang, who lived at the pagoda of Tien Chau Son (or Tien Chau Mountain). The former loved the life as a recluse and recited the book *Lotus Sūtra* once a day for several consecutive years. He was modestly clothed and accepted only what was strictly necessary. He learned Buddhist doctrine from the foreign bonze Dat

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<sup>12</sup> Nango or Nan Shih also called Nam Su Vietnamese. It means the history of Buddhism in the South of the country.

<sup>13</sup> It also called Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and means “*Regarded of the World's Sounds, or Cries*”, the so called *Goddess of Mercy*. Originally represented as a male, the images are now generally those of a female figure. One of the triad Amitābha, represented on his left. Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra is devoted to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

<sup>14</sup> *Mahāyāna* or *Mahārāna Sūtra*. The School of Mahāyāna attributed to the rise in India of the Mādhyamika i.e. the Mādhyamaka Śāstra or Mādhyamika School ascribed to Nāgārjuna, and the Yoga or Dharmalakṣana School the other School is the Hīnayāna.

Ma De Ba (Dharma deva)<sup>15</sup> and each time he practiced meditation he continued till the end of the day. When travelling from Banh Thanh<sup>16</sup> to Nam Hai, Kinh Luu Hoi, who had heard of Thich-Hue-Thang, invited him to go to China. The bonze followed the king to China and lived at the U. Thé Pagoda. In 520, Master Bo-De-Dat Ma (*Bodhidharma*)<sup>17</sup> arrived. Dat-Ma-De-Ba arrived in Giao Chau and met Thich- Huc–Thang at the beginning of the fifth century. Invited by Luu Hoi to China, the latter went to U. Thé Pagoda, living there in the fifth year of the reign of Vinh Minh, i.e. in 487. Thus, Dat-Ma- De-Ba had been teaching meditation in Vietnam for over half a century before Bo-De-Dat Ma undertook this task in China. According to the *More Stories about Celebrated Bonzes*, after Thich– Hue–Thang, the Second enlightened Vietnamese bonze was Thich-Dao-Thien.

Master Dao- Thien became a bonze very early. He kept his behavior as pure as driven snow. His parents and neighbors, religious or lay, had great respect for is austerity and dedication in his practice of faith. The surroundings of Tien Chau Son Pagoda were frequented by tigers that caused havoc, but when Dao-Thien went to live there, all the tigers went away. At that time King Canh-Lang of the Té encouraged the study of Buddhism, and people thronged to the capital Kim Lang when plenty of conference rooms had been built. They were the elites of the country, the great mass followers of the masses the eminent bonzes. Dao-Thien put good Buddhist works at their disposal and burnt mid-night oil over many nights reflecting on the search for a good method for communicating the truth to them. In the first years of the reign of Vinh Minh, he came to the capital and lived at Van Cu Ha Pagoda on Chung Mountain. He taught the Thap Tung (Śāstra) to the bonzes and taught people on the basic of renowned Buddhist texts, thus enhancing his prestige day by day. He was also an example of level-headedness because when preaching he maintained his calm and great attention. The population of both cities and rural areas came in the

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<sup>15</sup> Dharmadeva, a monk from the Nālandā Saṃghārāma who tr. under this name forty-six works, 973-981 and under the name of Dharmabhadra Seventy-two works, 982-1001.

<sup>16</sup> Banh Thanh; the names of the three large Buddhism centers.

<sup>17</sup> Bodhidharma. The 28<sup>th</sup> Indian patriarch and also who has the founder of Ch'an Sect Zen in China", Deeply learned Indian Buddhist monk who arrived at the Chinese Court in C.E. 520 . Known in China as Tamo, and Japan as Daruma. After his famous interview with Emperor Wu, he silence and departed. Bodhidharma was the first Chinese Zen patriarch

thousands to him to enter the religion, and hundreds of adepts permanently attended his courses on Buddhism. Dao-Thien loved remote places and avoided populated ones. He dressed modestly and lived very frugally. He shared with the poor and sick the food offered to him. At the end of his life, he lived as a recluse in a remote spot on the mountains, observing a life of austerity and virtue. In the first year of the reign of Dai Thong, this religious man died at his mountain pagoda at the age of 70.

Monk Dam Hoang's life story was written in the Monk's Stories as follows. He was a native of Hoang Long. He entered the religion in very early childhood and was very good at Buddhism theories. During C.E. 420-422 he moved to the South to Phien Ngung, staying at Dai Pagoda in Giao Chi reading and performing prayers in the *Eternal Life Sūtra*<sup>18</sup> and *Quan King*<sup>19</sup> and with determination to be reborn in the world of Supreme Happiness (Sukhāvati).<sup>20</sup> In 445, he set himself on fire on the mountain. However, he was saved by his disciple, but with half of his body burned. After one month's treatment, he recovered. Later, one day when people in the pagoda went to attend a festival in a nearby hamlet, he again set himself on fire. Villagers came to his rescue but he had died by then. So, they put more firewood on the fire to cremate him. The fire lasted till the next day and then it died out. On that day people saw Dam Hoang dressing in yellow and riding a yellow deer to the west without stopping to ask after anyone. Having seen this, people and monks collected his bones and ashes for worship.

The book *Monk's Stories* was compiled by Hue Hao in 530 C.E. i.e., eighty years after the self-immolation of Dam Hoang. Another book relates the same story

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<sup>18</sup> Derived from Sanskrit, *Amitāurdhyāna Sūtra. Sūtra of the meditation on Amitāyus.* (Amitabha/Pure Land); Buddha Recitation Pure Land School; Mind; Immortality; Chinese called O-Mi-T'o-Fo; in Japanese called Amida; in Vietnamese called A-Di-Da. The word Amitabha is used in English to represent two Sanskrit terms "Amitabha" (Infinite Light) and "Amitayus" (Infinite Life)". Amitabha is the most commonly used name for Buddha of Infinite Light and Infinite life.

<sup>19</sup> In Chinese it is also called *Guan Jing*. Guan is derived from the Sanskrit word *Vipaṣyanā*, or *Vidarṣanā*. It means "to look into, study, examine, also to contemplate and mentally enter into truth." *Jing* in Sanskrit is *Sūtra* (Pali: *Sūta*) meaning "Classical, scriptural text or simply a scripture". In sum, *Quan Jing* is "Contemplation of the Sūtra".

<sup>20</sup> *Sukhāvati* is derived from Sanskrit. Sukhāvati Sect, or pure-land, founded in China by Bodhirūci, who was a monk from Southern India whose original name Dharmarūci was changed as above by order of the Empress Wu (C.E. 683-713).

about Dam Hoang, but it was written much later in approximately 1066-1077 by Gioi Chau and was entitled *Vang-Sanh Tinh Do Stories*. Its content was similar to that of the *Monk's Stories*, and only different in the following paragraph. "His disciplines gathered his remain which, when struck against stone, did not break but give out light the next day, people Saw Hoang dressing in yellow, riding a yellow deer and moving in hurry to the West, he didn't answer when asked by anyone. If asked again, he only pointed one hand to the west. Some people tried in Vain to run after him."<sup>21</sup>

According to Hue Hao, Dam Hoang was a Chinese person, not a Vietnamese, His native place was Hoang Long, namely Hebei province near Pe King. But according to Gioi-Chau, he entered his monk hood in Guang Linh of the present day Jiangsu province.

According to the Monk Hue Lam and the book *Bach Hac (Discussion between Black and White)* Luan we clearly see that Hue Lam had attacked directly that belief. Though the Hue Lam incident with the book *Bach Hac* Luan largely occurred in China it must be analyzed and introduced here so as to understand a series of Buddhist incidents occurring simultaneously in Vietnam for instance the incident after the exchange of letters between Chinese Ambassador Li Mao and two Vietnamese monks Dao Cao and Phap Minh, the incident that monk Dam Hoang set himself on fire at Tien Chau Son pagoda (province of Bac Ninh, now Ha Bac). Wendi's rule occurred simultaneously with Xiao Buzhi's report demanding the King to issue a decree to restrict the construction of pagodas and the casting of statues causing a big waste of material and heavy losses to the public fund.

### **Li Miao and Two Buddhist Monks: Dao Cao and Phap Minh**

Zen Master Dao Cao and Phap Minh, lived under the Liu Song Dynasty, during the period C.E. 420-478. This can be confirmed through a still extant text titled "Reply letter to Li in Giao Chau, from Master Dao Cao" that belonged to this dynasty. It is a text consisting of six letters, found in Hoang Minh Tap by Seng Hui and written in Chinese. The six letters refer to Dao Cao and Phap Minh. Master Dao Cao was one

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<sup>21</sup> Nguyen- Tai -Thu, *History of Buddhism in Vietnam*. Social Sciences Publishers, House Ha Noi 1992 p. 65.

of the two authors of the six letters. Master Dao Cao was certainly a native of Giao Chau, i.e., a Vietnamese, because he was mentioned in Chinese historical document with the same footnote "Dao Cao a monk from Giao Chau." Master Dao Cao was not only one of the authors of the six letters but also the authors of the book titled *Ta Am (Borrowed Sound)* as well as another book titled *Dao Phap Su Tap*, according to the *Nhat Ban Quoc Kun Tai Thu Muc Luc*, quoted by the L.M. Van Hanh Compilation Board.

Thus, in addition to his works on Buddhism, Master Dao Cao wrote on the principles relating to the borrowing of sounds of Vietnamese words, not available in China or those terms which had no Chinese words to describe them. *Dao Cao Phap Su Tap*, as mentioned in the Japanese bibliographical book, might be a complete work or a collection of Dao Cao's work. The two books *Ta Am* and *Dao Cao Phap Su Tap* are no longer available. However all the letters have been kept till today in Hoang Minh Tap. (Hoang Minh's Collection) by Tang Huu and preserved in Han—Tang in the Chinese text.

The matter Thich Phap Minh, so far, has not been mentioned in any historical document but one sentence in Quan Song Wen by Yan Kejun that "Phap Minh a monk from Giao Chau". This shows that Phap Minh was a native of Giao Chau and not a Chinese.

Li Miao is mentioned as an ambassador in Vietnamese sources who might be the special envoy of the Chinese Emperor, who was sent to a certain locality for a certain mission, or the chief of a district. Though his biography is not clearly mentioned in historical books, he was a man of the Northern Court, who had a broad knowledge on Confucianism and great concern for the role of Buddhism in the Society. The common title for the original letters in Hoang Minh Tap is "*Cao Minh Nhi Phap Su Dap Giao Chau Ly Mieu Nan Phat Bat Kien Hinh Su*" which means "*two monks Dao Cao and Phap Minh answered the question of Li Miao in Giao Chau on the non-appearance of Buddha's image*".

The first of the letters was of Li Miao in which he asks a question: "Since Buddhism claims to be capable and powerful, why then does the Buddha not appear

in this world? Now, it is time for Buddha should appear. If he does not, the aforesaid affirmation will be a hollow one".

In the Second letter, Dao Cao's reply about the Buddha appears in three ways: first, he appeared physically as a human being, as did Śākyamuni Buddha.<sup>22</sup> Second, he appeared by having left behind religious practice and third, he appeared by having left behind similar regulation. So Dao Cao points out that as to in which way the Buddha should have appeared depended on the desire of living beings in each period. In whatever way they aspire, the Buddha will appear in that way, he pointed out. Moreover, he pointed out, these things are unseen for they happened in the past, hence we have to believe what has been written in books.

The third letter was again from Li Miao. According to him, since the followers of Confucians and disciples of Mozi have feverishly attacked Buddhism and Buddhist practices, we can not only use reasoning and books to argue with them that the Buddha was a holy person with unlimited wisdom and boundless love. Why should not he appear to get rid of all doubts? Moreover, there are things, he pointed out, which can be relied on books, for example, the worldly things mentioned by Confucian. Yet, the Buddha had spoken of not only things in this world but also of things of the future. When speaking of future things, the vestige of Buddha must previous the three generations that is he must exist now. But where is that vestige?

Letter number four was Dao Cao's letter. Dao Cao says: "The vestige you have asked is found in the fact that some people sit for meditation in jungle. Some entered monkhood; some observed Buddhist rituals, some sang in praise of the Buddha. All these things can be heard and seen. Moreover, whether the vestige and light of the holy being can be seen or not, depends on one's sincerity. With sincerity one would have inspiration and when inspired one would see them. Without sincerity one would not have inspiration and would not see. People who saw tell those who did not see. What could we do if the latter do not believe? You asked where were things done by Buddha? If seen with sincerity and with ability to see, they are just before your eyes."

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<sup>22</sup> Śākya the clan or family of the Buddha is said to be derived from *saka*, vegetables, but in Chinese it means as "powerful, strong, and explained by powerful," also erroneously "charitable", which belongs rather to an association with Śākyamuni.

In the fifth letter Li Miao writes that recalling his initial doubts Confucianism also speaks of rebirth and does not stop at the present life. He quotes a sentence to support his point of view: “One will have great joy when one keeps the good in oneself; and one will have great woe when one keeps the wrong in oneself.”

The sixth letter is of Phap Minh. On behalf of Dao Cao, Phap Minh answered the above letter of Li Miao. He held that Confucius could not be compared to the Buddha because the latter taught things of three generations while Confucius's teachings only stopped at the present life, as Li Miao said previously in his letter.<sup>23</sup> He further pointed out that speaking of creatures; “the Buddha says that they are immersed in metempsychosis from generation to generation. Mortal man, dull in his ignorance, has recourse to mediums and sorcery as well as to magic formulae. If so how can he see the Buddha, even when the Most Holy sends out light and makes the earth tremble? With regard to Buddhist works in circulation they resemble the masses waiting for fish, those who have ancient ties and appropriate levels of contemporary mentality can understand and apply them to be able at last to feel and see. Meanwhile, the Buddhist Sūtras circulated in this world are just like trapping baskets waiting for those who have predestined attachment to Buddhism then will be able to understand and practice, to be inspired and see.”

Phap Minh stressed the theory on inspiration initiated by Dao Cao, citing this time a series of examples mentioned in historical books. For instance, the stories that Emperor Han Minh De dreamed of the Buddha, then sent his envoys to India for Buddhist Sūtras, the song which was told in his dream that because he had given a bowl of rice as alms to the Buddha Amitabha, he had been put to the throne, that Wu Zongquan was allowed by monk Kang-Seng-Hui to see the Buddha's splendidly illuminating robe pearl which is still kept till today to Jianchu (Jianye) Pagoda, that a stone statue of the Buddha drifted on the sea offshore Wu district, which hundreds of monks and followers tried in vain to pull up while large a group of five or six monks, together with a group of four persons led by Zhou Zhang, pulled it up easily, that Guo Weju touched a tiger's mouth, or Lan Gong flicked off snow on a tiger, that with Hu

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<sup>23</sup> Confucians were considered which scholar's Buddhist monk black scholars the book title means discussions between Confucians and Buddhist.

Gong's pray, the dried up-streams suddenly become flooded with water. Phap Minh cited those examples to prove that the theory on inspiration advocated by Dao Cao and him was correct.

The above six letters show that by the sixth century Buddhism in Giao Chau had strongly developed, and that Giao Chau monks had a broad knowledge, who had thoroughly grasped the Buddhist theories and their reputation had spread so widely that even officials from Chinese Royal Court came to learn under them.