CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

In the previous five chapters, an attempt has been made to discuss the growth and development of the Vietnamese Buddhism. Buddhism has gone side by side with Vietnamese people for almost two thousand years of history. Having the same destiny, both have joined with each other in creating what is called Vietnamese culture and literature. They cannot be separated from each other. Therefore, to understand Vietnamese culture one should understand Vietnamese Buddhism.

Looking back, we see that Buddhism had existed in Vietnam for nearly a millennium by the time Vietnam established itself as an independent state free of the Chinese political hegemony. Continuous interactions with monks from India, central Asia, and China had helped create a learned clerical class in Vietnam. Learned monks from elite families were in a position to serve at court and assist the new dynasties (the Dinh – the Le, the Ly and Tran) in their efforts to severe their legitimacy and to defend themselves against Chinese pressure. The early Vietnamese dynasties found in the Buddhist clergy a cultural force that could assist them with their political agenda.

In a parallel development, through a process hidden from historians, by this time in Vietnam Buddhist stories and images had been disseminated among the common people, and Buddhist temples and monk had become a familiar part of the local religious scene. Buddhist monks became figures in traditional tales of magical powers. They were known not only as men of letters but as religious personalities with magical power that they could use to do wonders. They could help those in need and ward of natural and supernatural calamities.

The Ly dynasty (1010-1225) continued to draw support from Buddhism, and in returns they patronized Buddhism as well as the popular and local culls associated with it on a larger scale.
The Tran dynasty (1225-1400) also made serious efforts to legitimize its dynastic power. The kind of Buddhism that the Tran aristocrats patronized was the “new Buddhism”, the Chinese patriarchal Zen type that had been finding its way into Vietnam since the Ly dynasty. The Truc Lam (Bamboo Grove) Zen school, a genuinely Vietnamese Buddhist school, was founded by Tran Nhan Tong, the third king of the Tran dynasty. Although the Truc Lam school was short-lived it marked the first serious effort to establish a Zen school in medieval Vietnam.

At that time, Buddhism had contributed to training a class of intellectuals for Vietnam. The first intellectual class trained by Buddhism was familiar with Confucianism and was the first intellectual class. Many monks had helped the feudal court to administer the affairs of the state in the first stage of its foundation. In Ly, Tran dynasties, Buddhism had flourished and was considered as a national religion.

Buddhism under the Ly and Tran had brought to Vietnam a rich tradition of architecture for pagodas and towers. One could call these two dynasties the golden age of Vietnam Buddhism. These constructions express harmony with nature and became famous places of scenic beauty. Vietnamese Buddhism under the Ly and Tran dynasties bears a deep popular character with ideas of compassion, saving from misfortune and danger. Vietnamese Buddhism contributed greatly towards the creation of Vietnam as a great nation. To sum up, Buddhism under the Ly and Tran progressed greatly when all the kings practiced Buddhism. They liberally and lavishly donated for the construction of large pagodas and Stūpas. Many nobles and dignitaries of the court also participated in this activity with an equal enthusiasm. Thanks to the support of the upper classes, Buddhism under the Ly and Tran was to play and important role, its influence spreading throughout the country.

Formerly and today, since then, Vietnam Buddhism, after 2,000 years of rising up and down, of reunification and separation because of various reasons, is reunified from the north to the south of the country. The Buddhist sects have been preserved; their characteristics in practicing the Buddha’s dharma have been conserved. All pagodas with monks and nuns are registered and put into the organization systematically. Until 1991, thirty one cities and provinces founded their executive
committees of Buddhism. The Vietnamese Buddhist Saṃgha also formed a foreign
division in France. Hundreds of pagodas have been renovated and innumerable
numbers of statues, which form part of the national treasure, have been taken good
care.